

*A Defensible Hope: Ten Questions Curious Unbelievers Will Eventually Ask*

**#1: Is the Bible Reliable?**

Sunday Evening Bible Study, September 16, 2018

“... but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect...” –1 Peter 3:15

“To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that <sup>9</sup>by all means I might save some.” –1 Corinthians 9:22

“Men may argue the truth of the Gospel with great strength of reason, and so as cannot be answered...[but] they will never be fully convinced...the heart is naturally greatly prejudiced against the Gospel...so corrupt and has such enmity against everything that is holy and divine that the truths of the Gospel don’t suit it.” –Jonathan Edwards

**First Bible Church on the Reliability of the Bible**

“We believe the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments to be the verbally inspired Word of God, written by men by God’s control, inerrant and infallible in the original manuscripts, and the final authority in faith and life.” (The FBC Constitution, 1965).

**Terms**

1. Verbally inspired: Each word is “breathed out” by God and is not there by accident.
2. Written by men: Each had a unique style, personality, experience, and education.
3. God’s control: Men were the second cause, the instrument, by which God, the first cause, wrote this book (i.e., sub-contractors).
4. Inerrant: The Scriptures in the original manuscripts contained no error.
5. Infallible: The Scriptures are incapable of being wrong or misleading.
6. Original manuscripts: The original documents written by the human authors.
7. Final authority: Every proposition must be judged by the Bible.

**A Tactical Decision: Steer the Conversation to Focus on the Gospels**

The Bible is an enormous book and we will get lost in the details if we try to cover all of it right now. Can we agree to focus first on the Gospels for the following reasons?

The Old Testament predicts what happens in the Gospels →	The Gospels report the historical foundation of Christianity	The New Testament Letters reflect on what happened in the Gospels. ←
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**Seven Reasons to Believe the Gospels are Reliable**

**1. No ancient document has more textual evidence than the Gospels.**

1. Objection: Since the Bible we have today is a copy of a copy, etc. going back 2000 years, we can’t trust that it represents the original manuscripts (i.e., telephone game).
2. The Bibliographic Test: 1) Quality of manuscripts, 2) Quantity of mss, 3) time span
3. Quality: As with all ancient manuscripts, quality varies.
4. Quantity: Over 5700 Greek manuscripts in museums around the world.
5. Time Span: The span between the event and the earliest existing manuscript. There is a manuscript of a portion of John (P52) in the John Ryland’s Library of Manchester, England that is dated c. 125. Time span between event and manuscript: c. 95 years.
6. Compare: Julius Caesar’s *Galic Wars*—10 copies exist today—950 year time span.
7. The Gospels we have today are 99% pure and the variants affect no doctrine (i.e., Mk. 9:29).
8. Conclusion: Consistency demands that if you reject the Gospels because we don’t have the original manuscripts, you must reject all of ancient history (i.e., Caesar’s assassination).

**2. There are no legitimate competing sources contradicting the Gospels.**

1. Objection: There are many other “gospels” that did not make it into the Bible because they did not fit the party line of Christianity’s fabricators (i.e., Gospels of Thomas, Judas, etc.).
2. All scholars agree that all of these are forgeries written in 2<sup>nd</sup> century or later.
3. Principle: The less time passed, the more accurate the reporting.

**3. Extrabiblical sources only corroborate and never contradict the gospels.**

1. Objection: The Jesus story is just a myth/legend fabricated by people hundreds of years later.
2. Clement of Rome quotes Matthew, Mark, Luke, and 7 other NT books in 95.
3. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch quotes Matthew, John and 11 other NT books in 115.
4. Pliny the Younger, in 110, describes Christians singing to Jesus “as if to a god.”
5. Tacitus in 112, reports on the crucifixion of Jesus “during the reign of Tiberius, at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus.”
6. Seutonius in 120 reports Jews making disturbances “because of the instigator Chrestus.”
7. Furthermore, at no point does archaeology contradict the New Testament.

**4. No apparent contradictions between the Gospels nullify the essence of their message.**

1. Objection: The Gospels contradict each other, so they cannot be true.
2. The Gospels offer different perspectives for different audiences but still agree with one another.
3. Leaving out details that another witness includes is not a contradiction.
4. The apparent contradictions do not affect any point of Christian doctrine.
5. Historians routinely leave out or include details that serve their writing purposes.
6. The Gospels are in complete agreement on the salient points.

**5. The Gospels are confirmed by the principle of embarrassment.**

1. Objection: The Gospels were fabricated to make the authors look good and gain power.
2. The disciples are often portrayed as dull, impulsive, foolish, cowardly failures.
3. The Gospels feature the testimony of women whose testimonies were not permitted in court.
4. The principle of embarrassment: “When a statement is prejudicial to a witness, his dear ones, or his cause, it is likely to be truthful.” –Louis Gottschalk, Prof. History, University of Chicago

**6. The Gospels were written by an apostle (an eyewitness of Jesus’ resurrection) or by someone supervised by an apostles (Luke by Paul, Mark by Peter).**

1. Objection: The New Testament didn’t even exist until the Council of Nicaea (325).
2. The canon was never discussed at Nicaea because the New Testament was already recognized.
3. The Gospels were already considered to be Scripture (in the canon) in the lifetime of the apostles (i.e., 2 Peter 3:16; 1 Tim. 5:18).

**7. All of the apostles suffered for the testimony that they recorded for all time in the written record of what we call today the Gospels.**

1. Objection: The original disciples fabricated the Gospels for gain.
2. All the evidence supports the did not gain but lost because of their testimony.
3. While many die will for what they think is true, no one will die for what they know is false.