

Young Christian Defenders

*Helping Youth to Understand and Make Use of Christian Apologetics*¹

Discussion 1: How could a Christian respond to the following: “Christianity is just one religion like all the others. They are all basically the same; they all point to or lead to the same God.”

I. Is Christianity set apart from other religions? How?

A.

CHRISTIANITY is the only religion or worldview that believes in and confesses **one almighty, infinite, eternal, holy, just, personal, and all-merciful God in three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit**. It is this Creator God who entered the world to fix man’s real problem, all by Himself, and in a manner that required the greatest humiliation and sacrifice.

Discussion 2: What is meant by each of these: infinite, eternal, holy, just, personal, all-merciful? (See chart “How Christianity Is Set Apart...”, back page)

Discussion 3: Read John 3:13-18. Which verses reflect God’s almighty nature? His personal nature? His just nature? His all-merciful nature?

OTHER RELIGIONS fall into one of several religious categories:

- **Atheistic:** The belief that there is “no god.”
- **Pantheistic:** The belief that “everything is god.” This kind of god is *not personal*; neither is this god *almighty* or *all-merciful*.
- **Polytheistic:** The belief there are “many gods.” Such gods may be *personal*, but they are *finite* and *limited*, not *almighty*, and are often *sinful* and *unjust* themselves.
- **Monotheistic:** The belief there is “one god.” Like Christianity, Deism, Islam, and Judaism believe there is “*one almighty* and *eternal* god.” But unlike the Christian God, the god of these other monotheistic religions is not *personal*, at least to the extent the Christian God is, and they provide no evidence or basis for him being *all-merciful*.

¹ This is just an intro to apologetics. If you would like to learn more, go to www.apologetics.org.

Study columns A through F on chart “How Christianity Is Set Apart...”

Discussion 4: What is a word or sentence that would describe these differences between Christianity and other religions? How significant are the differences?

Discussion 5: Why would Judaism be closer to Christianity than all the others?

B.

CHRISTIANITY is a religion or worldview grounded in and dependent upon **historical events**, including,

- God’s creation of all things, especially His creation of man made in His image.
- The fall of Adam and Eve.
- The events of the Old Testament, including the prophecies and miracles.
- The events of the New Testament, especially the birth, life, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.

If this history did not really happen as recorded, then Christianity cannot be what it claims to be; it becomes hollow and false.

Discussion 6: Read 1 Cor. 15:14-19. How does Paul make the above point?

OTHER RELIGIONS, on the other hand, may have certain historical events *connected* to them, but those religions are not *grounded in* or *dependent upon* those events as is Christianity. They are not history-based religions in the same sense that Christianity is (though Judaism is closer than the others).

Discussion 7: What if someone told you, “You are now \$10 million richer. I deposited that amount four weeks ago in your bank account.” Exciting! But is it true? How can it be proven or disproven? Answer: Check last month’s bank record. If last month’s record shows this amount being deposited in your account, it is true. If the record shows no deposit was made at all, then it is a false claim. In other words, a truth claim (“You are \$10 million richer”) depends on a specific historical event (a deposit) really taking place. How does this apply to Christianity? Is it possible that another religion could be true even if it is not dependent on its historical events? What is the advantage of Christianity being grounded in and dependent on historical events?

Study column G on chart “How Christianity Is Set Apart...”

C.

CHRISTIANITY is a religion that offers a true **understanding of man and his real problem**: though originally created perfect, he is now fallen, living in rebellion against God, and unable to truly love his neighbor. All of history points to the reality of man's sinfulness: sin has been non-stop, often ugly, and the world is not getting better over time. Review Genesis 3:1-19.

Discussion 8: What are some tragic and evil events in history that say something about the human heart? Whose hearts are included in this understanding of man? Read Gen. 6:5.

Discussion 9: What does the above description say about each person's deserved and final destiny?

Discussion 10: What happens to Christianity's understanding of man's sinfulness if the fall of Adam and Eve was not a real historical event?

OTHER RELIGIONS find some goodness in man, believing people can improve morally. Or, they claim there is no such thing as sin, believing humans invented or constructed the idea of sin.

Discussion 11: Why does this difference matter?

Study column H on chart "How Christianity Is Set Apart..."

D.

CHRISTIANITY is based on the most **outrageous claims made by its Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth**. He, a man, claimed to be the true, almighty, eternal God, and His followers believe and confess this man Jesus to be the true, almighty, eternal God. (This will be studied in Part IV.)

NO OTHER RELIGION has a human messiah or leader who comes close to making such a claim about himself.

Study column I on chart "How Christianity Is Set Apart..."

Discussion 12: Why would this difference be important?

E.

CHRISTIANITY provides abundant and sound evidence that it is true – evidence that can be examined (the focus of this study).

OTHER RELIGIONS: One has very limited and faulty evidence (Islam), a couple reject evidence that supports the supernatural or miraculous (atheism, Deism), another has significant evidence but refuses any evidence in favor of Jesus as Messiah (Judaism), and the rest have either no evidence or “evidence” that cannot be tested and proved (for example, they rely on personal mystical experience or feelings as evidence). In other words, they are mostly blind-faith religions: a person may believe them even though there is no evidence, poor evidence, or very little evidence to support them.

Study column J on chart “How Christianity Is Set Apart...”

Discussion 13: How is this difference expressed in 1 Kings 18:20-39 and Acts 1:1-3?

Discussion 14: Again, how could a Christian respond to the following: “Christianity is just one religion like all the others. They are all basically the same; they all point to or lead to the same God.”

II. What is Christian apologetics?

Apologetics or an “apology” (apologia, ἀπολογία) as used in the New Testament and in ancient Greece and Rome had nothing to do with saying, “I’m sorry,” but with making a reasoned argument or defense that presents evidence or compelling proof.

Christian apologetics, therefore, is the defense of the truth of Christianity. It involves providing evidence that Christianity is the true religion and that Jesus Christ really is the Son of God and the only Savior from sin, death, and the devil.

Discussion 15: Besides an apostle, what did Paul consider himself to be (Phil. 1:16)? Did he and Peter view other Christians in a similar way (Col. 4:6; 1 Pet. 3:15)?

Discussion 16: How could we respond to this: “We do not need to defend Christianity. God is very capable of doing that all by Himself.”

III. The use of our senses and reason in everyday life – a clue to Christian apologetics.

How God made us: “I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, *eyes, ears* and all my members, *my ability to reason and all my senses...*”² (The Small Catechism, First Article explanation to the Apostles Creed)

So, what does this mean? How do we (and those early Christians in the New Testament) utilize our eyes, ears, other senses, and our reason in everyday life? And how might this apply to apologetics or the defense of Christianity?

Example: You are walking on a sidewalk along a street and you come to an intersection with a traffic light where you want to keep walking straight ahead. But you *see* a red light and a lit sign that says “Don’t Walk.” You press the button that will allow you to cross safely. As you wait you *hear* an audio message saying “Wait, wait, wait...” Then you *see* the light change to green, *hear* an audio message say “Walk,” and you *see* another lit sign on the other side that is starting a 20-second countdown. But you also *look* both ways and maybe even *listen* for traffic that might be turning to where you are about to walk. In other words, your senses of *seeing* and *hearing* give you important information (evidence). With that evidence, your *reason* kicks in so you can make a proper judgment: “It’s not safe to cross” or “It’s safe to cross.” If you are blind and deaf, you would not have the needed information or evidence in order to make a reasonable judgment (if you decide to cross, you would do on the basis of “blind faith”).

Our senses gather information – facts or evidence – and on the basis of those facts or evidence we make a reasoned judgment. We operate this way all the time throughout the day, for this is the way God created us.

There are times of course when we might not have evidence or enough evidence, or our senses might receive faulty evidence, or we might simply make a wrong judgment even though we have good evidence (we fail to reason well). But whatever the case, this is how we operate as human beings. Information comes to our senses,

² Words in *italics* throughout this study are added for emphasis.

reason kicks in, and we make judgments about what to do (or not do) or say (or not say) or think (or not think) or believe (or not believe).

Discussion 17: What are some other examples in everyday life that involve information or evidence that comes to one or more of your senses and what your reason does with that information?

IV. Senses and reason used in the defense of Christianity. How they have played a role in Christian apologetics.

Discussion 18: Here are just a few New Testament examples of Christian apologetics. Break up into small groups, each group taking two or more and answer these questions (you may have to look up the context): What senses are being used? What information or evidence is coming to those senses? What reasoned judgment do they make or are they being asked to make? What Christian truth is being defended or proved? Do any of these have people making a wrong judgment?

- [Nicodemus said,] “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these miraculous signs You are doing unless God is with him.” (John 3:2)
- “John [the Baptist] ... sent a message through his disciples and asked Jesus, ‘Are You the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?’ Jesus replied to them, ‘Go and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are told the good news.’” (Matthew 11:2-5)
- “But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.’ For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish...” (Luke 5:8-9)
- “But the chief priests had decided to kill Lazarus also [who Jesus had just raised from the dead], because Lazarus was the reason many of the Jews were deserting them and believing in Jesus.” (John 12:10-11)
- ““But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’—then He told the

paralytic, ‘Get up, take your stretcher, and go home.’ And he rose and went home.” (Matthew 9:6-7)

- “Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to Him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, ‘Can this be the Son of David?’ But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, ‘It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.’” (Matt. 12:22-24)
- “They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, ‘He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.’ Some of the Pharisees said, ‘This man is not from God, for He does not keep the Sabbath.’ But others said, ‘How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?’ And there was a division among them. So they said again to the blind man, ‘What do you say about Him, since He has opened your eyes?’ He said, ‘He is a prophet.’” (John 9:13-17)
- “...the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, ‘Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.’ He answered, ‘Whether He is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.’ ... And they reviled him, saying, ‘You are His disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where He comes from.’ The man answered, ‘Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where He comes from, and yet He opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, God listens to him. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, He could do nothing.’” (John 9:24ff.)
- “... Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, ‘Peace to you!’ But they were startled and frightened

and thought they saw a ghost. And He said to them, ‘Why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself! Touch Me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have.’ And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, He said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave Him a piece of broiled fish, and He took it and ate before them.” (Luke 24:36-43)

V. What evidence and apologetics **CANNOT DO and **CAN DO**:**
Limitations and clarifications about evidence, apologetics, and defending Christian truth.

What apologetics **CANNOT DO, and why.**

Discussion 19: What do the following passages suggest about the effectiveness of evidence for the truth of Christianity and Christ?

- “Even though He had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in Him.” (John 12:37)
- “The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about Me, but you do not believe because you are not among My sheep.” (John 10:25-26)
- “If they don’t listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.” (Luke 16:31)

Even though observed evidence clearly made the case for the truth of Christianity and the truth of Christ, not everyone came to a correct and reasonable judgment. There were divisions; many hearts and minds were not changed, they remained in unbelief, and some even concluded Jesus was in league with demonic beings. Clearly, no amount of evidence was helpful for many.

There are two reasons for that.

1) **The first** is negative and based on verses such as these:

- “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that *every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*” (Gen. 6:5)

- “And you were *dead in the trespasses and sins* in which you once walked, following the course of this world, *following the prince of the power of the air*, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—*among whom we all once lived* in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and *were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind*.” (Eph. 2:1-3)
- “No one is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; *no one seeks for God. All have turned aside*; together they have become worthless; *no one does good, not even one*.” (Rom. 3:11-12)

Discussion 20: What are these verses saying about the ability of anyone to do something truly good, including the desire and ability to seek God (and therefore to trust in Him)? What is impossible for sinful human beings to do?

The Small Catechism sums it up this way:

- “I believe that *I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him...*” (Third Article Explanation to Apostles Creed)
- 2) **The second reason**, based on verses like the following, is positive and comforting, describing what is needed for anyone to come to faith in Jesus:
- “For I am not ashamed of *the gospel*, for *it is the power of God* for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16)
 - “*But God*, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, *even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with Him ... For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this [faith] is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works*, so that no one may boast. (Eph. 2:4ff.)
 - “*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ*.” (Rom. 10:17)

Or, in continuing with the words of The Small Catechism:

- “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; *but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith...*”

Discussion 21: Based on these passages, summarize how one comes to faith in Jesus as God’s Son, Savior, Redeemer, and Lord. In other words, what is the bottom line or what ultimately and only truly effects (creates) faith within a person?

What apologetics **CAN DO**, and how.

And yet, at the same time, as seen from many of the above passages (see Part IV above), **many observed the clear evidence and then believed and confessed faith in Jesus Christ. How do we explain this** while holding to the scriptural truths that 1) we cannot by our own reason believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him, and 2) the Holy Spirit alone brings us to faith using the powerful gospel of forgiveness? These passages can help:

- “Wife, for all you know, *you might save* your husband. Husband, for all you know, *you might save* your wife.” (1 Cor. 7:16)
- “Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, *they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct.*” (1 Pet. 3:1-2)

Discussion 22: How can a wife or husband actually “save” the other spouse? How can one actually “win” the other to Christianity? How can they do this and still maintain it is the Holy Spirit who uses the gospel of forgiveness to do the work of creating faith, of doing the actual saving and winning someone to Christ? The question can also be asked this way: Can a believing spouse be used to point to the truth of the saving gospel by their words or actions? Can the way they live imply or confirm the truth that Jesus is the Savior?

Here is another example that illustrates that faith and forgiveness can come to a person *through* others: If you were baptized as an infant, who brought you to Christ and brought Christ to you so you were forgiven and saved? Answer: Your parents and your pastor – even though it was the Holy Spirit who did the *actual* forgiving and

saving in the baptismal waters. Parents and the pastor were simply instruments used by the Holy Spirit.

The same can be said of Christian apologetics, evidence, and the defense of the truth of Christianity. Christian apologetics and evidence (and we are talking about the evidence used within the Bible here – biblical evidence³) can point to the saving gospel. Christian apologetics (evidence) implies the truth or confirms the truth of Jesus as the Son of God and his work of dying for the sins of the world.

The evidence is there. It may or may not be believed.

But it remains evidence, **evidence that *points to, implies, or confirms* the truth of Christ and His work of forgiveness – the gospel, which alone creates faith.**

It was this evidence that was heard, seen, and even touched by many who came to believe in Jesus in the early Christian church, who in turn shared this evidence and defense with an unbelieving world. The apostles and many others were Christian apologists.

A final thought on what apologetics can and cannot do: A Christian must not allow any person – parent, pastor, pope, religious leader, or friend – to be lord over the Word of God and the powerful gospel. The same is true of our senses, reason, evidence, or apologetics. Apologetics is not an authority or lord over the Bible; it must not be used in order to undermine God’s Word or the work of the Holy Spirit. It is an instrument to be used in the service of the Word of God, in the service of the law, and in the service of the gospel. Apologetics is like a precious serving platter on which the truth and message of Christ can be served.

And this is precisely what we see Jesus, the apostles, and other Christians doing in the Gospels, the Book of Acts, the epistles, and within the early Christian church. We can and should, therefore, make use of Christian apologetics as they did, while being on our guard against bad apologetics and the misuse of apologetics.

³ There is also evidence outside of the Bible (what is called extra-biblical apologetics) which can be very helpful, but that we leave for another time.

VI. The need for and value of eyewitness accounts.

We have a problem: When all this evidence was given 2,000 years ago, we were not there (and neither were our unbelieving neighbors); we did not observe this evidence with our senses. We were not eyewitnesses of Jesus' miracles or of His resurrected body. Even today we do not hear, see, or touch Jesus. We (and those we might talk to about Jesus) don't have such evidence before us as they did back then.

Discussion 23: Does this mean apologetics is not available to us? Or, if it is available to us, how so?

Here is an illustration that helps: Let's say you live in Missouri. Your brother walks in the house and says, "I just saw a moose outside of town!" You know that moose do not live in Missouri, so you reasonably conclude your brother is either lying, joking, or mistaken. But then your older sister walks in and says, "I just saw a moose..." You still know this is rather impossible so you believe your siblings are playing a practical joke on you. Twenty minutes later your parents arrive home and say the same thing. Now you begin to wonder: Could this be true? That evening the news reports multiple people seeing a moose. It no longer seems reasonable to believe all these people are lying, playing a practical joke, hallucinating, or whatever. Even though *you* did not see the moose, there are too many reliable *eyewitnesses* who did.

Eyewitnesses. Very important.

In a court of law, the jury should find it hard to dismiss the testimony of eyewitnesses. If there are several or more eyewitnesses, all saying the same thing, all found to be honest people, and there are no eyewitnesses clearly contradicting what they are saying, their eyewitness testimony should be able to convince the jury so it comes to a correct and reasonable decision or verdict.

Though jury members were not *there* at the scene of the crime, they rely on eyewitnesses who *were there*.

The importance of eyewitnesses in the New Testament.

Discussion 24: When it came time to appoint another apostle to replace Judas (who had committed suicide), what did Peter say was a requirement (read Acts 1:20-22)? And whose idea was this according to the following passage?

- [Jesus said:] “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and *you will be My witnesses* in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

NOTE: *Witnesses* here and elsewhere in the New Testament means *eyewitnesses* – those who were physically present with Jesus; who saw, heard, and possibly touched and ate with Him. In this sense, we are not witnesses today (but what about us as jury members?).

Discussion 25: Did these disciples make it “to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8) with their eyewitness testimony? And not only that, were they able to share their eyewitness accounts verbally with all the future generations down to this very day? When did the last apostle die? And how far were they able to travel with their eyewitness testimony?

Discussion 26: We might assume eyewitness accounts need to be *spoken and heard in person* in order to be valid or trustworthy. But are there other forms of eyewitness testimony that work just as well? What about written records of some sort?

Discussion 27: What are some past events you know to be true, not because you were there or because you spoke face to face with someone who was there, but because of written records considered to be reliable?

Discussion 28: Besides believing the books of the New Testament are the inspired Word of God, they also claim to be written records of what? And written by whom?

Discussion 29: Which Gospels were written by eyewitnesses? Which ones were not? And of these that were not, who did the authors have contact with? And how did they go about their research before they wrote their records about the life of Christ? What about the Book of Acts and the New Testament epistles?

John the apostle, wrote this in his Gospel:

- “So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. *He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true*, and he knows that he is *telling the truth*—that you also may believe.” (John 19:32-35)

- “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but *these are written* so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.” (John 20:30-31)
- “*This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.* Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” (John 21:24-25)

Luke, the author of both his Gospel and Acts, a companion of the apostle Paul, and who had access to many in and around Judea, describes his method of research:

- “Many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as the *original eyewitnesses* and servants of the word *handed them down to us*. So it also seemed good to me, since I have *carefully investigated everything* from the very first, to write to you in an orderly sequence...*so that you may know the certainty of the things about which you have been instructed.*” (Luke 1:1-4)

Peter said in one of his letters:

- “For *we did not follow cleverly devised myths* when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but *we were eyewitnesses* of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to Him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,’ *we ourselves heard* this very voice borne from heaven, for *we were with Him* on the holy mountain.” (2 Pet. 1:16-18)

John, again, said in his first epistle:

- “What was from the beginning, what we have *heard*, what we have *seen* with our eyes, what we have *observed* and have *touched with our hands*, concerning the word of life—that life was revealed, and we have *seen* it and we *testify* and declare to you

the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—what we have *seen and heard* we also declare to you, so that you may also have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.” (1 John 1:1-3)

Discussion 30: If the Gospels, Acts, and letters in the New Testament were written by eyewitnesses or by those who had contact with eyewitnesses, in what way are Jesus’ words to His disciples (“you will be My witnesses ... *to the end of the earth*”) still being fulfilled today?

Discussion 31: One of the easiest ways to introduce a non-Christian to Christianity is to give him the Gospel of John (some churches have copies for members) and ask him to read it. If he asks, “Why? Who wrote it? Is it anyone who knew what he was talking about?”, the best reply would probably *not* be, “It’s God’s Word inspired by the Holy Spirit.” Though that’s true, he cannot relate to that yet. So, what would be a better response? How about, “It claims to be written by an eyewitness who was actually there. See what you think.”

VII. How a Christian can use apologetics (provide evidence) when talking to a non-Christian

A. Start with the claims of Christ.

Try asking someone, “Who do you think Jesus Christ is?” Jesus threw out this question, and others back then asked similar questions (read Matt. 16:13-15; Mark 4:41; John 8:25; 10:24).

Questions like this can help a person to think seriously, *especially* when they hear what Jesus claimed about himself.

Discussion 32: Of the dozens and dozens claims Jesus made about Himself, here are just several. What is he saying about Himself and how strange and outrageous are they?

- “...the Son of Man is *lord even of the Sabbath*.” (Mark 2:28)
- “... the Son of Man *has authority on earth to forgive sins*...” (Matt. 9:6)
- “No one has ascended into heaven except *He who descended from heaven*, the Son of Man.” (John 3:13)
- “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, *you have no life in you*.” (John 6:53)

- “Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die.” (John 11:25-26)
- “... the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” (Matt. 20:28)
- “For the Son of Man is going to *come with His angels* in the glory of His Father, and then *He will repay each person according to what he has done.*” (Matt. 16:27)
- “‘I tell you the truth, before Abraham was, I am.’ So they picked up stones to throw at Him...” (John 8:58-59)
- “I and the Father are one.” (John 10:30)
- “The high priest said to Him, ‘I charge You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Messiah, the Son of God.’ ‘You have said it,’ Jesus told him. ‘But I tell you, in the future *you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.*’” (Matt. 26:63-64)

Discussion 33: Do you know of anyone who talks like this? What would be normal reactions to and conclusions about someone who would say these sorts of things today? What were the three negative reactions and responses toward Jesus when He made these claims back then? Read Mark 3:21, John 10:20, Matt. 26:65. Would these be reasonable reactions and conclusions if His claims about Himself were not true?

These claims coming from the mouth of Jesus can help a person grasp that Christianity is truly set apart from every other religion. Because of His outrageous claims, many have reasonably concluded that Jesus could not have been simply a great moral teacher. He had to have been either a lunatic, a liar, demon possessed, or possibly – just possibly – exactly who He claimed to be: Lord and God. But the one thing He clearly cannot be is a human teacher worthy of great honor. His claims are too crazy and do not allow that as an option.

B. His miracles as proof of his claims.

Some non-Christian scholars have said that Jesus was just one of many miracle workers in the first century (they cite a few Jewish exorcists and rabbis performing a few minor miracles). Perhaps the best comparison to Jesus, they say, was a man by the name of

Apollonius of Tyana who (according to an account written long after his death) performed some miracles, “generally involving his ability to foresee the future or to perceive demonic activity. His most striking ‘miracle,’ raising a girl from her funeral bier, was doubted even by his most loyal followers...”⁴ So, was Jesus just one among many? Can others be compared to Him when it comes to the kind and number of miracles?

Discussion 34: What sets Jesus’ miracles apart from other miracle workers?

1. **His miracles were complete and perfect.** The sick, the blind, the deaf, the crippled, etc. were restored to perfect health.
2. **His miracles were instantaneous.** There was no delay (with one exception, which was a very short delay with a reason behind it; see Mark 8:22ff.).
3. **Jesus’ miracles were recorded either by eyewitnesses or those who had direct contact with the witnesses,** and recorded not long after Christ lived on earth (within a lifetime).
4. **Jesus’ opponents did not deny He performed miracles;** they even confirmed He performed them. They did, however, have a different explanation for how He accomplished them: demonic activity (John 9:13ff.; Matt. 9:32-34; see also Acts 4:14-16).
5. **The number of Jesus’ recorded miracles** far surpass anything attributed to anyone else in all of history. So, how many?

Discussion 35: Give a low estimate of how many miracles Jesus performed based on the following eight sections in Matthew that describe different times and locations. What number do you come up with?

- “And He went *throughout all Galilee*, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing *every disease and every affliction* among the people. So His fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought Him *all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics*, and He healed them. And *great crowds* followed Him from Galilee and

⁴ NIV Archeological Study Bible, Zondervan, 2005; p. 1706.

the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.” (Matt. 4:23ff.)

- “That evening they brought to Him *many who were oppressed by demons*, and He cast out the spirits with a word and healed *all who were sick*.” (Matt. 8:16)
- “And Jesus went throughout *all the cities and villages*, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and *healing every disease and every affliction*.” (Matt. 9:35)
- “Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And *many followed Him*, and *He healed them all* and ordered them not to make Him known.” (Matt. 12:15f.)
- “And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household.’ And *He did not do many mighty works there*, because of their unbelief.” (Matt. 13:57f.)
- “When *the crowds* heard this, they followed Him on foot from the towns. When He went ashore, He saw *a large crowd*, had compassion on them, and *healed their sick*. When evening came, the disciples approached Him and said, ‘...Send the crowds away so that they can go into the villages and buy food for themselves.’ ... He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them. ... Everyone ate and was satisfied. ... Now those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.” (Matt. 14:14ff.) [*Those fed included those who were healed, which probably would have been a small percentage of the total fed – let’s say 2%. The 5,000 who were fed did not include women and children, so it is reasonable to double that number which comes to 10,000. Using 2%, how many were likely healed?*]
- “And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. And when the men of that place recognized Him, *they sent around to all that region and brought to Him all who were sick* and implored Him that they might only touch the fringe of His garment. *And as many as touched it* were made well.” (Matt. 14:34ff.)

- “*Large crowds came to Him, including the lame, the blind, the crippled, those unable to speak, and many others. They put them at His feet, and He healed them. So the crowd was amazed when they saw those unable to speak talking, the crippled restored, the lame walking, and the blind seeing... Jesus called His disciples and said, ‘I have compassion on the crowd, because they’ve already stayed with Me three days and have nothing to eat...’ They all ate and were satisfied. ... Now there were four thousand men who had eaten, besides women and children.”* (Matt. 15:30ff.) [*Use the same method of Matt. 14 above.*]

Discussion 36: Why did Jesus perform so many miracles, so instantaneously, so perfectly? What was the result He was looking for? Read John 10:24-26, 37-38; John 20:30-31.

C. Fulfillment of messianic prophecies as proof of his claims.

Messianic prophecies are Old Testament predictions of the coming Messiah (or “Christ” – the Greek word meaning “Messiah”). They are descriptions or identification marks of the Messiah designed to help the Jews identify the Messiah when He would arrive – so they could say, “This is Him! He is fulfilling the prophecies of the Messiah found in our inspired Scriptures!”

It can be compared to something like this: You are told to pick up a person who is coming to speak at a conference. You have never met him so you need information. You need to know how he is arriving (plane, train, bus), where to go to pick him up (which airport or depot), the time of his arrival, his name, what he looks like (height, skin color, what he might be wearing, etc.). If you have those identification marks, you should be able to identify him and say, “This is him! He meets the description,” and then welcome him and bring him to the conference. The same with the Messiah.

The Jews were anticipating and looking for the arrival of the Messiah. A dozen or more Jewish men between 50 B.C. and 135 A.D. were considered possibilities, and many more since. But only Jesus has been able to retain that title to this very day. Why?

The Jews naturally and especially wondered about Jesus (see John 7:31).

Jesus Himself claimed He had come to fulfill the messianic prophecies (see Luke 4:21; 22:37; 24:44; John 5:39)

There are several kinds of messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. We will consider just one of those kinds, sometimes called **direct prophecies**. Here are a few examples.

The Messiah would:

...Be the line of Jesse and the house of David:

- “There shall come forth *a shoot from the stump of Jesse*, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord...” (Is. 11:1-3)
- “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will *raise up for David a righteous Branch*, and He shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.” (Jer. 23:5)

...Come from Bethlehem:

- “But you, O *Bethlehem Ephrathah*, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, *from you shall come forth for Me the One to be ruler in Israel*, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.” (Micah 5:2)

...Perform many miracles:

- “Then *the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped*; then shall the *lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy...*” (Is. 35:5-6)

...Be rejected, humiliated, suffer greatly, remain patient, be punished by God, undergo the cruelest of deaths, treated shamefully and honorably in his burial, and bear and pay for the sins of mankind:

- “He was *despised and rejected by men*, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces He was *despised*, and we esteemed Him not. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him *stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted*. But He was *pierced for*

our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so He opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of My people? And they made His grave with the wicked and with a rich man in His death, although He had done no violence, and there was no deceit in His mouth. Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush Him; He has put Him to grief; ... by His knowledge shall the Righteous One, My servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and He shall bear their iniquities ... yet He bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.” (Is. 53:3ff.)

...Would not remain dead (He would be resurrected):

- “For You will *not abandon My soul to the grave, or let your Holy One see corruption.*” (Ps. 16:10)
- “Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; He has put Him to grief; when His soul makes an offering for guilt, *He shall see His offspring; He shall prolong His days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in His hand...* Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the many, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors...” (Is. 53:10, 12)

His disciples did not recognize the fulfillment of these prophecies by Jesus as they should have. They eventually did, but Jesus had to remind them:

- ““O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe *all that the prophets have spoken!* Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory? And *beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.*” (Luke 24:25-27)

Discussion 37: Can anyone else in all of history be said to fulfill just three of these, let alone all of them? If you were to share just two of the above with others, which ones and why?

D. Eyewitness testimony of His resurrection as proof of His claims.

The resurrection is the best evidence and proof of the truth of Christianity and of Christ. However, merely *saying* He rose from the dead is not convincing by itself for the simple reason that *saying so does not make it so*.

So what really matters is this: *Were there eyewitnesses to those appearances?* If so, how many witnesses at how many appearances? Do those witnesses agree with one another? Are they willing to stand by their testimony? Or do any of them because of pressure, threats of imprisonment, torture, persecution, or death eventually admit the story of His resurrection was a hoax? Or perhaps a guilty conscience would eventually compel some of them to say it never really happened – one or two finally confess it was all a lie. **How can we respond? With facts.**

Here are **several basic facts** provided by eyewitness accounts. (Note: even the majority of non-Christian scholars agree with these facts. So, what do they do? They create theories – in bold **CAPS** – which they think refute a real resurrection.)

Fact #1: Jesus was dead by crucifixion. Christian and non-Christian scholars agree. But a couple of centuries ago, some non-Christians said, “No, I don’t think so!” and they came up with the theory that Jesus never really died on the cross; he merely **SWOONED** (went into a coma of sorts) and then revived in the tomb, moved the stone all by Himself (that weighed between 500 pounds and two tons), and presented Himself and convinced others He was the risen and glorified Savior. This theory is rarely believed today. Plus, there is no historical evidence for it. It is a blind-faith theory. The evidence that He died by crucifixion is overwhelming.

Fact #2: His body was placed in a known tomb (belonging to the rich and well-known Joseph of Arimathea). The records show that the women went to that tomb on both Friday and Sunday,

John and Peter ran to that tomb on Sunday morning, and the soldiers guarded that well-known tomb.

Fact #3: The tomb was empty. Mary Magdalene, the other women, Peter and John, and the Jewish authorities (Jesus' enemies) all confirm this. Nonetheless, some non-Christians came up with a theory – without any evidence – that the reason the tomb was empty is because the women went to the **WRONG TOMB** on Sunday morning (after being at the right tomb on Friday) and then concluded Jesus rose. This would mean that Peter and John went to the wrong tomb as well. It also means the soldiers were guarding the wrong tomb! If for some bizarre reason they had all gone to the wrong tomb, the Jewish authorities would have looked into the matter, easily discovered that everyone went to the wrong tomb, and produced the dead body of Jesus. But evidence that anyone – let alone all of them – went to the wrong tomb does not exist. It is a blind-faith theory. An empty tomb, however, does not prove a resurrection. In fact, none of those who discovered the tomb empty concluded Jesus had been raised from the dead. The only one who comes close to this is John. But his believing was based on the unique way Jesus' burial cloths were arranged in the tomb (John 20:5-9). The question an empty tomb raises is, "*Why* is it empty? *What happened* to His body?"

Fact #4: Reports quickly arose of people seeing Jesus alive with the same body with which He died. Even non-Christian scholars acknowledge that the apostles, the women, and other disciples *claimed* to have seen Jesus really alive. But as usual, these unbelieving scholars create other theories to suggest they did not see what they claimed to have seen. For example, they say the disciples **STOLE THE BODY OF JESUS**, and then lied saying he was alive. Or, according to a more recent theory, the disciples had the same exact **HALLUCINATION** of a living Jesus, several times.

None of the evidence supports these false theories. Just the opposite. The actual historical records based on eyewitness testimony give us this:

- a. **Jesus appears no less than *twelve* times over a period of 40 days following his death.** Here are six listed by Paul:
- “... Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that He appeared *to Cephas*, then *to the twelve*. Then He appeared *to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive*, though some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared *to James*, then *to all the apostles*. Last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared *also to me*.” (1 Cor. 15:1-8)
- b. **He appeared not just to a few but many, in different settings, in a variety of locations:** Four received individual appearances (Mary, Peter, James the half-brother of Jesus, and Paul); after leaving the tomb on Sunday morning several women saw Him and grasped His feet; two walked with Him on the road to Emmaus; the apostles plus others saw Him while locked in a house (*minus* Thomas); the apostles again locked in a house (*plus* Thomas); seven apostles saw and ate with Him at the Sea of Galilee; the disciples with Him at a mountain in Galilee; a group of over 500 saw Him at the same time; all the disciples with Him near Bethany who also witnessed His bodily ascension to heaven. That is a lot of people, a lot of appearances, in a variety of settings and locations.

Discussion 38: What are benefits of listing all these appearances? How would these eyewitnesses or the accounts based on these eyewitnesses have been used back then with an unbeliever or a group of doubters? Look up Acts 2:32; 3:15; 10:40-41; 13:30-31. How could these accounts be used, even now, with sceptics who say, “No way!”?

- c. **All those who saw Him were not expecting Jesus to come back to life bodily.**

Discussion 39: Why would this be important?

They responded the same way people would of any age, including today, for no one expects the dead to come back to life bodily. Not even an empty tomb would shake them from

their common-experience belief that people don't rise after being truly dead. *Something else was required.*

- d. **They became convinced only when He appeared to them bodily.**

Discussion 40: Read Luke 24:37-43 and John 20:19-29. What senses did Jesus appeal to, what evidence did He give them, and what conclusion was He asking them to make? See also Mark 16:14.

Discussion 41: Besides proving He was not a ghost, which false theories (pages 22-23) are disproven by these recorded appearances in Luke 24 and John 20?

- e. **Finally, there were drastic changes in the lives of the disciples after claiming to see a resurrected Jesus.** Because of what they saw, heard, and touched with their hands the Holy Spirit worked within them a new belief, a firm conviction, and a radical life change. They became bold, they told others, even under threat of punishment, imprisonment, and death. And they did so everywhere.

Peter had denied Jesus on Good Friday, caving under pressure from a 14-year-old girl who identified him as one of Jesus' disciples (Peter: "I don't know the man!"). But he becomes the courageous leader of apostles, willing to suffer and eventually die for his faith in Jesus! Why?

James, the half-brother of Jesus, refused to believe his half-brother was the Messiah, even saying Jesus was "out of His mind." But he is converted and is soon appointed the head of the church in Jerusalem, only to be martyred in 62 A.D.! Why?

Paul, the arch-enemy of the early Christian church, arrested Christians, imprisoned them, and voted to have them put to death. Talk about an unbelievable change: he goes on to become the greatest missionary and apologist the Christian church has ever known! Why?

Discussion 42: What would explain these changes? Would a stolen body? A hallucination? Going to the wrong tomb? A comatose man that somehow revives in a tomb? A myth?

Discussion 43: A person does not willingly submit to humiliation, suffering, torture, and death for a religious belief he *knows* to be a lie. On the other hand, if someone does *not* know a religious belief is a lie (that is, he believes it is true even though it is not), he *might possibly* be willing to suffer or even die for it. What would be some examples from recent history?

There are also many times when a person *knows* a religious belief is true, but even then, he is not willing to suffer for it. What is an example from the Gospels mentioned above?

If the story of the resurrection of Christ was a lie (let's pretend, for example, the disciples stole the body and then told everyone He rose), who would have known it was a lie – that it was not true? Answer: Those who stole the body! The disciples! Plus, all those who lied about seeing Jesus alive after He was dead, including St. Paul ("Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" 1 Cor. 9:1). If Christ was not raised from the dead, all these people would have known it was a lie. Would they have willingly suffered and died for what they knew was a lie? Read 2 Cor. 6:3-10 and then list the sufferings Paul experienced because of his confession and teaching about Jesus.

So what explains why these believers in Jesus would be willing to suffer and even die a martyr's death? There are no records of any of them changing their confession and saying, "It was all a lie." They maintained their confession of faith even in the face of suffering and death. Why? In the words of Peter and John as they were on trial, "...we cannot but speak of *what we have seen and heard*." (Acts 4:20)

VIII. Back to the cross, always

One of the truths proven by the resurrection is that Jesus really is who He claimed to be: the Messiah, the Son of God and the Son of Man, God in the flesh.

But there is another truth confirmed that is so obvious that it might be overlooked and not rightly considered. It is a fact that must be grasped and understood. It is where *I* need to go, *you* need to go, and where we need to bring *others who do not yet believe*.

Discussion 44: What is this obvious truth that might be overlooked?

The resurrection means that someone first _____.

Discussion 45: But who and how?

The Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity. This was the death of God. And the question that follows is why in the world does God allow himself to die, especially in such a brutal, tortuous, painful way – by crucifixion? He did not have to. He was God.

Discussion 46: What does this mean?

Here is what could be shared with an unbelieving friend, neighbor, family member, stranger, or whomever God puts across our path. “What does the death of the Son of God mean?”

1. “It means my sin and your **sin is real.**” He was sent here because of the reality of sin.
2. “It means my sin and your **sin is really, really serious.**” So serious that only God Himself could deal with it, all by Himself. How else can His crucifixion be explained? Why else would God descend from His heavenly home to a fallen world, take on human flesh, suffer and die?
3. “It means **my sin and your sin – and the sins of the whole world – are really forgiven.**” They have been paid for. His innocent body on the cross was bearing the sins of the world. His blood shed on the cross was so holy and infinitely precious that it could and did pay exactly what it was supposed to pay for. His blood covered and cleansed that which needed covering and cleansing above all else. In Christ sins are forgiven, washed away.

This is where I need to bring myself – and where I can bring my neighbor, my friend, my family member, my enemy, or the stranger God puts across my path. And in doing so, these important questions should also be asked:

Discussion 47: “What should I do with this reality and message?” And then also, when opportunities arise, I can and sometimes should ask my neighbor, “What are *you* going to do with this reality and message?”

For those who understand their sinfulness and are confronted with the truth of Christ, the answer is found in Peter’s Pentecost sermon.

Discussion 48: Read **Acts. 2:22-36**. As you read these verses note the references to apologetics, miracles, the resurrection, messianic prophecies, eyewitness testimony, claims about Christ, his crucifixion, and who crucified him.

And then read **Acts 2:37-39** (printed below) where we and our neighbor are told what to do with this reality and message.

- “Now when the Jews heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, *what shall we do?*’ And Peter said to them, ‘*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*’ For the promise is for

you and for your children and for all who are far off,
everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” (Acts
2:37-39)

Discussion 49: Why repentance? What is included in repentance? Why baptism? Why is baptism so important? How is it connected *to* and what does it bring us *from* the work and death of Christ on the cross? Read also Gal. 3:27; Rom.6:3; 1 Cor. 6:11.

Extra: Read just one or two chapters from John 3 through 17 and list the claims Jesus makes about himself or others make about him. How many are there? How many could be classified as “outrageous”?