

neat

let me apologize



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# neat

by andrew paul cannon

A thanks to my brothers, Nolan and Joel. You are more inspiring to me than you will ever realize.



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## Preface

“Don’t cuss. Don’t drink. Don’t have sex before marriage.” That is the message we were pounded with on a weekly basis. “We will give you cool stuff if you come.” That is what we were won with and to. We poured down the isles at summer camp, responding to some version of the Gospel, though it tasted more like watered down whiskey. We went to leadership camps and retreats. Our generation has had more churchy events than any other generation, but we still felt left out. All of that money they dumped into children’s and youth ministry for our generation was wasted. We weren’t interested in your behavior modification attempts.

We designed our own culture, so we thought. It was a result of our continuing education, that education you forced us into. We became the most most formally educated generation in the world. We were quite literally too smart for the church, the same church that chose to dumb things down so we could understand. The only thing you accomplished by dumbing things down was making us think your faith was a faith of ignorance. I hope you are paying attention. I hope I am, too. Now, you try and try to strategize, developing idea after idea to try and retrieve my generation from secular society. You haven’t realized that this isn’t even the point of the Gospel. Every attempt of yours is met with contempt and it frustrates you. “How can we reach them?” you ask, “How can we bring them back?” “Why don’t they understand?” we reply from our nooks with our pour-over coffees and our craft beers, “Why are they so stuck up?”

Turning over in the anthology of Scripture, I realize something very profound for my own generation; the one

that is still lost. God takes the time to reveal Himself in a fresh way to each new generation. Each generation responds in its own way. God causes the previous generations to be an example of either what it means to follow after Him or what it means to deny Him and preach a false gospel.

God is doing the same for us. He has not dumbed things down. The same Christ who blessed the wedding guests at Cana with new wine desires to do a great work in our generation and the next and the next. He does not desire that we simply change our behavior. He wants to give life as a gift. God meets us where we are. He is not bound to the ivory steeple. He is not bound by the rules people invented to seem more spiritual.

Christ ate and drank with sinners. He was called a glutton and a drunkard because of the company He kept. This is the Christ who calls to us now.

## **The Rejected Generation**

Is this the right place? My generation left the church and migrated to places like these because they offered something that the organized church did not- acceptance. That is, perhaps, the greatest travesty of our time. A whole generation responded to the negativity, the shallow semblance of true faith, and the condemnation of a people who presumed to be in the place of God. I think I am meeting someone here and I hope this is the right place. Those who drove us away from the organized church assumed we would become nothing, so they resolved to argue with us and to condemn us for no other reason than we were young. We were the “why” generation and our questions were never answered. I’ve never been here before. I was one of the fortunate, the few, the fifteen percent. I had good mentors and people who supported me. God pursued me and kept me. Most of us, though, ran away from the church because the organization was a bigger monster than what we saw in the world. It plowed like a tractor over the west leaving the land bare, without rotating the crop or fertilizing the soil or making sure there was enough sun exposure. We were hurt, and not merely on an emotional level. Real spiritual assault was perpetrated for the sake of the glory of the name and that ridiculous quote on their marquee. The church didn’t heal. They tried to prove to us that God existed, but if God existed and looked like the people who so adamantly told us that we needed to work to please Him, why would we want to worship that god? They doubled down. So did we. This isn’t what God desired. In their apologetic, there was no apology. Now, my generation is almost entirely absent. What is to come of the generation after us?

Where is this man? Oh, there he is. I see him sitting, sipping his whiskey. Here comes the server, “What will you have, sir?” Of course, I don’t know. I’ve never ordered at an establishment like this, but she is looking at me, “Sir, would you like a drink?” I look at the man I came to meet with as if differing my decision to him. He snickers, “He will have a bourbon whiskey, neat.” I have no idea what that means. I will trust the expert, and I won’t drink too much. I saw my father become a slave to alcohol, and the organized church couldn’t tell me why, there, either. They just said, “Don’t drink. It’s a sin!” That didn’t help anybody.

The server goes to the bar and the man rests his hand on the Bible he has sitting in front of him. The Bible has color-coded markers on many of the pages and I imagine that there are many markers and notes on the inside. His Bible looks more used than many pastors’ in the modern church. My soon-to-be friend, I am determined, is wearing a t-shirt with the letters “AHA” on the front as if to mock those who don’t see the world like he does. No, the letters don’t stand for Abolish Human Abortion. They stand for something else, a hyper-progressive, anti-god religion, and they are proud of that fact. It is how I came to meet this man. He is an evangelist for them, at least that is how evangelicals would describe what he does, but he would hate that sort of description, and perhaps I do also.

The silence has now been a little awkward, but the server finally brings the drink he ordered for me. Gulp. There is a sting and a fleeting sensation as the nectar fills my mouth and the aroma my nostrils. Maybe I won’t take such a big swig next time. Sips from here on out. I might have ordered something that wasn’t good. I am glad I

trusted a man who knew more than I did. I might like it more with a cube of ice.

“So,” the man starts as I marvel, “Can I tell you why I reject the Bible?” That is why we are here, go ahead. I’m listening. Whiff. Sip. Savor.

“First of all,” he starts his argument, “the Bible is an ancient collections of documents written by different human people with many, many contradictions.” He points his finger at the book in front of him. This is how everyone else starts this conversation. I used to think that Christianity presented a false picture of the world, but never did I notice a contradiction in the book. “What are those contradictions?”

As he adjusts his weight and opens the book to the beginning chapters, the server walks by looking at our glasses. Mine doesn’t seem to have gone down at all. He finds what he is looking for and, without making eye-contact, shares his thought.

“There is a different order of creation events in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2,” he says confidently. I wasn’t aware that Genesis two provided any chronology at all. Sip. It looks like you might be forcing some extra words into the story that aren’t there in order to create a contradiction. I don’t know about you, but I call that a straw-man. Really, if you want to be contentious on this point, I doubt seriously you could look at Genesis 2 and tell me where it says God created the people before, ‘before’ being the operative word, He planted His garden. At least those are my thoughts. When I open my mouth, cautiously I might clarify, it comes out like this, “I don’t see where the order is different.”

“Verse five!” he exclaims, “Verse five!” What about verse five? “It records explicitly that no plant had

sprouted!” The large book is being spun toward me as if the one who brought it wants me to realize my own hermeneutical blunder. I see verse five. I also see that verse five states very clearly that no man was there to cultivate the ground. Then, God formed people and planted a garden, but chapter two does not reveal the order. You have to add words to get that, or simply derive the information from the preceding chapter in the book. Isn’t that the way we usually read, anyway? Why would anyone start a different story in his or her mind after finishing chapter one? Why wouldn’t that person build on the part of the story previously ordered? Why would we assume that the story is disconnected? I think that reveals more about us than about the story this man is trying to disprove.

“What are you getting at, here?” I reply as I sip again, “You really have to tweak the story to get it to say what you are claiming it says.” I am also interested in something deeper than winning an argument. How shallow I have been. How could I settle for argumentation when this man needs Christ as much as I do? I am probably a much worse sinner than he, and here I am listening to respond. Let me try and understand this person. How can I love him like Christ loves me? “I wonder what has caused you to try reading the story the way that you have? What has caused you to start with a bias against the story such that you see what isn’t actually there?”

This man seems somewhat caught off guard by the question. He does what everyone else does when they don’t have a way to respond. He moves on to the next accusation, hoping to distract and gain an advantage. Rarely does anyone actually answer the question that I have asked. Sip. Savor.

I guess people do that with more than facts, don't they? We want things to be a certain way, so we find a way to justify our restructuring of life, or at least our attempts to do so. God didn't mean that. You can't dictate morality. The church hurt me, so her God can't be real. Since when has the existence or the character of God depended on the actions and demeanors of wretched people?

Whatever the reason this guy feels he needs to discredit a word given for the good of all people, I must apologize... and I must apologize.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry for whatever was done to you by sinful people." To my own generation, I'm sorry. Here is the open hand. To that prodigal generation who took the Father's inheritance too early and went to live for itself in a dying world, we're no longer children. We have lost too many too young. Why continue to make excuses? Why judge God based on what some sinful and hateful people did to us in the past? There is life and hope. This is my apology. Let me be honest.

## **A Room Full of People**

Look at all of the people here, in this place. Churches beg God for this kind of attendance on Sunday morning. I know, that's part of the idolatry in the organized church. She's jealous and hungry for her own popularity. That's why she hosted all of those shallow evangelistic events for us while we were growing up. Do you remember? Not all of them had that motivation. A few really wanted people to see the life available in Christ. There is not one seat available at the bar. The lounge is full. The dining area is hustling. No, not that kind of hustle. There is actually more of a sense of community in this place than in most local church establishments. It's just barely five-o'clock on a Tuesday. This apology is something that should interest every believer and every non-believer. I am under the conviction that if God is real and if the biblical account is true, that God would not keep either Himself or the validation of His Word from the people of the earth, from the people who fled the organized church to find sanctuary in this place. I have a new hope. Perhaps my believing friends will take advantage and will be strengthened in their faith. Just maybe my unbelieving friends, or friends who have placed their faith in anything or anyone other than Christ, will see that faith in Christ is the most reasonable faith to hold.

“Can I borrow your Bible?” The man sitting here with me, not surprised, answers, “Sure, but there is nothing in there that will make me believe.” I know that. I also know that it is not my responsibility to make anyone believe. I turn to 1 Peter 3:15-16. This particular verse states that we ought to be ready to give a reason for the hope that we have. Of course, the hope that we have as



children of God is in Christ and in the eternal life that He has promised. In order to give a reason, we ought to know the reasons and those reasons ought to be truthful and good. It is amazing that a Biblical faith actually requires that we refuse to have a blind faith. A blind faith actually makes us look naive, even ignorant and stupid and belligerent when we try to argue others into submission. We now see where that gets us. Our absence is the evidence, it is the fruit that was borne. We ought to know the reasons. We ought to not only know the reasons why we have the hope that we have, but we ought to be able to communicate those reasons to others, not belligerently, but with gentleness and respect. Perhaps acting and communicating with gentleness and respect is the most important concept we can grasp. I know. I was once the argumentative and hot-headed Christian. Don't believe me? Look at my twitter feed from 2011. Speaking truth means nothing if we do not do so in love. Our arguments ought to be made in peace with great love.

“I'm not here to convince you of anything, friend.”

He looks surprised.

We see things that are wrong, or that we perceive to be wrong. Our first instinct, many times, is to treat others harshly or form an argument that will accomplish our will and make others out to be the “bad guy.” Nothing is accomplished, even if we do win some profound argument. Yet, we celebrate. What, may I ask, are we celebrating? If I am so concerned about winning, then I will never be interested in seeing others win the greatest victory. Our goal is to honor Christ and to witness others experience victory in Christ as we have, or as we claim to experience. Christ died for people by giving Himself. His first priority was not to make other people look bad so that He could prove that He was correct. We would do well to follow His

example. The truth is, there are many times when we perceive ourselves to be correct on some idea or in some action and we simply are not; so we also make fools of ourselves because we have not spoken in humility and with gentleness and respect. Not only, then, do we show love by speaking with gentleness and respect, but we also safeguard our own reputation and our own relationship with Christ. Any argument we hope to have ought to be made in peace with grace, whether it is an argument for God's existence, a dispute at work, a disagreement in the home, or a plea for someone to come experience victory in Jesus. Why would anyone, after all, want Jesus if they feel persecuted by people who claim to be His people?

It is a miracle that I'm still here. If I based my faith on the action or inaction of people who claimed to be Christians, I would have forsaken the church long ago. I guess it's a good thing Christ is real and that He is the one building His church.

## **I apologize,**

because I'm sorry and because I think you need to be. What is the substance of this apology? Yes, content matters. You've had someone repent with no sense of remorse, haven't you? You've experienced an empty apology? I thought so. There is substance, here, I promise. On the one hand, I want to defend you against religious hypocrites. On the other, I want to defend Christ's honor in the midst of a generation that has assumed dishonor. Jesus doesn't need me to do this, please understand. I do this for your benefit and mine. My motivation is your good, your victory, not your defeat.

“Can I just share with you what I believe? Why I

think you are justified in your anger against the church?”  
That is not what he expected to hear, “I’m listening.”

Your worldview, and mine too, is shaped by the world that nurtures us as we react to the things we see, hear, taste, smell, and touch. I say worldview and not religion for this reason: Religion is a set of practices, worldview is a set of beliefs that guide those practices. Those who come here to shoot billiards with their friends each week are practicing a sort of religious ritual. That man over there just poured some beer on the ground to honor a friend who is no longer present in his physical body. His worldview drives that ritual. There is a belief behind it that has shaped and been shaped by each one’s experiences, reflections, responses, and actions. Every person has a worldview because every person believes the world to operate a certain way. Every person practices religion because every person acts in the world according to his or her worldview. Every person believes deeply that his or her worldview is valid. When my generation was different from the previous in our thinking, our level of education, our need to know that there is justification for believing something, and our rejection of shallow belief, our worldview was immediately criticized. Do you realize that you are the ones who forced our entire generation to continue our education? Then, treated us in church as though we couldn’t handle the deep substance of the faith? We are your handiwork. “I’m sorry we were treated this way. There really is a deep, inset hypocrisy that is going unrecognized and undiagnosed. I think you are right in being angry about this. We all should be.”

**This apology is important,**

If I did not believe it so, then I wouldn't waste my valuable time. I would not have poured hours and hours into preparing it and making sure it was substantial. I care too much for you. If God does not exist, the Christian faith is worthless. If Christ is not God, the Christian faith is a lie. If Scripture is not accurate, then it does not reveal God. If we are not sure that we can believe the validity of the Christian claim concerning these three things, then we waste our time with the Christian faith and with belief in the God of the Bible. If people hurt us, that has no bearing on who God is or on the veracity of the Bible's claim. Apologetics is important. My sorrow is real. My heartache, profound.

My arguments don't change the truth. No matter what arguments are made, what is true is true and what is not is not, though some philosophers may disagree. My worldview, or yours, has no bearing on reality. Ask me about a dream I had sometime. Just because something sounds good does not make it so. Any valid apology, then, will serve a very specific purpose: It can help us to have more confidence in what our worldviews claim to be true and they can convince us of what may be true and what we believe to be true. Apologies also help us to realize what about our worldviews might be wrong or invalid or weak. If God is indeed real, they can also help us to know God more. My apology cannot prove my worldview to be true, but it can and will prove that it is valid. "Are you ready? Let's question what we believe together."

## **Are our beliefs valid?**

There are very few things that we can know beyond the shadow of a doubt. Can I, for a moment, try to convince

you that that there is reason to doubt everything you believe? Name anything that you believe to be true. Here is mine.

1. I believe that I inherited my wedding band from my father.
2. It is possible that my father broke his wedding band and my mother got a replacement that he never wore.
3. If my dad never wore it, or never knew it existed, it is questionable as to whether or not it actually belonged to him.
4. Therefore, it is questionable that I actually inherited my wedding band from my father

I cannot prove that my I inherited my wedding ring from my father. Even if there was documentation, it is possible that it could have been forged. We could try another experiment:

1. I believe that I am writing this apology to be read by my peers.
2. It is possible that I am currently dreaming.
3. If I am dreaming, then I am not actually writing for others to read.
4. Therefore, it is questionable that I am writing and that others will read what I have written.

It is even questionable, then, that I am actually participating in the activities that I believe myself to be participating in at this moment. The same is even true for speculations like Darwinian evolution. Species may change over time and there may be a multiplicity of species on the

planet, but Darwinian evolution is not provable because it is not observable from beginning to end. The fact of the matter is that we can doubt most things that we believe ourselves to know. Many have questioned whether people can actually obtain any true knowledge at all. If we can reasonably create any doubt about the things in our lives, then those things cannot be proven to be true. So, we do not set out to prove things to be true beyond the shadow of a doubt. We set out to prove that we are rational in making certain truth claims. Humility is important for reasonable living and reasonable conversation. Gentleness and respect? I am sorry that so many people have presumed to have achieved all knowledge and to have a perfectly configured worldview.

## **I can't empirically prove my worldview,**

and that statement may surprise you. You know this. You've known it. That is why you forsook an organization that claimed to prove God because 'the Bible says so.' I have a handicap, here, because of the nature of knowledge and the nature of any worldview. A worldview is a belief system that makes certain truth claims concerning reality. It is by our worldviews that we interpret reality. No one that I know of or have seen actually develops a worldview based on reality because a worldview is necessary first in order to interpret reality. So, worldview is developed first based on what we hear from others and what we philosophize for ourselves. How we define reality, then, is always an interpretation of what we see, hear, feel, smell and taste. If anyone's worldview is wrong, then his or her interpretation of reality will most likely be wrong. So, we should be very

humble. In essence, no worldview can be proven to be true beyond the shadow of a doubt. There are facts that can be proven, more or less. These, though, are the evidences that must be interpreted in order to make arguments concerning one worldview or another. Worldview must be argued for on a more philosophically abstract level. If anyone ever claims that he can either prove or disprove God's existence beyond the shadow of a doubt, he is placing God's existence in the wrong category because God is not a physical or an empirical being. Instead, we must prove that belief in God's existence is a valid belief to hold. This is why we needed Christ to come and reveal God to us. It is why we must rely on the Holy Spirit to travel with the words that are preached from the church stage. It is why we need Scripture in order to know God more fully. It is why we are unable to simply come to have faith. It is why Christ must intervene to save us. We are slaves to our nature. We cannot see God and no one has ever seen God (John 1:18). So, we learn that if anyone ever claims to have seen God, he is a liar according to God's own word. We must remember that we have not seen God either. So, we speak about Him with humility. Gentleness and respect.

## **This book is honest about this.**

1 Peter 3:13-17 says, "And who will harm you if you are deeply committed to what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear or be disturbed, but honor the Messiah as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in you. However, do this with

gentleness and respect, keeping your conscience clear, so that when you are accused, those who denounce your Christian life will be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.”

The call in Scripture, then, is simple and we've ignored it. I'm sorry. We ought to always pursue truth and goodness no matter the cost. If we are not pursuing truth, we are not honoring Christ, the Messiah. This, and we always ought to be ready to give a reason for the hope that we have based on the truth that we have discovered. Our hope is eternal life in Christ. We are challenged not to have a blind faith. While it is possible to have faith in the right thing or person without a valid reason, the challenge here is for us to actually explore the reasons for our faith and know them. We should believe, yes, but we should also strive to know why that belief is valid. We should always communicate our reasons, whether those reasons are philosophical, evidential, or experiential, with gentleness and respect. According to Peter, this is how we keep our own conscience clear and how we honor God. Any argument we choose to make should be made with peace and grace. We often don't. My generation is just in its anger concerning much of the organized church. Again, I apologize.

## **I'm still sitting here,**

because I want gain a greater understanding. Shouldn't we seek that first? Second, I want my brothers and sisters to gain a greater confidence in Christ philosophically. Third, I desperately want you to realize



that a Biblical worldview is reasonable and not without merit. God is God despite the sins of the organized church. Am I only thinking or are these words actually coming out of my mouth. Are you hearing me? Are you staring into space because you are thinking, because you're bored, or because I am having that nightmare again?

Sip.

## **The Book on the Table**

This book, the one on the table in front of me and the one this man has so many problems with, is the single authoritative set of documents for the Christian worldview. Not only do we trust what is claimed factually, but it is our eyeglass through which we observe the world. Everyone has an eyeglass, many more smudged and scratched than others and many that are wrongly prescribed. Without the Bible, there is no solidarity among people who call themselves Christians. Without the Bible, there is no basis for the Christian worldview. Not coincidentally, both Judaism and Islam are also entirely dependent on the existence of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament. The relationship between Christianity and the Bible is complete and utter dependence. This can be relatable even down to the level of the local church. If a local church considers any other document to have authority over the life of the person and of the church, then that church must not be a church trying to follow Christ. There is another reason many of us forsook the church. Hypocrisy. Blatant hypocrisy. The Bible says one thing and the church didn't look like that, so we figured it was a scam. Most things are today and religion is no exception. You are merely looking for control. You are adding numbers to your bank account and your members list. It makes you look good, and that's really what you care about. Church by-laws do not have the authority that Scripture has, yet they are worshipped by most congregations. The only reason we have them is because they are required to operate according to human laws and required to protect the church from breaking certain laws of the state. The Book of Mormon has no authority. False translations of Scripture bear no authority.

Personal preference and philosophies have no authority. Tradition also bears no authority when compared with the Bible. Some of these things may be important to consider, but it is the Bible alone that is the authority for the Christian because it is the Bible alone that is considered to be the inspired word of the living God. Because there was a failure to at least strive to operate Biblically, a whole generation assumed that the Bible did not really have the power attributed to it by some. It is just another religious book with just as many errors as other ancient texts. Science and history have proved that it's not accurate. That is what my new friend claims. That is what I once believed, even if secretly.

The Holy Bible is composed of two sections: the Old Testament, which came from the Hebrew nation, and the New Testament, which came from the earliest followers of Jesus Christ. But, are these sections authentic? Are they actually reliable? Is the Bible a good historical document? Are there any contradictions present within the text of the Bible at all? The truth is, if there are, then we have the responsibility to question the biblical worldview. If, however, the Bible is coherent, it seems we have a basic responsibility to carefully consider its claims.

## **Before we consider these questions,**

we should know what Scripture claims to be. This is by no means a comprehensive look at everything the Bible claims or every reference suggesting these things, but here, sitting at this table looking out at the people here and talking with this man, it must suffice. Let me turn in his Bible.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

“All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

Isaiah 40:8

“The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God remains forever.”

John 5:39

“You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, yet they testify about Me.”

According to just these verses, if the Bible is true then it is the only word that has been inspired by God. There can be no other. Adding to it or to taking away from it would be to dishonor God, who chose to inspire this collection of documents and no other. To consider any other document to carry the authority of God would also be to dishonor God, who, again, chose to inspire the collection of documents found in the Bible and no other. This is especially so since Paul referred specifically to the Old Testament as he wrote his letter to Timothy. The only reason the New Testament has any authority is because it is

a record of the outworking of what had been predicted in the Old Testament. Without the Old Testament, the New Testament has no meaning.

Paul also mentions that Scripture is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, and for training in righteousness. This means that if the Bible is true, it is beneficial for teaching, for training and for correction. When we work this out, we have to realize that preaching, if it is not also teaching, is worthless. Yeah, we heard people who claimed to preach growing up. Even when I think back on my involvement in church, I realize that no one took the time to actually teach me the whole counsel of Scripture. It was random stories or others telling me how to live my life. To receive a random verse of Scripture out of context and listen to the predispositions of any preacher through that the proclamation of that text is actually dangerous for the church. Now, it seems, the church is seeing the results, or the lack thereof. The evidence is clear. Look at how many people are here.

I read a news article from the Babylon Bee because I love satire. The world we grew up in was a joke and it's becoming moreso. We need the distraction and we know that when people are being sarcastic is the only time they are telling the truth. In the article, there was a pastor who had a revolutionary message to deliver during the Christmas season. The title was, "Jesus is the Greatest Gift of All."<sup>1</sup> What is ironic about it is that this is the type of message we hear in most churches around Christmas time. It is the type of message that is expected. If we hear virtually the same message every year, we are guilty of not

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<sup>1</sup> **"Preacher Revolutionizes Evangelical Thought With 'Jesus Is The Greatest Gift Of All' Christmas Sermon." The Babylon Bee. 2016.**

exploring the whole council of Scripture. The same is true when we only teach popular passages or on popular topics. The church that doesn't walk through all of Scripture in some manner does not benefit from the holistic teaching of Scripture. No wonder we grew up to believe that the Bible wasn't that important. It wasn't even treated as important by our teachers... The generation before us did not consider it important enough to teach it wholly and deeply. We chose not to pay that much attention. Since we didn't pay attention, we didn't benefit. After all, the Bible is beneficial only for those who would be corrected by it. Why would we submit to a book from which we only heard the same ten stories repeated? We were set up for failure.

The Bible also admits its own limitations. We cannot be saved just by our knowledge of the Bible. Only Christ has the authority to save us and so it is only by faith in Him that we can be saved. The Bible does, though, claim to equip us for every good work. That means if the Bible is true, then we are not equipped for every good work if we do not receive its holistic counsel and strive to live according to that counsel. Without God's Word, we are unequipped to live holy lives clothed in good works that actually honor God. Even though we didn't receive this word wholly, still we are the ones who are blamed for leaving. I apologize to my generation, and it seems I am offering an apology for my generation now against what the church has become.

I must also, then, offer an apology concerning the veracity of the Bible. Is it what it claims to be? Am I justified in believing that the Holy Bible is both authentic and reliable?

# Authenticity

is accuracy of source. It is the difference between that twelve-year, single malt scotch sitting in front of you and some cheap imitation distilled in Bough's backyard somewhere in the Bible belt, most likely Tennessee or Alabama. It is the freshly ground and pressed Ethiopian Yirgacheffe as compared to Folgers burnt in an industrial coffee maker, that one in the break room at Kroger.

We might ask questions like, "Was the document truly written by the person or people to whom it is attributed?" and, "Was it written during the proper timeframe?" Is this really from Scotland? Was it distilled by a Scotsman? Was it grown by an Ethiopian, roasted correctly, and paid for by fair trade standards? Most of the time, authenticity for any document is impossible to prove conclusively. Even though I am writing this to you, in this room, I could never prove beyond any suspicion that I have written this after you receive it. For all you know, it was someone else pouring hours into this note and my name was simply placed on the cover. Though, I assure you that I would never want to take credit for anyone else's work. I am convinced that ghost-writing is one of the greatest travesties of our time. All we can do for any document, especially one of antiquity, is prove that it is more likely authentic than not.

Authenticity is not synonymous with reliability. Don't worry, I'll get there. If a document is not authentic, though, it cannot be reliable as a source. Reliability depends on authenticity, but not everything that is authentic is reliable. As we apply this to our thinking about the Holy Bible, we must realize that if it is not authentic, it cannot be reliable. If it is authentic, that doesn't necessarily mean it

represents what is true or that its claims are meaningful.

## Old Testament

It is more difficult to track the authenticity of the Old Testament than the New because it is a much more ancient set of documents. Essentially, we defined the Old Testament canon by adopting what had been passed down through the Israelite nation for centuries and what was already accepted by the nation as Hebrew Scripture. It had been passed down and accepted as Israel's history and culture. This speaks volumes of authenticity because the people by whom Hebrew Scripture was developed are still around, existing even as a national people. We can guarantee that as long as the American people are around, the content of the constitution will be preserved at all costs even if the original document one day perishes. The Old Testament canon was completed by around 435 B.C. and the oldest manuscripts currently date back to 150 B.C. (from both the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Greek Septuagint). While I sit here writing this, the oldest and complete manuscripts date back to the 4<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.

When compared, no significant differences are found between the oldest and newest manuscripts. This means that it is more likely that even the most recent manuscripts are accurate representations of the autographs (the original documents). Added to this, there is no textual or historical evidence to suggest that the Old Testament is not authentic.

While a proper study would require us to walk through the documents in the Old Testament and measure the authenticity of each work by considering the authorship and date of each one, this is sufficient for our current



purpose. With the given information, we can conclude that the current Old Testament is more likely authentic than not.

## New Testament

The authenticity of the New Testament can be more readily traced because it is more recent than the Old Testament. Please keep in mind, we are not yet exploring reliability, only authenticity. All of the documents within the New Testament were written within the First Century A.D. Before any New Testament book was officially listed as a part of the New Testament, it endured rigorous textual criticism. While we don't have the time to discuss every component of textual criticism (I only have so much bourbon), there is one condition that the books had to meet before they were considered to be Scripture by the early church. That condition is known as apostolicity. Apostolicity is simply this: the autograph had to be produced by someone who knew the incarnate Christ or someone who followed a follower of the incarnate Christ, just as good scotch is only authentic if it is made by a scotsman in his homeland. This means that the books with the greatest degree of question are Hebrews (which was believed to be written by Paul but is now questioned by scholars), and Mark, which was written by a disciple of Peter (we don't know if Mark ever met Christ in the flesh). Any questionable material was not accepted into the canon, and many works were rejected by both the early church fathers, modern day Protestants, and Catholics (Though the Orthodox and Catholic traditions have added what was not in the Hebrew Scriptures to the Old Testament).

The earliest list of books included in the New Testament canon surfaced in A.D. 367 and included all of

the books that are in the canon today; about 250 years after the documents in the New Testament were written. This means that the collection had been in circulation long enough for its contents to actually be questioned. The copying and distribution of the New Testament, then, occurred very shortly after the autographs were produced. There was not much time for edits to be made or for details to be changed.

Added to this, the earliest manuscripts date to between A.D. 125-200. This means the generation that saw the autographs would have still been alive and any edits would have been discovered. The great conspiracy would have been uncovered and burned under the scrutiny of the eye-witnesses and whistle-blowers. There are no significant variations between these earliest manuscripts and the latest manuscripts that we have available today. There was also not enough time for legend to develop within the text. Furthermore, there is no textual or historical evidence to support the claim that the New Testament manuscripts are not authentic. Therefore, the New Testament manuscripts are most likely authentic.

## The Whole Bible

When it comes to the authenticity of the whole of the Bible, we can consider the number of manuscripts. There are more than 20,000 ancient manuscripts that have been discovered and examined critically. The earliest manuscripts are dated to about 100 years after the autograph and no autographs are available. Remember, we are still not talking about reliability. There are other texts that are considered by even the most critical scholar to be authentic. Caesar's Gallic Wars, for instance, only has 10

manuscripts that have been discovered and the earliest manuscript is dated to about 1,000 years after the autograph is presumed to have been produced. Similarly, Aristotle's Poetics only have about 5 manuscripts that have been discovered, and the earliest manuscript is dated to about 1,400 years after the autographs are presumed to have been produced. This means that both of these ancient documents, that are considered by most scholars to be authentic, have much less textual evidence supporting their authenticity than does the Bible. This will be the case with virtually any other document of antiquity.

The collection of documents we call the Holy Bible, then, actually have more textual and historical evidence supporting their authenticity than any other historical or literary work in antiquity. Just the evidence mentioned here is so powerful that if we decide or claim that the Bible is not authentic, then we must also decide or claim that any other historical or literary work in antiquity is not authentic. If we do anything else, then we are contradictory in the way that we approach scholarship. Furthermore, the sheer number of years over which the Bible was written (1500 years) supports the authentic nature of the collection as a whole.

Here I have to add a side note. Any scholastic institution that refuses to teach the Bible must refuse to teach all history and literature because the Bible has surpassed all other literary and historical work regarding evidence in favor of its authenticity. Even in secular schools, this becomes a historical and a literary matter, not a matter of mere religion. The Bible is the most important book to teach at any institution that hopes to actually educate concerning history and literature, and I think that scares some people. Without teaching the Bible, education

is mediocre at best. The Bible must be taught well if we hope to be well-educated people. When the ten commandments are displayed on state property, they can be displayed on a historical, civic, and literary basis, not necessarily on a religious one. The Ten Commandments, then, cannot be removed because they are religious, for they are historically, civically, and literarily displayed.

## **Reliability**

is essentially the accuracy of truth claims present in any document. Whiskey from Scotland isn't necessarily scotch. Coffee from Ethiopia isn't necessarily rich or full. Reliability is important. The Bible makes certain claims regarding reality and we want to know if we are justified in believing what the Bible claims. Here, there is a great danger. There are many people who refer to themselves as Christians and who will say something to the effect of, "I believe this because the Bible tells me so!" That may be good, but the follow up question is always going to be, "Well, how can I know that I can actually believe the Bible?" We are a society in which all authority is questioned and in which people are skeptical and overly critical of everything. If we hear someone make a claim, we want to know that we can trust that person before we actually believe him or her. The same is true when we consider the Bible, especially for those who are not already believers. They want to know that they can trust the claims made in the Bible. So, we should also strive to know that we are justified in believing the claims within the Biblical text.

When we talk about Biblical reliability, or the

reliability of any document for that matter, we look at three things: authenticity (which has already been discussed), coherency (whether a document is internally sound or self-contradictory), and correspondence (whether a document paints an accurate picture of the world or not).

### Correspondence

Does the Bible paint an accurate picture of the world we live in? First of all, in every account and in every story, the Bible accurately describes the major eras throughout human history. In fact, the stories in the Bible seem to directly parallel the major eras in human history. Hebrew structures have been found in Egypt. A tomb that is believed to be Joseph's tomb was discovered. Inside is a statue of a man with red hair and with a coat of many colors. There were also Hebrew housing divisions in the same city. Egyptian hieroglyphs tell the story of foreign rulers who were in the land and who were driven out around the time of the Exodus. The Egyptians referred to these foreign rulers the Hyksos. Added to this, Roman persecution is evident in the historical records just as described in the Bible until A.D. 313, when the Edict of Milan was signed (which outlawed the persecution of Christians). There are even possible sites that have been discovered for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and these sites were covered in a layer of ash. While this is not a comprehensive look at the evidence, we can see that the Bible is accurate regarding many major historical events. As historical evidence is considered, the realization should be made that no event in the Bible has ever been disproven; not even a worldwide flood as described in the text. Again, we must remember the difficulty of proving or disproving

any worldview and especially any historical event.

While there are many instances in which the Bible has been authenticated by archaeological evidence, that is not the case with every event in the Bible. Not every event in the Bible has archaeological evidence to support it. When we encounter these, we can know that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. After all, some scientists still try to prove darwinian evolution even though it has not and cannot be observed. There are many good scientists who also spend their time looking for extraterrestrial life even though there is no apparent evidence to support the existence of that other-world intelligence. If the Bible is accurate in what it has described and that has also been attested to in archaeology, and has not been disproven on any account, then it is most likely believable in the events that have not been attested to archaeologically.

The Bible also accurately describes the imperfect state of the world and of people. Where the Bible has made predictions and those predictions have come to pass, those predictions in the Bible have been accurate. There are anywhere from 1,800-2,500 predictions made in the Bible depending on how those predictions are counted. 1,200-2,000 of them have been fulfilled without any deviation. If the Bible is accurate in its record of history and accurate in the predictions that it has made, then the Bible most likely corresponds to reality.

### Coherence

So, the Bible corresponds to reality in every degree that it has been tested and is testable. Does the Bible contain contradictions? Does it contradict itself?

There are about 40 different human authors spanning 1,500 years. All of these human authors throughout these 1,500 years tell the same story and that story does not change. Despite many attempts, no legitimate contradictions have been found within the collection of documents that together make up the Holy Bible.

In order to better understand the types of details that are proposed as contradictions by some, we can explore the Biblical text. We can read Matthew 28:1-8 and Luke 24:1-10. It is the account from two Gospels regarding the discovery of the empty tomb. Oh, look! You have this bookmarked with your notes in the margins. In Matthew's Gospel, one angel is recorded as descending from heaven and rolling away the stone. In Luke's Gospel, there are two men in dazzling clothing who suddenly appear. There is no record of these men or angels rolling away the stone or descending from heaven. Are there any contradictions? Some would insist that there are. If angels appear visually to be men, then both are accurate descriptions. If there are two, then there must also be one. In order for there to be a contradiction regarding the number of angels present, the text would have to read, "There was one and only one angel." When details are absent from one account, it does not mean that those details are not accurate. Rarely do we remember all of the details when we are recalling a story. There are no contradictions, here.

This is the case with virtually every proposed contradiction in the text of Scripture. Either this, or people have misread the text of Scripture. Difference is not disjunction. The reality is, most people who try to point out Biblical contradictions only point out differences in the recounting of events. The Bible is internally coherent, and

this means the Bible is most likely both authentic and reliable. It also outshines every other historical and literary document in antiquity because it is more sound and is more attested to than any other document. The Bible has also withstood centuries of close and critical examination to a degree that no other document in human history has. It has withstood even the tests of time and human cynicism.

## **Here is what this means**

for us and for every other person on the face of the planet: It is actually more reasonable to live according to the Bible than according to any other law or philosophy. In fact, if we want to know God, the Bible is the most likely set of documents to reveal God rightly. Consequently, the Bible is also the most important book to invest time in reading. Finally, it is reasonable for anyone to make the Bible his or her authority for life on this earth. There is one limitation, though. The Bible cannot save people or provide eternal life. Only Jesus Christ can do that.

Swirl. Whiff. Sip.



## **The Evolved Person**

The people here are so evolved, so cultured. The generation before us wasn't like this. Our ways are foreign. We are the new renaissance, or late Rome; either our flourishing or our destruction will reveal which. We are people of intellect and education, of philosophy and science and great passion. We work hard and we have even made drinking an art. We are so evolved. Surely, not even those living in Jesus' time were as intelligent or cultured or capable as we are.

One of the greatest hangups for people considering the Christian faith is that popular science promotes a certain theory of origins and a certain theory concerning the earth's age and these theories do not seem to be corroborated by the text of Scripture. We know more now. We are too smart for empty religion. In fact, according to some, there doesn't seem to be a need for a divine, intellectual Creator at all. The creation story we have come to believe is different from the creation story given in that book sitting on the table with its color tabs and marginal notes. Is there really any claim against it that actually holds any validity whatsoever? The Creation story was the basis for the whole Law, and the Law was fulfilled in the person of Christ. The Creation story, then, is very important when considering the whole text of Scripture. If the Bible is wrong in its account of creation, there is no basis for the Law or Christ's fulfillment of the Law. In all reality, the creation is my favorite part of the story that Scripture tells. Take a moment to pause and take another sip. Open up your Bible and read the first four chapters. Then we can continue our conversation. It's important.

If age of the earth or theories concerning evolution

are going to keep anyone from believing in the God of the Bible, then the Bible is going to have to be proven to give either an age for the earth or a process other than evolution by which God chose to bring about the existence of all creatures. What are you drinking, again? Twelve year, single malt? I'll keep that in mind.

## **Age of the earth in the Bible is**

presented by Creationists<sup>2</sup> to be around 6,000 years. This figure is found by tracing the genealogies in the Bible back to Adam and Eve, but this is the only way that this figure can be derived according to the text of Scripture. There are some problems with arriving at this as an accurate figure, though. First of all, Scripture seems to be vague on the amount of time that passed between the beginning and the first day of creation on the earth (Gen. 1:1-3). Secondly, we simply do not know how long Adam and Eve were in the garden. It seems to me that the only reason people have to count their age is because they are anticipating the end of life. There would have been no reason for Adam and Eve to anticipate the end of life if the world was perfect and death had not yet been earned. This, however, is only speculation on my part. It is a contemplation that can serve to create a question as to Adam and Eve's true age. There does seem to be evidence that Adam and Eve were in the Garden for an extended period rather than only a short period. When we read

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<sup>2</sup> Creationist here refers specifically to a person holding a scientific presuppositional belief in a literal six day creation and in a young earth. Thus, not every Christian is a "Creationist."

Genesis 4, particularly verses 1 and 14-17, we see that by the time Cain murdered his brother there were not just other people on the earth, but other nations. Furthermore, we see that Cain was not classified specifically as Adam's first-born son. We might even consider the command that God gave people while in the Garden, namely to multiply and fill the earth. In a perfect state of existence, it seems unlikely that people would have been unable to fulfill God's command. It is more likely that, even while in the Garden, Adam and Eve would have done what married people do and that nations would have had time to develop even while Adam and Eve were in the Garden. These inductions are not provable claims. Most claims are not. This requires much time before the Fall and, consequently, means that we cannot simply follow the genealogies back to find the specific age of the earth if we expect to be accurate. In fact, that is a simple-minded way of dealing with the question of the earth's age.

When the Hebrew text (the original text of the Old Testament) is observed, the six days of creation are missing a definite article. This is also true in Exodus 20:11, when Moses recorded the Sabbath Day as a requirement for the Jews. The 6 days of creation can be translated two different ways, then. First, they could be translated as, "The first day, the second day, etc..." Or, they could be translated as, "One day, on a second day, etc..." In fact, the only article is given for the seventh day and it was probably given to highlight the importance of the Sabbath Day or the Day of Rest. These translations, though they are both valid, have very different implications. One creates a necessity for a consecutive, literal 24 hour interpretation of the text. The other grants the opportunity to interpret the story in a non-consecutive manner, meaning Scripture is not precise on

the exact timing of creation. We read wrongly when we read it as though its aim is to provide these details. Though it has been accepted historically as 6 literal and consecutive 24 hour periods, it just isn't that exact in the text of Scripture. We also might learn that just because something is accepted by a group of people does not make it correct. It also does not make it incorrect.

The simple answer is this: We have no idea how old the earth is, how long creation took, how long people were in the Garden, and how many people were on the earth at certain times according to Scripture. This answer simply is not given. It is not the Bible's goal.

## **Most scientific models today**

posit that the earth is around 4.5 billion years old. That is much different than the 6,000 year claim! In fact, if I was convinced that science was beneficial I would be compelled to completely deny this book on the table if it actually genuinely led to a necessary belief in a 6,000 year old earth. The scientific number is gathered by radiocarbon dating space rocks that have fallen to the earth from beyond earth's atmosphere, somewhere in the solar system. There are some reasons that we might question this figure as well. First of all, radiocarbon dating is inconsistent enough to question. I am not claiming here that radiocarbon dating is always a terrible method, simply that there have been enough inconsistencies to question its reliability. The 4.5 billion year figure also does not take Einstein's Theory of General Relativity or Quantum Theory into account. It has actually been discovered that objects with a greater mass have a greater gravitational pull on time. This means that

there are some parts of the universe where time actually moves slower than it does in proximity to the earth. Weird! This makes it impossible to measure time across the distance of the universe and also makes it impossible to determine the rate of time at any moment in the past, especially the distant past.

Consequently, this means that any Big Bang model, beginning with one singularity at a near infinite density virtually stops any sort of discrete time. If time has no movement, then it is near impossible for any movement within time to develop. If our solar system is 4.5 billion years old and our universe much older, it's existence is so miraculous that only the movement of time, let alone every other needed variable, would demand the existence of a Creator in the continuous realm of time to spread the mass of this singularity out enough that time could even be experienceable or that anything requiring discrete time can actually take place without time itself being virtually stopped by the gravitational pull of the early universe. Time as we experience it is a miracle. Age, then, is scientifically relative and nearly impossible to count in any regular or systematic way on a cosmic scale. It is one of science's great limitations, but we don't want to admit that. We are drunk on the knowledge that we perceive ourselves to have. Curse those who question what we have accepted!

In addition, there is a great darwinian bias that plagues popular science. Darwinian bias requires that people assign large spans of time because darwinian evolution requires time if it is in fact the process by which the many species were brought about. Because of this presupposition, popular science today looks for older ages rather than younger ages intentionally, which seems to be just a little closed-minded. Most people from most

viewpoints are closed-minded in this way. Yes, even my evolved and cultured generation. Tell me again, why is it we've rejected the church? Bias.

## **Considering both viewpoints,**

then, we might ask how old the earth actually is. The simple answer: We do not and cannot know for sure. Anyone who claims differently on either side proves not to pursue genuine knowledge. Since Scripture is so vague on the subject, there is no claim that can cause us, or anyone else, to doubt the validity of the Christian worldview. Christians are free to explore any claim while many materialistic scientists are forced to be closed-minded because of their own presuppositions (aren't we all?). What was that science once said but has been forgotten? Oh, yes. Question everything.

## **God created all things**

according to Scripture explicitly. Remember, though, the language in the text is not as exact or precise as we might like it to be concerning God's cosmic timeframe. Because the language is inexact or imprecise, there have been a few different interpretations of the Creation account. The first being a literal, consecutive (also known as a Young Earth, but that is here a misnomer) interpretation where God literally produced creatures out of nothing by speaking them into existence. Now, the Bible seems to be clear that in the beginning God created, which means at some point God brought a discrete world into existence when there was no discrete world that previously existed,

but Scripture seems to indicate that God used materials that were already present as He made the earthly creatures. Secondly, there is a literary framework interpretation where the first three days parallel the second three days and the days are used simply as a structure by which the creation story is told. In this view, the days are not seen as literal but intentionally structural in order that the story might be told in an understandable way. Third, there is the Day-Age Theory, where each day of creation is said to represent a vast amount of time in which these things were taking place. There is the Gap Theory, which posits gaps of time between the days. Not surprising, there are still more theories concerning the interpretation of the creation account. The primary observation I wish to make is that the Creation Account has not bound itself to a consecutive interpretation. Neither are any specific processes described within the Creation Account; only that God spoke and the result was creation. That scotch you are drinking. It was crafted at a small distillery in Scotland. You wouldn't argue against the person who is telling you how it was made. So, Scripture tells us who created. That is its goal. We have the freedom to discover precisely how. I believe God wants us to. Why else would He create a discrete universe in which by looking at the stars we are looking into the past.

The only thing that we can deduce from the Creation Account is that it was God who did the creating and He created human kind in His image in order to rule over the rest of creation as His representative. Perhaps this is the entire point of the creation story anyway. Again, a specific mode is never described or even referenced. If we are to read the account for what it is, we still have to speculate or make an educated guess as to the "how" of creation. If we hold a genuine biblical worldview, then we

are free to discover without fear.

## The most popular scientific theories

are founded within the realm of darwinian evolution. Here, we should not make the mistake of thinking that any legitimate scientist has claimed any darwinian process to be fact, for there are several theories even within this realm and molecular processes present specific problems to every theory. The two most popular theories are the traditional (slow progress) and the punctuated theories. The traditional theory is still the theory being taught in most public schools and in the university even though many, if not most modern naturalistic scientists have moved from the traditional view to the punctuated view. Institutionalized education will usually be behind the latest discoveries in this way. The punctuated view claims that a great number of years pass and then there is a relatively short period of time where species are going through evolutionary changes. This is followed by a long period where species are, again, not going through evolutionary change. This does not require the fossil evidence that the traditional view demands, and is much more difficult to observe (in fact it is impossible). If it cannot be observed, then it must always remain unproved and in the realm of speculation.

Creationism is another popular view held primarily by the Christian scholars at the Institute of Creation Research. In this view, kinds were directly created by God distinct from one another. This view allows for speciation and changes within the genus. This, though, proves to have



the same problems that the theories of evolution have, namely that the processes cannot be observed. Thus, this theory must also remain in the realm of speculation.

There is so much evidence (and I find this interesting) suggesting the presence of an intelligent creator, that prominent voices in the scientific world like Richard Dawkins even say that we may have been seeded by some type of intelligent, extraterrestrial lifeforms. His presuppositions lead him to say that these lifeforms would have themselves had to come about by some sort of darwinian means.

## **I have a small pepper garden...**

When I planted the seeds, I desired to have them grow. I discovered that the soil needed to be fertile. That meant animal waste or decomposed organic material. Plants require animals to grow. Animals require plants to live. That is why no one can truly be vegan. Both animals and plants have to exist simultaneously for either to survive.

If many theories of evolution still exist, then it has not been observed and, therefore, cannot be proven. Similarly the Bible does not speak of the mode of human origin. William Lane Craig, a prominent apologist (that word seems familiar, what was I doing here again?), states approximately that if evolution were the mechanism by which the vast number of species were brought about, it would be so miraculous that it would require the existence of a creator. At the same time, if darwinian evolution is not the mechanism by which the vast number of species were brought about, the creation is so miraculous that it requires

the existence of a creator. I experience this truth every time I enjoy one of my peppers. This means that neither God, nor His inspired word, can be disproved by any theory concerning human origin. In fact, every current origin argument demands the existence of a creator. As you drink your 12 year scotch, you experience this truth, too. That barley required *fertilized* soil. The very generation that has forsaken the body of Christ enjoys daily the fruit of Christ's labor at the foundation of the world.

## **People are free**

to discover without fear. In fact, we are encouraged to discover more about God through what He has made. God's existence has not and cannot be disproven by any theory concerning human origins or the age of the earth. If God cannot be proven or disproven by use of the scientific method, then the only way that we can know God is by His own revelation of Himself. If it is more reasonable to believe the Bible than to not believe the Bible, and the Bible claims to reveal God, then we are more reasonable to trust the Bible than to trust science or philosophy in order to know anything about God. Yet, we have thought too highly of ourselves because we believe that we are evolved and cultured, moreso than the previous generations. This is the new renaissance, but it's just like the old.

Sip.

## **The Man in the Book**

The man that this book is about was called a glutton and a drunkard because of the company He kept. Yeah, the whole book is about one man; you didn't know? I think He would be here sitting with you, too. His name is Jesus. Did He actually physically exist on the earth? Is He merely a legendary figure? This question is a question that is not really considered by modern historians because evidence in favor of Jesus' existence is so definitive. So, we will briefly look at the evidence, know that we are reasonable in our belief that Jesus did physically exist, and then will move on to a more pressing question: Why does it matter?

That's what you want to know, isn't it? Why does this matter? What benefit is there if Christ was really present in the flesh? What gain is there under the ivory steeple?

## **Jesus' earthly life**

is presented to us in the Gospels. There we see both eyewitnesses (Matthew and John) and those who heard about Christ from eyewitnesses (Mark and Luke). These accounts are in this book, the one sitting on this table in front of us. The Gospel accounts (and the Bible as a whole) are most likely both authentic and reliable. In fact, the Bible is so engrained in and confirmed by history that if the Bible were to be removed as a valid historical resource, no work of antiquity could be considered a valid historical resource if we are to be consistent in our treatment of historical documents. Yes, I needed to repeat that. Jesus' existence is also confirmed in the Roman historical record.

Josephus, who lived from A.D. 37- c. 100 (within a century of Jesus), was a Jew who recorded history for the Roman empire. He was not, by any indication, a follower of Jesus. In his *Antiquities*, Jesus is mentioned twice. One instance is questioned by most scholars (and myself) and so I will not quote it here. The other instance is most certainly written by Josephus' own hand for the purpose of Roman history. In *Antiquities* 20.9.1 Josephus described the death of James the Just, who was a half brother of Jesus, who was called the Christ. Not only do we have secular evidence of Jesus' earthly existence, but also that James was his half brother as it is described in the Biblical text.

There was another Roman historian who was not a Jew. His name was Tacitus. In his *Annals* (44:3), he described the crucifixion for the purpose of Roman history less than a century after the event. Again, Jesus is recorded in the secular history of the Roman Empire. Not only is it clear that Jesus existed, but also that Jesus was crucified. Once again we read the same story in the secular history of Rome that we read within the Gospels.

In A.D. 112, there was a Roman investigator by the name of Pliny the Younger. By this time, the Christian faith had become considered by Rome to be its own religion instead of a sect of Judaism. The Christian people refused to worship the Emperor as a god and so the Christian faith had been outlawed. Pliny the Younger wrote a letter to Emperor Trajan, who was having the group investigated. Here is what Pliny wrote as he described the meetings of the early church:

“They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any

wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food—but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.”

Here we see in the secular history of Rome that, from early on, Jesus was worshipped as God and that those whose lives He impacted devoted themselves to a life of self-sacrifice. We also see that Jesus' life had a great impact not only on those who knew Him physically, but through the generations for years and years.

The evidence we see, then, suggests that Jesus did, in fact, exist. Not only did He exist, but He was worshipped as God from very early on. Christians from the start contented themselves to live lives of sacrifice, to love their enemies, to practice self denial, to tell the truth, to pay their debts, and to be good citizens (to be innocent in the eyes of the law of the state where it was possible). Again, not only did Jesus exist, but His life and ministry had an impact on many people through every generation.

The implications of the historical record are empowering. We are not reasonable to question Jesus' existence. Anyone who claims that Jesus did not exist simply has not taken the time to observe the historical record present in both the Gospels and in the secular Roman history.

## **This is life changing...**

If the Bible is truly authentic and reliable, then

Jesus, who most certainly existed physically, actually claimed to be God. Furthermore, the Biblical account is confirmed by the secular Roman history. Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate. The Old Testament, which is also most likely authentic and reliable, repeatedly predicts the coming of a Messiah. Micah 5:2 declares that this king would be from antiquity and from eternity. Through the 1,400 year development of the Old Testament, the Messiah is constantly and consistently predicted. If any event that had been predicted for at least 1,400 years came to fruition and was accomplished by one person, that event and that person would be the most important event and person within and throughout all of history for us to consider.

It is my discovery, then, that Jesus not only existed, but seems to be the most important person in all of history because history is centered around Him and leads to Him. If anyone is to insist that Jesus' existence does not matter, he or she also insinuates that history does not matter. If we insist that history does not matter, then we also insinuate that the products of history do not matter. As I understand it, current cultures, worldviews, traditions, religions, scientific discoveries, and philosophies are all products of history. Therefore, to insist that Jesus' existence does not matter is to insist that nothing anyone believes or thinks in the contemporary age matters at all. It must be the case, then, that in order to reasonably hold any viewpoint, the life and ministry of Jesus must be considered. If it is not considered, we cannot arrive at our current conclusions with any degree of certainty. Why are we here, in this place talking to each other? This moment is a product of history. Our generation is a product of history. Just ask the two people who shackled up twenty-eight years ago, making it possible for me to be here drinking this bourbon today. All

of history literally points to Jesus and figuratively screams the name of Jesus Christ. Our being here, your listening to what has become my seemingly endless monologue, is itself testimony to the reality of Christ.

We receive yet another empowering implication: Jesus' existence matters not only for the Christian, but for everyone. It is important for everyone, then, to examine the life of Jesus and decide for him or herself whether or not belief will be placed in Jesus as the Christ. Jesus claimed to be God. He claimed to be the Messiah and the Christ. John Duncan formulated a trilemma that was later used and popularized by C.S. Lewis:

“Christ either [1] deceived mankind by conscious fraud, or [2] He was Himself deluded and self-deceived, or [3] He was Divine. There is no getting out of this trilemma. It is inexorable.”

It was impossible for Christ to have been just a good moral teacher. We cannot approach the historical existence of Jesus as if He was only a good example or merely gave good precepts by which we should live. In John 6:6-7, Peter states that Jesus is the only who has the keys of eternal life. If Jesus is who He claimed to be, then He is the most important historical figure of all time. Not only the Gospel, but also secular history, including the Jewish records and Roman records, seems to indicate that Jesus was who He claimed to be. Secular history confirms the story in the Gospels. Added to this, we see that Jesus still impacts billions of lives today. To say, then, that Jesus' life is unimportant is to blatantly ignore all of history. Christ Jesus is the only one who has the keys to eternal life. We cannot find eternal life through any worldly avenue no matter what other people promise us. Jesus is the only one.

In the context of church and of the Christian life,

Jesus is not merely someone we talk about. He is the one person who means the difference between eternal life and eternal condemnation for us. This means that we must ask ourselves whether we have faith in Christ or not. Do we want Christ, or only the promises of the Christian faith? If we only want the promises of the Christian faith and do not place our faith in the person of Christ, we have placed our faith and our trust without purpose.

Charles Peace, a man who was on death row in England in the 1870's, was visited by a pastor and he had this to say:

“Sir, I do not share your faith. But if I did- if I believed what you say you believed- then although England were covered with broken glass from coast to coast, I would crawl the length and breadth of it on hand and knee and think the pain worthwhile, just to save a single soul.”

If the people in the church today truly believed what they claim to believe, there would be no sacrifice that was too great in order to reach just a single soul with the message of Christ. That, I fear, is what has made human religion worthless in the eyes of my generation. We claim Christ, but He is not really so important to us. I apologize.

“Excuse me, miss. Can I get a water to wash this down? Thanks.”



## The Legends We Write

We didn't like the legends of our fathers, so we wrote our own. We designed a new marketplace of ideas and almost every previous form of communication became antiquated and outdated in almost an instant. The church didn't communicate with us. So, we wrote our own stories, developed our own causes, and forgot about the plight of the previous generations. It's our fault, and theirs. Thus, my apology continues.

There are a few people today who will say that the Bible is full of myths, and excuse themselves from believing in Christ on that basis. Ah, he is still here; the man with the t-shirt. This is one thing he said. This statement is interesting because the word, "myth," could mean one of two things formally.

First, a myth could mean "a traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of a people or explaining some natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events." We wouldn't know that. We needed to rewrite and reinvent. Tradition meant nothing to us even though we were its product. Most stories concerning the revolutionary war, the founding of Rome, and even stories concerning the founding of individual states would be considered to be myths or would fit into this myth genre. These stories are always past tense and may contain truth and fiction or may be entirely true or fictitious. In this case, the first 11 chapters of Genesis and the Resurrection narrative fall into the "Myth" genre, but that does not necessarily mean the stories in these accounts are fictitious. Since we bucked tradition, we assumed that these stories were of little value. We wanted a current experience and shallow, entertainment

based church was born. Though some of those grew rapidly, mostly we saw through the facade. We didn't bite and we won't. I know, it looks like there are multitudes of us there when you look from the outside. The truth? 75% of us are still entirely absent. The entertainment experiment failed. It was a blunder to match that of the already established organized church.

Second, a myth could also be "*a widely held but false belief or idea.*" In this case, the phrases, "Sugar causes hyperactivity," and "Attention span is getting shorter," are myths that both parents and children believe even though they are false. These *myths* are always *present* tense and always fictitious even though they are perceived to be the truth. This sort of myth abounds because people are gullible in their wretched state of existence.

When stories in the Bible are referred to as myth, people are not usually using either of these formal definitions. Most are forming an entirely new, cultural hybrid definition of the word "myth." This hybrid definition might be stated in this way: "A story that is believed by some to be true, but is unauthenticated and most definitely false." This matches more closely the definition of "legend." We don't need our fathers' legends. We are writing our own. We are meeting in places like this and sharing with others the way we think things ought to be over a pint and a game of billiards. Who are you voting for? What about welfare and gun-control? Have you noticed that our opinions are almost always the direct opposite of the previous generations? There is a deep truth to be grasped, here.

From the start, then, we can notice a linguistic problem to the accusation that the Bible is full of "myths." It may be the case that scholars once identified the genre of myth in the Bible (which does not necessitate fiction), and that popular culture (which held an entirely different

definition of the word) interpreted “myth” to mean what it did not. Because of this, people may have believed that the Bible was full of made-up, fictitious stories. It is entirely possible that there was a general lack of understanding and a misinterpretation due to linguistic morphology. The man sitting at that table over there just ordered an Old Fashioned. He was brought a Whiskey Sour. There is a difference between sours and bitters. Misunderstanding leads to the message being transformed into something that it is not. All of the sudden myth becomes legend, and we are writing our own. This is not difficult for us to understand. If I were to ask any person today what I meant when I said, “That is incredible!” I would receive the answer, “You mean that whatever it is you are referring to is awesome or amazing.” This would not have been the case years ago when incredible was properly used to say that something was without credibility. A scholar today may use the word correctly to mean something is not credible, and popular culture might interpret the saying to mean that the scholar is amazed by something that he or she does not actually believe to be true.

Not only, then, must I apologize to my own generation on behalf of the church, but also to the church on behalf of my generation. Before we assume to know what someone else means when they say something, we should strive first for understanding. Truly listening is important, and not many people do so. That’s simply what it means for us to love others. We’ve missed that all around, haven’t we? Just look at that terrible political ad on the television above and behind the bar.

When people say that the Bible is full of myths, we cannot really be sure what they mean. Because of this, I want to change the language of the question for the sake of clarity. Are there any fictitious stories that are presented as truth in the Bible?

In Luke, chapter 7 and verses 41-50, Jesus, yes, the

man who is the focal point of all history, tells the story of two men who owed a debt. One man owed a much larger debt than the other, but both debts were forgiven. Jesus used this as an illustration when He was talking with Peter and painted a picture of the idea that those who are forgiven more, have more love and appreciation toward the forgiver. I believe that the Bible is entirely accurate in its telling of the events, but the illustration Jesus' used may be understood as a made-up scenario for the purpose of teaching. When we do find possible fictitious accounts in the text of Scripture, they seem to be illustrations used for the purpose of teaching and understood in light of the text of Scripture as such. Scripture doesn't make those stories out to be true and literal. Nothing, though, that has been presented as truth in the text of Scripture has been proven to be fictitious on any grounds. This book is most likely both authentic and reliable. If it were to be removed as a historical source, so would virtually every other work of antiquity. There, I repeated myself again.

There is one story that has been accused of being entirely fictional in nature: Noah's Flood. Noah's flood is presented as historical narrative in the book, though some claim it to be a made-up story, or legend. It is nearly impossible to prove or disprove any historical event. All evidence is interpreted through the lens of one's worldview. In Genesis, chapter 7, we read that Noah and his family entered the Ark. We read that all animals entered according to their kinds. We read that all the mountains were covered under the whole of the heavens (and I checked the Hebrew to be sure it was the whole of the heavens or sky). It is specified by the text of Scripture to be a literal, global flood.

There are some seemingly reasonable objections to this story. First, that the ark could not have floated. In fact, scientists have produced scale models of the Ark and have put them through the a flood simulator. The models

capsized. Ships that were built out of wood and were not as big as the Ark capsized on the ocean without a global flood phenomenon. Of course, this first objection only works for the materialist or for those who are looking for an excuse to discredit God's existence. Bias. Anyone who believes in any sort of spiritual realm can see that, in the context of Genesis 7, it is God who closed the door of the Ark. It is God who provided safety for Noah's family. It is entirely possible for the God of the universe to carry the Ark, which was not sufficient by the abilities of Noah and his family. The story is about God's deliverance, not the ability of any person. Such is the case with the whole Bible. Yet, we tend to make ourselves the center of the story. Oh yeah, we saw the same tendency with the creation account, didn't we? Interesting.

Second, there is the claim that no archaeological evidence has been found. It is true that the ark has not yet been discovered (at least formally). This does not, though, mean that the story is fictitious. Third, fossil evidence is questionable. There have been mass fossil graveyards found, but multiple explanations exist as theories concerning their formation. It may have been a global flood, or something else.

Though there is no certain evidence in favor of a global flood, there is also no certain evidence that stands against a global flood without much unhealthy speculation. If the Bible is both authentic and reliable, then we are reasonable in believing the story of the Great Flood. Is there any evidence in favor of this story? Or, will we reject this as legend that needs to be rewritten?

There are fossils of sea creatures found far above sea level today. This evidence is always interpreted through the lenses of a worldview and multiple theories exist to explain it. The Black Sea is thought to have been fresh water at one time, and much lower. 7,000 year-old villages were found about 300 feet under the current sea level.

Given the inexactness of the dating methods, this could have been around the time of the Flood, but still does not necessitate a world-wide flood event. Any interpretation of evidence is highly speculative on both sides of the debate. A world-wide flood cannot be absolutely proven empirically. The good news is: Neither can an ice age, an extinction event caused by a meteor, or the former existence of a sort of Pangea; which are all events or formations that most scientists believe to have been. It is by speculation that evidence is interpreted through a worldview to determine past events. We have employed inference through both our inductive and deductive faculties. Most historical claims prior to the recording of history are weak claims even if valid and even if absolutely true.

This means the story of the Great Flood cannot be claimed by science to either be fiction or non-fiction. We are reasonable to believe that the story is entirely truthful.

I have recently been looking into population genetics and the study is fascinating. If an equation is developed to predict human population that is based on current population trends world-wide (A.D. 0-2011), there would be about the number of people on the earth today as there are (around 8 billion) if Noah and his family were the only ones present on the earth according to the biblical timeframe. Furthermore, if Adam and Even lived 8,000-10,000 years ago, then the population of the earth just before the Great Flood would have been around 10 billion (which most experts agree is the max number of human inhabitants the earth can support).

This is also highly speculative (I just find it interesting), because natural disasters, baby booms, and medicine cannot be measured accurately by the equation. The world seems to look just how we might expect it to look if there truly was a world-wide flood. This is not the only explanation that might work, but the observations are

certainly compelling.

What exactly does this mean for us? First, not everything can be proved or disproved empirically, but that does not make it fiction. Second, everyone accepts historical events on the basis of faith (yes, including the materialist). According to the historical narrative, God takes the matter of sin and human wickedness very seriously. That, my friends, is a message that we should pay very close attention to, especially as we write the legends that will be passed down to our own children. Or, perhaps, we will do what generations before did not do out of fear, the fear that was realized when we forsook the church. Perhaps we will tell the truth after seeking genuine understanding. Maybe we will go back to the church and see reformation in the likeness of Christ. Maybe I'm just dreaming.

That Old Fashioned sounded good, "Please make sure bitters are used. Don't smash the cherry. Thanks."

## Image Is Important

Nobody expected this, but perhaps that is precisely why we wrote this into our culture. Everyone was trying to dress down and we revisited the 20's (the 1920's that is). Hairstyles went back, just a little shorter on the sides and I want that hard part. Men started wearing suits again, and I have a box full of pocket squares. Let's be honest, though. I'll wear a partial so I can look more relaxed. Business casual is the new casual. We grew our beards out and broke out the suspenders. I haven't been able to find those button suspenders that I want, yet. Guess I will have to order them. We were done with what we perceived to be the mediocre existence of Generation X. Image was important. We wanted others to know what we were. I think that is also why, for the most part, we stopped using coffee machines. Well, that and we wanted a more genuine coffee with a fuller taste profile. Pour-over filters, french presses, and moka pots started selling again. Oh, look. My spellchecker doesn't even recognize what a moka pot is. That is how old, and new, it is.

As we read through the Psalms, we catch a glimpse of the hearts of people that were responding to God. 73 of the psalms in this book are attributed to King David. David was known as a man after God's own heart and, in many of his psalms, he shared the distress of his heart. In Psalm 14 David cries out to God wondering why nobody else seems to call upon the name of the Lord.

My heart resonates deeply with David's. As I look around, my heart is so burdened. I feel, many times, like I am striving to live life according to God's instruction. It is such a good instruction to follow! Then I see others who have access to the very same instruction from the all-wise



God of the universe and choose not to follow it, but follow their own preferences and their own wisdom instead. This is how I feel to the depth of my bones when I consider my own generation, the very people in this place.

In the book sitting on the table (1 Chronicles 21:1), we read that Satan actually stood up against Israel, moving David to take a census. In 2 Samuel 24:1, in the same book, we read about God stirring David's heart, which led him to take presumably the same census of the people. Someone who already believes that the Bible is truthful will reconcile the two versions of the story and someone who already believes the Bible to be false will claim that there is a contradiction. It may be the case, here, that God has stirred David's heart, causing David to take a census and Satan took advantage of that opportunity and moved David to respond to God's work in a way that was not honoring to God. If this is the case and if this is the proper way to look at this part of history, then we can notice something very important about the way Satan works to turn the people of God against God.

1. Satan inserts himself during times of transition.  
David's reign was about to end and he was about to pass his kingship to his son, Solomon. David was trying to prepare the people for the transition and he even began laying the foundation of the Temple that Solomon would be responsible for completing (1 Chronicles 22). Because Satan inserted himself and people allowed him to deal damage, there was division among the people of Israel. Joab opposed David in the first part of 1 Chronicles 21. If we are pursuing what God wants us to do, then the church is always in transition, always growing more mature,

always learning to serve and love more people, and love people more. If the church is always growing in a variety of ways, then there is always an opportunity for Satan or Satan's army to insert itself in the life of the church and cause division where division makes no sense. Thus, churches become more concerned about securing their future than about following Jesus. Does this not bear significance when new generations look for their place in the church on this earth? Satan will stir our hearts, create thoughts within us that we will dwell on, and use those to turn brothers and sisters in the faith against one another. This is what has happened with and in my generation. We must be vigilant and be aware that Satan will take every opportunity to insert himself in our society and in our lives, especially during any time of transition.

2. Satan will tempt us to respond to God's providential work on our own terms. This contributed to the conflict between David and Joab. When someone has a different way of doing things than we have or uses different tools than we would use, Satan will draw our attention to those trivial differences. When we focus on those differences, Satan gets exactly what he wants because we stop focussing on Christ and His vision for society and for our lives. We must not focus on differences between methods and tools. We must focus on the mission of God and be aware that Satan will use anything he possibly can to distract us from that mission. I am sorry the church lost sight of her first love and forgot to love people instead of buildings, money, and influence. God is still faithful. In fact, He works even human unfaithfulness together

for His glory.

3. Satan's objective most often is not to attack God's people in an obvious way, but to sneak in and turn the people against one another and against God using the vision that God has provided. All of the sudden, we have turned understanding into dogma and moral purity into legalism. Again, I apologize to my own generation and to the church. We built our own kingdoms upon the promises of Christ and we wrote our own legends. We should have listened to Johnny Cash. We wrote the new legends on our walls and shared them in our stories. You see what we want you to see about us, and we don't acknowledge what we have kept hidden.

It was within the context of David's life, and all of the division that Satan caused in these ways throughout David's reign, that Psalm 14 was written. Why did the people of God not seem to call on God? This is the question David continually asked through many of his psalms, especially this one.

## **There is no God,**

I hear the thought of the man sitting here with me echo throughout our society. Scientific discovery has made it possible for people to believe that things have come into existence without the need for a creator. We not only write what we want to be seen, but refuse what we don't want to see. It's more important for me to be true to myself than to receive and give honestly. So, I have not recognized that if

any theory of evolution were true, it would be so miraculous that it would demand the existence of a creator.

It's not the bourbon talking. I'm sober-minded. When I look at the beauty of the world, I see God. Look, the stones in your glass are crying out. No, it's not the bourbon talking. Scientific evidence seems to suggest that the universe had a beginning, so we can draw a certain conclusion:

- Whatever begins to exist has a cause
- The universe began to exist
- Therefore the universe has a cause

This is a simple argument known as the Kalam Cosmological Argument. If we continue to follow this line of thinking to its natural conclusion, there is either an infinite regress of causes or one single uncaused cause of everything. That uncaused cause would be God.

The rocks are crying out again. There are not many people on the face of the planet that would claim there to be no objective morality. Those who claim that there is no objective morality (that there is not one moral standard that applies to all people) would have to claim that it is morally right to treat all subjective morals as right (that's a shortening of the word 'righteous' if you didn't notice), which is an objective moral claim. If there are objective moral values, there has to be a standard for those values. That standard would need to be God.

- If God does not exist, objective morals and duties cannot exist
- Objective morals and duties exist
- God exists

There are other crying stones (the Ontological is my favorite), but these will suffice for the purpose of insisting our belief that God exists is not only valid, but more likely the case. There is not enough whiskey here to get every rock to the table with us so we can listen.

It is the fool who says that there is no God. If we observe the world today and observe the human condition, our observations cannot lead us to believe that there is no God. In fact, listening to the rocks leads us to the truth of God's existence.

The God from whom and through whom and to whom these rocks exist loves the atheist and desires the atheist to come into a relationship with Him just as much as He wants us and wants to bring us to our dwelling place with Him. When David writes about the fool saying in his heart that there is no God, we have to think about David's context. First of all, He doesn't say that the fool says with his mouth that there is no God. He specifically refers to the heart (the seat of the emotions and of thought). David was the King of Israel. He had many struggles. Satan was moving in the hearts and minds of the people of Israel and David was perturbed by the tendency of God's people to practice such Godlessness. The Hebrew word for fool specifically refers to someone who acts in a morally detestable way. David is writing about his own countrymen and people who outwardly profess to be God's people.

So, when we think about foolishness, we can know that it is foolish to say that there is no God (because God's existence seems obvious to us when we listen to the rocks), and we can know that it is foolish of people who claim to be God's people to live a life with which God is virtually ignored. David wept at this tendency within the nation of

Israel and we should weep when God's people today are only His people by proclamation and not by lifestyle. Again, I apologize and apologize and apologize.

## **We became corrupt...**

David poured his heart out saying that God has looked down to find who was wise, and everyone was found to be corrupt and to have turned from God. The Israelites claimed to be God's people, yet in their action they were corrupt. Jesus comes close to quoting this psalm in Matthew 10, when the rich young ruler came to Him and asked “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus responded by asking, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.”

Jesus went on to point out the fact that the rich young ruler claimed to be part of God's people, but he had ignored the poor (which was an action in opposition to God). Foolishness, then, leads people into corruption. Foolishness is proclaiming with our mouths that we are God's people and then still believing that we are actually our own. This belief leads to action. To be corrupt is to confess with our mouths that we are God's people and then to let our belief in self lead us to act in a way that completely dishonors God, whom we confess with our mouths. I'm sorry we've done this, and I'm sorry we've done this.

This is not difficult for us to understand in the world today. We confess that exercise is good for us, but we believe in our hearts that we would rather sit on the couch and eat cake (I am guilty). This belief leads to the action of sitting on the couch and eating cake. I justify my coffee

intake by arguing that it is made with water, so it must benefit me at least as much as water does. Only with God, the consequences are much greater than just being out of shape or getting the jitters (which admittedly I've never had). If we are foolish, that foolishness can develop into corruption very easily and this is all too real in the western church.

David referred to those who had become corrupt as workers of wickedness who eat up or devour the people who eat bread. Those who are corrupt and have turned from God because of their foolishness actually drain the energy from those who remain faithful to God. When anyone in the church is concerned only about self instead of the things that God is concerned about, that person usually causes more conflict and causes the church body to fracture and fall. Perhaps he causes one generation to leave or contributed to that exodus. We see this over and over again in the church. Sometimes it happens slowly and sometimes it does not wait. Again I will insist that the people of God must be vigilant in a world where Satan works in the ways that he does, by God's providence of course.

## **Righteousness is real...**

David didn't only mention a corrupt people within the nation of Israel. He also mentioned a righteous generation (v. 5). I do not know which generation this might have been because David could have penned this psalm at any point during his reign. He described this righteous generation as afflicted and accused those who are corrupt of constantly making endless arguments against the righteous generation in order to keep them down, by down

I mean under the foot of or keeping quiet or from having influence. What was that you said about Millennials? I have no doubt that David probably felt as though he was a part of this righteous generation. Even though there was no end to the complaints of the corrupt, the righteous generation found their refuge in God.

To be righteous, then, is to experience this conviction, burden, and affliction that David describes; seeking to always go through the process of honoring God better with our lives rather than confessing God and trying to stay the same. Those who confess God and then live according to self are corrupt according to David's psalm. They are the ones who will usually make empty accusations and criticisms that are not God honoring and that do not promote the things that God is primarily concerned about. When we are the object of empty accusation and criticism, we can know that our refuge is in God and not in people.

## **I am not here to convince you...**

It is not the responsibility of the righteous to restore the corrupt in David's psalm. Neither is changing you any responsibility of mine. Let's continue enjoying our drinks as we talk honestly. This type of change is a responsibility that God reserves for Himself. Only God has the power of deliverance and only God has the power of restoration. This means that instead of lashing out against those who afflict us and those who proclaim with their mouths that they are God's people but live in contrast to Him, we simply pray for them and become content in our affliction. When the



Lord restores us, there will be great rejoicing!

Image is important, but not what is written on our walls or in our stories. What we hear coming from the rocks draws our attention to someone different, someone higher, the one in whose image we were created and who yearns jealously after us.

Whiff. Sip. Savor.

## Grasping for Life

We work hard. We are constantly trying to find meaning. It is why we write our stories, develop our culture, and imagine that we have created some real meaning in our lives through philosophy and social activism.

The rocks say something that seems to be very outstanding. The claim is that our Savior not only died on our behalf, but was also raised from the dead. In all reality, I have to wonder if anyone really has a reason to believe that we are making the correct claim. As far as we understand death, there is no coming back from it. The rocks are honest about that. There is a fossilized fish tacked to the wall and it looks like he is holding a beer. “Stout Life.” It was Jesus who predicted that He would conquer death throughout His ministry. His claim was outstanding to those in the First Century just as it is outstanding to so many today. The truth is, the entirety of the Christian faith hinges on whether or not Jesus was actually raised from the dead. If He was not, then there is no power in His promise to give life. If He was not, then we worship and serve a dead man. We are like that fossil on the wall. If He did, however, then eternal life really is available for all people who would genuinely trust in Him. Instead of a stout beer, we eternally drink from the river of life. Instead of fossilizing, we receive new and perfect flesh. There is a rock in Jerusalem that would tell this story, a whole cave, in fact, where there once was a corpse and it got up and walked out.

We see one of the accounts of Jesus' resurrection in the work of a Greek and a historian who lived during Jesus' time:

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb. They went in but did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men stood by them in dazzling clothes. So the women were terrified and bowed down to the ground.

“Why are you looking for the living among the dead?” asked the men. “He is not here, but He has been resurrected! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, ‘The Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and rise on the third day’?” And they remembered His words.

Returning from the tomb, they reported all these things to the Eleven and to all the rest. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them were telling the apostles these things. But these words seemed like nonsense to them, and they did not believe the women. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. When he stooped to look in, he saw only the linen cloths. So he went home, amazed at what had happened (Luke 24:1-12).

The women who discovered the tomb empty were prepared to finalize Jesus' burial. Even though Jesus taught that He would rise from the dead, they were ready to bury Him forever. There was a lack of faith in the teachings of Jesus throughout the duration of His public ministry. When the women reported what they had seen, the apostles did

not believe them. It was nonsense that someone could actually raise himself from the dead. They knew. They were eating fish. Peter ran to the tomb to see for himself. Instead of celebrating the empty tomb in belief that Jesus' body had returned to life, he went home to marvel at what had happened.

Those who knew Jesus were so slow to believe that He had actually been raised from the dead. Those who find it difficult to believe are in good company.

After this, Jesus began to show Himself by making public and private appearances. In 1 Corinthians 15:5-8, Paul writes about many eye-witnesses (more than 500) to the resurrected Christ. Scripture is both authentic and reliable. This is especially the case since Paul was acquainted with the eye-witnesses that he mentioned. Added to this, separate Gospel accounts record Jesus appearing to the disciples. Gerd Ludemann, a German scholar and critic of the Christian faith, even writes that it is historically certain that people truly had experiences in which they saw Jesus after Jesus was crucified.

## **Is it possible, though?**

Is it possible that someone would actually be raised from the dead? Surprising as it is, Jesus is not the only one who has been raised. There are other accounts in Scripture of others being raised to life. There are also a multitude of stories outside of the Biblical text of people being raised to life after experiencing death. For instance, and just to give one example, Craig Keener wrote a two-volume work in which he compiled well documented miraculous healings. In his work, there are more than a few documented cases of

resurrection from the dead:

Noel Fernando was an Assemblies of God pastor also working at a Bible school, with a wife and two children. After he was taken to the hospital seriously ill, the Bible school sent out word to pray, but Noel died of a heart attack in the hospital. Because there was little privacy in the hospital, not only doctors and nurses but also many patients were aware of his death. Because he was still fairly young for a heart attack, they used a procedure to try to restart his heart; the procedure managed only to break a number of his ribs, but since he was dead it did not seem to make much difference anyway. The doctors finally gave up and pronounced him dead; because the doctor who needed to sign the release for the body to be taken to the morgue had left the facilities, however, the hospital had to hold his body. Meanwhile, believers elsewhere in Sri Lanka were still praying for Noel, unaware that he had died.

Some twenty-four hours after being pronounced dead, Noel returned to life, with all his systems functional except, ironically, the broken ribs. Other workers and patients in the hospital, who belonged to various religions, all recognized this as a miracle; some even laid food at the foot of his bed as offerings, in accordance with their traditional customs. In this case, there was both medical documentation and multiple eye-witnesses. Keener lists others. If you are interested, I recommend both volumes of his work.

This kind of resurrection is beyond the means of modern day medicine and something that the scientific method is unable to reproduce because the means do not seem to be material. People have been and are brought back

to life by something other than a doctor and science is incapable of explaining it. If Scripture describes the supernatural rising of Jesus, if Scripture lists eyewitness accounts, and if raisings are witnessed in the world today; then we are certainly justified in believing that Christ was, indeed, raised from the dead.

## **There's our story, again...**

As we look at the text of Scripture, we notice that the apostles knew that Jesus taught He would be raised, but they did not believe when it actually happened. Christ-followers today claim that Jesus has been raised, but do not many times celebrate what He has actually accomplished. We tend to, for instance, celebrate our own accomplishments. When many people who claim to follow Christ share their testimonies, it is all about them (not about what Christ has actually done). I am sorry.

If Jesus is alive (and He is!), there is even power over death in His hands! If Jesus is alive, then we do not have to fear anything (other than Him that is). If Jesus is alive, then we truly can trust in Him for eternal life.

If Jesus is alive, it would make sense to say that people who follow Christ ought to live like He is actually alive. We have more reason to celebrate than to discriminate. We have more reason to rejoice than to criticize. We have more reason to praise than to complain. If Jesus is alive, we can come to Him for peace when this world is so cruel. This means that time in prayer and time in Scripture are even more important for us than we might have otherwise thought. If Christ is alive, He actually speaks both through His word and as we bow our heads in

prayer.

And through these rocks. Sip.

## **Pardon Me**

People in the church really do seem to be hateful toward some and seem to look down on others. That is why we are sitting here together having this conversation. I just hope your being as genuine as I am. We have all experienced it. Perhaps there was a group in the church that talked about someone behind that person's back for any number of reasons. Perhaps we heard a preacher tell us that we were going to Hell because we are doing something that he believes is entirely sinful. Turn that phone off! Don't you dare take a drink! Dude, Jesus commanded that we remember Him when we drink the fruit of the vine. He will have it with us when we have it together in the fulness of His kingdom. Maybe, like me, growing up you saw that the church was quick to declare the all-loving nature of Christ and the imperfection of people, yet pretended to be perfect and refuse to share the story of a Christ who desires that all people come to Him. Maybe they did share that story every Sunday morning, but it never made it to the people who needed the message outside. What kind of love is that? If Christ loves all people and desires all people come to Him, why do so many people in the organized church ignore those outside the church walls? The inconsistencies I saw growing up made me think that the whole church thing was a joke and that people who claimed to love Christ only said that so they might feel better about acting selfishly.

The difficult truth is this: there are many people in the church who claim to be people of the gracious God and, at the same time, show one version of hatred or another toward others in their action or live lives with which God is not proclaimed as absolutely preeminent. In my own opinion, that is one of the worst sins, against God and



humanity.

Why is this the case? If God is all-good, why do people who claim to belong to God do terrible things? Why do we still struggle with sin?

What is it about our nature that warrants a conversation like this in this place, sitting at this table, and with this book sitting in front of us? People who claim to be God's people are not the only ones who struggle with this. Some inclusivists (people who claim to incorporate great diversity into their belief systems) seem to be hateful toward anyone with an ideology that promotes a single worldview over all others. Some atheists claim to have a greater capacity for love than the religious person, but then don't speak in a loving way concerning religious belief. Some intellectuals claim to be more prepared to live for the benefit of others, but pursue status and authority selfishly. Some of us, my generation, claim to have a better way of living than older generations, but live in such a way that the older generations suffer as a result of our lifestyles. Some who are more aged claim to be wiser for the benefit of others, but are really only concerned about fulfilling their own preferences. Some people in every category do what others consider to be evil. Thus, I realize that our question deals more with human nature as a whole and not particularly the tendencies of some who claim to be God's. People in every category do evil things. Why is this the case? Again, why do we all struggle with sin?

There is something else written in this book that comes to mind. Let me find it. Here, 1 John 1:5-2:6.

## **Why we are this way...**

In Genesis 1, we read about the creation of

humankind. People were created in God's image and were created in perfection. Perfection included the freedom to make certain choices. In Genesis 3, we read of how people used that freedom of choice to choose against a perfect God. To choose against a perfect God is to choose imperfection. In this, people sinned, walked away from God and chose to place themselves in a different condition: a godless one. My generation wasn't the first to walk away from God. The very first generation led the way, and every generation in between followed suit.

Scripture is honest about this condition and it is something that we can plainly observe when we look at our world and even our own lives. This is what it means to say that we are fallen creatures. People have a fallen condition that is a result of sin that is a result of our need to try and be righteous. Ask me about that sometime. If we claim to be without sin, Scripture states that we have deceived ourselves and are without truth. We have convinced ourselves that people are basically good, but even basic observation would lead us to a different conclusion. The rocks are still making noise.

There are a couple of ways that we can claim to be without sin. The first, and most obvious, way is that we say with our mouths that we are without sin. When we claim with our mouths to be perfect, we deceive ourselves. What was that you said about being better than another generation? What I find is that most people will not outwardly claim to be perfect and will not profess with their mouths to be without sin. The claim is subtle, like the notes of flavor in this Old Fashioned or in the espresso I will brew tomorrow, pour over some Baily's, and top with whipped cream, caramel drizzle, and a dash of nutmeg.

The second, and not as obvious, is that we insinuate

our perfection by constantly pointing out the imperfections in others. When we focus on the faults of others, we don't usually have to think about our own faults, and this is something that many people in every worldview are guilty of. Yes, I meant to say guilty. There was a story in Scripture in which Jesus went up the side of a mountain and began to deliver some moral teachings. We know this commonly as the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 7:1-5, Jesus addresses the temptation of judging others:

“Do not judge, so that you won't be judged. For with the judgment you use, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye but don't notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and look, there's a log in your eye? Hypocrite! First take the log out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.”

In all honesty, this should scare us. Here we have the God of the universe telling us not to focus on the faults of others, but instead to focus on our own faults. When we focus the faults of others, our attention is not on Christ. We should not assume that this is some new way that God operates. There was an instance in the Old Testament in which King David had sinned against God but was unwilling to recognize the sin in his own life. Nathan, a prophet God chose to hold David accountable, went to David and began to tell the story of another person's sin:

“So the Lord sent Nathan to David. When he

arrived, he said to him:

There were two men in a certain city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one small ewe lamb that he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up, living with him and his children. It shared his meager food and drank from his cup; it slept in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man could not bring himself to take one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for his guest.

David was infuriated with the man and said to Nathan: "As the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die! Because he has done this thing and shown no pity, he must pay four lambs for that lamb."

Nathan replied to David, "You are the man!" (2 Samuel 12:1-7).

King David was entirely willing to point out sin in the life of another man until Nathan revealed that man to be David himself. As we read more of the story, we learn that God was absolutely furious with David. We present ourselves as perfect when we complain about or constantly point out what we believe to be the insufficiencies of other people, or generations, instead of focusing on our own imperfections and sins. I apologize. I'm sorry we've been this way.

There is yet a third way that we present ourselves as being without sin, and I call it "Holier Than Thou Syndrome." At church, many people act like they have it all

figured out even though their lives are in shambles when they get home. I guess the same is true in this place. We dress up and talk about everything we are doing correctly. This is the tendency that many people have to act in front of people in a way that makes them look good. This forces us to not admit the struggles that we have. It also forces us to be more concerned about looking perfect than about pursuing Christ. In our effort to look good, we miss the goodness that Christ actually has for us. I might, here, refer once again to Jesus' famous sermon. In Matthew 6:1, Jesus teaches that we ought not practice our acts of righteousness before people. In Matthew 6:5-8, He teaches that prayers are to be secret, simple, and to the point (not to impress people). In Matthew 6:16, He teaches that we should not brag about our spirituality. We should not be concerned about others seeing our righteousness, and we should not be concerned about whether or not we see the righteousness of others. We won't, not true, godly, imputed righteousness anyway.

If we claim to be without sin when we focus on the sin of others and when we present ourselves as holy, John claims that we have deceived ourselves. This is ironic because our attempt is to deceive others. When we do any of these things, all we accomplish is hurting ourselves because we are not open to Christ's leadership in our lives. If we are not basically good, it seems that there is some need for leadership and direction so that we can learn to be genuine and honest about our condition. That is not natural, we were created in God's image. So, we try to look like gods in our own sphere. I know this drink was distilled by people in Kentucky. Those beans grown and roasted in Columbia or Ethiopia to be ground and pressed at home by us. Still we call it the nectar of the gods.

# This self-deception

is mentioned by John in reference to walking in the light. John implores his readers not to deceive themselves by convincing themselves that they are without need of improvement. Instead, they are to walk in the light. To walk in the light is to adopt a lifestyle by which we are actually seeking to improve and seeking to make changes based on Christ's conviction in our lives. If we focus on the improvements that other people need to make or pretend to be more perfect than we are, then John's claim, here, is that we walk in darkness because we have made Christ Himself out to be a liar by rejecting His word for our lives. To assume that we are correct and not in need of reformation is to make the king of all creation out to be a liar... I apologize. We've been stuck in our own ways for far too long and we alienated you. These apologies go both ways. Have you noticed?

Our current condition according to Scripture is a fallen condition. We are all imperfect. We are unrighteous. Every person in every place and under any worldview is capable of unspeakable evils. We are also capable of not recognizing our own evil deeds because we simply don't like to be wrong. It is why we have made up this idea that people are basically good and try so desperately to cling to the errant truth we have invented for ourselves. Christ, though, challenges His people to rise above this pattern, to examine the sins and the imperfections in their own lives, and to change according to His conviction. This is a constant process in the life of the genuine Christ-follower and it is a process referred to as sanctification.

The world is full of people who do bad things. The

difference for the genuine Christ-follower is that he or she is constantly being conformed to the likeness of Christ through this process of sanctification. It's uncomfortable, but we are okay with that. The pursuit of real and beneficial social justice is uncomfortable, yet we give up everything in our pursuit. So you see that our generation is okay with being uncomfortable. That was never the issue. You didn't have to entertain us. We just want our pursuits to be worthwhile. That's what we need, a pursuit of Christ in the context of community that is worthwhile, not shallow and not fake and not dumbed down.

## **Where we've failed...**

John claimed to write these things so that his readers might not sin. If anyone does sin, though, it is Christ who comes to our defense if we belong to Him. We've stated that evidence of our closeness with God lies in our works. Works are evidence of our closeness with God. When our works reveal that we are not close with God, it is Christ who defends us and draws near to us. This is a beautiful thing! God does not depend on people. This is grace!

John does state, though, that we can know we are in Christ if we walk as Jesus walked. In context, this means that we can know we are in Christ if we are walking in the light that we have described: allowing our sin and imperfection to be exposed to us so that we can strive for change. Jesus was perfect, but our calling here is not to exist as Jesus exists. That would be an impossible calling because we are not basically good. We are subject to our own unrighteousness and to this fallen condition. Instead, we are called to walk in the same manner that Jesus

walked: in the light. This is an idea that even practically benefits those who have not received faith in Christ. If we obey God's word, striving to apply the text of Scripture to our lives, God actually makes His love complete in us. The truth about our failure is this: it doesn't matter in light of salvation. The church will be full of imperfect people, and the only way we reject God is by claiming, even by insinuation, not to have any sin or imperfection. Pastors need to start setting this example. If we boast, we boast in and from our weakness and insufficiency.

The tendency of people to perform acts of evil is a human condition, not particularly a religious condition. We are all in desperate need of Christ to begin and carry on this work of sanctification within us so that we might be conformed to His perfect image! Without Christ, we cannot be transformed in this way. No one can.

Let us, then, surrender to Christ and surrender to His work of sanctification in us. Let us not focus on the faults of others but, instead, always strive to change according to Christ's conviction. This will help us to love one another more, and it will help us to love those who are members of other generations more. It will help us to mend what we have broken by our own failures. It is not our job to change one another. It is not up to us to change the actions and behaviors of those in our community. That is a job that belongs specifically and strictly to the Holy Spirit. Thank the Lord for that! All God asks us for is faithfulness to His sanctifying work of conviction in our lives while we are on this earth. God's sanctifying work, His grace, draws us into deeper commitment and greater works for Him.

Why do people do bad things? We live in a fallen condition. Why do we struggle with sin? Because we are still being sanctified. There are people who claim to be



Christians who do not follow Christ, but for those who do, sanctification will be a regular part of life for as long as we live on this earth.

Sip. That one burned as it went down.

## **Killing the Competition**

We didn't like the shallow religion of the previous generation, so we implicitly vowed to kill it off in favor of something new. Whether or not the new thing was healthy wasn't even part of the equation we were writing on our walls. If it weren't for God's love toward His bride, we would have succeeded. God is good even to us, and us: those who almost killed Christianity in my generation and those who implicitly vowed to be religion's last breath in response.

God has also killed, hasn't He? Why would a good God command that anyone be killed? What do the rocks have to say about that? This is probably one of the more difficult questions for the Christian to consider. The fact of the matter is, there is a time in Scripture when the Israelites came out of Egypt and God commanded them to destroy entire nations as they made their way to and entered the Promised Land. Entire nations! What causes alarms to ring in the minds of many people (including myself) is that the same God who commands some killing also gives a command to the nation of Israel not to murder (Exodus 20:13). With a command like this, we must decide whether we believe God is just in His own action or whether we believe He is not. If God is just, what does this mean for the faith and the trust that we place in Him? I guess we could ask Nietzsche. He would know the answer for sure now. Did the philosopher meet his maker or cease to exist? Is God dead?

Why do we prefer soft truth with our hard drinks? Let's flip the pages of the book sitting open behind your scotch to Deuteronomy 7:1-11.

## **A hard truth...**

What exactly does that mean? We have grown accustomed to these hard drinks, drinks that some abuse in order to forget the hard truths. A hard truth is not something difficult to understand. It is a truth that has a hard consistency, and truth that cannot be reasonably overlooked. Like the rocks in your glass.

In this part of Israel's history, we do read that God commanded the complete destruction of the Canaanite tribes who inhabited the promised land. Here, we need to make a very important realization. There is no story in Scripture, no reporting of events, that exists out of context. What is context? The fact that the Bourbon used in my Old Fashioned was distilled in Kentucky means much about the taste that is produced. Just as prohibition had a direct impact on the current popularity of moonshine in East Tennessee and the use of grape juice instead of wine in communion. Thomas Welch marketed to churches intentionally even before prohibition, though. It was nothing more than a business move and still we find the popular brand in Christian book stores. Still, instead of wine, as Jesus had and as churches had before our friend Thomas' business venture, churches purchase juice from the Welches company. The reason we have grape juice is not a biblical one. Kopi Luwak is so expensive because of the long, unorthodox process used to grow and transform the beans (though I haven't worked up the nerve to try it and am not sure I ever will). Context is important. The events described in Scripture are always a result of their own history and their own current circumstances. In our day, there is nothing that occurs without the past events that

have led to its occurrence. We left because we are responding to something. There is now a greater emphasis on reaching us because we left. Those attempts fall on deaf ears because people weren't real with us before. Why would they change? Oh, yeah. Sanctification.

There is always a context. In some cases, we are not provided with context. We are provided a description of an event and we are left to induce or discover the underlying context and circumstances. In the case of the destruction of the Canaanites, the book open here in front of us actually does give us context for God's command. We find this specific context in Genesis 15:7, 13-16. The pages sound like those flip books that got really popular in the 90's.

He also said to him, "I am Yahweh who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess..." Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know this for certain: Your offspring will be foreigners in a land that does not belong to them; they will be enslaved and oppressed 400 years. However, I will judge the nation they serve, and afterward they will go out with many possessions. But you will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a ripe old age. In the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

In this earlier part of the story, God brings Abraham to the land of Canaan and tells him that the land would be reserved for his descendants (the Israelites). When God brought Abraham to show him the land, the iniquity of the Amorites (which was a Canaanite tribe) had not been completed. In fact, God, in His omniscience (that means

all-knowledge), revealed that it would be at least 400 more years before the Amorites would complete their iniquities and the Israelites would be brought back to the land to inhabit it. God gave the Amorite people 400 years to repent and turn to Him and they did not. This sounds a whole lot more like mercy and grace than vindictiveness to me. I know that I do not often have the patience or the grace to give someone one year to apologize, let alone 400. Perhaps this is a fault that we all have, but God practices great mercy before administering right punishment. In one generation we tried to kill what we did not like and bring something new. We are not gods after all. We have criticized God for not showing mercy, when it is us who have not been merciful. What was that about our fallen and wretched condition? Context is so important for us to understand any time we read any document, especially this book sitting in front of us.

The two hard truths we see in this text are that God keeps his loving kindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him (Deuteronomy 7:9), and that He repays those who hate Him to their faces (v. 10).

## **So, we want social justice,**

but we have not been socially just on either side. If we are to look at the context and God's action in this particular record of events, we can know that God always has a reason for doing the things that He does. The Amorites hated Him for 400 years before He brought destruction upon them. Secondly, God always acts with grace and mercy. He could have destroyed the Amorites much sooner than He did and gave Abraham the land from the start. In Genesis 18, flip, flip, flip, we read of God's

judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah. His promise to Abraham was that if there were just a few righteous people in the cities, He would spare all (yes that right, all) of the people. Yet, no righteous people were found. If we apply this aspect of God's mercy and care to the Amorite people, then God would only command a people to be destroyed if there were no righteous people (or if their iniquities were completed). While God has every right to take life that He creates, He still provides more than sufficient reason to declare His own justness in His action. God is beyond reproach.

## **We are a moral people,**

and the reason we left is because we saw what we perceived to be immoral or moral standards that didn't make much sense. The reason we were pushed is because people were defending what they desperately believed to be morally correct. We are not the standard for morality and neither are they. We come to the understanding, on both sides, that God is the standard for morality; human reason, nurture, and responsiveness are not. Have we acted in love toward God or have we acted with hate toward Him? One is the measure of right action (yes, short for righteous again) and the other is the measure of action that is morally wrong. If our morality is centered around our wants or what we feel like our needs are or our own nature, we are a people morally detestable before God. Sadly, in our case, this means that most people on the earth are morally detestable (even many within the organized church and in this place). What we understand, here, is that it is God who decides when and how to punish nations who have hated Him. Why wouldn't He do so? He is our creator. He is

king. A king cannot rightly or generously rule without just punishment. A father cannot even lovingly raise his son without just and rightly applied discipline. Without hazardous conditions in the distillery, there is no Old Fashioned. Without stress and without this fallen condition, we are not fashioned for glory. It seems as though God might be working all this together, and the rocks, also formed under stressful conditions, cry out.

We come to the understanding that genuine morality is important for us. God, again, draws a parallel between our love for Him and our keeping of His commandments. If we love Him, we will strive to keep His commands. Jesus made this exact statement in John 14:15 and 14:23. Our obedience to God comes as a result of our love for Him, but cannot cause us to love Him. Behavior modification doesn't work. It's why we left, remember? When we love God, the result is obedience. If we are still concerned about justifying our own action rather than changing for God, then we have proven not to love God. Morality is, then, absolutely important for us. If we reject the commands that God has given, then we act in hate toward Him. There is no other option. We either love God or we do not. We are responsible enough. We have used unhealthy religiosity as our excuse to hate God and to be unjust in our rejection on both sides. All the while, we make up arguments to try to justify what we have written.

## **God is just**

as He brings one nation against another. This is an especially difficult realization when we recognize that nations are composed of children as well. In this, we have to trust that God is both just and merciful. Some arguments

can be made to make God look good to us in these circumstances, but I find them to be largely unsatisfactory. When considering this, our trust in God's just nature must carry us because we don't have all of the information. In fact, in the vastness of creation, we don't really have that much information at all. I know, that sounds odd to those who know how to pronounce ten-duotrigintillion and who use that search engine everyday. God is also always merciful and shows grace. He stands up against those who hate Him and shares His loving-kindness with those who love Him and keep His commandments.

With the Canaanites, God would no longer delay. His punishment on the nation was imminent. There will be a time when God will judge the nations and people and generations of the whole earth. It is His responsibility and His alone (we cannot be arbiters of God's wrath and we, as individuals, cannot punish on God's behalf). When it is time for God's judgment, will we be found to have loved God, or will we be found to have hated Him?

When we flip to Deuteronomy 7:12-15, we read of some of the rewards that God would give to the Israelites if they kept His commands in love to Him. While these rewards are material for the nation of Israel and we are not promised material rewards as God's people in our own day (though God may still grant them), we learn another important aspect about God's just nature. Just as He punishes, He also rewards. Let us love God and receive His reward rather than His punishment.



## Endless Apps

So our belief in a creator and in Jesus Christ as Lord is a rational belief and a belief that is justly held. Scripture is both authentic and reliable as we seek to know God, and God is just in what He does: always showing more grace and mercy to even the worst sinners. There are many sinners in this place. They have congregated here because many church organizations drove them away. Once again, I apologize.

What does all of this mean for us? What good are these truths about God and about the rationality of our belief in life and ministry and whiskey? Where do we go from here? What pursuit do I give myself to? In Matthew chapters 5-7 we see Jesus' famous sermon on the mount, in which He gives direct moral teaching, including the fact that not one letter will pass from the Law. Of course, this discourse leads into the rest of His bodily life and ministry on this earth. He is the fulfillment of the Law. At the end of His sermon on the mount, Jesus teaches us something very important regarding the foundation of our lives:

### **Matthew 7:24-29**

“Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on the rock. The rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds blew and pounded that house. Yet it didn’t collapse, because its foundation was on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of Mine and doesn’t act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, the rivers rose, the winds blew

and pounded that house, and it collapsed. And its collapse was great!”

When Jesus had finished this sermon, the crowds were astonished at His teaching, because He was teaching them like one who had authority, and not like their scribes.

## **We all have**

two options as we live on this earth. It is not whether or not we will put rocks in our scotch. Either we will build our lives upon the foundation of Christ's words or we will not. There is much more at stake here than that tingling sensation and the goodness of that cherry resting at the bottom of your glass. There doesn't seem to be an in-between here. We are either fully committed to live according to the words of Christ, or we are not committed at all. If Christ is the eternal word, then it was through Him that all of Scripture was inspired, and all of Scripture, including the words of the Law that Jesus mentioned, are words that mean something very significant for our lives. This is a clear indication that the words in all of Scripture are words that are either accepted fully or denied fully. They are not words that can be accepted only in moderation. They cannot be accepted only in part. We cannot love Jesus and reject a portion of the words He inspired in the text of Scripture. Furthermore, they are not words that can be accepted only on a trial basis. Let me see if Christianity works for me. If we test drive Christianity like we do a car, then it will not work for us. We will not be delivered. We will not receive eternal life. We will either build our lives on Christ's words or we will not.

As we consider our own lives, we come to this

realization: Christ taught that when we build our lives on the foundation of His words, we have a firm foundation in this life. A firm foundation sounds pretty good. Considering this, we might think about some of the struggles we have. We endure shaky ground. There are storms that impact us in this life. Most of the time, we do not have any control over the storms. We might lose a loved one, a relationship might end, we might experience financial struggles, problems in marriage, persecution of some kind, loss of a job, or illness. What we learn, here, is that a life in Christ is a life firmly grounded. This does not mean that we do not suffer. It does mean that when storms come, we are more prepared to stand through them because we have built our lives on the firm foundation of Christ. This can serve as evidence for our own lives. A life firmly grounded is a life in Christ. Christ helps His people to stand in times of great trial and tribulation. The context of this part of the text, though, runs much deeper than this. According to verses 22 and 23, a life built on Christ's word will help us to stand through Christ's judgment when the time comes. There is a time coming when Christ will judge the whole world. This will be a tribulation greater than any other for those who have not built their lives on Christ's words.

Thus we learn, and this is what Jesus taught, that whoever does not build his or her life on Christ's word (that's all of Scripture) has a faulty foundation. This foundation may hold for a time, but will ultimately fail (especially concerning the judgment of Christ). If we build our foundation on our own words, thoughts, feelings, or orientations; our foundation is less likely to weather the storm. Furthermore, it will not withstand Christ's judgment. Here, the challenge is the same for those defining their own lives in any way- from a self-defining of sexual orientation,

to the culture we try to design, to our generational trends, to our saying that we don't need the body of Christ to love Christ. We must deny the shaky foundation that we have built for ourselves so that we can build our lives on the foundation of Christ's word for the purpose of honoring Christ, not ourselves. When we build our foundation on our own material possessions, on our families, on our own thoughts about organization or structure, on our human relationships, on our thoughts about being a part of the church, or even on the work we think we are doing for the Gospel, we have a misplaced foundation and it is faulty because we are imperfect people. The challenge is always self-denial and submission to King Jesus.

## **By the life we live, then,**

we either show Christ or deny Christ. Whether or not we like to put things in these terms, every genuine believer is also an apologist and an apology maker. We choose every day to either show God plainly to people or not in our obedience to God's word. The sad reality is, most people do not reject God because the earth seems to be older than what some 'Christians' claim. Most people do not oppose God because evolutionary theory contradicts some interpretations of Genesis 1 and 2. Most people don't choose to reject Christ because resurrection is impossible by materialistic standards. Most people who have rejected the faith or consider the faith to be unimportant because many people who claim to be Christians live in a very un-Christlike manner. This is why I rejected the faith early on. Many people in the church today have not built their lives, their organizational churches, their relationships, or their basic beliefs on the actual words of Christ. When posed

with difficult questions, most 'Christians' choose to give a “That's the way it is!” type of answer rather than giving a true reason, an apology, for our having the faith that we have. We choose every day to either answer difficult questions about the faith or not. We choose every day to either obey 1 Peter 3:15 or not. With our lives, then, we argue either for God or against Him.

To those who left the local church. To those who say that they can love Jesus and not go to church. To those who have been hurt by the ridiculousness that has become the religious estate in the world today. I apologize, and I apologize. We live our lives in response to God's goodness, not the failures of people. Can I introduce you to who Christ really is?

## The Gospel of Grace

A long time ago, God created the earth and everything in it. He also created people in His own image. He lived with people but also gave them the ability to choose. After all, we cannot truly love if it is not a choice. People chose to rely on themselves, and in doing so chose to deny God. We were slaves to our nature. This action required God, who must be just, to pour out His wrath on people, but because of His great love and mercy, God did not do so immediately. This was part of His plan from the moment of creation. Instead, several thousand years later God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to satisfy human debt to God for the wrong that was done. God did this so that all people would have the opportunity to have a relationship with Him once again. Christ has paid our debt and no sin can keep us from God any longer. When we surrender to Christ, He gives us His righteousness and continues doing an amazing work within us. As we give our lives to Christ, we are given an eternal relationship with the God who created us, and the best part is that this relationship begins, for us, now.

There was a man from the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Him at night and said, “ Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher, for no one could perform these signs You do unless God were with him.”

Jesus replied, “ I assure you: Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

“But how can anyone be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked Him. “Can he enter his

mother's womb a second time and be born?"

Jesus answered, "I assure you: Unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again. The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

"How can these things be?" asked Nicodemus.

"Are you a teacher of Israel and don't know these things?" Jesus replied. "I assure you: We speak what We know and We testify to what We have seen, but you do not accept Our testimony. If I have told you about things that happen on earth and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you about things of heaven? No one has ascended into heaven except the One who descended from heaven — the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in Him will have eternal life.

"For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world that He might condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. Anyone who believes in Him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the One and Only

Son of God.

“This, then, is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who practices wicked things hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed. But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God” (John 3:1-21).

We cannot earn eternal life. We must be born again, of the Spirit. A relationship with Christ is not something that we can attain by keeping rules. It is a gift given by Christ. Being rescued from the darkness in this way means that we become exposed creatures, living in the light for God's glory.

If you would like to have a relationship with God, and be a part of His forever family, say the following words. God can hear you. In fact, He is the one bringing you to Himself and giving you the gift of eternal life.

God, I know that I have done wrong. I've done wrong by simply living without you in my life. Please forgive me. I believe that you are real, and that you sent your Son, Jesus Christ, to pay my debt. Because of that, God, I want to ask you to save me. I give my life to you, and want to have an eternal relationship with you. God, thank you for saving me. Thank you for loving me and giving me life.



## The Drive Home

That was a good conversation. I don't know if you really understood what I was trying to say or not. I will leave it to you. I trust enough in God's grace that I believe He is working in your heart and mind. Over the years, God has brought me from my once argumentative persona to desire more genuine conversations. I thank Him for working that out within me. Most people never mature enough to reject the need we have as creatures made in God's image to prove ourselves correct all of the time. God had to ruin that in me so that His strength and perfection in all things would be made evident.

There is a moment when the conversation leads to epiphany and epiphany leads us to ask many more questions. What is the church? Is it permissible to consume alcohol? Has my whole life been a sham? Is God calling me to do something more with my life? Can I understand God more deeply? Which religion, if any, correctly describes who God is? I know I have given my life to Christ and I believe that I am saved, but how is He saving me? When we have relationships with people, we care about them enough to know them more. We want to know their desires, likes, dislikes, and passions. It is natural that we would want to know more about God. My generation spent time learning the difference between a riesling and a moscato, a scotch and a bourbon and straight Tennessee. We learned how to make our own cocktails. We've seen the destructive power of alcohol and we have learned its health benefits. We have not learned much about God. Part of that reason is that the organized church never encouraged us to ask the deeper questions. "You must have faith," is what they said, but they never told us what faith was. We were

left to inquire of our friend, Google. Some found Christ, but so many of us found the clutter instead. I apologize. They tried to dumb things down for the most educated generation in the United States and we rejected it. What were we supposed to do? The secular world invested more in us.

You listened patiently to my words, but I don't know if you really understood. You have responded by saying that there is only one church. You are correct. This one church is composed of people. People exist in local communities. There are, therefore, local churches that exist as part of the one church. To reject the local church is to reject the one church. If we reject the church that Christ is building for Himself, what have we insinuated about our own love for Christ? Have we fooled ourselves in order to justify what we are doing? That was why we rejected the faith of our fathers, and here we stand doing the same thing.

They will reply, "Yes! What he said!" We are not off the hook. Those who are responsible for causing children to fall will be held as such. What was that Christ said about it being better for them to have a millstone tied around their necks and their being cast into the sea? Oh yeah, we aren't supposed to talk about that stuff... I have to apologize for how most of the Bible was ignored during our upbringing, too.

I desperately hope that you have accepted my apology and my apology. I desperately hope that your pursuit of Christ is reignited. I desperately hope that God will use this basic apology to ignite within you a need to know God more and understand Him more deeply. I have not sought to answer the great theological questions of our day, here. We can have another conversation about that

over a cup of coffee or another drink of your choice. This is only the beginning, and God does not desire that anyone perish but that all come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).



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