

Dealing with Doubt: Part 4 April 1, 2012 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 “When I Don’t Think its True”

Driving thought: It is reasonable to have confidence in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Introduction: Be sober and remember to distrust; These are the sinews of the mind. – Epicharmus¹

Is it true that skepticism is the key to mental and rational strength?

Presuppositions over doubt: those who doubt are more intellectual. On the contrary, skepticism is intellectual laziness.

Ronnie Floyd, “You can’t outthink Jesus. When your faith is frail, you are not thinking like Him, you are not thinking big enough. #10things”²

The “New Atheism” does not make the claim that religion (most specifically Christianity), is irrational but that it is dangerous. There is a push to not only eradicate Christianity from the public square but from Western society altogether.³ Preparation for defense of the truth is not an option; it is a requirement.⁴

Yet, for many Americans, it may be shocking news to discover that such an anti-Christian attitude has been “normal” throughout much of Christian history. Alister McGrath reminds us, “a very early anti-Christian graffito shows a kneeling man worshipping a crucified man who has the head of an ass.”⁵

The Danger of a shallow faith: emotionally driven shallow soil

Repentance is the first step. We live in a battle zone. A host of worldviews are colliding into our own and our children and grandchildren are hit from a number of angles. You have a duty to prepare yourself for the battle so that you will be able to have mercy upon those who doubt. Instead of preparing ourselves for battle we have become intellectually lazy like a soldier who sleeps in and refuses to train and is overrun when the enemy attacks. Repent for your intellectual and spiritual laziness and commit to training your mind.

Rejection of a caricature – Goethe writes, “we have got used to the fact that people make fun of things they don’t understand.”⁶

Most people do not reject true Christianity; they reject “churchianity.”

¹ Epicharmus. Cp. Book XVIII. 40. Cited in, Polybius, *The Complete Histories of Polybius*, trans. W.R. Paton (Digireads, 2009), 547.

² Ronnie Floyd *Twitter* (@ronniefloyd) 3/15/12 3:45 PM

³ “Richard Dawkins to atheist rally: ‘Show contempt’ for faith.” Cathy Lynn Grossman, *USA Today*. Accessed March 30, 2012. <http://content.usatoday.com/communities/Religion/post/2012/03/-atheists-richard-dawkins-reason-rally/1#.T3UyhngMpq>

⁴ “The New Atheism and Five Arguments for God” William Lane Craig. Accessed March 30, 2012. <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=8088> This is an excellent article in combating many of the arguments from the New Atheists.

⁵ Alister McGrath, *The Sunnier Side of Doubt* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1990), 123.

⁶ Ibid.

1) The resurrection of Jesus Christ **transforms** lives – 15:1-2

Mark 8:29 *who do you say that I am?*

Alister McGrath, “Christianity isn’t just about ideas; it is about a person . . . Interest in Jesus as a person is often the beginning of a long and secret process of reflection that eventually culminates in acceptance of him as Lord and Savior.”⁷

2) The resurrection of Jesus Christ **fulfills** prophecy – 15:3-4

Psalms 16:10

“For You will not abandon my soul in Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.”

Messiah must die but also have an everlasting kingdom

Isaiah 53:8 *“...He was cut off from the land of the living...”*

Psalms 22

The Messiah must die but also reign forever.

Daniel 2:44 *“In the days of those kinds the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.”*

3) The resurrection of Jesus Christ was **verified** by eye-witnesses – 15:5-7

OBJECTION: The belief that Jesus rose from the dead was a later addition to Christian belief.

REBUTTAL: Not true. 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 is recognized by scholars as an early Christian creed. What is the significance? The early Christian creeds were the message that was preached before the New Testament was written down. Just think about the gravity of such a proposition. Not only was the belief that Jesus rose from the dead central to *the* earliest Christian beliefs but it was an integral ingredient to the early Christian preaching about Jesus.

Paul Barnett comments on 1 Corinthians 15:3, “Here, then, we are very close to “the faith” of “the church of God” in its early months . . . “The faith” Paul attempted to destroy was one and the same thing as “the teaching of the apostles,” in short, Christology.”⁸

The problem of evidence – every second of television programs is edited. New “discoveries” found in articles on the Internet can be devastatingly misleading. In order for something to even qualify as possible evidence it must first be published in a peer-reviewed academic journal.

If the resurrection of Christ can be demonstrated to be factual, then:

1. Jesus’ claims to be the Messiah is validated

⁷ Ibid, 99.

⁸ Paul Barnett, *The Birth of Christianity: The First Twenty Years, After Jesus, Volume 1* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 59.

2. It is humanly impossible; hence, providing conclusive evidence for the existence of God
3. It overturns the power of death

Skeptical Theories:

#1 The Swoon Theory: Jesus did not really die on the cross but rather swooned into unconsciousness. After being revived by the cool air in the tomb, Jesus got up and left.
= If this is true, the disciples would have given Jesus first aid, not worship.

Jesus suffered the following:

- Scourging from the cat-of-nine-tails
- Beaten with clubs
- Beaten with fists
- Ripped by a crown of thorns
- Forced to carry a rugged cross
- Nailed to a cross
- Speared by expert Roman executioners

People who believed that Jesus died:

1. The Jews
2. The Disciples
3. The Roman Soldiers

*Roman spear head & precision kill stroke on the cross

BIG QUESTION = How could a bloody, half-dead Jesus inspire the disciples to give their lives for the message that Jesus had arisen from the dead and was Lord over death?

= If this is this theory is true, the disciples would have given Jesus first aid, not worship.

#2 The Hallucination Theory: All of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances were the result of mass hallucination.

= Studies now show that mass hallucinations do not produce the same vision. Every person who saw Jesus after his Resurrection reported the same account.

I Corinthians 15:6 "*After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep.*"

Conclusion:

The Hallucination theory is not plausible because it contradicts certain laws and principles to which psychiatrists say visions must conform.

#3 The Wrong Tomb Theory: The disciples and Mary went to the wrong tomb.

= Why didn't the Jewish leaders and Romans bring Mary and the disciples to the correct tomb and show them Jesus' body?

#4 The Theft Theory: The disciples stole Jesus' body then claimed that he has been raised from the dead.

= How and why would 11 scared disciples want to or even be able to overpower a detachment of Roman soldiers in order to steal Jesus' body to make up a lie?

Q# How and why would 11 scared disciples want to or even be able to overpower a detachment of Roman soldiers?

Crack Roman Troops vs. scared disciples?!?!?

Q# What if all the guards fell asleep?

“The ordinary punishment for falling asleep on the watch was death. Could the soldiers be persuaded by any amount of money to run such a risk?”⁹

#5 Intentional Fraud Theory: The disciples deliberately lied about Jesus being raised from the dead.

= Why would the disciples knowingly create a lie that would only bring them persecution and death?

Gary Habermas writes, “Liars do not make good martyrs.”¹⁰

OBJECTION: Could the earliest Christians jump to conclusions in regards to the resurrection?¹¹

= The Resurrection would be the last conclusion because it was not an accepted idea.

Jesus exalted soon after McGrath⁹⁷ = Bauckham Jesus and the God of Israel.

McGrath inquires as to the change in the disciples, “But how could this remarkable transformation in the perceived status of Jesus who died as a common criminal have come about? If he was a prophet, or maybe even a martyr, the most we could expect would be veneration of his tomb (see Matthew 23:29). Why then did the early Christians start talking about a dead rabbit as if he were God? And, perhaps even more intriguing, why did they start talking about him as if he was alive, praying to him and worshipping him?”¹²

OBJECTION: Presupposition of naturalism – why aren't miracles possible? Because they would violate the laws of nature.

REBUTTAL: This is certainly true unless...God actually exists. Before precluding the possibility of miracles, one has to prove the veracity of naturalism.

Bertrand Russell, “Sir, why did you take such pains to hide yourself?”¹³ Russell's objection to the supposed insufficiency of evidence for God's existence, and also the

⁹ A.B. Bruce, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 267.

¹⁰ Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ*, 227.

¹¹ Alister McGrath, *The Sunnier Side of Doubt*, 95.

¹² *Ibid*, 97.

¹³ Russell unveils the ultimate hopelessness of life if God does not exist, “No dungeon was ever constructed so dark and narrow as that in which the shadow physics of our time imprisons us, for every prisoner has believed that outside his walls a free world existed; but now the prison has become the whole universe. There is darkness without, and when I die there will be darkness within. There is no splendour, no vastness,

resurrection of Christ, is bizarre unless one angle is considered: a man's philosophy and theology is directly influenced by his morality. Russell's long career as a womanizer virtually precludes any possibility of him being able to cognitively and fairly assess the evidence for God's existence. His lifestyle inclined him away from any prospect of God existing. What a terrible prospect that would be if you had to one day face such a God and give an account of a life of repeatedly violating His laws? Russell's objection to God (although rarely referenced in any of Russell's works), I contend, is primarily moral, not intellectual.

Non-New Testament Evidence for the Historical Jesus:

Pagan Romans: Cornelius Tacitus, Seutonius, Thallus, Pliny the Younger, Emperor Trajan, Emperor Hadrian, *Acts of Pontius Pilate*, Phlegon

Pagan Greek: Lucian

Pagan Syrian: Mara Bar-Serapion

Non-Christian Jews: Flavius Josephus, The Jewish Talmud, *Toledoth Jesu*,

Non-New Testament Evidence for the Resurrection: (See, "The Minimal Facts Argument" by Gary Habermas)

- Tacitus, Roman historian (114 A.D.)

Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.¹⁴

J.N.D. Anderson, "It is scarcely fanciful to suggest that when he adds that "A most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out" he is bearing indirect and unconscious testimony to the conviction of the early church that the Christ who had been crucified had risen from the grave."¹⁵

- Seutonius, Roman Historian (AD 117-138)

"Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from the city."¹⁶

"After the great fire at Rome . . . Punishments were also inflicted on the Christians, a

anywhere; only triviality for a moment, and then nothing. Why live in such a world? Why even die?"
Bertrand Russell, *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell: 1914-1944* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1968), 231.

¹⁴ Tacitus, *Annal*, 15.44. Cited in, Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1996), 188.

¹⁵ J.N.D. Anderson, *Christianity: The Witness of History* (London: Tyndale, 1969), 19. Cited in, *ibid*, 189-190.

¹⁶ Seutonius, *Claudius*, 25. Cited in *ibid*, 191.

sect professing a new and mischievous religious belief.”¹⁷

- Flavius Josephus (AD 37-97)

(Arabic version)

At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. His conduct was good and (he) was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive; accordingly he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.¹⁸

(“Western” version)

“Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats. ... He was (the) Christ ... he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him.”¹⁹

- Thallus (circa 52 AD) An attempt to explain away the period of darkness when Jesus was on the cross

Julius Africanus writing of Thallus in 221 A.D.

“On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. This darkness Thallus, in the third book of his *History*, calls, as appears to be without reason, an eclipse of the sun.”²⁰

Habermas writes, “Julius Africanus objected to Thallus’ rationalization concerning the darkness that fell on the land at the time of the crucifixion because an eclipse could not take place during the time of the full moon, as was the case during the Jewish Passover season.”²¹

- Pliny the Younger (written around 112 AD)

Pliny found that the Christian influence was so strong that the pagan temples had been nearly deserted, pagan festivals severely decreased and the sacrificial animals had few buyers” (in the province of Bithynia).²²

They (the Christians) 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

¹⁷ Seutonius, *Nero*, 16. Cited in, *ibid*.

¹⁸ Charlesworth, *Jesus within Judaism*, 95. Cited in, *ibid*, 193-194.

¹⁹ Josephus, *Antiquities* 18:3. Cited in, *ibid*, 192.

²⁰ Julius Africanus, *Extant Writings*, XVIII in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. By Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), vol. VI, p.130. Cited in, *ibid*, 197.

²¹ Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ*, 197.

²² *Ibid*, 198.

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.²³

- 1) Christians should not be sought or tracked down.
- 2) Repentance coupled with worship of the gods sufficed to clear a person. Pliny expressed doubts as to whether a person should be punished in spite of repentance and only recounts the pardoning of persons who had willingly given up their beliefs prior to questioning.
- 3) Pliny was not to honor any lists of Christians which were given to him if the accuser did not name himself.²⁴

- Emperor Hadrian

I do not wish, therefore, that the matters should be passed by without examination, so that these men may neither be harassed, nor opportunity of malicious proceedings be offered to informers. If, therefore, the provincials can clearly evince their charges against the Christians, so as to answer before the tribunal, let them pursue this course only, but not by mere petitions, and mere outcries against the Christians. For it is far more proper, if any one would bring an accusation, that you should examine it.²⁵

- *Acts of Pontius Pilate*

And the expression, “They pierced my hands and my feet,” was used in reference to the nails of the cross which were fixed to His hands and feet. And after He was crucified, they cast lots upon His vesture, and they that crucified Him parted it among them. And these things did happen as you can ascertain in the “Acts” of Pontius Pilate.²⁶

- Phlegon

“Origen records the following:

Now Phlegon, in the thirteenth or fourteenth book, I think, of his Chronicles, not only ascribed to Jesus a knowledge of future events (although falling into confusion about some things which refer to Peter, as if they referred to Jesus), but also testified that the result corresponded to his predictions.”²⁷

“So Phlegon mentioned that Jesus made predictions about future events that had been fulfilled. Origen adds another comment about Phlegon:

And with regard to the eclipse in the time of Tiberius Caesar, in whose reign Jesus

²³ Pliny, *Letters*, transl. by William Melmoth, rev. by W.M.L. Hutchinson (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1935), vol. II, X:96. Cited in, *ibid*, 199.

²⁴ Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ*, 201.

²⁵ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, IV:IX. Cited in, *ibid*, 201-202.

²⁶ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, XXXV. Quotations from Justin and Tertullian are from the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. By Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), vol. III. Cited in, *ibid*, 216.

²⁷ Origen, *Contra Celsum* XIV in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Cited in *ibid*, 218.

appears to have been crucified, and the great earthquakes which then took place, Phlegon too, I think, has written in the thirteenth or fourteenth book of his Chronicles.”²⁸

- *The Talmud*
Yeshu was hanged on Passover Eve. Forty days previously the herald had cried, “He is being led out for stoning, because he has practiced sorcery and led Israel astray and enticed them into apostasy. Whosoever has anything to say in his defense, let him come and declare it.” As nothing was brought forward in his defense, he was hanged on Passover Eve.²⁹

Habermas comments, “It is interesting that there is no explanation as to why Jesus was crucified (“hanged”) when stoning was the prescribed punishment. It is likely that the Roman involvement provided the “change of plans,” without specifically being mentioned here.”³⁰

- *Toledoth Jesu*
“It relates that his disciples planned to steal his body. However, a gardener named Juda discovered their plans and dug a new grave in his garden. Then he removed Jesus’ body from Joseph’s tomb and placed it in his own newly dug grave.”³¹

- Lucian (Pagan Greek)
The Christians, you know, worship a *man* to this day – the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account . . . You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them; and then it was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws. All this they take quite on faith, with the result that they despise all worldly goods alike, regarding them merely as common property.³²
- Mara Bar-Serapion (Pagan Syrian)
What advantage did the Athenians gain from putting Socrates to death? Famine and plague came upon them as a judgment for their crime. What advantage did the men of Samos gain from burning Pythagoras? In a moment their land was covered with sand. What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise King? It was just after that their kingdom was abolished. God justly avenged these three wise men: the Athenians died of hunger; the Samians were overwhelmed by the sea; the Jews, ruined and driven from their land, live in complete dispersion.

²⁸ Ibid, XXXIII. Cited in, *ibid*.

²⁹ *Sanhedrin* 43a. Cited in, Paul W. Barnett, *Jesus and the Logic of History* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 81.

³⁰ Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ*, 204.

³¹ *Ibid*, 205.

³² Lucian, *The Death of Peregrine*, 11-13, in *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, transl. by H.W. Fowler and F.G. Fowler, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1949), vol. 4. Cited in, *ibid*, 206.

But Socrates did not die for good; he lived on in the statue of Hera. Nor did the wise King die for good; he lived on in the teaching which he had given.³³

- Manuscript evidence comparison:

Additionally, while we have the entire New Testament text, this is not the case with every ancient work. For instance, of the 142 books of Roman history written by Livy, 107 books have been lost! Only four and a half of Tacitus' original fourteen books of Roman *Histories* remain in existence and only ten full and two partial books remain from the sixteen books of Tacitus' *Annals*. In contrast, each New Testament book is complete, which is also a factor in establishing the authenticity of these writings.³⁴

Michael Grant on the unbiased treatment of resurrection sources and other historical sources, "But if we apply the same sort of criteria that we would apply to any other ancient literary sources, then the evidence is firm and plausible enough to necessitate the conclusion that the tomb was indeed found empty."³⁵

Paul Maier concludes:

Accordingly, if all the evidence is weighed carefully and fairly, it is indeed justifiable, according to the canons of historical research, to conclude that the sepulcher of Joseph of Arimathea, in which Jesus was buried, was actually empty on the morning of the first Easter.³⁶

NT Wright raises these devastating questions for the skeptic:

This forces us to ask: could the belief that someone had been raised from the dead, whatever precisely was understood by that, have produced the results it did—*unless certain things were known, and continued to be known, about the one who had thus been raised after having been crucified?* . . . The resurrection thus vindicates *what Jesus was already believed to be*; it cannot be the sole cause of that belief which sprang up around it . . . The gospel of the early church, of Paul, of the evangelists, is that the promises of the Jewish scriptures had come in the resurrection. That is why Paul and others keep insisting that Jesus' death and resurrection happened 'according to the scriptures', or in fulfillment of them.³⁷

Point = Even still, as Paul Moser writes, "Miraculous events do not interpose their interpretations on us."³⁸

In John 12:36-37 that miracles are insufficient on their own to produce repentance is quite clear. Miraculous events on appeal to our desire for entertainment and the spectacular whereas simple truth such as the fact that we are all selfish, lying, lustful,

³³ British Museum, Syriac Manuscript, Additional 14,658. For this text, see Bruce, *Christian Origins*, p. 31. Cited in, *ibid*, 207-208.

³⁴ Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ*, 55.

³⁵ Grant, *Jesus: An Historians's Review*, p.176. Cited in, *ibid*, 226.

³⁶ Paul L. Maier, "The Empty Tomb as History" in *Christianity Today*, 29/13, March 28, 19750, p.5. Cited in, *ibid*.

³⁷ N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 399-400.

³⁸ Paul K. Moser, *Why Isn't God More Obvious?* (Norcross, GA: RZIM, 2000), 32.

foul-mouthed sinners who are under the judgment of God and will go to hell if we do not turn from our sins and trust Christ, deals with the transformation of who we are.

The evidence is clear: The resurrection of Jesus Christ demonstrates not only that God exists but that he has the power to redeem all those who turn from their sins and trust him.