



WHY TRUST THE GOD OF THE BIBLE?

A SHORT CASE FOR THE
TRUTHFULNESS OF CHRISTIANITY

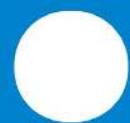


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1. What is Biblical Faith?

“There are two ways of looking at the world: through faith and superstition or through the rigors of logic, observation, and evidence—in other words through reason.”¹ So says outspoken atheist Richard Dawkins. This type of thinking regarding faith and reason has become predominant in our culture, though such a concept is completely foreign to the pages of Scripture and historical Christianity. As Edward Feser notes, “Faith is not emotional; it is rather an act of the will. And again, not because faith contradicts reason, for it doesn’t. Rather, faith in God...is nothing less than the will to follow reason’s lead when emotion might incline us to doubt.”² Hence, biblical faith is better understood as an active trust in the authority of what God has said.

It is not unlike what takes place when we visit a doctor. We would not take the medical advice of a random stranger on the street. Rather, we seek out trained and credentialed medical professionals that have proven they are knowledgeable about the workings of the human body. Given their training, they have access to information about our health to which we do not have access. Thus, when they provide a diagnosis we choose to trust them and do what they say or not. The facts that they have been trained by a competent school, have been properly credentialed, and maybe even come highly recommended by others give us reason to confidently place our trust in them.

What are the reasons, the “preambles of faith,” that should lead one to place their trust in the God of the Bible? In the pages of this booklet you will get a taste of a complete apologetic for Christianity. Apologetics comes from the Greek word *apologia* meaning “to give a defense.” It is simply loving people enough to answer their honest questions. This resource, based on the distinctive philosophical approach and apologetic methodology taught at [Southern Evangelical Seminary](#) (SES), contains the overview of a brief, but complete, argument for the truthfulness of Christianity. It is our desire that you will study the arguments, investigate the endnotes, and begin your journey of knowing why Christianity is true so that you can either put your trust in Jesus Christ for the first time or be equipped to communicate to others your convictions in a winsome and respectful way (1 Pet. 3:15; Jude 3). Far from being a blind leap in the dark, faith, in the biblical sense, is simply a step of trust in light of the evidence. There is no room for blind faith in the war of ideas for your mind (2 Cor. 10:5).

It is the desire of SES to equip men and women (whether in lay or professional ministry) with a synthesis of sound philosophy, classical apologetics, and a cohesive theology based on the inerrant Word of God in order to persuasively share their faith in a secular

world. May this resource serve in some small way to that end.

For those of you who are ready to go even deeper in your Christian thinking, please consider the many ways SES can help you be equipped. From our free mobile app, to the Lay Institute self-study courses, to certificate programs, to undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degrees, SES can meet you where you are on your journey. Visit our [website](#) to learn more about how you can receive vital training for evangelism and discipleship in a post-Christian culture.

2. Can We Know Anything for Sure?

Many today fail to see the importance of grounding their reasoning process in reality in spite of the fact that whatever is not based on reality is un-reality, in other words unreal. The slippery slope of subjectivism and relativism is the result of such “reasoning” manufactured in the imaginations of the mind rather than in reality, on Truth. This distinction is especially important for the Christians who desire to share their “reasonable” faith. Sadly, subjectivism has crept its way into the church with the assumption that we do not need to defend our faith with reason; we only need the Bible.

One of the most fundamental observations anyone can make of reality is that it changes, and yet something about it remains the same. What remains the same is its *essence*. What changes are called *accidental* properties. We can observe anything in reality, natural or man-made, for example a real tree, and see that it changes—grows larger, develops branches, colorful leaves, etc. over time—and yet it remains the same tree such that it is distinguishable from all the other trees. Its change is accounted for by the principles of *actuality* (act) and *potentially* (potency) that are present in all created things. Actuality is the existence of some thing. Potentiality accounts for the capacity of some thing to change or become other than what it is. Change could be *substantial*, in that I could destroy the tree and it could no longer exist. Or it could be *accidental*, such as cutting off a limb. The change could be internal, such as its growing a new limb, or the change could be external if I cut the tree down.

Everything in the world that we experience is a composition of *form* (actuality)—or what something is—and *matter* (potentiality to change) that individuates the form to be *this* thing and not *that* thing. For example, a cat is a cat because of its form or *catness* (what it is), and its matter individuates it to be *this* cat as opposed to *that* cat. Matter, as used here, should not be equated with physical matter, and form should not be equated with the shape of something. Instead, these are principles found in things or substances. As already explained, there are things essential and accidental to a nature. Something essential cannot be removed without changing what it is. Something accidental could be otherwise and would not change what something is. For example, it is essential to the nature of a cat that it be an animal nature. If that is changed or removed somehow, it ceases to be a cat. But it is accidental if the size and color of the cat change. Despite the change, it stays a cat. Such a description is possible for every created thing from the

smallest subatomic particle to the largest galaxies.

We come to know reality in an act of existence, in other words by its actual existence. This knowing relates to its form (essence) and its matter (potential to change). The form of something is related to its actuality. Again, form is what something is (i.e., an essence). For example, a cat has the form of catness and a dog has the form of dogness. Matter is related to the individual potentiality (to change). It is that which individuates an essence to be this cat or that cat. The form of a substance is immaterial. The matter of a substance is what individuates the essence to be a particular thing that gives it extension in space, which is limited to its form. We can say a dog is not a cat because of their different form or essence. We can say this cat is not that cat because of their different matter or individuation of matter.

The Process of Knowing

The soul is the substantial form of the human body. The way in which we know something is by its form, which is united to matter. We know things via our five senses. Since the form of a substance is immaterial, it is able to enter our mind, and we are able to know the thing, know the form extracted (in our mind) from its matter, as it is in itself. Contrary to what some philosophers have proposed throughout history, the form that enters the mind is not a different substance or copy of the substance that comes to exist in the mind of the knower. Rather, the same form that is united with matter unites with the mind of the knower; in a sense the knower and the thing known become one.

Once the form enters our minds, in an act of existence, our internal senses combine all the available external sensitive input. Our intellect is able to extract the universal from the particular, catness for example. We are able to form mental images (*phantasms*) of particulars by using the internal senses combined with other intellective powers such as remembrance and the abstracted universal. We are able to make judgements and form concepts and ideas about the known thing. All of this and much more happens effortlessly, almost without awareness.

This process of knowing can be applied to sensible reality and to the interpretation of any text or spoken word. We come to know a written or spoken word the same way we come to know any other thing in sensible reality. First, the author or speaker has an idea. Meaning exists as form (immaterially) in the mind of the author/speaker. The author/speaker causes a text to exist by imposing form (meaning) upon language (combining it with matter) to create a text or spoken language in sensible reality. The speaker expresses his thought, then the mind of the reader or hearer extracts the form (meaning) from the text or spoken word in reality through the senses, and then the meaning is processed

by the intellect. In this way a reader or hearer is able to know the meaning that is in the text or spoken words.

Why is This Important?

All humans have the same nature/essence; therefore, every intellect has the same capacities. Since the forms in reality are the same as what comes to exist in the human mind, *what* something is is determined by *reality* and *not the knower*. This is what we mean by truth. Truth is that which corresponds to its object, or, more specifically, truth is the conforming of the intellect to reality. Knowledge, meaning, and the intended purpose of all things are grounded in reality and are objectively verifiable. This explanation supports all human endeavors in the sciences and humanities and particularly makes Christian apologetics, theology, and ethics worthy endeavors.

This unity of existence between intellect and reality is the basis for the two extremely important great apologetic goals: to demonstrate the existence of God and to demonstrate the historical truth that God raised Jesus of Nazareth from the dead.

3. Does God Exist?

Since humans know the world, they must conclude that knowledge can be reduced to undeniable facts or principles. In philosophy these are expressed as *first principles*. For example: *something* exists is an undeniable statement about our act of knowing reality. It is on this undeniable knowledge that we can reason from effect to cause and see that even the most mundane object we encounter can lead us to truth about the existence and nature of God. “There is nowhere the unbeliever can hide in all reality where he is not standing on some ground that can be shown to point to its Creator.”¹

From the cosmological argument, to the design argument, to the argument from objective morality, there are many popular lines of thinking, both scientific and philosophical, showing that theism is true; that is, that there exists a God who is separate from, yet active in, His creation. We will look at two arguments, based on the thinking of the 13th century thinker Thomas Aquinas, built upon the understanding of sensible reality we have established.

First, imagine you are driving in your car and you come to a railroad crossing where you see one train car after another rolling by. Based on your observations and knowledge of how trains operate, you know that while these particular train cars are *actually* moving, left to themselves they only have the *potential* for movement. In other words, you know that each train car is dependent for its movement on something else to push or pull it (in this case, the train car in front of or behind it). Because you are so intelligent you also conclude that if the train you see was merely an infinitely long chain of train cars, or even a complete loop of train cars that wrapped around the entire earth and connected back on itself, the train would not be moving. Why? *Because you know there must be an engine.* That is, you know that since each train car has only the *potential* for movement, if there were not something, like an engine, that had movement of itself (so to speak) currently *actualizing* the train cars’ movement then there would be no movement at all. Regarding the relation between potentiality and actuality, Edward Feser says,

“A potential is always a potential *for* a certain kind of actuality; for example, potential gooeyness is just the potential to be actually gooey. Furthermore, potency cannot exist on its own, but only in combination with act; hence there is no such thing as potential gooeyness existing all by itself, but only in something like an actual rubber ball. It is incoherent to speak of something as both existing and being purely potential, with no actuality whatsoever. But it is not incoherent to speak of something as being purely

actual, with no potentiality at all [emphasis in original].[2](#)

Of course, the train cars could not move at all if they did not exist. The movement of the train cars is analogous to our understanding of why anything at all actually exists at this moment. Given our understanding of potency and act, we know that everything that exists must either be a combination of potency and act or it must be pure actuality. Whatever exists as pure actuality cannot, of course, contain any admixture of potency, and visa versa, whatever is not pure actuality cannot, in the ultimate sense, actualize itself. Our observations of physical reality show us that all aspects of the sensible universe are limited and/or changing. That is, *particular* things only occupy a *particular* space at a *particular* time and undergo change (ex. change in time, location, size, knowledge, etc.). The concepts of potentiality and actuality are the only ways to explain the limitations and changes of the things we experience. Hence, all of physical reality is a combination of potency and act, even in its very existence (i.e. things *actually* exist at *this* time, as *this* kind of thing, but have the *potential* to be otherwise or to not exist at all).

As with the train cars, any potential cannot actualize itself but must be actualized by something already in act. Much like the fact that our closed loop (or infinitely long chain) of train cars cannot account for its own motion, it follows that there cannot be an infinitely long line of actualized potencies. Therefore, there must be a first cause (in the order of being, not in the order of a linear series) that is Pure Actuality (i.e. it has “movement” of itself) currently sustaining the actuality of all aspects of physical reality. Just like the train’s movement stops with no engine, or the music ceases with no musician, physical reality cannot exist without a Purely Actual Uncaused Cause keeping it in existence. Whatever else we may mean by the word, “God” is simply what we call this Uncaused Cause.

Similarly, the second argument begins, some *thing*, a tree for example, undeniably exists. *Essence* is *what* a thing is, and whatever is true of a tree is either because of its essence or some other reason. For instance, to be a tree is to grow roots, sprout leaves, etc., not to be in a particular location such as a backyard. We must ask, is *existence* part of what it means to be a tree?

The answer is no. Even if all trees ceased to exist we would still know what a tree is because its essence (related to potency) and existence (related to actuality) are distinct. For example, you can know what a unicorn is, the essence of a unicorn as it were, even though it does not actually exist. From where, then, does existence come? The tree either exists through itself (by virtue of its essence), exists through another (receives its existence), or causes itself to exist. Self-causation is a contradiction and thus false. Ad-

ditionally, trees go from potentially existing to actually existing, or they can be turned into piles of ash, tables, chairs, homes, etc. and thus cease to exist as trees. Hence, they do not exist by virtue of their essence as trees. Therefore, the tree must be receiving its existence from another.

Whatever is causing the tree to exist is either receiving its existence from another or it necessarily exists by virtue of its essence. Much like our infinitely long chain of moving train cars cannot account for its movement without an engine, a chain of existence-receiving causes cannot account for its own existence. Hence, there must exist an Uncaused Cause (an “engine” so to speak), who’s essence simply is existence, causing all other things. As Being itself, its essence and existence are identical such that it is unlimited Being while everything else only receives being. Feser notes,

“If essence and existence were not distinct, they would be identical; and they could be identical only in [something who’s essence is its very act of existing]. That is to say, something whose essence is its existence would depend on nothing else (e.g. matter) for its existence, since it would just be existence or being. But there could only possibly be one such thing, for there would be no way in principle to distinguish more than one.”³

And as Aquinas says, this everyone knows to be God.⁴

Is Reason Inherently Atheistic?

While it is true that many Christians have become anti-intellectual and have even spurned reason, as we have seen, such a view is not biblical. Nevertheless, this false piety of anti-intellectual Christianity has spurned many atheists and skeptics to view reason as solely their domain. In fact, David Silverman, President of the American Atheists, writes, “The message we deliver is undeniably true, even if it may be politically incorrect. *God is a myth and reason is inherently atheistic*” [emphasis in original].⁵

Aside from the facts that most Western universities were started by Christians, many prominent scientists and philosophers through the centuries were Christians (or at least believers in God), most of the founding fathers of the United States of America believed in God, etc., in an ironic twist, the very fact that human beings reason in the first place actually serves to demonstrate the existence of the very God the atheistic/humanistic “champions of reason” refuse to acknowledge. Using the basis of the argument above we can see why this is the case.

Please understand, this is not an argument about the complexity of the brain, how

much complexity there must be for consciousness, or any other such biological or neurological issues. Rather, the argument here rests on the fact that man has an intellect that is directed towards pursuing truth.⁶ That man has an intellect should not need elucidating. The very fact that this debate about reason is taking place is illustrative of man's intellectual powers. Likewise, upon a moment's reflection, one can see that his intellect is directed towards attaining truth. Philosophers George Klubertanz and Maurice Holloway say,

"...our own human intellect is itself a natural power that is ordered to its proper end. For man does not order his intellect to the truth; he finds that of its very nature it is already ordered to the truth....While man can order himself in many of his actions for ends that he sets up for himself, he nevertheless finds his powers initially finalized [i.e. directed] toward ends that he has not established, but toward which these powers tend of their very nature."⁷

To deny this fact is actually in practice to confirm it. In other words, if one disagrees with the fact that his intellect is directed towards truth, he would essentially be saying, "Wait a minute. That's not true!" But if his intellect is not directed towards truth, then who cares if it is not true? What he is communicating by such a statement is that he only wants to believe what is true (i.e. what corresponds to reality), which is precisely the point!

How does this point to God? Man's intellect and its directedness towards truth is part of the nature of man as a rational animal. Again, Feser says, "... for a thing to have a certain final cause [i.e. goal directedness] entails that it also has a certain formal and material cause and thus a certain nature or essence; otherwise its final cause would not be inherent in it, nor would it be capable of realizing it."⁸ David Oderberg observes, "... *what* a thing is does determine *how* it is – in the traditional terminology, function follows essence. Essence just is the principle from which flows the characteristic behaviour (sic) of a thing" [emphasis in original].⁹ Again Feser notes, "But the essences that determine the ends of things – our ends, and for that matter the end of reason too as inherently directed toward the true and the good – do not exist independently of God....they pre-exist in the divine intellect as the ideas or archetypes by reference to which God creates."¹⁰

Why must that be the case? Man's reasoning ability is proof that man changes because he forms arguments, makes judgments, and learns. Thus, man is a limited, contingent, and changeable kind of being. As we have seen, any limited or changing being, as a combination of potency and act, cannot account for its own existence but has an essence that must be joined to an act of existence. Feser continues, "It follows that whatever orders

things to their ends must also be the cause of those things and thus (given what was said earlier) Pure Act or Being Itself.”¹¹ As Klubertanz and Holloway put it, “A natural being is ordered to its proper end both by its nature [essence] and by an intellect. Immediately and intrinsically, it is ordered by its nature, but ultimately and extrinsically, it is so ordered by the divine intellect who has established the end and created the nature.”¹²

This is why the philosophical theology of Aquinas laid out above is so brilliant and deceptively simple. By reasoning well about the most mundane and uncontroversial, dare one say undeniable, aspects of reality one can reach the conclusion that the God of classical theism exists, and from there one can further investigate the truth claims of Christianity and see that trusting in Jesus as Savior is the most reasonable thing one can do. As G.K. Chesterton says,

“But the mind is active, and its activity consists in following, so far as the will chooses to follow, the light outside that does really shine upon real landscapes....In other words, the essence of the Thomist common sense is that two agencies are at work; reality and the recognition of reality; and their meeting is a sort of marriage. Indeed it is very truly a marriage, because it is fruitful; the only philosophy now in the world that really is fruitful. It produces practical results, precisely because it is the combination of an adventurous mind and a strange fact....God made Man so that he was capable of coming in contact with reality; and those whom God hath joined, let no man put asunder.”¹³

Ought man trust in reason or trust in God? Both, because it is not an either/or proposition. As we will see, reason examines reality and concludes that God exists and is trustworthy (Romans 1). Reason concludes that the Bible is reliable and that Jesus is therefore God in human flesh who is the only way to salvation. The Holy Spirit can then use man’s reasoning as the occasion upon which He provides the faith that enables the will to trust in Christ as Savior (true biblical faith) and to have conviction that God is trustworthy even when reason does not understand (Hebrews 11). That trust leads to obedience, and that obedience leads to prayer and other spiritual virtues. Would that those spurning God in the name of reason, as well as those spurning reason in the name of God, see the beauty of the marriage God has made between faith and reason.

4. Can We Trust the Bible?

Once it is shown that the theistic God exists, using good reasoning, we can see that, of necessity, any non-theistic view of reality, or world view, must be false. This means an incredible amount of work has already been done in showing that Christianity is true. Atheism, agnosticism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Wicca, and any other non-theistic world view must be false regarding their views of God. That leaves us with Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and any other unnamed theistic worldview as possible contenders for the one true view of reality.

How can we adjudicate between these views? If one of the above belief systems were confirmed by miracles then we would have reason to believe its truth claims. We can know that miracles are at least possible because we know an all-powerful God exists who is currently sustaining in existence the whole of sensible reality in which He can act. Thus, the miracles recorded in the Bible, specifically the resurrection of Jesus, will distinguish between our remaining world views of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, or any other theistic belief system.

But can we trust what the Bible says? For our purposes we will focus on the New Testament (NT). Why? Because Jesus, whom the NT shows is God, says the Old Testament (OT) is the Word of God. Thus, while there is independent evidence for the reliability of the OT, by confirming the NT we get the OT as well.

Two questions must be asked regarding the NT's reliability. One, do we have an accurate copy of the original writings, and two, did the NT writers tell the truth? Accurate copies of fairy tales would do little to help in our search for truth.

Ranging from fragments with a few verses, to pages, to whole books and collections of books, the manuscript evidence for the text of the NT far outweighs any other ancient literary work. There are currently over 5,800 NT manuscripts in the original Greek, most of which date from AD 1,000 and later, though many date well before that (at least six from the second century AD).¹

Our earliest copy of any portion of the NT is around 25-40 years removed from the original.² In second place is Homer's *Iliad* with 1,757 manuscripts, our earliest copy of which is 400 years removed from the original.³ Support for other ancient documents drops significantly from there. When you add in the tens of thousands of copies of early translations of the NT and over a million quotations from the church fathers (ranging from the first century AD to the middle ages), the text of the NT is incredibly well attested.⁴ While there are over 200,000 places where these NT manuscripts differ amongst

themselves, only about 1% of those differences (which affect about 0.1% of the NT text) have any significant bearing on the meaning of the verse in question. Most importantly, not one of those differences affects any essential Christian doctrine.⁵

Do these well-attested NT documents tell the truth? We have good reason to believe they do. For instance, none of the NT documents mention the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, an earth-shattering event for the Jews, which occurred in AD 70. There are also indications within the text that imply the temple was still in operation. It stands to reason that the most likely reason for the absence of such information is because most, if not all, of the NT was written prior to the events of AD 70. Thus, there is good reason to believe the NT contains early testimony about Jesus and the Apostles.

The authors of the NT claimed to be eyewitnesses of the events recorded or claimed to have interviewed eyewitnesses. Even if we only have 1 Cor. 15:3-8, which even critical scholars grant was written by Paul around AD 55, we have the core of Christianity and a powerful apologetic for Jesus' resurrection preserved in those few verses. We have much more than that however. There are hundreds of archaeological finds that verify various persons and places mentioned throughout the NT, and several ancient non-Christian sources that corroborate many aspects of the NT narrative. Perhaps most powerfully, we know from both tradition and history that most of the Apostles were killed for proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus. While people die everyday for what they believe, no one willingly dies for what they know to be a lie when they have nothing to gain. The Apostles would have been the perpetrators of the lie if the resurrection did not actually happen. Yet, they never recanted their testimonies. While it is true that some ultra-skeptical critics today attempt to question the very existence of a historical Jesus, there is virtually no reason to entertain such a notion. It is almost laughable, within the academic community, to suggest that a historical Jesus did not actually exist. The real question is, "Who exactly was this historical Jesus?"

Did Jesus Claim to Be God?

"Lord," as found in most modern English Bibles, is the equivalent of the Hebrew letters YHWH, also known as the tetragrammaton, and is usually transliterated into English as Yahweh or Jehovah.⁶ This is the special name God gave for Himself in the OT (Ex. 3:14) as opposed to other titles for God such as Adonai and Elohim which can also be used to refer to human rulers or false gods. While perhaps less than explicit to the modern reader, Jesus clearly claimed to be Yahweh come in human flesh.

Perhaps most explicitly, in John 8:58 Jesus said, "...before Abraham came into existence, I am!" (NET), equating Himself with Yahweh in Ex. 3:14.⁸ According to Ron

Rhodes, both “I AM” and “Yahweh” have the same root meaning from the verb “to be” and can be used interchangeably.⁷ Jesus’ listeners knew exactly what He was saying, and they picked up stones to stone Him—the prescribed punishment for blasphemy. In addition, Jesus claimed to share glory with the Father (John 17:5) even though Yahweh clearly says He does not share His glory with anyone (Is. 42:8).

Jesus also claimed titles for Himself that were reserved for Yahweh alone. He referred to Himself as “the Son of man” (Mark 14:61-64), a title given to the “Ancient of Days,” referring to Yahweh, in Dan. 7:22. He calls Himself the “first and the last” in Rev. 1:17, a title for Yahweh in Is. 42:8. Jesus called Himself the “good shepherd” (John 10:11) even though the Psalmist calls Yahweh the shepherd (Ps. 23:1). Moreover, Jesus claimed prerogatives that belong to God alone. He forgave sin (Mark 2:5-11), declared power over life and death (John 5:21), accepted worship (Matt. 14:33; John 20:28), and commanded the same honor as the Father (John 5:23). In many ways Jesus clearly claimed to be God!

Again, His followers understood His claims to divinity and also called Him Yahweh in many places. For example, John writes in John 1:1 that Jesus (the Word) was “fully God” (NET). He says that Jesus created everything that has been made (John 1:3), yet Yahweh says He alone created everything (Is. 44:24).⁸ Paul called Jesus God in Phil. 2:5-11 and Col. 2:9. Referring to Jesus, Paul says, quoting Joel 2:32, in Rom. 10:13 “...everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (NET), a verse that clearly says to call on the name of Yahweh.

The earliest Christians also understood Jesus’ divine identity. Pliny, the governor of Bithynia (in modern-day Turkey) during the early second century, condemned Christians for offering worship to Jesus “as if to a god.”⁹ Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch who was martyred c. 107-110 AD, said Jesus is “the mind of the Father” and properly called “our God.”¹⁰ From this sampling it is clear Jesus was understood to be God.

Is Jesus Really God?

We have seen that Jesus claimed to be God, and that His earliest followers believed He was God, but do we have reason to conclude His claims were true? Recall that a claim verified by miracles gives us very good reason to believe it. The NT attributes many miracles to Jesus, but one stands above the rest, namely His resurrection. As Paul says in 1 Cor. 15, Christianity hinges on the resurrection, and we have good reason to believe it actually occurred.

Investigating the resurrection involves doing good history by explaining the key pieces of evidence, the historical puzzle pieces if you will, in the best way possible with the fewest un-evidenced assumptions. Most critical scholars will grant five key pieces which,

when taken together along with our background knowledge that God exists, show the resurrection is a historical fact.[11](#) Using F.A.C.T.S. as an acronym, here are the five key puzzle pieces.

F - FATAL CROSS

Jesus actually died on the cross. This contrasts the swoon theory that Jesus somehow survived the crucifixion and was resuscitated. The biblical text, historical investigation, and modern medical science demonstrate that Jesus died.

A - ABANDONED TOMB

Most scholars grant that Jesus was buried in a borrowed tomb that was later found empty. It was first explained by inventing the story of the disciples stealing Jesus' body (Matt. 28:13).

C - CONVERSION OF THE DISCIPLES

Jesus' disciples went from cowering away in a locked room (John 20:19) to turning the world upside down (Acts 17:6). History shows that all but one of the disciples died for proclaiming the risen Christ. People may die every day for what they believe is true, but no one willingly dies for something they know to be false.

T - TRANSFORMATION OF JAMES

According to Paul, Jesus' brother James was an eyewitness of the risen Jesus, as were the apostles and more than 500 others (1 Cor. 15:3-8). After the resurrection James transformed from skeptic (Mark 3:21; John 7:5) to leader of the early church and martyr (Gal. 2:9; Eusebius).

S - SAUL BECAME PAUL

Saul, the zealous persecutor of Christians, became Paul the Apostle after encountering the risen Christ (though his encounter was not a pre-ascension encounter like the others). He, too, died for his proclamation. Like James, something major had to happen in his life in order to cause such a drastic change that ultimately resulted in much physical suffering and death.

An actual resurrection of Jesus best accounts for all the puzzle pieces without forcing them to fit. Other theories simply leave some pieces out, are completely ad hoc, or unnecessarily rule out the possibility of miracles. As Paul says in Acts 17:30-31, "Therefore, although God has overlooked such times of ignorance, he now commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has set a day on which he is going to judge the world in righteousness, by a man whom he designated, having provided proof to everyone by raising him from the dead" (NET).

What About the Trinity?

Jesus claimed to be Yahweh, the one true God, and He proved to be God via the resurrection. But saying Jesus is God raises a host of questions and objections. Let us examine a few such issues.

First, Jesus being God implies something like the doctrine of the Trinity. While the word “Trinity” is not explicitly mentioned in the Bible, the doctrine of the Trinity accounts for the information God has revealed to us about Himself. It does not mean that God is one God and three gods or one Person and three persons, which would be necessarily false contradictions. Rather, the Trinity is the notion that there exists within the one God three co-eternal and co-equal persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God is three in a different way than He is one (one “essence”/three “persons”). Thus, no contradiction results.

The Trinity is not against reason even though it is beyond our ability to comprehend. Yet, we can apprehend what has been revealed to us. The most common illustration is that of an equilateral triangle. There is only one triangle, yet within that one triangle exists three equal angles. Each angle is distinct yet equal, and without them the triangle would not exist. Similarly, there is only one God. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. Yet, the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Father, etc.

Regarding Jesus, in addition to His divine nature, as Phil. 2 notes, He added a human nature to Himself when He became man at the incarnation. While Jesus is totally God, He is also totally man. Theologically this is known as the hypostatic union, two distinct natures in one person. Therefore, when asking a question about Jesus we must consider this dual nature.

For instance, when Jesus says He doesn’t know something (Mark 13:32), we must realize that in His human nature He does not know, yet in His divine nature He knows all. When He gets tired or hungry it is His human nature that suffers the limits of humanity not His divine nature. In other words, Jesus is not less than God. This is an example of the importance of a sound philosophy that informs our theology and understanding of the Bible (more on that in a moment).

Virtually no credible scholar denies Jesus’ actual existence, and many people claim He was a great man and a great moral teacher. Yet, as C.S. Lewis notes, “You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon, or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”¹² Jesus is Yahweh, the great I AM, Being itself, the source of all creation (Col. 1:17). As such, this has tremendous implications for what He teaches.

5. What Does All of This Mean?

Recall that in our argument for God's existence we distinguished between potency/act and essence/existence. Potency limits act in all limited/changing things much like essence limits existence to be this particular thing, like the tree in our example from earlier, rather than something else. As Richard Howe observes, "Like a balloon that limits and shapes the air that infuses it, the essence of the creature bounds the otherwise limitless fullness of the perfections of existence."¹ We have seen that a theistic God simply is Pure Actuality or unlimited Being itself since His essence and existence are identical with no admixture of potency (see chapter three). The importance of this conclusion cannot be overstated, for from this follows all the classical attributes of God.

As Pure Act God has no potential for change in any way. He has no need for anything and cannot be other than He is. He is the Uncaused Cause, the Unmoved Mover, the great I AM (Ex. 3:14). He not only created us but is sustaining us in existence every moment we exist (Col. 1:15-17).

As the source of all other existing things, all the perfections of those things preexist in God in an unlimited way. As Edward Feser says, "To show that an Unmoved Mover exists, then, is just to show that there is a single being who is the cause of all change, Himself unchangeable, immaterial, eternal, personal, all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good. It is, in short, to show that there is a God."²

Without a sound philosophy, the student of the Bible would be unable to ground such classical attributes of God. This is so because many passages of the Bible speak metaphorically about God as having various bodily parts. Unless there is some way to judge that such passages are figures of speech, one runs the risk of falling into heresy.

Consider the challenge of understanding the Genesis narrative when it says that Adam heard the sound of God "walking in the garden in the cool of the day" (Gen. 3:8). How could God walk in the garden without legs? If He has legs, how could He be transcendent to the universe as Christianity understands God to be? Some might suggest that perhaps these specific descriptions are a Theophany (an appearance of God in human form, referred to by some as a Christophany, before the Incarnation). Even if this explains the narrative here, there are many other physical descriptions of God, some of which cannot possibly be explained as a Theophany (ex. God's "wings" in Ruth 2:12 and Ps. 17:8).

It will not do to appeal to other verses of Scripture to adjudicate the matter. As an

example, one might suggest that we can know from John 4 that God is Spirit and therefore He cannot literally have bodily parts like legs. Thus (they might say), when Genesis 3 talks about God walking, it must be speaking metaphorically (if it is not a Theophany). The problem with this response is that there would be no way to judge whether the Genesis passage is to be taken as metaphor and John 4 is to be taken as literal or whether John 4 should be taken as metaphor and the Genesis passage is to be taken as literal. We can only defend the fact that the above verses are indeed metaphors and John 4 is literal by an appeal to reality.

To illustrate what is meant here, consider an easier example. When we read in Is. 55:12, “For you shall go out with joy, And be led out with peace; The mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you, And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands” (NKJV), we know that this is metaphor precisely because we know from reality that mountains cannot sing and trees do not have hands. Our ability to know this is because of our simple apprehension of the nature of mountains and trees by means of our sensory faculties. But our knowledge of the nature of God (i.e., whether He does or does not have bodily parts) cannot be done directly by our sensory faculties. It requires more actions by the intellect. These actions constitute doing philosophy (or, more precisely, metaphysics). We can know by sound philosophy not only (to some extent) what the nature of God must be like (and thus we can know that He cannot literally have such bodily parts) but we can also know certain solid principles of biblical interpretation (hermeneutics). This is not to say that a believer cannot understand his Bible without formal training in philosophy. It is to say, however, that sound interpretations can only be rigorously defended against heretics and critics with some training in sound philosophy.

What Did Jesus Teach About the Bible?

While for us, truth is the conforming of our minds to reality (see chapter two), in an ultimate sense, truth is the conformity of being to an intellect, specifically the divine and creative intellect (e.g. “true” love, a “true” gentleman, a “true” circle). Necessarily it follows that, as Being itself, God cannot be anything other than Truth itself since what He is and what He knows are one and the same thing considered under different lights.³ A lie or falsity is a privation of truth. Hence, God cannot lie because He has no potential to be other than He is. This also lines up with what the Bible says about God (1 Sam. 15:29; John 14:6; Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2).

We have seen that Jesus is God, the second Person of the Trinity. From a simple deductive procedure then, it is easy to see that whatever Jesus teaches is true (it corresponds to reality) because He is God and God cannot lie. But Jesus is also fully man.

Could His human nature limit His trustworthiness? Not at all. Even from the standpoint of His willfully limited human knowledge, Jesus taught from what He did know, namely, whatever the Father taught Him (John 8:26).

Hence, we would be wise to consider carefully what Jesus taught. In the words of the Apostle Peter from John 6:68-69, “Lord [Jesus], to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God” (NET).

When we began our investigation of the reliability of the Bible, if you recall, we focused only on the NT . The reason for this is because that is where we learn about Jesus (though He was prophesied in the OT). We concluded that Jesus is God and that whatever He teaches is necessarily true. Therefore, we can trust whatever Jesus teaches about the Bible as a whole.

As we examine the words of Jesus we see that He affirmed the OT. When speaking to the unbelieving Jews, Jesus explicitly said in John 5:39-40, “You study the scriptures thoroughly because you think in them you possess eternal life, and it is these same scriptures that testify about me, but you are not willing to come to me so that you may have life” (NET). There can be little doubt that Jesus considered the OT the Word of God which He fulfilled. But He did not stop there. Not only did Jesus affirm the OT, but He promised the NT. In John 14:26 Jesus tells His disciples, “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and will cause you to remember everything I said to you” (NET).

The divinely inspired authors of the promised NT agreed. For instance, Peter called the writings of Paul “scripture” in 2 Pet. 3:16. Paul concludes in 2 Tim. 3:16, “Every scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness....” (NET).

Jesus also taught that the Bible is inerrant, that is, that the original writings are without error (Matt. 22:29). While our understanding or interpretation of either nature or Scripture may be in error, we know the two will never conflict because the Bible is the Word of God, and God cannot be in error or untruthful; therefore, the Bible cannot err. That is not to say that the Bible does not accurately record many lies and sinful behavior, but it does not affirm these things as good behavior. May we take care to understand what the Word of God actually says.

6. But That's Just Your Interpretation!

All of us at one time or another have been involved with a Bible study where after reading a passage, the leader looks up and asks the group, "What does that passage mean to you?" On the surface it may sound like a reasonable, amiable question, but is the purpose of Bible study to bounce around subjective ideas based on changing times? Would not the serious student of the Bible want to know an objective meaning that is true for all people and at all time, one that reveals the mind of the Author?

What is objectivity when it comes to studying the Bible? Objectivity in Bible study means that it is possible to know what the text of the Bible actually means, to have a correct interpretation of the Bible.

However, for many Bible scholars today, objectivity is thought to be a kind of neutrality, or an approach to the text and to reality that is determined by one's own perspectives. According to these scholars, objectivity is rejected as a naïve approach that ignores what they believe is the all-important perspective of the interpreter. Their position is that Bible study *involves* interpretation, and *interpretation* involves everything that we think and everything we are, what we believe, our point of view, what we think is true and false, what is important to us, what we think about our world, our training, dispositions, and opinions—all these factors that come together to form our personal world view. Our personal world view determines how we interpret the world. It is like having a set of glasses through which we look at and interpret our world. Since no two world views are exactly alike and since our world view determines the way we look at the world, they say it is not possible to have an objective understanding of the Bible. This is a belief held not only by those outside the Christian church, but also by almost all Evangelical scholars today.

Implications

There are two significant implications for Bible study that follow directly from these beliefs about objectivity. First, if objectivity is a kind of neutrality, then in order to be neutral, the reader must take off his glasses/world view. This creates a problem. It is our world view that makes understanding possible, and without your world view, you cannot understand or know anything. When you take off your glasses, you cannot see. So then, no one can study the Bible without looking through his own glasses/world view. But, it is this very world view that unavoidably influences your interpretation. So, every

interpretation will *necessarily* be a product, to some degree, of your own world view, and this fact militates against the degree of certainty about having arrived at the correct interpretation.

The second implication that follows is that with the rejection of objectivity there would seem to be no grounds upon which to decide whose interpretation is the correct interpretation. If every interpretation is the product of your own world view, then there can be *no single correct interpretation*. James Smart identified how the rejection of objectivity makes it impossible to know what God says in His Word,

“The danger inherent in this development was that theological interpretations of Scripture would be its meaning for this or that theologian. Thus, theological exposition, instead of penetrating to the one word of God in Scripture that brings all Christians into fellowship with one another, would give each segment of the Christian community the license to read its own theological convictions out of the text of Scripture.”¹

Once we reject the possibility of objectivity, we have lost the very Word of God.

Connecting Different World Views & Objectivity

Does this mean that it is impossible to know what God says? In fact, objectivity is possible even though each person has his or her own world view. How is it possible? This is because there are some things in the world that are the same for all people, all the time, no matter where or when they lived. These things are the *first principles* of thought and being we mentioned earlier. First principles are truths that cannot be denied which form the foundation of knowledge and make it possible for different people with different world views to connect with each other and communicate to each other.

Let me give you an example of a first principle: the *law of non-contradiction* (also often referred to as the law of contradiction). This law means that a statement cannot be both true and false *in the same sense*. So, if I make the statement, “God is good,” this statement cannot be both true and false in the same sense. Either God is good, or He is not. You cannot have it both ways. We know that this is a first principle because it cannot be denied. Anyone who says that the law of non-contradiction is not true must use the law in order to deny the law.² Now, a statement *can* be both true and false, but not in the same sense. If I am living in Charlotte, NC, I can say, “I live in Charlotte, North Carolina,” and this is a true statement. However, if I were to move to another city in another state, then the statement “I live in Charlotte, North Carolina” is no longer true. So, the statement can be both true and false, but not at the same time or in the same sense.

The law of non-contradiction was as true for the biblical authors as it is for us today. Because of these first principles, like the law of non-contradiction, when the Bible says that “God is good,” then we know that this statement was as true for the authors of the Bible as it is for us today. Because these first principles are the same for all people at all times and in every place, we have a connection with the Bible that is not affected by our own personal world view. These first principles form the foundation upon which truth rests. These first principles also are true for everyone because that is the way God created the world, and, because the first principles transcend our own world views, it is possible to have an objective interpretation, *a correct interpretation*, of the Bible. Let me apply this solution to the question of objectivity.

1. Doesn't everyone have his or her own world view?

We do not deny the fact that everyone has his or her own world view. However, we disagree that a person's world view makes objectivity impossible. The fact is, there are first principles that are common to all humans as part of the nature of humanity as God created it. For someone to say that there is no such thing as objectivity is to count on the objective meaning of this very claim. To deny objectivity while counting on objectivity is self-defeating. Indeed, any claim that denies first principles is ultimately self-defeating and false. Although everyone has his or her own world view, the foundation of any world view is the same for all people, at all times, in all cultures, regardless of language, background, training, world view, perspective, horizon, etc.

2. Can any world view be universally valid?

It is simply false to claim that no world view is universally valid. In fact, this very claim assumes its own universal validity. It is undeniably the case that there are aspects of every framework that are unavoidable, self-evident, and true. The basic laws of logic and the undeniability of truth are the same everywhere and at all times. Consequently, any claim that denies these foundational principles is self-defeating and false.

3. But, isn't universal validity implied in the notion of objectivity?

Not only is universal validity implied in the notion of objectivity, but it is also the very essence of objectivity. Anyone who attempts to deny neutrality assumes that his own claims are universally valid and therefore objective. To claim that there can be no neutrality assumes this very neutrality. All such claims are self-defeating and false.

4. Can an interpreter really be objective in interpretation?

To claim that no interpreter can be objective in his or her interpretation is both self-defeating and false. For anyone to claim that no interpreter can be objective assumes that the one making the claim has been objective in his interpretation of the question of objectivity. Regardless of the fact that interpreters do not always *achieve* objectivity, the

fact is that objectivity is possible.

5. If objectivity is possible, then isn't a “correct” interpretation also possible?

Since objectivity is possible, then so is a “correct” interpretation. To claim that there is no correct interpretation assumes one’s own interpretation is the correct one. This too is self-defeating and false.

6. If objectivity is possible, doesn’t that mean that it is also possible to judge whether an interpretation is correct or not?

In spite of their denials of objectivity, some Evangelicals still think that it is possible to decide between interpretations. It is not only possible; it is unavoidable. Every act of understanding is, in one way or another, an act of deciding between interpretations. We hold one thing to be true and its contradiction to be false. We accept one view and reject its opposite. It is not necessary for Evangelicals to compromise on the notions of objectivity and truth in order to accept the undeniable fact that all understanding is mediated through one’s own world view. The fact of self-evident, undeniable first principles constitute a foundation upon which objectivity is based.

We believe that the God of the Christian Scriptures has created us after His image, and this insures the objectivity of truth and a correct interpretation of His Word are in fact possible.

7. What Can We Conclude?

If you recall, we said the Bible would distinguish between our remaining theistic world views. Since God cannot lie, we can conclude that the Bible is in fact His Word revealed to us and that we are capable of accurately understanding what He has said. This means that Christianity is objectively true, regardless of what anyone believes about it. Using our indispensable tool of the law of non-contradiction, which says opposite ideas cannot both be true at the same time and in the same way, we can immediately know that any world view that contradicts Christianity is necessarily false. That is not to say that other world views are incapable of containing any truth whatsoever. Any world view that says, for example, “You should love your neighbor as yourself,” says something true. It is simply that, where it contradicts or opposes Christianity, it must necessarily be false at those points. This is not a matter of preference or probabilities, rather, it is a necessary truth given that our reasoning about Christianity is sound.

Such a conclusion is a far cry from any type of blind, wish-in-the-dark faith. As we have seen, this is a reasoned faith where every step in the argument builds on the other, and each step is supported by solid evidence. True faith is a response of trust in light of what we know, much like our decision to trust the well-trained doctor’s diagnosis and treatment protocol.

Reason, however, can only carry us so far. Biblical faith is not just knowing *that* God exists; it is an active trust *in* God and the authority of what He says. His diagnosis is that we have failed to be the men and women we are supposed to be—that we are sinners deserving of separation from Him (spiritual death/hell; Rom. 3:23). We cannot reason our way to a right relationship with God. He must reveal the way to that restored relationship (which He has done in the Bible), and we must take Him at His word. Jesus, the God-man, came to pay our sin penalty for us by dying on the cross (Rom. 5:6-11; 6:23) as the only means of reconciliation (John 14:6), and by trusting in His death and resurrection we will be saved (Eph. 2:8).

That is the Gospel (the “good news”), the only cure to our very bleak diagnosis. It is true, and it is the greatest news of all (1 Cor. 15:3-8). The God of all creation is sustaining you in existence at this moment to give you a choice. We know He is Love and Goodness itself, and He offers to restore your broken relationship with Him so that you will one day know Him as He is and enjoy Him forever (1 John 3:2; Ps. 23:6). That is life’s true purpose.

We come to Him by trusting in Jesus’ death and resurrection as payment for our sins

(John 3:16). He takes us just as we are, but He loves us too much to leave us that way. From there, we can give God our lives to use for His glory (Matt. 16:25).

As Étienne Gilson says,

“God creates, not that there may be witnesses to render Him His due glory, but beings who shall rejoice in it as He rejoices in it Himself and who, participating in His being, participate at the same time in His beatitude [true happiness]. It is not therefore for Himself, but for us, that God seeks His glory; it is not to gain it, for He possesses it already, nor to increase it, for already it is perfect, but to communicate it to us.”¹

The choice is yours.

If you have never trusted in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you can choose right now, wherever you are, to humble yourself before God, confess your sinfulness, acknowledge Jesus’ death and resurrection as payment for your sin debt, and ask Him to save you (John 3:16; 1 Cor. 15:3-8). He promises to never turn you away when you come to Him (John 6:35-40). Please do not wait until the opportunity to receive this free gift from God is gone (Heb. 9:27). If we can assist you in your journey in any way, please contact us at SES: (800) 77-TRUTH / info@ses.edu

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Endnotes

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2. Can We Know Anything for Sure?

3. Does God Exist?

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4. Can We Trust the Bible?

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6. But That's Just Your Interpretation!

1. James D. Smart, *The Interpretation of Scripture* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), 46.
2. In other words, by saying the law of non-contradiction does not exist, one is saying things can be true and not true at the same time in the same sense. If you insist that you are right that the law of non-contradictions does not exist, then you are saying what you just said does not need to be true. But you are insisting that it is true, so you are agreeing with the law of non-contradiction.

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