

HOW THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRIST AFFIRMS

THE EXCLUSIVITY OF CHRISTIANITY

BY

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WHO IS CHRIST?

“‘Who do you say I am?’ This was the key question of Jesus’ public ministry.”¹ It is The Question of the ages. Who *do we* say Jesus Christ is? Does it even matter? Detractors and devotees of all stripes have butted heads against these questions throughout history. It is critical how all of us answer these questions because the ultimate answer can be either hazardous to our eternal health or the key that unlocks the heavenly gates to eternal ecstasy.

Who is Christ? The question has merit and must be answered. “Jesus knew that people must recognize who He was . . . He did things and spoke words intended to present His credentials as Son of Man and Son of God, the world’s only Saviour. Most people today know little or nothing about Jesus . . . even many Christians.”² Jesus realized the importance of The Question and put that very question to His disciples as well; “Who do people say that I am?” (Mk. 8:27)³ He recognized that His disciples needed to come to terms with the answer themselves. They needed to know in their hearts and understand in their minds who Jesus was, before they could ever carry His Gospel throughout the world.

For centuries various cynics and critics, higher and otherwise, have tried to obscure the identity of Jesus Christ using various lines of erroneous reasoning. They have arrogantly attempted to recast Christ in the mold of their own design. One tactic often used as a fulcrum for their lever is to minimize Christ and oversimplify Christianity. Should we not expect the complex, rather than the simplistic if we are to comprehend a religion? “If we ask for something more than simplicity, it is silly then to complain that the something more is not simple. . . . this silly procedure is adopted by people who are not silly, but who, consciously or unconsciously want to destroy Christianity. Such people put up a version of Christianity suitable for a child of six and make that the object of their attack.”⁴

¹ Irving L. Jensen, *Chicago: Studies in the Life of Christ* (Moody Press, Chicago, 1969), 1.

² Ibid.

³ All Scripture, unless specifically noted is taken from the New American Standard version of the Bible.

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity-The Case for Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1977), 47.

This thesis is not meant to be a direct apologetic comparison of Jesus in opposition to other so-called religious founders, teachers and gurus of various religions. Rather, this paper will assume that Jesus was a historical person and the biblical accounts are accurate. It is the feats He performed and power He displayed during His life on earth that affirm Christ's uniqueness and establishes Christianity's claim of exclusivity; indeed, if Christ is true, exclusivity is the only option.

Why Does It Matter?

Is Jesus who He said He was, the Holy Son of God? Can He be just a great teacher, when Jesus himself claimed Godhood? (Jn. 14:9-11) This is a pivotal question. Charles Ryrie tells us,

Many in our day deny the deity of Christ, knowing that in doing so they are undermining the central aspect of Christianity because they have removed from it the divine Saviour. . . . Those who deny His full deity either regard Him as a . . . great man . . . a good man . . . or a man more advanced. Along with such views of Christ goes the denial . . . of His miraculous birth, death, and resurrection.⁵

Are these naysayers correct in their suppositions? Is Christianity merely a rotting carcass without spiritual essence? It must be noted that Jesus did not just walk around merely *claiming* to be God as many other pretenders did. Jesus backed-up His claims, as noted by former journalist and Christian critic Lee Strobel,

. . . Jesus didn't just claim to be God—he backed it up with amazing feats of healing, with astounding demonstrations of power over nature, with transcendent and unprecedented teaching, with divine insights into people, and ultimately his own resurrection from the dead, which absolutely nobody else has been able to duplicate. . . . When Jesus claimed to be God, it wasn't crazy. It was the truth.⁶

In his inimitable style, C.S. Lewis verbally flogs the proposition Jesus was *just* a teacher:

I am trying to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing about Him: 'I am ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who is merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level of the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice.⁷

Therefore, the questions set forth, “who is Christ” and “does it really matter” are critical to both the nonbeliever and believer in Christ. A.W. Tozer eloquently explains,

The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man's spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has

⁵ Charles C. Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 52.

⁶ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House), 198.

⁷ Lewis, 55, 56.

ever been greater than its idea of God. Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God.⁸

Alister McGrath tells us that, “. . . [The] Christian existence is possible only on the basis of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and the nature and shape of that existence itself embodied in his own life, and inspired and informed by it.”⁹

This is the very thing Paul taught, “. . . if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied” (1Cor. 15:13-19).

CHRIST IN COVENANT AND PROPHECY

Jesus Christ’s uniqueness is most intensely illuminated in His mission as the Son of Man. Nevertheless, for the complete picture it is important to look at what the Old Testament prophecies says about the Messiah. Norman Geisler reinforces this view, “The fully bloomed New Testament doctrine that our salvation is possible only through the work of Christ is rooted in the Old Testament. From the very first prediction about Jesus (Gen. 3:15) to the final prophecy (Mal. 4:3, 5) there is one and only one way . . . [we] can be restored to a relationship with God—through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”¹⁰ Merrill F. Unger further fortifies this assertion: “The whole of the Old Testament is to be looked upon as bearing prophetic character. The idea underlying the whole development of these Scriptures and the life dealt with therein is that of God’s gracious manifestation of himself to men, and the establishment of His kingdom on earth.”¹¹ In addition, Irving Jensen writes, “Divine design in the ancestral line . . . is supremely manifested in the ancestry of Jesus. Every prophetic word concerning Him which was uttered in the centuries before He was born was spoken according to a perfect divine plan, and fulfilled with the same accuracy.”¹²

The entire Bible, front to back, is about the Christ. He is the Scarlet Thread Of Redemption¹³ prophesied in the Old Testament; realized in the New Testament. “Fulfilled

⁸ Aiden Wilson Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 1.

⁹ Alister McGrath, *A Passion for Truth* (Downer Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1996), 36.

¹⁰ Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, *Sin-Salvation*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2004), 412.

¹¹ Merrill F. Unger, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), 718.

¹² Jensen, 7.

¹³ W.A. Criswell, “The Scarlet Thread of Redemption,” *New American Standard Bible, The New Open Bible Study Edition* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville), 1527.

prophecy does not prove the existence of God, but it does show that unusual events predicted in his Name . . . are evidence of His special activity.”¹⁴

God Prophecies

God Himself gave the first Messianic prophecy in The Garden at the inception of sin and the fall of man in Genesis 3; but many more prophecies are to follow. In fact, there are 190¹⁵ prophecies concerning just the advent of the Messiah. Interestingly enough, “the number of passages in the Old Testament regarded by the Jews . . . as prophetic is much larger than that of the special predictions to which Christians have commonly appealed. . . . upward of 456”.¹⁶ It is amazing to think the Jews missed Jesus as Messiah after 456 signs pointing to Him. Nevertheless, when we have finished scrutinizing Christ's “credentials, as Son of Man and Son of God, the world’s only Saviour”¹⁷ it will be evident Jesus is *that* sole Redeemer.

God’s Covenants

In the Adamic Covenant in Genesis God Himself proclaims the first Messianic prophecy when He curses the serpent for his part in man’s fall. “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your seed and her *seed*; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel.” (Gen. 3:15) This passage speaks of the Messiah that will defeat Satan at the cross and ultimately crush him at the end of time.

In Genesis 12:1-3 God calls Abraham out of his land and proclaims to him the Abrahamic Covenant, “the first of the theocratic covenants (pertaining to the rule of God).”¹⁸ While this blessing is three-fold; the *universal* blessing that “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” is the focus here. This passage speaks of *all* the families of the earth, which means it cannot be speaking simply of Israel. God created all men in the past, the present and the future (Psalms 24: 1).¹⁹

So how is Abraham to be a source of blessing all men? It is through the Messiah, born in the flesh of the line of Abraham.²⁰

¹⁴ Norman L. Geisler, *Grand Rapids: Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books a division of Baker Book House Company, 1999), 609.

¹⁵ Barton Payne, “Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy,” in *Ibid.*, 610.

¹⁶ Merrill F. Unger, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), 718.

¹⁷ Jensen, 1.

¹⁸ *New American Standard Bible, The New Open Bible Study Edition* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville), Page bottom notes for Genesis 12:1-3.

¹⁹ **Psalms 24: 1**— “The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it . . .”

²⁰ NASB, Page bottom notes for Genesis 12:1-3.

This promise is expanded in Genesis 22:17-18:

“ . . . indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your *seed* as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your *seed* shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your *seed* all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”

Notice in each of these passages in Genesis chapters 3, 12, and 22 “where God declares the word *seed* in all instances is singular, not plural *seeds*”.²¹ Abraham’s “*seed* will be as stars of the heavens. . . . In your *seed* all nations of the earth shall be blessed. . . .” Norman Geisler bears this out; “That the coming Redeemer was to be the ‘offspring’ or ‘seed’ of the woman is important in a patriarchal culture.”²²

Abraham was a man numbered with the Patriarchs, yet repeatedly struggled with his lack of faith and often failed God. In one of the best-known Bible stories Abraham takes his only son Isaac to Mount Moriah. This is God's test for Abraham (v. 1), but also is a prophetic typology of the coming of the Messiah. I have noted some of the parallels between Isaac and Jesus in Table 1.

Table 1

Abraham	Realization	Jesus
1. Isaac was Abraham's only begotten son.	John 3:16;	1. Jesus was God's only begotten Son
2. Abraham did not have to sacrifice his son he chose to	1 John 4:14	2. God the Father also chose to sacrifice His Son.
3. Isaac obediently allowed himself to be sacrificed.	John 10:17, 18	3. Jesus obediently allowed Himself to be sacrificed.
4. Isaac carried the wood he would be sacrificed upon.	Luke 23: 26	4. Jesus carried the wood (the cross) He would be sacrificed upon.
5. “The angel of the Lord” (Jesus), interceded for Isaac, who was faithful	Romans 8:34	5. Jesus is faithful and interceded for us who are faithful.
6. God provided a substitutionary sacrifice in Isaac's place	John 1:29	6. God provided a substitutionary sacrifice in our place.
7. The angel of the Lord” promised that because Abraham was obedient the nations of the world <i>would be</i> blessed.	Phil. 2: 7,8	7. Jesus is that promise realized. Because He was “obedient unto death” all the nations of the world <i>are</i> blessed.

Fast forward to Genesis 49 and Jacob, near death, prophesies to his twelve sons. He tells Judah, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples”(Gen. 49:10).

The scepter and the staff are obvious references to a king or Shiloh. So Shiloh must be a king, but is he Messiah? Walvoord and Zuck address this question:

These verses anticipate the kingship in Judah culminating in the reign of Messiah in which nations will obey Him. Many sources, including the Targum (Aram. paraphrase of the OT), see “Shiloh” as a title of the Messiah. . . . the Hebrew word *šîlōh* should be

²¹ Ravi Zacharias: *The Uniqueness of Christ In History*, 45min., RZIM, date unknown, videocassette.

²² Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, *God-Creation*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2003), 601.

rendered “whose it is,” that is **the scepter will not depart from Judah . . . until He comes** whose it is.²³

So we see that Genesis 49:10 directly refers to the Messiah who will come.

2 Samuel 7: 12, 13, 16

This is part of the covenant God made with King David. In 2 Samuel 7 David was concerned because he, David, had a permanent house, but God, i.e. the Ark of the Covenant (God's throne or mercy seat), did not. God made a covenant with David. While David wanted to build a temple for God, God had a different plan. In verse twelve God reveals,

When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever. (2 Sam. 7:12-13)

So we see Solomon, David's son was to build God's temple, but it was God's Son's throne that was established. Solomon's temple was destroyed in 70AD, but God's Kingdom is forever.

The Davidic covenant is “the fourth of the theocratic covenants.” It claimed for David “an unending dynasty . . . an everlasting kingdom.” However, there is a problem here that is not highlighted in 2 Samuel, but is stated in Jeremiah. Jeremiah prophesied, “[Solomon's] seed is cursed in the person of Jeconiah . . . Jeremiah prophesies that no one whose genealogical descent could be traced back to David through Jeconiah and Solomon would ever sit on David's throne.”²⁴ How then is Christ to come through the line of David?

Jesus was the descendant of the throne of David through Jeconiah (cf. Matthew 1:12). . . . Joseph was only Jesus *legal* father by virtue of being engaged to Mary when she became pregnant, he did not inherit the curse on Jeconiah's *actual* descendants. Since Jesus was the actual son of David through Mary, according to Luke's matriarchal genealogy, He fulfilled the conditions of coming “from the loins of David without losing legal rights to the throne of David by falling under the curse of Jeconiah. Thus, the

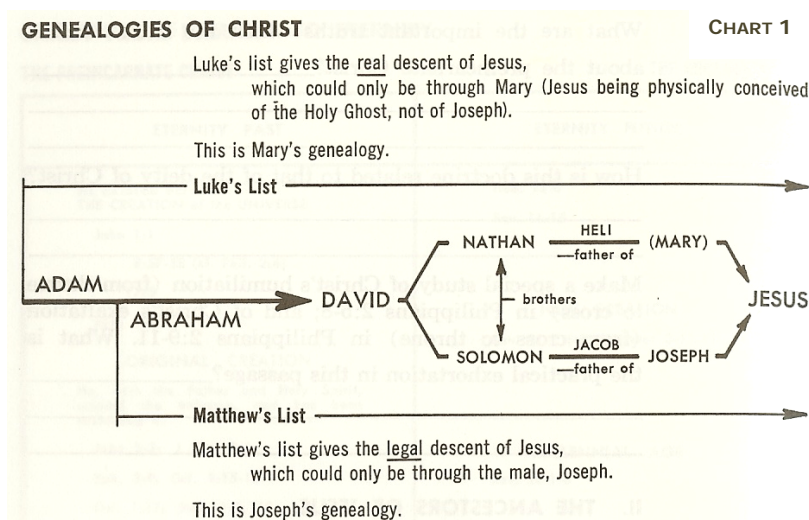
Virgin Birth is implied in the consistent understanding of these Old Testament passages.²⁵

²³ Allen Ross, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, “Genesis,” Walvoord and Zuck, ed. (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, A Division of Cook Communications, 1985), 98.

²⁴ NASB, Page bottom notes for 2 Samuel 7:4-17.

²⁵ Geisler, S.T., vol. 2.

Chart 1²⁶ clearly illustrates the dual genealogical lines of Jesus. The genealogies listed in



Luke, the *favored* line, which is Mary's, as opposed to the cursed line, listed in Matthew (Joseph line) both diverge from David and converge back on Jesus and only Jesus. It is fascinating to see how God providentially worked through the "cursed" line and the "favored" line so that it is unarguable that Jesus descended from the house of David. Interestingly, Joseph is virtually ever again mentioned; almost as if he is superfluous once the "legal" lineage of Jesus is established.

Psalm 22

This Psalm, too lengthy to quote here, interestingly enough begins with some of the final words Christ uttered from the cross; "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Though Psalm 22 is written by David "no known incident in the life of David fits the details . . . the expressions describe an execution, not an illness . . . [it] is more appropriate to Jesus' crucifixion than David's experience. The Gospel writers also saw connections between some of the words in this Psalm (vv. 8 , 16, 18) and other events in Christ's Passion."²⁷

For example, in verses 14 through 18 the Psalmist says,

I am poured out like water, And all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It is melted within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And my tongue cleaves to my jaws; And You lay me in the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has encompassed me; They pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me; They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots.

"David used many poetic expressions to portray his immense sufferings, but these

²⁶ Jensen, 8.

²⁷ Allen Ross, *BKCOT*, "Psalms," Walvoord and Zuck, ed., 809.

poetic words became literally true of the sufferings of Jesus Christ at His enemies' hands."²⁸

Almost every line of this Psalm adds another paint stroke to this powerful word picture of The Crucifixion.

Isaiah 6:1, 3

In Isaiah we get an awe-inspiring description of the pre-incarnate Christ. “. . . And one called out to another and said, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.’ For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.” I believe Christ is synonymous with the Lord of Hosts and the Angel of the Lord.

That the Angel of the Lord is the second person of the Trinity is derived from two main lines of evidence. *First*, the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament serves the same role as does Christ in the New Testament: The Father is the one that plans and sends the Redeemer, the Son is the one that is the Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit is the one who convicts and applies redemption to those who are redeemed. *Second*, once the Son (Christ) came in permanent incarnate form, never again does the Angel of the Lord appear.²⁹

Isaiah 7:14 and 9: 6-7

7:14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.

9: 6-7 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom . . .

These famous “Christmas passages” clearly speak of the Jewish Messiah who was to come. They are so specific there can only be one match; “a virgin will . . . bear a son . . . she will call His name Immanuel. . . . a son will be given to us . . .” All the names given, “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace” are names of the Christ. Geisler says, “. . . Isaiah 7: 14 confirms that Christ is God . . . [and] Isaiah 9:6 is another clear affirmation of Christ’s deity.”³⁰ The fulfillment of these passages from Isaiah is seen in Luke 2:11-12. Only one person has ever lived that meets *every* prediction; Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 53

In Isaiah 53 are some of the clearest word pictures of the preincarnate Christ given in the Old Testament. Again, due to the length of the text I will not quote it here. I believe Isaiah 53 paints an even more intense description than Psalm 22. For example, verse 2 says, “[Jesus] grew

²⁸ Ibid., 809.

²⁹ Geisler, ST, vol. 2, 600.

³⁰ Geisler, ST, vol. 3, 540.

up . . . like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him” This refers to the humanness of Jesus. He didn’t look kingly or special, He looked like any man. He was *fully* human. In fact in verse 3 we are told, “He was despised . . . forsaken of men” and a “man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief . . .”. He was not esteemed by men, our “griefs [sicknesses] He bore”, our “sorrows [pains] He carried”, and He was “smitten [struck down] of God”. Verse 5 tells us “He was wounded and crushed for our sin. The rebuke that should have been ours, He has taken. He was led like a like a sacrificial lamb to the slaughter and killed (v. 7); buried in a rich man’s tomb (v. 9).

The validity of the prophecies in Isaiah is established by the New Testament writers as well as Jesus Himself. From the notes in the Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible we see,

Jesus Himself, taught His disciples that He fulfilled at least part of it (Lk. 22:37), and several N.T. writers took their cues from Him. Matthew connected Isa. 53:4 with Jesus healing ministry (Mt. 8:17). John used [it] (John 12:38) . . .the writer of Hebrews (9:28) and John [in] (Revelation. 5:6, 12; 13:8) made reference of Jesus’ death by drawing on the . . . phrases of this passage. . . . and in 1 Pet. 2:22-25 . . . Peter completely wove the language of several verses of Isa. 53 into his own sentence structure.³¹

Zechariah 9 and 10

Verse 9 of chapter 9 clearly recounts Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem at His first advent. “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

We see this prophecy also fulfilled by Jesus in Luke 19:29-30, 31; Jesus “Sent two of His disciples saying, ‘Go into the village ahead of you; there, as you enter, you will find a colt tied on which no one yet has ever sat; untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, “Why are you untying it?” you shall say, “The Lord has need of it.” Once again we see that what is anticipated in the Old Testament is authenticated in the New Testament.

Had Jesus merely read this prophecy in Scripture and tried to fulfill it? One such argument of critics is that Jesus manipulated His life and events merely to look like He fulfilled Scripture. Many straw men have been fabricated to disprove Jesus’ Messiahship; only to be blown apart by the hot air of those that built them.

³¹ Spiros Zodhiates, Warren Baker, Joel Kletzing, Editors, *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers), Footnotes, 966

In an interview with Louis Lapidès, former journalist Lee Strobel asks Lapidès the question on whether or not Jesus could manipulate events and his life so that it only appeared he fulfilled prophecy. Dr. Lapidès' singular riposte annihilates this myth:

“How would he arrange to perform miracles in front of skeptics. . . . how could he arrange for his ancestry . . . or the place of His birth, or His method of execution . . . or that His legs remain unbroken on the cross?”³²

Lapidès *coup d'état* for me is his explanation to the question “How would [Jesus] arrange to be born when he was?” Lapidès explains,

When you interpret Daniel 9:24-26, it foretells that the Messiah would appear a certain length of time after King Artaxerxes I issues a decree . . . to rebuild the walls in Jerusalem. That puts the anticipated appearance of the Messiah at the exact moment in history when Jesus showed up, . . . Certainly that's nothing he could have prearranged.³³

CHRIST IN THE WORLD

Breaking the Silence

The prophecies, miracles and types of Christ in the Old Testament are signposts pointing to the revealed Messiah in the New Testament. The Gospel accounts of Jesus' life illuminate for us a life lived as no other has ever lived. Nonetheless, He was also the God's Son, sent as a “missionary” to a lost and dying world. That is a mystery of our faith, that He was fully man and yet fully God. As mentioned at the outset, this has been a stumbling block for billions throughout history.

The advent of John the Baptist (Lk. 1: 13-17) was followed quickly by Jesus' own advent. God was speaking once again to the world and while His Word would be rejected by many, He would not be ignored. This time God was not just speaking to His chosen people, the Jews. His New Word spoke to all the peoples of the world and in the salvific language of God's love. His Word speaks to us today.

God Becomes Man

“The often-touted phrase—‘God became man’—means that the infinite became finite.”³⁴
The incarnation means explicitly that “Jesus, God the Son, existing as the second person of the

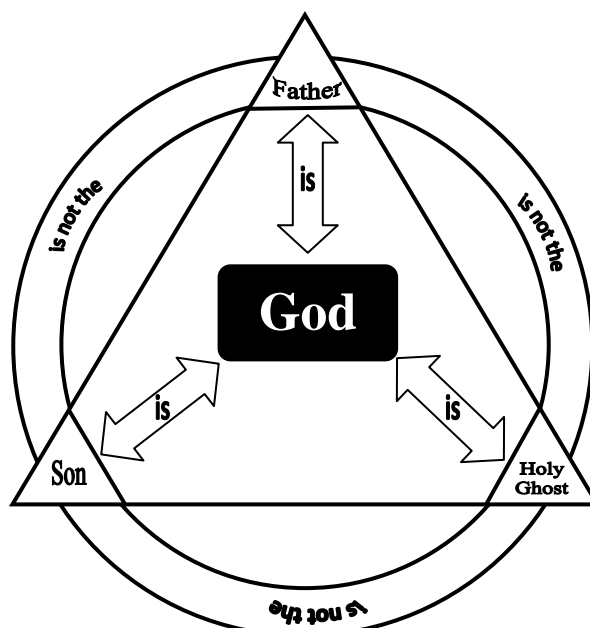
³² Louis Lapidès, “Interview with Louis Lapidès” by Lee Strobel, *The Case For Christ* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 249.

³³ *Ibid.*, 249.

³⁴ Norman Geisler and Peter Bocchino, *Unshakable Foundations* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2001), 296.

triune God, *united* His human nature to His divine and through it came into the world. He didn't stop being God when He added humanity to Himself. How is this possible? This is the mystery of the *hypostatic union*. As Athanasius taught, “*in the incarnation there was no subtraction of deity but an addition of humanity.*”³⁵

If Jesus was just a man; even being a sinless man He could not exonerate us from our sins, let alone efficaciously die for them. But, Jesus *was* equal with God and *claimed to be equal* to God. The New Testament reveals this; “I and the Father are One . . .” (Jn. 10:30) and again, “. . . although He [Christ] existed in the form of God, did not regard equality as a thing to be grasp . . .” (Phil. 2:6) and lastly, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.” (Jn. 14:6). The following illustration shows this easily in a visual manner.



Does not Philippians 2:7, which declares that Jesus “emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men.” contradict all of that? If God (the Son) emptied himself to become man, then He is no longer God. Does this not contradict what we just said?

Actually, it does not. In the Greek the word *emptied* means “laid aside”, *not* removed.³⁶ Jesus was still God He simply had two natures, one divine, and one human. He did not divest Himself of being God, but humbled Himself in His humanity. This is clearly taught in the Bible.

³⁵ Ibid., 296.

³⁶ Ibid., Center note 1573.

Hence, Jesus was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary and the long promised Messiah became flesh, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 7. “Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.” Also Isaiah 9, “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.”

“While some of the Old Testament references are only implicit, the New Testament is explicit about Christ's virgin birth.”³⁷ Matthew 1:18-23 confirms four prophetic nuances that demonstrate Christ was virgin-born. The four factors [from those verses] are [listed] below . . . ,

1. Before they came together . . .
2. . . .planned to send her away secretly . . .
3. . . . the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.
4. Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL . . .”³⁸

Geisler gives us valuable added insight on the virgin birth and paganism:

Since James Frazer published *The Golden Bough* (1890, 1912), it has been common to charge that Christianity is not unique in its story of Christ's incarnation, but that stories of supernatural births are common to pagan gods. If true, this would appear to undermine Christianity by showing that it might have borrowed ideas from other religions. Several lines of evidence that refute the pagan myth source theory are discussed . . . [Here the main points are summarized]:

1. The New Testament was written by contemporaries and is not the result of late myth development. Legends do not develop if the stories are written while eyewitnesses are still alive to refute inaccuracies.
2. The virgin birth records do not show signs of being mythical, nor do they include borrowed elements from known pagan birth myths.
3. Persons, places, and events identified in connection with Christ's birth are accurate historically. Even details once thought to be errors have been vindicated by research.
4. No Greek myth spoke of the literal incarnation of a monotheistic God into human form. In Christianity the second person of the Godhead became human. In pagan religions gods were only disguised as humans; they were not really human. In pagan myths a god and human invariably mated sexually, which was not true in the Christian account.
5. Greek myths of gods who became human postdate the time of Christ, so the Gospel writers could not have borrowed from them.³⁹

³⁷Geisler, ST, vol. 2, 603.

³⁸Ibid., 604, adapted.

³⁹Geisler, *BECA*, 201.

Angelic Herald

The advent of Christ was unique even in its announcements. The birth of Christ was heralded and acknowledged in numerous ways. No other religions' leaders or teachers were pre-announced or acknowledged by man until after they had made a name and none at all by God. That Jesus was special was made clear to Joseph, Mary, and a select few "outsiders", such as the shepherds, the noblemen and Simeon.

The proclamations were not heralding a mere man, but the long awaited Messiah. These revelations were not vague and general but specific in their details and extraordinary in their method. This is manifest in Luke 2: 8- 14,

In the same region there were *some shepherds* staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. And *an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them*, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This *will be* a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Looking at some of the specific components in this verse we see; *first*, this revelation is not just to one man, but a group of shepherds. This validates the witness of what they saw since it was many men that saw and heard the angel. The angel had also prefaced this message by telling the shepherds the message *is good news of great joy*.

Second, the method of delivery, i.e. the angel verbally confirmed for the shepherds that this message was indeed from God and *not* just the angel, but Scripture tells us, *the glory of the Lord shone round them*. I think this was not simply a bright light—rather the absolute, indescribable presence of God. *Third*, what the angel proclaimed to them was monumental news. Take note of the elements of the message. When—*Today*; this is happening right now! Where—*in the city of David*. The angel did not tell them in *Bethlehem*, rather, used words "in the *City Of David*". This phrase was not lost on these men. They knew where the City of David was; they were after all Jews. I believe they would have pieced this together with the prophecy the Messiah would come through the line of David and born in the city David. The angel told them the Who—*a Savior, who is Christ the Lord*. The two words, Savior; *sōtēr* in the Greek means deliverer and Christ in the Greek is *Christos* which means *Messiah*.

I am not a student of Greek, but this seems to be a very emphatic use. The angel then seals the message with the signet ring of God: "suddenly there appeared with the angel a

multitude of the heavenly host praising God. . . .”

Lastly, the angel says “[this] will be a sign,” which is terminology right out of Isaiah, chapter 7. The shepherds are given a specific description of what Messiah would look like; how old He would be, what He would be wearing, what He would be lying in. “This *will be* a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” God is not going to throw His “pearls before the swine.” He would have proclaimed this most important message to men who would not only understand it, but would not reject it.

Simeon’s Song

Further affirmation of who Jesus really was came thirty-three days after His birth. By “. . .the law of the Lord, ‘Every first-born male . . . shall be called holy to the Lord.’ (Lk. 2:23; Ex. 13:1). Therefore, Joseph and Mary had to present Jesus to the priest for purification and dedication. Simeon, was the priest they presented Jesus to. The Bible says, he was a man full of the Holy Spirit. The details of this divine appointment are related in Luke 2:23-31 thus;

And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; . . . And it had been *revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ* [italics mine]. And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, “Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation,. Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, And the glory of Your people Israel.” And His father and mother were amazed . . . And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, “Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed. . . .

Here we see Simon, by God’s Spirit, proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah. This is a compelling testimony of Jesus identity.

Pre-Ministry Years

Left Behind

From the time of His dedication to the Lord, almost nothing more is said about Jesus until His anointing for ministry. Dr. Luke alone writes of the trip to Jerusalem for the Passover when Jesus is twelve years old. After the Passover was over the family left to return home and evidently they did not see Jesus, but assumed he was in their caravan. It was not until evening, a day’s journey from Jerusalem, they discover Jesus is not with them. Then Luke records,

When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him. Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were amazed at His

understanding and His answers. When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, 'Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You.' And He said to them, "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's *house*?"

Jesus was anxious to learn and begin His Father's work. "By the time He was 12 years old, He understood His mission on earth. . . . In response to Mary's question about why He had treated them in this manner, Jesus drew a sharp distinction between them and God, His true Father (2:49). His statement confirmed that He knew His mission and that His parents also should have known about His mission."⁴⁰

Unique Anointing

Jesus' anointing for ministry is recorded in all four of the Gospels. John the Baptist, the preordained forerunner (Is. 40:3) of the Christ, is the temporal marker for this incident. By this time John has already gained significant prominence among the people (Mk. 1:5) and the Jewish religious leaders are becoming interested in the activities (Mt. 3:7) of this upstart preacher. As a convex lens focuses light to a point, events providentially converged, to focus on Jesus' anointing by God.

It seems to me the baptism of Jesus is actually a twofold event. John understood in some sense his cousin's true identity and mission and did not want to baptize him. (Mt. 3:13-14) Jesus was insistent and told John, "Permit *it* at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." John's message was "repent", but Jesus' immersion under the waters of the Jordan had nothing to do with repentance or His sin; for He had not sinned.

Rather I think John's baptism of Jesus was actually a temporal sign heralding the beginning of Jesus' ministry to the world. The Greek word *baptizō* used in Luke 3:21 refers only to a *ceremonial ablution*.⁴¹ While baptism has no salvific power in Christian doctrine, it is commanded of the followers of Christ I believe Jesus' baptism was different. "A more likely explanation seems to be that here is a symbolic inaugural rite signifying the end of the old dispensation and the initiation of the new."⁴² Hebrews 1:1 declares, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has

⁴⁰ Eugene Merrill, *BKCOT*, "Numbers," Walvoord and Zuck, ed., 210.

⁴¹ Spiros Zodhiates, Warren Baker, Joel Kletzing, eds., *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible "Greek Dictionary of the New Testament"* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers), 18.

⁴² Jensen, 35.

spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.”

Part of the mystery and uniqueness of Christ *is* the immanence and intimacy with which the three persons of the Godhead work together. “There is order in the Trinity, and each member has a specific role to play. With regard to salvation, the Father plans and sends; the Son is sent and accomplishes; and the Holy Spirit convicts unbelievers and applies salvation to believers.”⁴³

It is more than significant that all three persons of the Godhead are involved here at Jesus anointing. Matthew 3 tells us that, “After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove *and* lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.’” Then in Dr. Luke’s version we see that “. . . *when all the people were baptized*, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in *bodily* form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, “*You are My beloved Son*, in You I am well-pleased” [Italics mine]. Note the phrases in italics:

1. Jesus was “baptized” *after* everyone else had been baptized.
2. The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus *bodily* like a dove.
 - a. This apparently was not an ethereal specter, but Scripture says the Holy Spirit took some sort of physical form that was visible; like a dove or a bird.
3. God the Father spoke in an audible voice and the Holy Spirit took a physical form that was visible. Those standing around heard God and saw His Spirit. The words God the Father spoke were Jesus’ ordination.

God’s proclamation breaks down into three segments as demonstrated from *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* which declares,

You are My Son . . . “affirm[s] Jesus’ unique sonship with the Father. . . . The second clause *whom I love*, is literally ‘the Beloved One’ . . .it stresses the intensity of love between God the Father and the Son . . .*with you I am well pleased* point to the kind of kingly Son Jesus was to be in His earthly mission. . . . At His baptism Jesus began His official role as God’s Anointed One.”⁴⁴

God was literally breaking the 400 years of silence with His words and His Word. “When Luke recorded that *heaven was opened*, he was conveying the idea that God was breaking into human history with revelation—sovereignly declaring that Jesus was His Son.”⁴⁵

⁴³ Geisler, *ST*, vol. 2, 676.

⁴⁴ John Grassmick, , *The Bible Knowledge Commentary-New Testament*, “Mark,” Walvoord and Zuck, eds. (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, A Division of Cook Communications, 1983), 105.

⁴⁵ John Martin, *BKCNT*, “Luke,” Walvoord and Zuck, eds., 212.

The Real Temptations of Christ

Each gospel provides added nuance to the complex portrait of Jesus; each focusing on a specific attribute. Matthew portrays Him as *king*; Luke illuminates His *humanity*; John reveals His *deity* and in Mark He is the *servant*. Only Mark, which portrays Jesus as the servant specifically tells us after His baptism that, “. . . immediately the Spirit impelled Him *to go out* into the wilderness.” When an obedient servant is commanded, he goes or does what he has been told to do immediately.

Luke tells us that Jesus “was led about by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days being tempted.” So for forty days and nights, Jesus communed with the Spirit and the Father, but He was also being tempted by the devil. We do not really know how many times Jesus was tempted; the Bible identifies only three temptations. Nonetheless, it could be that God loosened Satan’s leash and allowed him almost free reign with Christ, much as God had with Job.

This was the devil’s big chance and I think he would have thrown *every* temptation he had in his arsenal at Christ. This may have been a time of continual tempting. Of course that is speculation, but this may be borne out by the teaching of Hebrews 4:15, “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in *all* things as *we are*, yet without sin.” And in Luke 4:13, “. . . when the devil had *finished* every temptation . . .” The word *finished* in the Greek means “to complete entirely.”⁴⁶

“What Matthew recorded as the second and third temptations were reversed by Luke. Again this may be indicative that there were continual temptations in these areas.”⁴⁷ As each day passes in this 40-day period Jesus is increasingly ravaged by hunger pangs and growing tired and weary from the constant onslaughts from Satan. Satan, not making any headway, attempts a last ditch effort to convince Jesus that if He performs a spectacular miracle now, then “the nation [Israel] would immediately accept Him. . . . without going to the cross”⁴⁸ Jesus however knew He must be obedient to The Father and his salvific mission was not just to the Jews, but to men of *all* nations.

The Earthly Labor Begins

“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish

⁴⁶ Spiros Zodhiates, Warren Baker, Joel Kletzing, Editors, *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible “Greek Dictionary of the New Testament”* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers), 69.

⁴⁷ Martin, 213.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 214.

but to fulfill.” (Mt. 5:17) Jesus had called out His motley band of disciples and began the work the Father had given Him. It must be realized that the events and miracles ascribed to Jesus in the Bible in the three plus years of his ministry are *not* comprehensive. They are only a small sampling of the immense work Jesus accomplished. John, the last and only disciple to die a natural death, closes his Gospel with the words: “And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.” (Jn. 21:24-25)

As stated early on, the express purpose of highlighting the deeds and miracles posited here is to demonstrate Jesus’ uniqueness in His sinless humanity and illuminate His deity. John’s Gospel possibly more than any other book in the Bible illustrates the uniqueness of Jesus because it focuses on His deity. As stated previously, Jesus is not a mere man, but He is fully man—and fully God. There is no contradiction here, rather a mystery of the Christian faith that we can in no way begin to fathom. At best, we can only snatch intimations of it. The miracles of Jesus authenticate Him as the Son of God, just as the signs and wonders *and* the inerrancy of the prophets validated them to the world.

John records only eight of the hundreds, if not thousands of miracles Jesus must have performed during His ministry. These are:

- First* Transformation of water into wine (v 2:1-11)
- Second* Healing of the nobleman’s son (v 4:46-54)
- Third* Healing at Bethsaida (v 5:1-15).
- Fourth* Feeding of the 5,000 (v 6:1-14).
- Fifth* Christ walks on the water (v 6:15-21).
- Sixth* Healing of the man born blind (v 9:1-7).
- Seventh* Christ raises Lazarus (11:1-44).
- Eighth* Miraculous catch of fish (21:1-13).

The first, transforming water into wine is recorded only in John. One of the primary purposes of this sign apparently was to manifest the glory of Jesus for the profit of His disciples. John 1:11 tells us that because of this miracle “His disciples believed in Him.” Directional road signs point us in the right direction; in the same way Jesus’ *signs* point to Him as the Christ. His disciples grasp this at once.

Judean Ministry

As Jesus began His ministry and mission in earnest, we can see the three aspects of ministry that He focused on.

These ministries were:

1. signs—identification of authority
2. interviews—demonstrations of love
3. preaching and teaching—exposition of truth.⁴⁹

In both of Jesus' natures, His humanity and in His divinity, Jesus had extremely close communion with God the Father. Therefore, when He finds the temple, His Father's house being used for commerce and personal gain, not worship, He is filled with righteous anger. He could not let this stand! Jesus hastily fashioned a whip out of cords and drove the money changers out. This is only the first cleansing of the temple by Jesus—He did it twice.

While this is not a miracle, it is a sign because Jesus' actions fulfill Old Testament prophecies. John 2: 17 says, "His disciples remembered that it was written, "ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME." (Ps 69:9; 119:139) When the Jewish leaders questioned Jesus about asking for a *sign* of why He did this "Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Of course, they thought He meant Solomon's Temple, "But He was speaking of the temple of His body." He was speaking of His *tour de force*; His Resurrection.

Shortly after this event Jesus had two "interviews". They are a study in contrast. The first was with Nicodemus; the second with "the woman at Jacob's well". Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin and not just *a* teacher; Jesus called him *the* teacher of Israel. He sought out Jesus by night. Jesus expended considerable energy explaining that man must be born again. However, Nicodemus just did not get it. "[He] was ignorant of the realm of which Jesus spoke. He represented the nation's unbelief and lack of knowledge."⁵⁰ There had to be an internal struggle going on within him, his worldly position in the Sanhedrin against the prompting of the Spirit of God to follow the Messiah.

The Samaritan woman on the other hand had nothing to lose. Jesus' providential meeting with this forever-unnamed woman at Sychar was the polar opposite of Jesus' meeting with Nicodemus. Being a woman and a Gentile was two strikes. On top of that she was Samaritan—strike three. It gets even worse yet; she was a despised whore—she was not just out, she was out of the game! She just came to get some cool water in the heat of the day when no one would be there to berate and deride her.

So when Jesus spoke to her of living water, she immediately said, ". . . give me this water, so I will not be thirsty, nor come out here to draw." While she only understood Jesus

⁴⁹Louis Barbieri, *BKCNT*, "Matthew," Walvoord and Zuck, eds., 43.

⁵⁰Edwin Blum, *BKCNT*, "John," Walvoord and Zuck, eds., 281.

analogy in the temporal sense, she was tired of the stagnant pool in which she resided. She was tired of the interminable ridicule she had brought on herself; she was tired of her life—a life as barren as the Judean wilderness. Jesus then began to tell her all about her life and when He ultimately revealed He was the long awaited Messiah, she instantly believed. Her life transformed on the spot!

So animated and excited was this woman she ran into the city telling everybody she saw to come and see the man who “told me all the things that I have done”. The Bible tells us that many came to believe about Jesus Christ from her testimony and many more “believed because of His word”.

Only the power of God's Spirit can change hearts and minds like that; Only Jesus has ever been able to transform the lives of sinful, wretched people in an instant. Man has free will. God will not coerce or compel anyone into His kingdom. Though he eventually became a follower of Christ, Nicodemus was hesitant and wary. The woman, on the other hand, was ready and grateful. People come differently, but they must choose to come.

Galilean Ministry

Jesus' ministry shifts into high gear after His encounter with the woman at Sychar. The Galilean's received Him more cordially than He was received in Judea and He began to teach, heal and minister. In John 4:46 Jesus returns to the area of Cana. Here he encounters a royal official who pleads with Jesus to save His dying son. Scripture tells us the man was told to go his way, his son lived. He believed Jesus and returned home. His slaves met him on the way and told him his son was healed and that it had happened the very hour Jesus spoke.

In Jerusalem at the feast of the Jews, Jesus heals the man who had been sick for thirty-eight years. He does this on the Sabbath, which infuriates the Jewish leadership. Here in John 4:17-23 is one of the many places Jesus claims Godship, “The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. But He answered them,

For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. . . . *For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.* [italics mine]

The Jews knew exactly what Jesus was claiming and they wanted Jesus dead.

Christ the Logos

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (Jn. 1:1-3). These opening lines in the book of John plainly declare the truth. Jesus *is* God. Jesus created *all* things. The Bible is not just the teachings of Jesus, though it contains His teachings.

The book of John speaks of the Word; in the Greek, *Logos*. This word “does occur elsewhere in the Gospel but not as a Christological title.”⁵¹ The *Logos* is God and the *Logos* is Jesus. That Jesus is God can be no clearer. One may choose not to believe it, but Jesus alone among all other “gods” uniquely claims eternal salvific grace for mankind. Hence, Christianity among all other religions is exclusively unique by the power of this doctrine alone.

Christ - Unique in Death

“Grace takes its rise far back in the heart of God, in the awesome and incomprehensible abyss of His holy being; but the channel through which it flows is Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. . . . God's grace from God's crucified Son.”⁵² In this short testimony, A.W. Tozer recognizes the font of grace from whence flow the springs of the death and resurrection of our Lord and succinctly conveys to us the redemptive theme woven by the Scarlet Thread of Redemption through the whole of Scripture.

Jesus prophecy of His death and resurrection is referenced in each of the Gospels. The cross represents the beginning of the final stanza of the opus of Christ's atoning ministry, both to and for mankind. All the gospel accounts paint a similar picture of the crucifixion. When I say crucifixion here I include the arrest, spurious trial and Jesus' death on the repugnant Roman cross.

Since Rome allowed the Jews a certain amount of self-rule Jesus was forced to endure two trials; both held in secret and both illegal. The Sanhedrin's unlawful trial, held in the middle of the night was fruitless, they could find no fault with Jesus; in the end had they to resort to false witnesses to give credence to their allegations (Mk. 14:55-57). Even Pilate, the hapless Roman procurator, could find no fault (Jn. 19:4) with Jesus and tried to take the high road of neutrality. “. . . [Jesus'] life has always been regarded as the purest that has ever been lived. His

⁵¹ Ibid., 271.

⁵² Tozer, 146.

antagonists were challenged to bring some contrary proof against Him. They were never able to besmirch His pristine life. By contrast, no other individual ever elicited such accolades. By their own admission, this includes Mohammed, Buddha, and Krishna. Their . . . struggles [and sins] are recorded within their own scriptures.”⁵³ People in all cultures stumble over the name of Jesus and it is because His life is Truth. The conflict and strife Christ caused leading up to His death is manifested throughout history to our day.

Resurrection

Century after century detractors have leveled criticism against Christianity because of the resurrection. Is it myth? Is it fact? Is it scientifically impossible? By definition the resurrection was miraculous, so those with an antiscientific bias chafe on it and dismiss it out of hand. Still others either distort the facts and spiritualize it or claim Jesus rose as a spirit not bodily.

No the resurrection is not a myth. It is a fact that can be confirmed scientifically; not with observational science, e.g. biology or chemistry, but, with forensic science; cause and effect. A miracle by definition is a rare occurrence, but the resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the most historically substantiated events in the world. “The New Testament presents overwhelming proof of the resurrection of Christ. At least seventeen appearances of Christ occurred after His resurrection.”⁵⁴ This is empirical data that cannot be easily discounted.

The fact there are no witnesses to the Resurrection really is no problem to validating the fact of the resurrection. In his book *The Case for Christ*, Lee Strobel interviews Dr. Gary Habermas who explains his methodology for looking at the evidence for the Resurrection: “First, did Jesus die on the cross? Second, did he appear later to people? If you can establish those two things, you’ve made your case, because dead people don’t normally do that.”⁵⁵ There is abundant documentation and books proving Jesus did not come off the cross alive. But, did Jesus really appear visibly in a physical body to his disciples and others?

Paul’s account in 1 Corinthians 9 affirms two personal encounters with the risen Christ. In verse 1 he says, “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” Then in 1 Corinthians 15:8, “Last of all He appeared to me also.” In verses 5-8 he lists encounters Jesus had with others. In verse 5, “He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.”; verse 6, “After that He

⁵³ Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods* (Nashville, World Publishing, 2000), 40.

⁵⁴ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Major Bible Themes* (Grand Rapids, Academie Books, from Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), 66.

⁵⁵ Gary Habermas, “Interview with Gary Habermas” by Lee Strobel, *The Case For Christ* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 307.

appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep . . . ”; and in verse 7, “ then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles. . . .” Dr. Habermas tells us,

Indeed, Acts is littered with references to Jesus’ appearances. The Apostle Peter was especially adamant . . . he says in Acts 2:32, “God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses to the fact.” . . . In Acts 3:15 he repeats, “You killed the author of life, but God has raised Him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.” The Resurrection was undoubtedly the central proclamation of the early church from the very beginning. The earliest Christians didn’t just endorse Jesus’ teachings; they were convinced they had seen Him alive after His crucifixion.⁵⁶

The Resurrection is why Jesus was born and lived. It is chief to all other aspects of His ministry. Jesus resurrection enables man’s salvation. “If Christ has not been raised . . . you are still in your sins” (1Cor. 15:17). “Dr. David Freiderick Strauss, an unbelieving sceptic who has severely criticized anything supernatural in the Gospels, was forced to acknowledge the fact that the resurrection is the ‘touchstone, not of the life of Jesus only, but of Christianity itself.’ It ‘touches Christianity to the quick’ and is ‘decisive for the whole view of Christianity.’”⁵⁷ Christianity has never claimed less.

Most of the major religions, barring atheism are salvific in some manner. The Muslim wants to spend eternity in a paradise filled with pleasure. The Hindu and Buddhist seek for some ethereal “oneness” with an unknown force. While the founders of each of the major religions were sinful mortal men; Jesus, was not *just* a man or even just a good man—He was the God-man. Additionally, “Almost all other religions are based on a theological dictum or ideology, not upon the historical fact of its founder’s identity or an event in time or space.”⁵⁸

The efficient cause of “man’s religion” is always man’s efforts. Man must find some way to reach up to a god and appease that god, so he can live out eternity in some assumed, but not assured, state of bliss. The truth that Jesus was God is corroborated by the fact of the Resurrection of Christ. Only Christianity claims a *relationship* with the Living God; it is God reaching down to lift man up to Himself. The Resurrection *is* the zenith of God’s salvific work.

Christ’s Uniqueness Displayed in the Culture

Ironically, one thing that illustrates Jesus uniqueness throughout history is the sheer magnitude of vicious hatred, confusion, and vilification of the character and nature of Jesus

⁵⁶ Ibid., 317.

⁵⁷ Josh McDowell, *The Resurrection Factor* (San Bernardino, Here’s Life Publishers Inc., 1981), 14.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 15.

Christ. No other religious leader, founder, or teacher is despised with such fervor. Even the name “God” is tolerated—just do not bring in the name of Jesus! Although Christianity is disparaged as the pariah among its critics; for anyone who is intellectually honest and seeking the truth⁵⁹ I believe the evidence for the historical accuracy of the Bible and the historicity of Christ is so substantial as to be virtually incontrovertible.

That non-believers do not understand Christ's unique life is expected. However, if ostensible believers do not understand the uniqueness of Christ in time then they cannot even apprehend, let alone comprehend, His singular life's mission or His work for eternity. Neither will they understand His work of primacy in their lives.

Undisciplined, Undisciplined, Uncommitted

In a recent Barna Group survey Barna asserted that 66% of America's adult population was what Barna dubs “Casual Christians,” while only 16% were committed Christians (Captive Christians). Barna describes these Casuals as, “comprised of significant proportions of minimally active born again Christians and moderately active but theologically nominal Christians . . . spiritually middle-of-the-road, perhaps even ambivalent about their faith. . . .”

This of course is the portrait of the *lukewarm* Christian John wrote about in Revelations and the rejected disciples in Matthew.⁶⁰ But it get worse. Again Barna in answer to the question about what elements make the Casual Christian tick affirms:

[The elements it gives are] The ***comfort*** that this approach provides. It offers them *life insights* if they choose to accept them, gives them a ***community of relationships*** if they desire such, fulfills their inner need to have some type of ***connection with a deity***, and provides the ***image of being a decent, faith-friendly person***. Because ***Casuals do not view matters of faith as central to one's purpose or success in life, this brand of Christianity supplies the multi-faceted levels of satisfaction and assurance that they desire*** (emphasis mine).

This is an unhealthy, easy-believism; a retreat back to cheap grace. This false comfort and image is a lie of Satan. This is what building self-esteem without real achievement fosters.

This is the off-spring of unconvicting preaching without challenge and phony “discipleship programs” instead of biblical disciple building—this is Christianity without Christ! But that is a topic for a different day.

⁵⁹ Truth is that which corresponds to its object.

⁶⁰ **Rev. 3: 16** –“So because you are **lukewarm**, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.” **Mt. 7: 21** –“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.”

Indeed, it is only through Jesus Christ's distinctive and unique life as His committed disciples that we can in some finite measure comprehend God's attributes of grace, love, justice and mercy; all illuminated vibrantly in Him for our benefit. It is by Christ's redeeming work in His humanity that God makes His glorious majesty known to the world. The simple truths that testify to Jesus' uniqueness over the founders of other religions are;

1. Only Jesus claimed to be God.
2. Only Jesus performed miracles.
3. Only Jesus was bodily Resurrected.
4. Only the tomb of Jesus is empty.

These have been the stumbling blocks for millennia, as foretold in the Bible (1Cor. 1:23). Those that say Jesus never claimed deity have never actually "read" the Bible, or if they have they have come to it with such deep-seated and intense presuppositions as to be blind to what the words of Scripture actually say. Alister McGrath states, ". . . it is clear that Scripture regards God as 'making knowledge of himself' . . . available through the 'unveiling' of God's person and purposes. In the New Testament, this 'unveiling', 'showing', and 'making known', is focused on the person and work of Christ."⁶¹

Every other major religion adheres to their dogma because of the *teachings* of their respective founder and their "holy" books contain these teachings. While the Bible does contain the teachings of Jesus, it is the very Word of God; it is God's Book. The Bible reveals Jesus Christ to be the unique Son of God. None other can stand against His life of purity and commitment to His creatures. The uniqueness of Christ is in fact the only way to obtain eternal life with God.

This means Christianity *is* true and *exclusively* possesses the Good News of God. "Jesus unequivocally states the He is the only means of salvation . . . not only is the work of Christ needed for our salvation, but so is believing in Christ who performed that work."⁶²

This conundrum summarizes the stated intentions of this paper.

The New Testament is *contained* in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament is *explained* in the New Testament.

The New Testament is *concealed* in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament.

The Old Testament *anticipates* the New Testament.

The New Testament authenticates the Old Testament.

⁶¹ Alister McGrath, *A Passion for Truth* (Downer Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 36.

⁶² Geisler, *ST*, vol. 3, 412, 413.

In the Old Testament the New Testament lies *hidden*.

In the New Testament the Old Testament lies open.

The Old Testament *foreshadows* the New Testament.

The New Testament fulfills the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament they were always *seeking*.

In the New Testament they found.

The Old Testament *predicts* a person.

The New Testament presents that Person.

And that Person is the Lord Jesus Christ—who fully validated the Old Testament.⁶³

“Who do you say that I am?” Hopefully, we like Simon Peter will answer, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”(Mt. 16:16). “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God” (Jn. 6:68-69).

Jesus is the Son of God who died for *all* the sins of *every* person that has ever lived or will live. Jesus paid the price for those who will *never* accept His free gift of grace; as well as for those who *do* accept that free gift. It is available to all, but because God gave us free will, but we must choose to accept Christ's salvific sacrifice.

I will close with what Dr. Barry Leventhal recently said in a sermon regarding appropriating Christ's grace: “. . . [We do] religious things to appease [our] own conscience; to deal with [our] own guilt and shame when the reality is, that's not where it goes! It goes to the cross. It goes to the cross. We can never pay Him back what He's given us freely. And that's what makes Biblical Christianity unique from every other religion. . . .”⁶⁴

⁶³ Dr. Roy W. Gustafson quoted by Franklin Graham in, *The Name*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), 71.

⁶⁴ Dr. Barry Leventhal, Sermon on *Forgiveness*, delivered at Southern Evangelical Church, April 18, 2005, compact disc.