

Proof

Clayton Howard Ford

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To my Dad and Mom,
for their constant support
and to Terri, my sister,
who encouraged me to continue writing

Introduction

Think of a friend of yours whom I have never met and, for the sake of simplicity, let us say that his name is Michael. Let us also say that, for the moment, I cannot meet or talk to Michael. How would you prove to me that Michael exists? It is not enough to prove that “A man whom I would call Michael exists,” for you must prove to me that this particular person exists, a person who stands so tall, has a certain color of hair, a certain color of eyes, a certain temperament, certain likes and dislikes, etc. How would you prove to me that your friend actually exists? Once you discover the method by which you can prove the existence of Michael, you will have also discovered the method by which we can prove the existence of the Christian God. The method which you will use will not provide *absolute* proof of the existence of Michael, but it will give me reasons to believe that he does. So, too, this same method will not provide *absolute* proof of the existence of the Christian God, but it will give you reasons to believe; that is, it will demonstrate that Christianity is a reasonable faith and a valid system of truth.

Does this surprise you? For years I have heard people say—and you have probably heard it, too—that it is not reasonable to believe in God’s existence; we must put aside our reasoning and simply believe that he exists. Christianity is often presented in the same way: it is not reasonable to believe in it; we must put aside our reasoning and simply believe that it is true.

But the Christian Bible itself tells us that we should not blindly accept what Christianity has to say. It tells us that we should test the validity of any statement, especially those of the people who claim to be speaking on God’s behalf: “Do not believe every spirit, but test

the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). It tells us that Christianity’s central tenet is the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. And it plainly tells us that if the resurrection did not actually occur in history, if the resurrection is not as verifiable as your own birth is, then we should rightly reject Christianity: “If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!” (1 Cor. 15:17). So the Bible itself invites us to test the validity of what Christianity has to say. It invites us to consider the arguments and evidence in favor of the Christian faith and either accept or reject it based on those arguments and evidence.

The purpose of this little book is to present those arguments and evidence. I believe it was Thomas Aquinas who once said that if you want to convince someone that he should be standing on your side of the room, you do not yell across the room at him. You start at his side of the room and then walk with him, step by step, to your side of the room. I intend to do the same in this book. I intend to start with a statement with which all of us can agree and then walk with you step by step until you can see why we Christians believe that our God really exists.

The first step in this process begins with the absolute truth that you are reading this book.

Truth

My U.S. History teacher at the community college had warned the class that he would occasionally interrupt his lectures to ask the “important” questions of life, such as, “Why are we here?” and “How did we get here anyway?” Now, here on only the second day of the semester, he stopped his lecture and asked those

very questions. One student said that we were simply created, but by what or by whom he did not know. Another said that the earth had been seeded by aliens. Others offered various versions of the evolution theory. Finally, one student asked, "Since no one was there to see what actually happened, how are we supposed to know which theory is true?" To this, the teacher said, "Well, we all know that there is no absolute truth."

My response to his statement caused an uproar in that classroom.

I raised my hand and when he called on me, I said, "You are wrong. There is absolute truth."

"Oh! And I suppose you know what it is," he said sarcastically.

"Yes, I do. God the Son, Jesus Christ, came to earth, became a man and then died on the cross for our sins."

I was not allowed to say much after that. A group of students immediately took over the classroom for the rest of the session and accused me of being closed minded, bigoted, hateful and willing to kill anyone who disagreed with me, even kill my own brother. I was never given the floor long enough to say anything in my defense, but if I had, this is what I would have said. Other faiths may teach their people to be closed minded, bigoted, hateful and willing to kill anyone who disagrees with their faith, but Christianity does not. Satan seeks to steal, kill and destroy, and would like all of us to do the same. But Jesus came to give life abundantly (John 10:10), even to those who disagreed with him, by loving them and ultimately giving away his own life for their sake. And that is our mission as well. We do not try to convert people to our faith by threatening to take away *their* lives. We try to convert them by loving them and even giving away *our* lives when necessary for their sake.

It is true that some people have committed terrible acts in the name of Christianity. The Spanish Inquisition and the civil war in Northern Ireland are just two examples. But there is a difference between those who are Christians and those who claim to be Christian, just as there is a difference between those who are doctors and those who claim to be doctors. The results that are produced in both cases speak for themselves. Jesus said we would be able to tell whether people are good or bad by the fruit they produce (Matt. 7:15-20). He also said that we would be able to tell if people were his disciples by their love for one another (John 13:35). Those who do not love other Christians and those who are not willing to lay down their lives for others are not Christians themselves. They can claim anything they want, but the fruit is obvious to everyone else.

And yes, we do believe in absolute truth, not just because our faith teaches us to believe in it, but also because its existence is a logical necessity. The statement, "There is no absolute truth," is one of the tenets of a philosophy known as postmodernism. It also teaches that truth cannot be known, that if you believe something is true, then it is true for you, and that what is true for you is not necessarily true for me. Each of us decides for ourselves—but for no one else—what is true and what is not true. Thus, I can decide that my car is white and you can decide that it is black and we would both be right. Truth changes from person to person. That is why there cannot be any absolute truths.

The problem with this philosophy becomes apparent as soon as we ask, "Is the statement, 'There is no absolute truth,' absolutely true?" If it is, then there is at least one absolute truth, which means that the statement is wrong. And if it is not, then absolute truth does exist somewhere, which means once again that the statement is wrong. In other words, the statement

contradicts itself. And so do the postmodernists. They believe that the statements, “If you believe something is true, then it is true for you” and “What is true for you is not necessarily true for me,” are true, which means that those statements are true for them but not necessarily true for the rest of us. And yet they want all of us to believe in these statements as if they were absolutely true. And if truth cannot be known, then how can we possibly know that the statement, “Truth cannot be known,” is true? And if we cannot know that the statement is true, why do the postmodernists preach it as if we should know that it is true? The point is that denying the existence of absolute truth leads us to logical contradictions and impossibilities. Besides, you already know that the statement, “There is no absolute truth,” is absolutely false because you know of at least two absolute truths. You know that your friend, whom we are calling Michael, exists. And you know that you exist. If it is not absolutely true that you exist, then who is reading this book?

So, absolute truth does exist and we can know what it is. But what is truth? Simply put, truth is a statement about reality. In other words, a statement is true because it corresponds to reality. The statement, “My car is white,” is a true statement because it corresponds to reality: my car really is white. The statement, “You are reading this book,” is a true statement because you are really reading this book.

But how can we know whether a statement is absolutely true? Fortunately, we have at our disposal several tools which can help us discover what is absolutely true and what is not. These “truth tools” have proven themselves to be very useful and have in fact been used by people since the first man walked the earth. But like all tools, they have their limitations. Each tool is designed to accomplish only so many

tasks. Using them for tasks outside of their designed limitations may lead to frustration, a waste of time and even injury. We do not use a jackhammer to remove a screw from a drywall and we do not use a screwdriver to break up a slab of concrete. So, too, whenever we use these “truth tools” outside of their designed limitations, we only succeed in achieving undesired results.

And some of those undesired results have led some people to disbelieve in God’s existence. They look at the results that these tools have produced and use them as reasons for rejecting God. They do not realize that these results were produced by the improper use of these tools. Let me show you what I mean.

Philosophy

Some people say that faith is an uncertain foundation upon which to build a system of truth, including Christianity. After all, so many people believe so many things that one cannot decide which one is true. Some of those who say this also say that logic is a better foundation because it always leads us to the truth. This is why they cannot believe in God’s existence, because his existence cannot be logically proven.

They are right about one thing: God’s existence cannot be logically proven. That is because, despite the attempts of philosophers for thousands of years to use logic to prove his existence, logic was never designed to do so.

Philosophy uses a form of logic called deductive reasoning. Every argument in deductive reasoning consists of three parts:

A major premise
A minor premise
The conclusion

For example:

All men are mortal. (Major premise)
Plato is a man. (Minor premise)
Therefore, Plato is mortal. (The conclusion)

The first important point we must remember about philosophy is this: every argument and every philosophy must begin with a set of premises.

If either premise is false, then the argument itself is false or invalid. For example:

All men are immortal.
Plato is a man.
Therefore, Plato is immortal.

The conclusion is false because the major premise is false. The second important point we must remember about philosophy is this: every argument and every philosophy is only as good as its premises. In other words, to build a true argument or a true philosophy, we must begin with true premises.

How, then, do we know that the premises themselves are true? We cannot use logic to prove the premises are true, for then we would have to start with another set of premises, and how are we to know that *those* premises are true? There is no way we can *prove* that our starting premises are true. We must simply believe they are true. In other words, philosophy and logic are themselves based on faith.

We can reach this same conclusion when we start with the question, “How do we know that logic always

leads us to the truth?” We cannot use logic to prove that logic always leads us to the truth, for then we would be committing a logical fallacy called begging the question. Suppose a total stranger were to come to us and say, “You can believe everything I say because I always tell the truth.” “How do we know that you always tell the truth?” we may ask. If he were to say, “Because I said so,” we would rightly reject his argument as a form of circular reasoning. The proof of his credibility must come from somewhere outside of himself. So, too, the proof that logic always leads us to the truth must come from outside of logic. But the philosophers have been unable to provide that proof. They simply believe that logic always leads us to the truth.

But if logic always leads us to the truth, why are there so many philosophies? There is utilitarianism, existentialism, and postmodernism. Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, and Sartre all had their own philosophies, none of which completely agreed with any other. In fact, there are more philosophies than there are major religions. But why? The answer is that each person began with a different set of premises. Each one chose which premises he wanted to believe in and built his philosophy from there.

Thus, the reasons why we should reject Christianity are also the reasons why we should reject philosophy and logic. Christianity should be rejected because it is based on faith; so are philosophy and logic. Christianity should be rejected because there are so many beliefs out there that we cannot determine which one is correct; the same can be said about philosophy and logic.

And yet, these are not the reasons why we reject a particular argument or philosophy. We reject or accept a philosophy according to how well it corresponds to

reality. If its premises do not correspond to reality (that is, if the premises are false), then we reject it. If its premises do correspond to reality (that is, if the premises are true), then we accept it. What their original proponents believed about the premises has nothing to do with our rejection or acceptance of the philosophy. Christianity and all other religions should be rejected or accepted for the same reason. If Christianity's premises can be proven to be false, then it should be rejected. But if its premises turn out to be true, then a reasonable person would do well to hear what it has to say.

Skeptics

Here is one reason why philosophy cannot prove God's existence: since every argument must begin with a set of premises which we believe to be true, one can refute any argument by simply disbelieving the premises. Skeptics do this all the time.

Most of us trust our physical senses so that when we see a chair, we believe that it is a real chair, so much so that we sit on it, trusting that we will not fall completely to the floor. But some skeptics say that our senses are actually deceiving us, so that they are not an accurate way to determine what is true or real. In other words, the chair might not be real after all, even though our senses tell us that it is.

Most of us know that our hand will get burned every time we put it on a hot stove. We believe in cause and effect: placing our hand on the hot stove (the cause) burns our hand (the effect). But David Hume said that cause and effect does not exist. All we can say is that event B (the burned hand) followed event A (placing our hand on the hot stove). It is only the habitual

thinking of our minds that makes us believe that A caused B.

Thus, the problem with logic is that it allows any skeptic to play the game. And no one can prove anything to a skeptic, especially the existence of God since the skeptic's approach only compounds one of philosophy's major limitations: it cannot prove the existence of any person, let alone God.

Let me illustrate. Go back to the question I asked you at the beginning of this book: How would you prove to me that Michael exists? It is not enough to prove that "A man whom I would call Michael exists," for you must prove to me that this particular person exists, a person who stands so tall, has a certain color of hair, a certain color of eyes, a certain temperament, certain likes and dislikes, etc. Would you use the ontological argument, that because you can imagine such a person could exist, he therefore must exist? Would you use the teleological argument, that since the universe has a design to it, it must have been created by an intelligent person and that person you would call Michael? Would you use the cosmological argument, that there must have been a first cause or else no other causes and effects would exist and this first cause we could call Michael? But even if you succeeded in concluding that some person whom you would call Michael exists, what philosophical argument could you contrive that would prove to me that your friend must be a male and not a female, must be a blond and not a brunette, must have blue eyes instead of brown, prefers jazz over country, likes puns and corny jokes, is an introvert and not an extrovert?

You might abandon the purely philosophical arguments and go for a more direct approach. You might tell me that you know Michael exists because you have seen him. But I could then argue that your

senses are deceiving you. You might present documentation, such as Michael's driver's license, complete with his picture. But then I could argue that the senses of both of us are deceiving us. You might then bring me to meet Michael face to face. But then I could argue that my own senses are deceiving me. In fact, my senses are so deceptive that I am not even sure that you exist. And Hume said that we cannot even philosophically prove to ourselves that *we* exist. Everyone believes in the concept of the self, but that is all it is: a belief, an unprovable and therefore unjustifiable belief. Skepticism may be a great way to deny the existence of God, but it eventually denies the existence of everyone else as well.

Philosophy is a useful tool for proving the truth of ideas, but it cannot prove the existence of a person. If philosophy cannot prove the existence of your friend or even of yourself, then it should not surprise us that it has yet to prove that God exists, for he, too, is a person. And quite frankly, philosophy may never prove it, for the tool is not designed for the task. Someday it may prove that an infinite, immortal and all-powerful being or that a designer or that a First Cause whom we would call God exists, but those are merely ideal beings, not persons. To prove that the *Christian* God exists, it must go on to prove that this being whom we would call God loves people but hates sin, that he is very strict but also very forgiving, that he is just but also merciful, that he exists as one God but three Persons, that the Person known as the Son took on flesh and walked on this earth as Jesus Christ, etc. It must go on to prove that he is Yahweh and not Allah or Jupiter or Zeus or one of the many Hindu gods. The task is just too great.

This is why the writers of the Bible were wiser than we are, for they never did attempt a logical proof of God's existence. They knew that God's existence is

not contingent on the success of a line of reasoning. They knew that God is not the conclusion of a long line of arguments. He is the starting premise for those arguments. He is the source from which all other truths are derived. If God did not exist, then no other truths would either.

That philosophy cannot prove the existence of God, therefore, does not mean that God does not exist. It simply means that philosophy is limited. We are trying to make it do something it was never intended to do.

Evil

Before we leave philosophy, I would like to answer an argument that has been used to disprove the existence of God, at least the existence of the Christian God. That argument concerns the problem of evil.

The teleological argument says that the world is like a large and expensive house. Such houses do not spring up on their own. An architect designs a plan for it and then the master builder constructs it according to that plan. The orderliness of the structure shows that an intelligent being created it. The world, too, shows signs of orderliness, which means that an intelligent being, an architect/builder, must have designed it and built it. This architect/builder we would call God.

Some have taken this argument to what seems like the next logical step. The evil in this world—the earthquakes, hurricanes, avalanches, storms, famines, poverty, wars, accidents, death itself, anything that hurts and/or kills people—must be proof that this intelligent being is also incompetent at best or evil at worst. The house is falling apart all around us, which means that this intelligent architect/builder whom we

would call God has accidentally—or *deliberately*—built a shoddy house. Christianity says that God is all-powerful and all-loving, but the presence of evil in this world is proof that he cannot be both: if he were, he would simply stop the evil. He either wants to stop the evil because he loves us but he is unable to do so, or he is able to stop the evil but he simply does not wish to do so. Either way, this architect/builder is not the God of Christianity.

Or perhaps—just perhaps—both the orderliness and the evil in this world are the results of chance. No one created either the orderliness or the evil. We have no need to create a God to explain the existence of the world. The world is the way it is simply because that is the way it is.

All of this would be true except for one very important fact: God is not responsible for the evil in this world. We are. As a wise and good architect, God designed this world to benefit us all. As a wise and good master builder, he built it according to his own specifications. The house was beautiful and perfect when he was finished: “Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). But then we moved in. We decided that the main door should not be in the center of the front wall but towards the left corner of the rear wall. We moved the staircase from the middle of the house to the middle of the kitchen. We eliminated some posts because they obstructed our view. We gutted one of the weight-bearing walls so we could have an entertainment center there. The house is falling apart not because of the architect but because of the tenants. We have brought the roof down on our own heads, all the while blaming God for building a shoddy house.

All of us would love to see God eliminate evil once and for all, but most of us do not realize what this

entails. The success of any business corporation rests in large part upon the CEO of that corporation. If he or she makes good decisions, then the corporation prospers and all the employees benefit. If he or she makes bad decisions, then everyone under his or her authority suffers for it and may lose their jobs. When God created Adam, he put all of creation and all of his descendants under his authority. Adam made a bad decision, and all of us have been suffering for it ever since.

The best way to cure chronic problems at a corporation is to replace the CEO. Sometimes some of the employees resent this change and rebel against the authority of the new CEO. When that happens, the CEO cleans house by removing those rebels, brings in new blood and continues setting everything aright once again. So, too, God has replaced Adam with a new CEO in charge of all creation: his own Son, Jesus Christ (see Rom. 5:12-19). He is going about setting everything aright once again, but that means he will eventually have to remove all those who are rebelling against his authority and causing the problems. If you and I are among those rebels, then we will have to go as well. Everyone is in favor of removing the evil in this world, as long as it does not include the evil residing within ourselves.

We cannot afford to play this game of destroying the house and blaming God for it much longer. There is not much left to the house, so it is time that we face the facts. The Architect/Builder—who still owns the house, by the way—has already appointed his Son as the new head of the household. One day soon, he will permanently evict those who are rebelling against his authority and willfully destroying the house. Then he and the remaining tenants—those who submit to his authority because they love him and each other—will

raze this severely damaged house and build a bigger and better mansion, one in which they and even God himself will live forever.

I am not saying that the teleological argument proves the existence of God. There are many problems with it, which men more competent than I have already pointed out. But the presence of evil is not one of those problems. The presence of evil in this world does not mean that the Christian God does not exist. It simply means that we are not living according to his blueprint.

Science

Some people say that faith is an uncertain foundation upon which to build a system of truth, including Christianity. After all, so many people believe so many things that one cannot decide which one is true. Some of those who say this also say that science is a better foundation because it always leads us to the truth. This is why they cannot believe in God's existence, because his existence cannot be scientifically proven.

Those who argue this way simply do not understand the foundation of science. Science is founded upon several premises, including these three:

1. Our senses are reliable; what we are observing is real.
2. The principle of cause and effect is real.
3. Nature is orderly and operates according to laws.

Science cannot even begin to function without these premises. Scientists spend most of their time observing the world around us. But if our senses are

deceiving us, as some skeptics have said, then what is the point? Science cannot lead us to the truth if our senses are not reliable. If the principle of cause and effect is not real, as Hume argued, then it is pointless for scientists to try to find what causes the effects we observe. And if nature is not orderly, then what is the point in trying to find the laws that govern it? If these premises are not true, then science is a waste of time.

But scientists assume that these premises are true. I say “assume” because none of these premises can be scientifically proven to be true. They also assume that a fourth premise is true, namely, that science always leads us to the truth. Again, we cannot use science to prove that science leads us to the truth, for that would be begging the question. Scientists simply believe that these premises are true. Hence, science is also ultimately founded upon faith.

Once again the reasons for rejecting Christianity are also the reasons why we should reject science. But we do not reject science because it is based upon faith. We accept or reject scientific findings based upon evidence. If the available evidence supports the finding, we accept it. If the available evidence is contrary to the finding, we reject it. So, too, Christianity should not be accepted or rejected simply because it is based on faith but because the available evidence leads us to accept or reject it.

Those who seek a scientific proof of God’s existence also do not understand the limitations of science. By its very nature, the scientific method is limited to studying events that are *repeatable*. Let us say that a scientist has discovered a new element and wants to determine the temperature at which it melts. He will heat the element, gradually raising the temperature, until he reaches its melting point. He tries to keep all other factors (such as air pressure) constant

so that the only factor affecting the element is the heat. He records this temperature and then sets out to repeat this experiment several times to see if he gets the same result. If he keeps getting the same temperature, he then reports his finding to other scientists, some of whom will then repeat the same experiment in their laboratories to see if they too get the same result. If they do, then they conclude that this is indeed the melting point for this element.

But this means that science cannot prove history, for history is not repeatable. A scientist who happened to observe the Battle of Waterloo could not, when it was finished, ask everyone to return to their original positions and fight the battle over again so he could see if he got the same results. Nor could he send them to other laboratories and ask them to do it over again for his fellow scientists. Those who do not know history, it has been said, are doomed to repeat it, but they do not repeat it with the same participants at the same location with the same results.

Therefore, if we cannot accept a statement as true until science can prove it, we must reject our entire history. And you must reject your personal history, even though you know it actually happened, because science cannot prove that it ever happened either.

Science cannot even prove that any person who lived in the past, such as Napoleon, ever lived. But, you may ask, cannot science prove his existence by exhuming his body? Let us suppose some scientists exhumed a body and that there were still enough remains to make some detailed observations. All these scientists will be able to do is to give a description and the measurements of the body. They can tell us, based on the stage of the decomposition, that the person must have died within a certain period of time, and, based on the skeletal structure, that the person was a male. They

can also tell us his approximate age and how tall he was and how much he weighed when he died. And, if enough of the skull remains, they may even be able to reconstruct his face so we can tell what he looked like.

That is as far as science can go. To complete this proof, we must then match this data with the known information about Napoleon. If Napoleon did die within that period of time at the right age and if he did stand the same height and weighed the same weight and if the reconstructed face does indeed look like his face, then we can say that this body was most likely Napoleon's, which means that he once existed. But this information came from historical sources, from sources outside of science. Science could never have proven Napoleon's existence without this information, which means that some truths do exist outside the realm of science.

Indeed, some items, including God himself, will always exist outside the realm of science because by its very nature, the scientific method also limits science to learning the truth about items that are *observable*. By "observable," scientists mean measurable. Gravity cannot be seen, but it can be measured. Hence, gravity is observable. To properly engage in scientific research, it is not enough for us to observe that an object exists. We must quantify it. We must measure its dimensions and mass. It is not enough to observe that an object is moving quickly. We must measure how quickly. If it cannot be measured, then science cannot deal with it.

This, of course, means that science cannot prove the existence of faith, hope, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, freedom, aspirations, initiative, and contentment because they cannot be measured. How does one measure the amount of love a man has for a

woman, or the amount of freedom that actually exists in our country? It cannot be done. These items will always exist outside the realm of science, but they will always exist.

This also means that science can only deal with the physical universe, for the objects in the spiritual universe cannot be measured or observed. Thus, science cannot observe or measure God, for he is Spirit (John 4:24). He, too, will always exist outside the realm of science, but he will always exist.

That science cannot prove the existence of God, therefore, does not mean that God does not exist. It simply means that science is limited. We are trying to make it do something it was never intended to do.

Witnesses

There is a third tool which will lead us to the truth, and it is the tool that is used in our schools, in our courts and in our everyday lives. It is the tool that helps us pass on the findings of philosophy and science. It is the tool that verifies history and even proves that your friend Michael exists. That tool is the testimony of witnesses.

We rely on this method so much that we often do not think about it. Have you ever been to Antarctica? If not, how do you know it exists? You know because reliable witnesses have told you it does. You deftly avoid all the accidents and congested areas on the freeways on your way to work even though you do not personally see these areas. How? Because the reliable witnesses on the radio tell you where they are. When you get sick, you know which medicine to take and how often. Why? Because a reliable witness, your doctor, told you so. You know when your birthday is

and even what your name is because reliable witnesses, your parents, told you what they are.

Of course, your name also appears on your birth certificate, which is a written document issued by the government. We drivers also carry around another government issued document, a driver's license. In each case, the document is the written testimony of a government recognized official (such as the doctor who delivered you or the clerk who issued your license) that you are in fact the person you say you are. Other people (such as police officers) rely on those documents to verify your identity, which is why the government is so opposed to identity theft. It undermines the reliability of those documents.

Can witnesses sometimes be mistaken? Yes, they can. And can witnesses lie to us? Yes, they most certainly can, which is why witnesses need to meet certain qualifications. How close were they to the events, in both space and time? Those who were in the store while it was being robbed are better witnesses than those who were standing in the parking lot 500 feet away. Did they see the events themselves, or are they accurately passing on the testimony of those who did see the events? Can their testimony be confirmed by others, including those who may be hostile to them? We normally do not accept the testimony of one witness, especially when the testimony is about something bizarre or when, as in a court of law, someone's life is on the line. It is possible that the one witness did not see all the important factors or is simply misunderstanding what actually happened. But when several people testify to seeing the same thing, we are more apt to believe them. How reliable are they? Is their character such that we can trust what they are saying? We do not accept the testimony of known liars but we do accept the testimony of those who have never

lied to us. This is why this tool, like the other two, is based on faith, but with a notable difference. Whereas philosophy and science place their faith in a set of premises, this tool places its faith in the character of the witnesses. We believe what they have to say because we believe them to be trustworthy, to be reliable. And our witnesses need to be reliable because we rely on them to verify and pass on truths in so many areas of life.

How do we know what happened in history? We know because of the testimony of witnesses. We know that the Battle of Waterloo actually happened even though none of us were there and even though philosophy and science cannot prove that it ever happened because the witnesses who did see it passed that information on to us. We know that Napoleon existed because witnesses have testified to seeing him. The information that science needed to prove his existence came from those witnesses.

How do we know whether a person committed a crime? We know because of the testimony of witnesses. Logic and scientific evidence may be introduced during a trial, but even that evidence rests on the reliability of the witnesses who gathered that evidence and the witness (the expert) who explains the evidence and its implications to the jury. By the time the case goes to trial, the crime itself has become a past event. It is now a part of our history and it is verified the same way any other historical event is verified. The testimony offered in a courtroom is perhaps more formal than the testimony found in historical sources, but the jury goes through the testimonies to decide whether the accused really did commit the crime just as a historian goes through the testimonies of witnesses to decide what really happened in history.

How do we know what science has discovered? We know because of the testimony of witnesses. When a scientist performs an experiment and records the information he gathered from it, he learns that information firsthand. But when he tells his fellow scientists about his experiment and his information, he is acting as a witness and giving his testimony: "I performed this experiment and this is what I observed." When these scientists then share their findings with the world, they are again acting as witnesses.

How do we disseminate historical, legal, scientific, indeed, any kind of information? We do so through the testimony of witnesses. Even though we have gained some of our knowledge firsthand through experience, most of our knowledge has come to us secondhand. The majority of us know that a water molecule consists of two atoms of hydrogen and one atom of oxygen, but most of us have never conducted the scientific experiments which prove this. Many of us know that a philosopher named Plato once lived, but none of us have ever met him. How, then, do we know that these things are true? We know because reliable witnesses who did conduct the experiments and reliable witnesses who saw Plato passed that information on to other reliable witnesses who passed them on to others until it was passed down to us. The witnesses who passed the information to us were primarily our parents and our teachers, but the witnesses also include friends, experts, reporters, filmmakers and authors.

How can you prove that your friend Michael exists? You can do so the same way that we have used to prove that Plato and Napoleon once existed, through the testimony of witnesses. You can provide the testimony of those who have met him, such as his parents, teachers, co-workers, mutual friends. Will this provide *absolute* proof that Michael exists? No, for it

will still depend on how much faith I can put in the reliability of your witnesses. Of course, the best proof would be to have me meet him face to face. But until then, the testimony of witnesses will have to suffice.

How can I prove that the Christian God exists? I can do so the same way that you can prove that Michael exists, through the testimony of witnesses. Of course, the best proof would be to have you meet him face to face. But until then, the testimony of the witnesses who have already met him will have to suffice. Let us see what that testimony is.

Scriptures

The testimony of witnesses in a court of law is usually oral, but documents may be introduced as well. If the prosecution should discover that one of the documents entered by the defense is a copy of the original, they have every right to question whether that copy is a reliable facsimile of the original, for the defense could have altered the document from testifying against them to testifying for them.

Some of the witnesses who have met God face to face wrote down their testimonies in a series of documents which have been collected into a library which we call the New Testament. The problem is that they wrote on vellum or parchment, materials which quickly decay. Before these documents completely decayed, scribes made copies of them by hand. As those copies began to decay, other scribes made copies of those copies by hand. This scene played itself out over and over again, so that we now have copies of copies of copies. Copying by hand, of course, can cause mistakes, which would only be compounded by further copying. A scribe, not knowing that his

decaying copy contains several mistakes, would reproduce those mistakes and possibly add some of his own. In the meantime, the originals have become lost. How, then, are we to know that the copies we have today are a reliable facsimile of what these witnesses originally wrote? How can we know whether changes, accidental or *otherwise*, have not been made to the originals?

The New Testament is not the only ancient literary work to undergo this process. *All* of the ancient literary works, including Homer's *Iliad* and Caesar's *Gallic Wars*, have undergone this process. In each case, scholars are extremely interested in knowing what the authors originally wrote. The process of reconstructing the original text of any ancient document is called textual criticism.

Textual critics look for at least two factors when trying to reconstruct a text from the existing copies. The first factor is age: older copies are generally better than younger copies because the less time there is between the copy and the original, the less likely it is to have mistakes. The second factor is the number of copies: the more copies we have, the more likely we can determine which reading is correct. If we have only eight copies of a work and four of them have one reading while the other four have another reading, it is difficult to determine which one is correct. But if we have 5,000 copies and 100 have one reading while the other 4,900 have another reading, we have a better idea of which one is correct.

The table below lists several famous ancient literary works and the number of copies which we now possess, as well as the number of years between the time of its original writing and the time the oldest copy was made.

Author	Aristotle (<i>Poetics</i>)
Time of Writing	343 BC
Oldest Copy	1100 AD
Gap (Years)	1400
# of Copies	5
Author	Plato (<i>Tetralogies</i>)
Time of Writing	427-347 BC
Oldest Copy	900 AD
Gap (Years)	1250
# of Copies	7
Author	Herodotus (<i>History</i>)
Time of Writing	480-425 BC
Oldest Copy	900 AD
Gap (Years)	1350
# of Copies	8
Author	Thucydides
Time of Writing	460-400 BC
Oldest Copy	900 AD
Gap (Years)	1300
# of Copies	8
Author	Caesar (<i>Gallic Wars</i>)
Time of Writing	100-44 BC
Oldest Copy	900 AD
Gap (Years)	950
# of Copies	10
Author	Homer (<i>Iliad</i>)
Time of Writing	800 BC
Oldest Copy	400 BC
Gap (Years)	400
# of Copies	643

In each case, scholars have no doubt that the author listed was the actual author of the work listed and despite the rather large gap in years and the paucity of copies, they are reasonably confident that they have reconstructed at least the majority of the original text.

Now compare that information with the information on the New Testament. The writings within the New Testament were completed by 80 AD. The oldest copy of the almost complete New Testament is the Codex Vaticanus, written around 325-350 AD, a gap of only 270 years. The oldest copy of a portion of the New Testament is a scrap of papyrus upon which John 18:31-33 and 37 were written. It was written around 130 AD, only 50 years later. And the number of handwritten copies of at least portions of the New Testament which we currently possess numbers 5,686 in the original Greek, with nearly 20,000 more copies in other languages. Out of all the ancient literary works, the *Iliad* places a distant second with only 643 copies. In short, the small gap between the original writings and the oldest copies as well as the sheer number of copies makes the New Testament the easiest text to reconstruct and assures us that the copies which we read in our homes are in fact reliable facsimiles of the original text. Some textual critics have even said that the New Testament copies are more reliable than any ten ancient literary works combined.

But what about the thousands of errors that are supposedly in the New Testament? What we might call errors, scholars call variants. A variant occurs when two or more copies do not have the same reading. Most of these are trivial, such as a difference in spelling (much like the difference in our American spelling of “theater” as opposed to the British spelling of “theatre”) or the use of a synonym. If 20,000 copies have one spelling and 4,000 copies have another

spelling, that is counted as 4,000 variants. Those who claim that the New Testament is unreliable because the copies contain “thousands” of errors are simply misunderstanding how scholars count these variants.

They also misunderstand how insignificant most of these variants are. If we were to print the complete New Testament in only 100 pages and put all of the verses that have variants together at the end, they would take up only one-eighth of the New Testament or twelve and a half pages. Some variants do change the meaning of the text. If we were to put all of the verses with those variants together at the end of our New Testament, they would take up only one-sixtieth of the New Testament or one and two-thirds pages. That is, the copies have accurately preserved 98.33% of the New Testament. Compare that to 95% for the *Iliad*. And none of the variants change any of the doctrines historically taught by the Christian Church.

So we do indeed have reliable facsimiles of the original text. Notice that I am not touching upon the subject of whether the New Testament is the inspired Word of God or even if what has been written in the New Testament is correct. All I am saying is that the copies of the New Testament which we have within our hands are reliable copies of what these witnesses originally wrote down. The question we must ask now is, “How reliable were the witnesses themselves?”

Disciples

The New Testament writers claimed to be eyewitnesses to some extraordinary events. What did they see?

First, they saw Jesus die by being crucified. All four Gospels record this event. John adds the detail that

blood and water ran out of Jesus' body after a soldier verified his death by sticking a spear in his side (John 19:24). Doctors tell us that this detail means that Jesus died of a ruptured heart. The heart is surrounded by a sac of pericardial fluid. When the heart ruptures, the blood that was in it is released into this sac. This sac was pierced by the soldier's spear, allowing the blood and the fluid, which looked like water to John, to flow out of the wound. This detail rules out the theory that Jesus merely passed out on the cross and was mistakenly buried, for no one survives a ruptured heart.

Second, they saw Jesus being buried in a tomb cut out of rock in a hillside. Following the customs of the day, the opening of this tomb, once the body was placed inside, was covered by a large round stone. Given the material available in that area and the size of the opening, this stone probably weighed 1.5 to 2 tons, which means that if Jesus had been buried alive (and if he were a mere man), he would never have been able to get out of the tomb by himself.

Third, they saw Jesus alive again three days later. This was the event that led them to tell the world what they had seen and to eventually write down their testimonies.

The apostle Paul said that these three events were the Gospel that he preached: "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:1-4). In fact, and this is an important point, Paul said that if these events did not actually occur in history,

then Christianity is a worthless religion: “And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!” (1 Cor. 15:17). The whole of Christianity rests on this one event. If Christ did not in fact rise again from the dead, as these witnesses say he did, then you can rightly reject Christianity.

But did these witnesses actually see what they say they saw? How reliable were they? Several factors point to the reliability of these witnesses. First, they pointed out their own failures, including their unbelief. Most people, when they make up stories that include themselves, make themselves out as the good person, the perfect or almost perfect person. But these disciples recorded Peter’s denials. According to their own writings, Jesus told them several times in advance that these events would take place, but according to their own writings, they did not understand or believe him. They had a hard time believing that he had risen even when he was standing right in front of them. If they had made up the story, they would most likely have pictured themselves as believing from the very beginning.

Second, most of them died for their testimony. John was boiled in oil and then exiled to Patmos. All the others were killed. In every case, they were told they could live if they would simply stop preaching the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But they did not and suffered for it. People sometimes give up their lives for something they believe to be true but which is actually a lie, but men do not willingly die for something which they *know* to be a lie, especially a lie which they made up themselves. This fact rules out the theory that the disciples stole Jesus’ body from the tomb or that the stories of the resurrection were merely legends developed by the first century church.

Third, their testimony was confirmed by other witnesses, both friendly and hostile. Paul says that Jesus appeared to 500 people at one time (1 Cor. 15:5-8), most of whom were still alive when he wrote the letter to the Corinthians. This fact also refutes the legends theory, for those who knew the truth and could have refuted the legends were still alive when the documents of the New Testament were written. It also rules out the theory that the witnesses were merely hallucinating, for no two people, let alone 500 at once, have the same hallucination. The hostile witnesses included Paul himself, who was on his way to arrest some Christians when Jesus appeared to him. The hostile witnesses also included the priests who had Jesus crucified in the first place. Once his body had been placed in the tomb, they posted a Roman guard to keep the disciples from stealing the body. After the resurrection, these soldiers, following the instruction of the priests, claimed that the disciples stole the body while they were asleep. In other words, even the hostile witnesses admitted that the tomb was now empty!

Fourth, and perhaps the best reason supporting the reliability of these witnesses, is that they began preaching the resurrection of Christ not in Athens or Rome or some far away city, but in Jerusalem itself. They made their first public announcement of the resurrection within walking distance of the tomb. Anybody in the audience could have gone to the tomb to check it out for themselves. If they had begun preaching in Athens or Rome, no one could have verified it. But they began in Jerusalem because they knew that no one could prove them wrong.

And, at that point in time, proving them wrong would have been the easiest thing to do. All the enemies of Christianity had to do to stop Christianity dead in its tracks was to produce the dead body of

Jesus. If they had simply paraded the body around town, the disciples would have been chased out of town and their new religion would have been dismissed as a fraud. That the enemies of Christianity failed to do so is further proof that Christ has indeed risen from the dead! This fact rules out the theory that the disciples saw an empty tomb because they had gone to the wrong tomb that Sunday or because the authorities had moved the body to another tomb to prevent the disciples from stealing the body. Either way, the body was still in the possession of the priests and all they had to do to refute the disciples' teaching was to simply bring the body out for all to see.

The final possibility is that Jesus' resurrection was a spiritual one, not a physical one. But Jesus himself refuted this when he appeared to the disciples and said, "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have" (Luke 24:39). Thomas insisted that he would not believe Jesus had risen until he could physically touch Jesus' wounds. When Jesus appeared again and told him to do just that, Thomas said, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus then said, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:28-29).

Most of us Christians have never seen the risen Christ in the flesh, let alone touched his wounds, but we believe the resurrection actually happened for the same reason we believe that the Battle of Waterloo or any other historical event actually happened: because reliable witnesses have told us so.

Lord

The actual, historical, physical resurrection of Jesus Christ is significant for several reasons. Most obviously, it means that our biggest fear and our biggest enemy, death, has been overcome. We will live forever after all, for there is in fact life after death. Less obviously, it validates Jesus' teaching and proves that God does indeed exist.

Jesus said that he received his teaching directly from God: "For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak" (John 12:49-50). This claim does not immediately separate him from all the other religious leaders who also claim to have received their teachings from God.

But Jesus also predicted his resurrection, not just once but several times. "The Son of Man," he said, "must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day" (Luke 9:22). Even more amazing, he said that *he* would raise *himself* from the dead: "'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' Then the Jews said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking of the temple of His body" (John 2:19-21). To predict that he would raise himself from the dead, something that no one had done before or has done since then, Jesus must have been either a lunatic or someone who knew what he was talking about. By making such a claim, he was putting the rest of his teaching on the line, for if he did not raise himself from the dead, then we could rightly say that he did not

know what he was talking about and that he did not receive his teaching from God.

But he did it! He did rise from the dead. He did know what he was talking about. He did receive his teaching from God, for who else could have told him that he would indeed rise from the dead?

The resurrection also tells us who Jesus really was. Since only God can raise the dead, Jesus must have been claiming to be God. And in fact, he point blank said he was. In the famous story about the burning bush in the Old Testament, God appears to Moses and announces that his name is, "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14). Jesus applied this name to himself. To the Jews on one occasion, he said, "Before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58). They understood what he meant, for they picked up stones to kill him for blasphemy. They knew he was saying that he was the same God who had appeared to Moses. He was not saying that he was God because he is a part of the universe and God is one with the universe. He was not claiming that God is in him because God is in everything. Nor was he claiming that anyone else was God or could become gods. He was not picturing himself as the pantheistic god of the Eastern or New Age religions. He was claiming to be the God of the Old Testament. The Old Testament emphasized that there were no gods before God and that no gods would be formed after him. God is the only God and there will be no others. The Old Testament also said that God is separate from the universe. He existed before he created the universe and he will continue to exist should the universe ever come to an end. Therefore, when Jesus said, "I AM," he was claiming to be that one and only God, the God who is separate from the universe but able to invade it in the form of a man, the God who created the universe and all that is in it,

including you and me. To the Jews, this claim amounted to blasphemy, because in their minds when a mere man, which they thought Jesus was, claimed to be God, he was reducing the great and holy Creator who is above all creation down to the level of a created being. According to the Old Testament law, a man who blasphemed God must be punished by being stoned to death. This is why they picked up stones to kill Jesus.

Most of the people who do acknowledge that Jesus once lived on this earth but reject his claim to being God himself choose to honor him as a good moral teacher or a good prophet, but Jesus himself did not leave that option open to us. On another occasion, a man asked Jesus, “Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” He answered the man by saying, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God” (Mark 10:17-18). Jesus was not denying that he was good. He was saying that if you are going to call him good, you might as well call him God. This is why we do not have the option of calling Jesus simply a good moral teacher or a good prophet. His teaching presents us with a challenge: he was either a liar (he knew he was not God but claimed to be anyway) or he was a lunatic (he was not God but thought he was) or he is in fact the Lord God Almighty himself. A liar cannot be a good moral teacher and a lunatic cannot be a good prophet. If we are to accept any of his teaching, then we must accept all of it, including his claim to be God himself. Otherwise, we must completely reject his teaching as the work of a liar or a lunatic. There is no middle ground.

But liars and lunatics do not raise themselves from the dead. The resurrection of Christ validates his teaching. It tells us that he knew what he was talking about. It tells us that he did receive his teaching directly from God. And it tells us that God exists, for it tells us

that Jesus Christ was—and is—the Lord God Almighty himself.

Psychology

Those who wish to deny the historical resurrection of Jesus Christ and its implications, that Jesus Christ is the Lord God Almighty and that God actually exists, believe they have one last explanation for why people come to believe that God exists even though, according to them, he does not: the psychological one. The subjective experiences of those who claim to have met God can all be explained away by the objective science of psychology. Is it not more than coincidence, they ask, that people often come to believe in God after a traumatic event occurs? For the disciples, the traumatic event was the crucifixion of Christ. For others, it may be the loss of a loved one, or the loss of a job, or the onset of a serious illness. The stress and the sorrow caused by the trauma force people to seek for a source of strength and solace. Psychologically whole people, of course, find this source within themselves. The psychologically weak and insecure, however, think the source must be outside of themselves and often come to depend upon God to be this source for them. Some of them even have experiences in which they see God or the risen Christ. But the experiences are not real. The mind simply conjured up these beliefs and visions to relieve its anxiety.

This explanation is simply another version of the hallucination theory, although in this case the hallucination is self-induced. However, the resurrected Christ appeared to 500 witnesses at the same time, and 500 people do not have the same hallucination.

The critics are right in saying that psychological factors have played a part in the meeting between the weak and insecure people and God. But all of their theorizing does not alter the fact that some of these people have actually met God.

Suppose I have recently met the President of the United States. Suppose further that a group of psychologists have been allowed to observe me before and during the meeting and that these psychologists had come to know me very well due to months of prior examinations. These psychologists may be able to tell you why I had desired to meet the President. They may be able to tell you why, before the meeting, my palms had been sweaty and why I had paced so much. They may be able to tell you why, during the meeting, I had difficulty looking into the President's eyes or why I had crossed and uncrossed my legs so often. They may be able to tell you why I had said what I had said before and during the meeting. They may even be able to tell you what I had thought and why I had thought it. But none of their psychological explanations can alter the fact that I have actually met the President of the United States.

I would be very surprised if psychological factors did *not* play a part in any meeting with God. We are not just physical beings. God also designed us to be spiritual, social, emotional and psychological beings. And because he designed us, he knows that any meeting with him can itself be a psychologically traumatic experience. That is why God psychologically prepares us for our meetings with him.

Job, we are told, was a righteous man who worshiped God. Without warning, several traumatic events shook his life. He demanded more than once during his dialogue with his friends that God appear before him with an explanation for his suffering. God

did not appear before Job then and there. Instead, he first sent a youth named Elihu to explain God's actions to Job. *Then* God appeared and had his conversation with Job. During this conversation, Job was able to say to God, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You." Job was privileged to meet God face to face, but God used the people and the traumatic events of his life to prepare him for that meeting.

God does the same for us. Unfortunately, many of us use the traumatic events of our lives as an excuse to run *from* God rather than *to* him. After all, so we think, if God is so powerful and so loving, he would keep traumatic events from happening to us. What most of us fail to see—what we refuse to see—is that God has designed traumatic events to show us that we cannot make it through life on our own. He uses traumatic events to show us that we are not whole people after all, that deep down inside we are spiritually and psychologically broken. He uses traumatic events to show us that our own methods will never succeed in making us whole again. And he uses traumatic events to show us that we can be made whole only by meeting him and entering into an everlasting relationship with him.

That is why those who disdain Christianity as a psychological crutch are right: it is a crutch. But what is wrong with crutches? If I am lying in bed with a broken leg and my house catches on fire, you can bet I will use my crutches to get out of there. If I were a whole person, then of course I could leave my crutches behind and run out of the house like any other whole person could. But we are not whole people and as a result all of us, even those of us who criticize crutches, are relying on crutches of one sort or another.

Some crutches are more obvious than others. The alcoholic's crutch is his drinking. The drug abuser's crutch is his drugs. But the man who is avoiding problems at home by working late at the office also has a crutch: it is his job. The woman who fights the inevitable wrinkles through makeup and plastic surgery also has a crutch: it is her beauty. The man who tries to overcome his sense of inferiority by constantly proving to others how macho he is uses his physical prowess as a crutch. The woman whose self-worth is enhanced by keeping her children dependent on her is using her sense of motherhood as a crutch. Boyfriends, girlfriends, husbands, wives, money, food, books, games, computers, TVs—all the seemingly acceptable items of everyday life can be crutches. A crutch is whatever we turn to when life becomes overwhelming. A crutch tells us we are OK when we feel like failures. A crutch tells us we are important when we feel inconsequential. A crutch tells us that life is still worth living when we feel like dying. A crutch is anything that keeps us moving when we simply cannot go on by ourselves.

Most of us, especially those who criticize crutches, fail to see our dependence upon crutches because all of our crutches, except one, have been designed to deceive us. Since they work so subtly and seemingly so well during the smaller crises of our lives, they lull us into thinking that we are whole people after all, that our legs are not broken. And instead of driving us out of the burning house, our crutches drive us into the cellar where we are certain to be trapped but where we can pretend that the house is no longer on fire because we cannot see the walls burning above us. There, we can hide from our problems and pretend that nothing needs fixing. Jesus Christ is not like that. He will not deceive us into thinking that we are out of danger when we

really are not. He will make us confront our problems and work to eliminate them, not hide from them. More than that, he will make us face who we really are. This crutch will remind us daily that we are leaning on him because we are broken people who cannot even take the smallest step in the right direction without his help. And he will do this so that we continue to lean on him. If we ever get to the spot where we think we can go on without him, we will fall flat on our faces and place ourselves in even greater danger.

But this is the spot in which so many of us want to be. We run from Jesus Christ precisely because we do not want to confront our problems or face our brokenness. We would much rather go on believing that we are not dependent upon any crutches at all, and certainly not on the crutch called Jesus Christ.

However, the proof that we are dependent on crutches is what happens to us when our crutches collapse. All of our crutches, except one, have a breaking point. They may support us through small crises, but when the crises become too large or too many, they collapse. And when they do, terrible things happen. Parents abuse their children, children run away from home, marriages dissolve, friendships fall apart, wars start, governments end, crime runs rampant, and people kill themselves or each other. Jesus Christ will never collapse. He lives forever and he will never change. We can count on his support no matter how large or how many the crises are. He is the only crutch we can rely on to safely deliver us from the burning house. Those who have “tried” Jesus and found him to be unreliable and unable to deliver them from their problems have only themselves to blame. No matter how reliable a crutch is, it cannot help you stand up and walk if you choose to crawl away from it. Jesus will

help us out of the house, but only if we rely on him every step of the way.

And rely on him we must, for someday, the burning house will cave in, and when it does, this lifetime will be over. In that day, all the other crutches will collapse and we will come face to face with the one crutch that survived. Those of us who met Jesus Christ in this lifetime and entered into an everlasting relationship with him will discover—to our delight—that he is more than a crutch. He is also the great physician who will fix us and make us whole again. And he is the carpenter who has built us a new and better house in which to live. Those who rejected Jesus Christ in this lifetime and will be meeting him for the first time will discover no such delight. He will let them remain like their crutches and abandon them to the spot they have chosen for themselves—in the cellar of a collapsed house, broken and burning forever.

This is why it is imperative for you to meet Jesus Christ today, in this lifetime, while there is still time to escape the burning house. Meeting him later, in that day, when the house is falling in on you, will be the most traumatic event of your life!

Relationship

And so, God exists. The proof of that rests on the testimony of witnesses who walked with Jesus during the first century. And it rests on the testimony of the millions of Christians who have met God since then. The best proof, of course, would be for you to meet him yourself, face to face. In fact, God would very much like to meet you whenever you are ready.

All the other religions teach that you must work your way to God, that you must do more good works

than bad to get into heaven, that you must somehow perfect yourself before you can enter into a relationship with God—if, indeed, there is a relationship to be had at all. Christianity is the only faith that reminds us that God comes to us, that he is constantly looking for us. He is like the woman who diligently searches throughout her house until she finds the missing coin. And how happy she is to find it! He is like the shepherd who leaves the ninety and nine sheep to find the one that is lost. And how happy he is to find it! He is like the suitor who pursues the girl of his dreams. And how happy he is when she finally agrees to marry him! God is looking for you. He wants to enter into a permanent relationship with you. And how happy he will be when you finally agree to that relationship!

Like all permanent relationships, your relationship with God will be based on two things. The first is unconditional love. Christians refer to this love as *agape* love. It is a love based not on emotions but on choice. God has chosen to love you, which means that he will love you no matter what you do or what happens to you—or even what happens to him. For this *agape* love is also self-sacrificial love. Jesus proved this by sacrificing himself on the cross so that we would not have to die for our sins. This is the kind of love that God wants from you. You must learn to love God no matter what he does or what happens to you. And he wants you to sacrifice all of your hopes, your dreams, everything you have ever wanted, for him. He wants you to give your entire life to him so that he can give his entire life to you. I suspect that most people deny that God loves them because they instinctively know that should they receive his love, they could not help but love him back. But loving him back means giving up everything they hold dear and this they are not willing to do. Those who think this way do not

understand that they are getting the better end of the deal, that they are trading fleeting pleasures and mortality for permanent joy and immortality. As Jim Eliot, a missionary who did sacrifice his life in service to God, once said, “He is no fool who gives away what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

The second thing is absolute trust. Your relationship with God must be based on an absolute trust in his character. “Without faith,” says the Bible, “it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). The emphasis here is not that we must believe that He *is*, that God exists, for atheism was not prevalent in the days that the Epistle to the Hebrews was written. Rather, polytheism, the belief in many gods, was the prevalent belief of the day. The emphasis, therefore, is that we must believe that *He* is, that the God proclaimed by Jesus Christ, the stern and loving, just and forgiving, honest, self-sacrificing, generous and merciful God who comes looking for his lost sheep, exists. To believe in God’s existence is not enough. We must also believe in his character.

This is where the Christian faith differs from the faith of philosophy or science. The latter faith is based on human knowledge and experience, which is never certain and always changing. But the Christian faith is based on God himself, who is always certain and never changing. He has proven to those of us who already know him that he knows everything (whereas philosophy and science do not) and that he does not lie to us (whereas philosophy and science can lead us down the wrong paths). When, therefore, he says that something is true, we can know for a certainty that it is true. We believe that the historic teachings of the Christian Church are true not because we just happened

to choose to believe they are true, but because God himself has said they are true. We believe that the Bible is the infallible Word of God not because some people in authority with a hidden agenda foisted this belief upon us, but because God himself has told us that it is. We believe we should live a certain way not because some old-fashioned men from way back when told us we should, but because God himself has told us we should. And how do we know that God has spoken? Because the witnesses who have met him down through the centuries have confirmed what he has spoken.

This relationship with God, based on unconditional love for him and absolute trust in his character, will gradually change you so that you can do the good works that all of us know we should be doing but are unable to accomplish on our own. "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" the Jews once asked Jesus. His answer was, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent," that is, that you believe in Jesus Christ, the one whom God has sent (John 6:28-29). To do the works of God, we must start with belief. All the other religions have got it backwards. They say that we must do the good works so we can enter into a relationship with God. God says we enter into a relationship with him so that we can do the good works. Indeed, he says that we can never do the good works apart from this relationship with him. "Without Me," Jesus said, "you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Good works do not produce a relationship with God; a relationship with God produces good works. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8-9).

What is the gift of God? Certainly, it is his grace. And yes, it is the salvation that he is offering all of us. But it is also the faith needed to receive his grace and his salvation. In this book I have given you some good reasons to believe in the existence of the Christian God, but at best these reasons will only satisfy your intellect. What God is wanting from each and every one of us is the faith that consumes our entire being. And I cannot give you that. All I have tried to do is to bring you to the point where you can believe in God long enough to ask him for this faith. He is extending this faith to you as a gift—you do not have to earn it and in fact you cannot earn it. All you have to do is to ask for it and receive it when he offers it. And nothing would make God happier than for you to receive that faith.

A happy God? A joyful God? A God who loves people and wants to spend eternity with them? Yes, that is the God who exists. He wants you to share in his happiness, to enter into his joy, to spend eternity with him, in short, to have his whole life living in you. Then and only then will you finally be a whole person, physically, spiritually and psychologically. All you have to do is surrender your whole life to him and receive his gift of faith.

Testimony

Since Christianity relies on the testimony of witnesses for its proof, let me add my testimony to those of the millions who have gone before me.

For as far back as I can remember I have always known that God existed. But his existence usually did not mean anything to me. He was a God who existed way out there somewhere. He had little to do with me and I had little to do with him. The few times I realized

that God may actually be close to me and watching what I was doing scared me. I remember times as a child when I would cover myself up with my blanket, hoping God could not see me under it and knowing full well that he could. If God had appeared to me then, I probably would have run from him, never to come back. Knowing this, God wooed me to him by gradually revealing himself to me.

My first two years of high school were spent at a Catholic school. There I came across the writings of a priest who argued that Jesus taught situation ethics. Jesus, he said, knew that we were imperfect and could never become perfect in this lifetime. Being a compassionate person, Jesus would never have hurt or frustrated us by expecting us to live up to a standard he knew we could not keep. When, therefore, Jesus said we should always love, he did not really mean that we should *always* love, only that we should do our best to love as often as we can. Jesus could overlook the occasional failures. When Jesus said we should not lie to protect ourselves, he did not mean that we should *never* lie, for there may be situations in which lying is the best thing to do. I had a hard time accepting this, but I also had a hard time arguing with it since I did not know anything about Jesus' teachings. So, for the first time in my life, I sat down and read all the way through the Gospels.

I came away with an important realization. Jesus did expect us to be perfect. He did want us to love always. He did want us to never lie to protect ourselves. And he did know that we cannot do any of this—*on our own*. That is why Jesus offered to help his followers to become perfect. He alone was able to live perfectly and he was willing to help others to do the same. All they had to do was ask. This offer was not extended merely to those who lived at the time Jesus did. Nor was this

the offer of a man who had long since died, whom death had rendered incapable of fulfilling his offer. In a sudden flash of revelation, I saw that because Jesus has risen from the dead, never to die again, he is alive and well *even now* and fully capable of extending his offer to those of us who live *even now*. And so, for the first time in my life, I knelt down and prayed—not one of the rehearsed prayers I had learned in my childhood, but my own prayer. I asked God to help the married couples who were about to be divorced to keep their marriages together. I asked God to help those who had already divorced to reconcile their differences and get back together again. I asked God to help those who wanted to lie, cheat, steal and murder to not do any of those things. And I asked God to please help me to do what was right. Then, I got up off my knees, walked out of my bedroom, and promptly forgot the prayer and all that I had learned.

Shortly after graduating from high school, I took a one-day course in writing articles for magazines. For the class assignment, I chose to write an article on what the Bible says about our environmental problems. Environmental issues had interested me since junior high school and even then I had used a reference Bible to pull out proof texts on what the Bible says about our relationship with our environment. Proof texts were all I had been interested in finding; I still had not read the Bible all the way through. But for the sake of the article, I once again pulled out my Bible and began reading it. This is why my Bible came to be lying on my bed just before I entered the conversation that was to change my life.

My sisters and I had noticed that my parents had been acting somewhat peculiarly lately. When we were younger, my Mom insisted on taking us to the local Catholic Church. Then, inexplicably, she stopped

going for several years and then, just as inexplicably, she started talking about attending church again but only if we could find a good one—and, to our surprise, not a Catholic one. And my Dad began to say grace at the dinner table. We knew they had been spending time with a Christian couple and thought that might have something to do with their behavior. This behavior forced my sister Maria to start facing what she believed about God and Christianity. I think this made her uncomfortable, for she did not have all the answers to her questions and the answers she did have she did not necessarily like.

One summer evening, my Mom, Maria and I were sitting at the dinner table, finishing our meals. The others had already left the table. I was sitting on the corner, Maria was to my left and to my right, around the corner, was my Mom. Maria could not contain herself any more. She needed some answers and hopefully Mom would be able to give her those answers. Why, Mom, are you now a Christian when you used to be Catholic? Why do we have to believe in Christianity? Do we really have to be perfect to get to heaven? And then Maria made an interesting comment. She said that it was not fair of God to expect us to be perfect when he knows full well that we cannot do it. When she said that, everything I had learned from reading the Gospels in high school came back to me. I told her that yes, God knows full well that we cannot be perfect on our own, but he has promised to help us become perfect. All we have to do is ask.

I know that my Mom and Maria continued talking to each other after that, but I do not know what they said. I did not even hear their voices for my attention had been diverted to what was happening to the room all around me. Immediately after I gave Maria my answer, the room filled up with a golden glow. The

glow became so strong that the walls of the room disappeared. I looked around me, wondering what was going on, but I became so overwhelmed by the glow that I could not help but hang my head down and stare at the table. I became aware of a robed figure, a person no larger than my hand, standing in front of me, hovering in the glow. I could not look directly at the figure and I could not make out the facial details, but it did not matter. I knew immediately that this was Jesus. Then I heard a voice inside me. This voice did not come from the figure, but, as I also recognized immediately, from God my Father. This voice asked, "Then why don't you take me up on it?" I had just told Maria that God would help us if we asked him to help, and now God was asking me, "Why don't you take me up on it?" I paused a few seconds, still in awe at what was happening to me, before I answered. "OK," I said in the same place where I had heard that voice, "I will." As soon as I said that, Jesus moved forward and came inside me and suddenly the glow was no longer around me but in me. God was no longer someone who existed way out there somewhere. He was now living inside me. He was now someone who was very real to me, someone who could talk to me and someone to whom I could talk.

Inside myself, where no one else could hear, I asked him to help me overcome my fear of people. My classmates had teased me unmercifully and I had learned to retreat from people because of it. I wanted to develop friendships with people and not run from them. God himself did not say anything more, but I suddenly pictured my Bible on my bed and had a strong desire to read it from cover to cover and learn all that it had to say. The glow began to fade and the room again came into focus. I was able to lift up my head and hear what my Mom and sister were saying. I looked up at my

Mom and the first thing I said to her was, “I have got to get to a Bible college.”

That is how I met God. This is how I know that he exists. I know my story seems bizarre and even far-fetched, but God is capable of doing whatever he wants and that is how he chose for me to meet him. You may want to dismiss my story as a fairy tale, the fantasy of a fool, and if my story were the only one that could be told, you would probably be correct. However, millions of people around the world and through the ages have met this same God. Some of them have had encounters with God that were more dramatic than mine. And I have met at least one person who cannot point to a dramatic experience at all. One day it dawned on him that at some point in his life—he doesn’t know when—he had entered into a relationship with Jesus Christ and had been with him ever since. Not every true Christian has met God in a dramatic way, but every true Christian has met God.

This, then, is the proof I offer that God exists. I have met God and so have many of the people I know. The biographies and autobiographies of Christians such as Hudson Taylor and George Mueller substantiate my proof. The New Testament, as we have seen, contains the records of several people who have encountered God as well. The Old Testament does also. Of course, the best proof would be for you to meet God yourself. Your encounter with him might not be dramatic or mystical; then again, it might be. God wants to have a relationship with all of us, but he relates to each of us as individuals.

You may want to scoff at the testimonies of myself and my fellow Christians. You may want to dismiss our stories as mere fairy tales. You have every right to do so. But before you do, ask yourself this: Are you sure your friend exists, or are *you* believing in a fairy tale?

Conclusion

Christianity, then, is a reasonable faith and a valid system of truth. Unlike most religions, Christianity is not based on a set of unverifiable beliefs which we are expected to blindly accept as true. Christianity invites us to verify its beliefs, for the Bible itself tells us that the Christian faith rests squarely upon the physical resurrection of Christ. If the resurrection did not in fact occur, we might as well reject Christianity as a fraud. But if it did, then the Christian faith is a valid system of truth, for the resurrection confirms that Jesus Christ did receive his teachings from God and is God himself. And the testimony of reliable witnesses has confirmed that the resurrection did in fact occur.

Christianity is more than just a set of beliefs. It is a permanent relationship with God himself. This relationship, based on mutual, self-sacrificing love and faith in his honest and unchanging character, will transform you so that you can do the good works that we know we should do but are unable to do by ourselves. God is eagerly waiting for you to enter into this relationship. Nothing else you could do would make him happier. And once you do enter into this relationship, you will know that Christianity is indeed a reasonable faith and a valid system of truth, for once you enter into this relationship, you will have all the proof you need.

For Further Reading

C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*.

Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*.

Josh McDowell, *More Than a Carpenter*.

Francis Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason*.

Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*.

If You Are Now a Believer

The Gospel of John

Clayton Howard Ford, *The Basic Doctrines of the Christian Faith: A Primer*

Visit <http://claytonhowardford.com>
for more resources

