

John (Part 3)

Biblical and Secular Testimonies to Jesus Christ's Divinity

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Tonight we are going to be picking up in John the first chapter once again. We are not going to go through very many verses because I am going to make a digression tonight that I feel is very helpful to understanding the book of John, and to the increase of the faith that we are going to need to do this work under Jesus Christ.

Just to review very quickly, the book of John begins with *the unique* opening of all time. "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 were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." (John 1:1-2) There is no other book that has ever been written by man that opens like that one does. If we can compare it to something in music: a tremendous and great crashing chord.

He introduces the main character that he is going to be writing about, and lays down right away at the very beginning so that we know—at least a little bit—of the length and breadth and depth of this Being that he is going to be telling us about. He was God. He *is* God. He was in the beginning with God. Therefore He was pre-existent—at least pre-existent in terms of man. Before there was time, there was God.

Before there was time, there was the *Logos*. The *Logos* is the main character of this story that is going to unfold. He *was* God; He was *with* God; He is the Creator of everything that is. He is the one who gave life to Adam and Eve. He is the power that is behind every law, force, and energy that exists. He is the one who was there from the beginning.

Then he begins to lay even more groundwork so we understand where John is coming from. So he begins introducing words that are going to play a great part in understanding this personage: that He is light, that He is truth, that He is *reality* in contrast to those things which are real—at least physically real—but they are not eternal. They are not age-lasting as He is.

We had gotten down to verse 11 or 12, and that is where we are going to pick up once again. We are going to go up to verse 18, and then we are going to make that digression that is going to last at least the remainder of this Bible Study.

John 1:11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.

The way it is written, it actually means, "He came to His own home." It can mean, "He came to His own people," or "He came to His own town," but certainly the connotation is that He came amongst those who were *His*. It did not matter who it was, whether it was His own family (you can read in John 7 that they did not believe in Him), or His own race of people (the Jews certainly rejected Him), or anyone on earth, really, except, as we are going to see in a little bit,

those who accepted Him, everybody rejected Him. Of course, even His own disciples abandoned Him at the last moment. So "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him."

John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

I explained that that word *right* means "the authority" or "the power." So, "to as many as received Him, to them He gave the "authority" or the "power." This applies to you and me. He came here to give us an abundant life, and also to ultimately save us. We cannot ever let ourselves feel as though we were behind the door when the gifts of God's Holy Spirit were handed out. He has given all that He has called—all that have received Him—the power to become a son of God. So the power is there.

One of these days I will be giving a sermon which I think will convince you beyond a shadow of a doubt that God is faithful and true to what He says there in I Corinthians 10, that He never gives us a trial that is too great for us. He has given us the power to overcome. It is there. But most of the time what happens is we back out on them. We lack the patience, or we lack the faith—whatever it is—and we back away from the challenge that He has put before us. But He is faithful to His promise; the power is there. After all, we have the Holy Spirit, and that is the very power which created the earth. Though we do not have it in the measure that we are eventually going to have it, we have enough to do the job that we have been given to do.

Verse 12 also contains something that is important to know and that is "to those who believe in His name." "Name" to a Hebrew person indicates what the person *is*, and not the phonetic sound that is attached to this particular person. My name is John. But to a Hebrew, if you would just say, "Yahshua" or "Jesus," they would take it as meaning what the person was—His character.

We have a great deal of this. It carries over into our English language. You know very well that when somebody mentions somebody to you, you begin to think about that person's personality, about the way that they did things, about the way they talked, about mannerisms. If I say "Herbert W. Armstrong" to you, you immediately conjure up in your mind a picture of a person, and you see in your mind a bit of his characteristics. They flash before your mind.

It is those who believe in His name who are going to be saved. This is another thing that really is worthy of a whole sermon. What it means is that those who are going to become sons of God in the fullest sense are those who trust in, rely upon, and conduct their life according to what God is—what Jesus Christ is. He is Lord, He is Master, He is Savior, He is Healer, He is Creator, and it goes on and on. He is our Shepherd. He is our Lawgiver. He is faithful to His promises.

Everything that Jesus Christ reveals to us about His personality, about His character, is wrapped up in His name. So we have to conduct our lives within the framework of trusting in that name. That is what is going to lead to eternal life. Because we trust and rely, we are going to obey. We are going to submit. We are going to have certain attitudes.

John 1:13 Who were born [begotten], not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

We are begotten. "Not of blood" refers to the fact that there was no physical generation to this begetting by which we can become sons of God.

"Nor of the will of the flesh" indicates that we were not looking for God—we did not know what to look for. We knew a lot about gods—the gods of this world. We knew about the Catholic god or the Presbyterian god or the Methodist god or the Jehovah's Witness god, or the god of communism, or whatever it was ("there are Gods many," Paul said), but we did not know what the God of the Bible was like. That is what we have to come to know. We have to come to know what the God of the Bible is like. That is where eternal life resides. It is in knowing God. We did not know Him.

So if we did not know Him, we did not know what to look for. Even though we may have been searching for "God," we were not really searching for the God of the Bible because we had no idea what to look for. We would never have looked for a God that kept the Sabbath, or kept the Holy Days. That was "Jewish." Our minds have been prejudiced in many, many different directions. We never would have looked for the God of the Bible.

So the finding of God was not physically generated in any way. There are many ways to show this. Perhaps you can recall—those of you who are older in the church—the two goats that represent Satan and Christ on the Day of Atonement, and the symbolism there. After men chose the goats, God had them cast lots over them, and *He* chose the goat that represented Christ. He was telling you and me that we did not know the difference between Christ and Satan! He had to make the choice—He had to reveal which one was which. Satan appears as an angel of light. We, before God's calling, could not tell the difference between the two.

There are many places in the Bible where God shows this is the truth. John is showing it in another way—that we were not begotten by physical generation. We did not come to know God through any act of our own will, but rather it was something that came as a gift from God entirely.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

I have seen in commentaries where some of them have said they personally feel that this is the greatest verse in the Bible, because what John is saying is that God became a man. The Greeks—remember these things were primarily written for a Greek-educated audience; not exclusively for them, but that is the main thrust of the message that is here—could have never, in their wildest imaginations, have thought—with the background of philosophy, with the background of the mythology (as we call it today; the gods that they worshipped)—of God becoming a man. That was something that was too far beneath a God to do.

You remember the emanations thing; you remember their ideas on dualism, as we call it again today, that the flesh is evil—they could not even associate a perfectly pure and righteous God becoming something that was (what they considered) inherently evil. God "became flesh and

dwelt among us."

When you add to that some of the things it says in the Bible about the flesh—this word that is used here is the exact same word that the apostle Paul uses in his books to designate human nature. What John is saying here is that the Word—that is, the *Logos*, the pre-existent One, the Creator—became subject to humanity in its fullness, in the exact same way that you and I are subject to humanity.

He was subject to the pulls of the flesh. He *could* have been influenced by Satan. He had the desires. The possibility was there for Him to have the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. He was not withheld from any of those things. It is awfully hard to think of God encumbering Himself with humanity. But there was a reason why it had to be done.

Hebrews 2:14-17 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same [those things were not withheld from Him], that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren [here comes the reason], that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

In other words, in order to be the payment—in order to be man's Savior—He had to be a man. But He had to be a man who was more than a man. He had to be encumbered with humanity, and yet He had to be God in the flesh. He had to be both at the same time. So the pulls of the flesh could not be withheld from Him. He had to endure that. He had to overcome it. He had to be able to rise above the influences of Satan the Devil in order to become the propitiation—that is, the payment—for the sins of the people, ~~and~~ also so that He might be prepared to be a merciful and faithful High Priest.

This has very much to do with your calling and mine, because you too have been called to become a priest. We are to become kings and priests. This is something that I am going to be expounding a little bit later on in the series of sermons I am giving, as to why we go through what we go through. What we go through is very similar to what Christ went through. As He was called to be High Priest, we are called to be priests under Him. So we have to go through trials similar to what He went through. In order to qualify for what He is, He had to go through what we go through.

Hebrews 2:18 For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

God is preparing us to aid others, even as Christ was prepared to aid us. We are being prepared to be a priest, to aid others who are coming along later.

So the Word became flesh—and everything that "flesh" might mean, He became.

John 1:14 [A]nd dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Let us look at the word "glory" for just a bit. John is saying here that the powerful, dynamic creative Word—the One who is responsible for life, the One who is responsible for being the agent of Creation, that guiding and controlling Word, the One who was still sitting at the controls of the universe—He became a human being, "and we beheld His glory."

What is he talking about, "His glory"? Remember, it has to be something that pertains to this calling that we have. It also has to pertain to what He *is*. Certainly he did not mean that we saw His glory in terms of brilliance, as in something that radiated from Him. Certainly God has a glory like that. No man can look upon the face of God and live. There it is referring to this eminence of power that radiates out from Him, which the light symbolizes. Jesus did not radiate any of that during His lifetime, except for that brief period when He was up on the mount—the Transfiguration—and Peter, James, and John saw that for just a brief period of time. They saw some of the glory of Jesus Christ as He would be in His Kingdom.

But "glory" here is referring, in one sense, to the *Shekinah*. Do you know what the Shekinah was? The Shekinah in the Old Testament literally means "in the presence." I know the word "presence" there is correct, and I am pretty sure it means "in the presence." Every once in a while you will read in the Old Testament that the "glory of God" settled on the tabernacle, or the "glory of God" was seen on the mount, or "we beheld the glory of God" or something, and what it meant was that God was present with them. So He gave them a brief glimpse of some of that which radiated out from Him.

As I said before, Christ did not radiate anything, and yet this is a direct reference to the fact that God was present with His people. "God came to His own . . . and we beheld His glory. What did men see of the glory of God? They saw God in the flesh—they saw how He lived. That is the whole purpose of the book of John. It is to reveal God, and how He lived.

When we say "how He lived," we are talking about the attitude He exhibited. We see His mercy when somebody comes to Him sick. It says He healed them all. You begin to see what the mind of God is. You see His attitude toward His creation—that He wants to help it out of its struggle; that He wants to lead it to a better way of life. He wants to provide for it in every way. So we see God feeding the 4,000 and feeding the 5,000. Again, we see His attitude toward people—His compassion—and that He wants to provide for people in every instance. We see Him teaching. We have the words of life, and so we see God guiding His people, telling them the way of life that is going to work. We see the glory of God in every area.

God is revealed in the life of Jesus Christ. We see His glory. So what we have here, then, is the manifestation of the divine character. That is His glory. It is the manifestation of the divine character. John is not speaking here mystically. He is not spiritualizing this away. He is saying that we literally see it. It is something that was beheld by men's eyes.

Again, there is something here that we have to relate to the purpose of the writing of this book.

Remember I told you a bit about docetism. *Docet* comes from a Greek verb—*dokein*—that means "to be" or "seems to be." These people thought that, "Well, maybe this was God, but it was not *really* God. We were looking at a phantom. He only *seemed* to be God; He was not really there." John was writing so these Greek people would understand; yes, this literally was God, and we saw Him. He is not answering the whole question at this time, but he is letting these people know this literally was God in the flesh. He was genuine in every way.

The next word (an important word for the book of John): "He was full of grace." Grace has two meanings to it. There is a primary meaning, and there is a secondary meaning that kind of blends together with the primary meaning. Its primary meaning is something that is given but undeserved; a gift. It is something that is not achieved, but rather something that is given. It carries with it this secondary application—that what is given is beautiful. It is a gift given that is beautiful. It is winsome; it is holy; it is lovely; it is attractive. The gifts that are given are undeserved and attractive.

This Jesus of Nazareth was *full* of grace and truth. It is the *fullness* of it. This goes right back to the beginning of verse 14—"the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The *Logos*, the pre-existent One, the Creator God became flesh. We did not see a carbon copy. We saw it in its totality *except for* its radiating glory. I want to prove that to you. Look how Paul backs up what John said (He was *full* of grace and truth):

Colossians 1:19 For it pleased the Father that in Him *all the fullness* should dwell.

Not part; not three-quarters; not half; but all of the fullness.

Colossians 2:8-9 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead [divine nature] bodily.

That is pretty clear. I have a footnote here that says "bodily form." "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form." We did not get cheated at all. John and Paul used exactly the same word for "full" or "fullness." It is exactly the same word. It means the totality.

He was full of all of the beauty, all of the gifts of God. In addition to that, it says that He was full of truth. This again can be taken in several different ways. It can be used in the sense of "a teacher of truth"—one who said truth, which is certainly what He did. He gave people the way of life. He gave them the truth about God, but He did it in a special way. It is not truth in the sense that $2 + 2 = 4$. Anybody, anywhere, at any time, can utter that kind of truth—mathematical formulas or things scientific that work according to law, such as the physical laws of this universe.

What Christ was full of was the truth about how to make decisions in regard to relationships, in regard to God, in regard to other people. He gave us the truth on how to conduct our lives. He gave us the truth on what is important in life, and what is unimportant in life, or secondary in

life.

He gave us principles and laws by which to judge when we come to a fork in the road, when we come to a "Y", when we come to a crossroad—"Which is the right way to turn?" That is the kind of truth that He was full of. Many people before Him came bearing truth. We could even say the great heroes of the Bible—Moses came bearing truth. But he did not have truth in the way Christ had truth. Christ was the bearer of the fullness of it. Now we have direction.

Christ said in John 14, "I am the way, and the truth." This probably reveals more than all the other applications of truth that we could make. What He meant was, "I am the embodiment of truth." What He meant here was that He was not dealing with anything that was abstract.

A lot of us have trouble with things that are abstract, and so a person can describe something to you—as I am attempting to do now; I am attempting to describe something to you—and though it is truth, it is not always easy to grasp, because the words that I use do not bounce off you all in exactly the same way. So we have difficulty grasping things that are coming out of a person's mouth. But what He meant was, "What you *see's* truth." There is nothing abstract about something you can see. He embodied it in the way that He lived.

Men no longer have much of an excuse before God. Before, men could argue: "Well, there was Moses. He was a pretty good example, but I know that he did some things that were wrong, and he did not always have the right attitude, and there were times when his faith broke down. And then there was David. David was a man after Your own heart, but, God, look at what David did!"

We could go through the Bible like that, and can we say that each of those great heroes of the past that we could bring up *embodied* truth? They *had* truth, but they did not embody it. Christ embodied it. Everything about Him was true. There was never, ever in His life a shadow of doubt. Nothing that He ever did would ever cast any kind of aspersion on His Father.

Everything He did embodied truth. He is unique. No other human being who has ever lived can ever make that statement. So He could add to it, "I am the way," because "I am truth. All you have to do is follow Me." He said, "I am the light." What does light do? It guides and reveals. It all hinges on what He was. He embodied truth.

That is John's purpose in this book. He is going to show us what truth is as a Person lived it. He is not going to be dealing in things abstract. He is going to report exactly what happened. So God leaves us virtually defenseless. Maybe we can plead some ignorance, but He can always turn to us and say, "Did you not read the Book? There was the embodiment of truth right there." Remember, what He revealed to us was the way to go. That kind of truth had never been given to man in that quality and that intensity ever before or ever since. So He was full of the grace—the gifts of God—and He was truth.

John 1:15 John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.'"

He could mean this in a couple of ways. We know of course that John was preparing the way for

Christ. That is indisputable. But John is deprecating himself. It could mean in one sense, "I am the older of the two, but the younger is going to supercede me." John, His cousin, was six months older than Jesus. That is one application. Another application is, "Though I am older than He is, He is really older than I am. He is superior in every way, because He is the One who was there before man was—before time was." He could mean it in that sense.

He could also mean it in the sense that, "Well, right now I am greater than He is, in the sense that I have a greater following than He does, because I have been out here preaching—preparing the way—but it will not be long before He is going to supercede me, and I am going to have to give way to Him, and He is going to be the one who is going to capture the minds and imaginations and the crowds and so forth of the people." In either case, John was deprecating himself, and pointing to his cousin, that He was going to be greater.

John 1:16 And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.

That is an interesting statement. It seems rather strange to our English-hearing ears. I think in the King James it says "grace for grace" as well. In the Greek, it literally means "grace instead of grace." I guess the translators were a little bit hard put as to try to make any sense out of it. Again, remember what the word "grace" means. It means "gift." It means "beautiful, attractive gift." It means "charming gift."

We have to kind of extrapolate out from that to understand what he meant here. "And of His fullness"—He was the fullness of the divine nature bodily—"we have all received . . ." Whatever these gifts were that He possessed, He has given them to you and me. One of the things that He mentions that He gives to men in Ephesians 4 is the ministry. It says that He "led captivity captive," and He gave gifts unto men. Then Paul proceeds to name the gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. What he is saying there is that Christ gives the ability to communicate to people—to teach to people—in order to carry out the functions of the Body—at least one of the functions of the Body.

We can read in I Corinthians 12 of the gifts that are given by the Spirit of God. He mentions wisdom, knowledge, understanding, discernment, speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, and it is one Spirit giving all of these gifts so the whole Body can profit.

We can read in Romans 12 of some of the gifts that are given, such as the ability to perform services to the congregation. Paul goes on to say that everybody ought to be performing their function within the Body. We ought to be making use of the gifts that are given.

That is what John is referring to here. All of us have received gifts from Christ. Now, he says, "gift upon gift." Or we might say, "One wonder leading to another." That is actually an alternate way of saying this thing. He is saying that Christ is an inexhaustible source of wonder, of fresh experiences, of beauty, of power, of gifts. He is the fountain-source. Christ said, "Without Me, you can do nothing." He is the trunk of the tree. Without Him we can do nothing. This is what John is alluding to. God has given gifts to all who have the Spirit of God in order for them to perform their function within the Body, and to enable them to have the power to become sons of God in its fullness.

We have become attached to an inexhaustible source of wisdom, of understanding, of power, of love, of joy, of peace—you see, all of the fruits of God's Spirit; whatever one needs—they are there, to be used to glorify God, to attain to the Kingdom of God, and perform our function within the Body. We have an inexhaustible source there.

There is another application here that we can go to. Here the reference is more to Christ Himself in terms of what He has done for man. Here we enter into the realm of healing. The books of the Bible reveal these gifts—wonder upon wonder—that He performed for the benefit of men, whether it be the healing of people, the casting out of demons, the walking on the water, the feeding of the 4,000 or 5,000, or whatever. The book of John ends with John saying that He did so many things that there are not enough books to contain what He did.

That is what he is talking about here. "Grace upon grace"—just an unending flow of it. Now look, brethren. This does no good unless you see that you are a part of this. It is not practical; it is not helpful; it does not increase your faith unless you see that God wants you to understand that you can *rely* upon Him, and that what He has done for others He will do for you and me within the context of what His purpose is—what He is drawing us toward; what He wants to develop—you see, as we yield to Him.

The inexhaustible source of power, of love, of sound mindedness—it is there, and He will not withhold it if we will but yield to Him, and allow Him to work through us, and trust Him, by faith, that He will pile wonder upon wonder. That is what He wants to do. He glorifies—He brings honor and praise on—Himself through you and me, even as He did through Christ. "Grace upon grace," or "grace for grace," or "grace instead of grace," "one wonder leading to another"—it is a continuous chain of fresh and wonderful experiences.

John 1:16-17 And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

My eye picked up something else here that I should have said about this "grace for grace." It also means that God is opening up by His Spirit these gifts that He gives. There are always new horizons for the expansion of understanding, of enlightenment, of grasping what lies before us. God is an unending source of revelation. Gift upon gift. Grace upon grace. If nothing else—if we are yielding to Him, if we are overcoming and growing—He is going to educate us into what He is like, and what lies before us, and He is going to fill us with hope, and He is going to fill us with faith, and He is going to fill us with vision. He is going to give us understanding. So at the very least those things should be increasing—always new horizons opening up before us.

Back to verse 17. "For the law was given through Moses. . ." You will notice that the word "but" is in italics. It was supplied by the translators, and they have undoubtedly supplied that with a bit of prejudice in their minds because it conjures up visions of controversy, like one is opposed to the other. "Law is *opposed to* grace." It is not a very good insertion. The word "and" would have been much better. "For the law was given through Moses, *and* grace and truth. . ." Christ agreed with Moses. He was not opposed to Moses. It was not a "but." There is not an opposition here. They went hand in glove, as we are going to see in a bit.

John 1:17b-18 . . . [and] grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
No one has seen God at any time. . .

This may give you some understanding as to why John said what he did, now that we have just expounded what we did there. No one has seen God at any time—how are we going to know what He is like? We get back to that abstract picture. When we think of God, we have to think in abstract terms. When we think of God, we are "looking through a glass darkly," because we have never seen Him. We have never seen Him in action. So our mind has trouble comprehending what God is like.

John 1:18 No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son,
who is in the bosom of the Father . . .

"Bosom of the father" is a Hebraic term that indicates extreme closeness, just like you do with your baby. You just hug them right in. It denotes the closest kind of intimacy. What he is describing is if somebody is this close to God—if He is that intimate—surely He ought to know what God was like. Well, here is One who is qualified to show us. That is what John is saying.

John 1:18c . . . He has declared Him.

He declared Him verbally, and He declared Him with His life.

God has boxed man into a corner. Some day He is going to have to say to men—He may not do it literally—but God is going to say, "You had every opportunity. I gave you My creation as witness that I am. And I gave you My Son as witness to what I live like." So man is without excuse.

If you do enough reading in history books like I do, you will find even the most skeptical of people—people like Voltaire or Rousseau; people who were against Christianity—even they recognize that Jesus Christ—Jesus of Nazareth—was the most sterling character that ever lived. Even if they will not admit that He is God, they admit that nobody else has ever lived like Christ lived. Even the doubters and the scoffers are willing to admit that. That is what John is saying: He has declared Him by His life.

There has to be a basis for us believing in this individual. You will recall that last time we had a Bible Study I gave you that list of sections that some commentators had broken the book of John down into—things relating to belief or to faith. The very first thing was "The Proposition for Faith." See, "Here is my proposition. Here is the basis. Here is what I am proposing to you—proposing that you should believe in." The proposition is this: this Person that I am asking you to believe in—this Jesus of Nazareth; the One that you are going to trust and rely on—He *is* God. That is the proposition."

That is what we are going to examine. Is it a fair proposition in the sense that Jesus really *is* God? Is He? What I am saying here is that *who* Christ is is equally important, and perhaps more

important than what He has done or what He has said. They all kind of go together. If Jesus is not God, we are in trouble. That is what I am saying. So, what is it? Was He a lunatic? Or was He really the Lord? Was He a liar? Or was He the greatest truth-teller that ever was?

We need to begin to examine some of that, so we are going to be spending the remainder of this Bible Study, and maybe some of the next Bible Study, in providing a basis for faith—a basis for believing that Jesus of Nazareth really is who He is. I am doing this so that your faith will be increased; so that you will have good, practical things to look at, and to know that the claims that are made for Christ, and the claims that He makes for Himself have solid basis—because if they do not, our faith is in vain. He really does have to be God, or we have all been bilked—we have been fooled.

We are going to start with some of the writers. I am going to give you a lot of scriptures (mostly in the New Testament) but believe me, brethren; I have only scratched the surface. But we will give you enough so that you will understand where we are coming from here. By "we," I am talking here about the ministry, I am talking about the church, I am talking about the writers of the Bible.

Let us begin in Luke 1. I think this is as good a place to begin as any. We have already seen the proposition—the proposition that Christ is God. Who has proposed this? In the book that we are reading there, John the apostle has proposed that. But we also see the same thing popping up—to a lesser intensity; to a lesser degree—in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. They all made the same basic claims, but John really made this particular one the heart and core of what he is writing here.

Luke 1:1 Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us . . .

Luke was saying the same thing that I was here, in a way. This thing is being noised about—everyone generally accepts it—but do not we need an orderly account of things? That is what he is going to say.

Luke 1:2-3 . . . just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us [the emphasis is on the word "eyewitnesses"], it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed [That is what I am doing here].

The point that is made here is that the people who wrote these things were eyewitnesses. They were not receiving second- and third- and fourth- and fifth- and sixth- and seventh- and eighth-hand accounts. They were not things that were battered by the countless telling and re-telling of things. They are repeating to you and me what they saw with their own eyes, what they heard with their own ears, what they experienced in their own lives.

Just to make sure that you understand that what is reported is reported accurately, God gave us four different accounts of the same thing. His own Word says, "In the mouth of two or three witnesses, let everything be established." But God gave us *four* witnesses. What He expects us to do is leap back and forth between all these four witnesses, compare the accounts, and see if there are any inconsistencies, whether there are any differences between the accounts that tend to set them against one other. They were eyewitnesses, so we are receiving first-hand testimony.

II Peter 1:16 For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

Again, not a second-hand account at all. Let us go to Acts 2:22. This one is really interesting. Peter is speaking:

Acts 2:22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— . . ."

Did you get that? Peter *accused* his hearers, and these hearers were not converted Christians. They were the people who were witness to the ministry of Christ, but were not converted. He is talking about the common, ordinary guy on the street. They *knew* what was done in their midst.

John 19:35 And he who has seen has testified [John is talking about himself], and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe.

This next one is really a good one. Paul is on his way to Rome, but he is before King Agrippa. He is making his defense before King Agrippa for the things that he has done and said in Jerusalem.

Acts 26:24-26 Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!" But he said, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. For the king, before whom I also speak freely, *knows these things*; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was *not done in a corner*.

We have three principles here by which we can understand and increase our faith. First of all, what the writers of the Bible gave was firsthand testimony. They were eyewitnesses. They heard it firsthand. That is number one.

Number Two: the writers of the Bible appealed to the knowledge of their hearers. That lent authority to what they said because their hearers could not refute it—because they saw it too.

They heard it too.

Thus, number three: they could not afford to manipulate because they would have been exposed as frauds by those non-Christians who were also eyewitnesses.

What about Jesus of Nazareth? Did He live? Is there any record of Him in history outside of the Bible? Well, it seems as if every year new discoveries are made regarding writings of ancient peoples writing about it. I am going to give you just a brief overview of historians, philosophers, who wrote about Christ within about 100 years after. Most of these people—maybe "most" is a little bit too strong; but many of them—wrote *against* Him. But never once do they say that He never lived. He was *very* real.

Tacitus, a Roman historian in the year 112 AD, in the writing of a history, mentioned Jesus of Nazareth as a real character, a real personality who lived and walked, and was founder of that heresy (he called it) called "Christianity."

Lucian, another Roman historian writing during the same period; again writing against Christianity, acknowledged that Jesus of Nazareth lived.

Two different times in *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus, who is probably the one who is best known by church members, mentioned Jesus of Nazareth.

In 20 AD, another Roman by the name of Suetonius, who was a court official under the emperor Hadrian, was writing about how he had persecuted the Christians, and he mentioned Christ in it, again affirming that He was a real character. He was a real personality.

Pliny the Younger was a Roman governor of Bithynia. Pliny, in 112 AD, wrote how he was persecuting the Christians, and again he acknowledged that Jesus of Nazareth lived, and that He was the founder of this religion.

This is an interesting one. This fellow is a Syrian, whose name is Mara Bar-Serapion. He wrote a letter to his son. (This thing was recently found.) It is dated in what we know as 73 AD, which is right after the destruction of the Temple, and he mentioned Jesus of Nazareth as being someone who ought to be followed.

Justin Martyr was a Roman. He became a "Christian" (I do not know if he really was a Christian). In writing an essay in defense of Christianity, called "Against Celsius", he appeals, for authority, to Pontius Pilate's record—his report—in the archives which were in Rome. He said, "It is there. You can go read it yourself (Pontius Pilate's report of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ)." That was in 150 AD, and he told this Celsius to "go there and check it yourself." I guess Rome had their bureaucracies, and all the reports that they had to make too, so it was in the archives.

The Jews, in the Talmud, mention Jesus of Nazareth. They do not mention Him at all as being a mythical character, or as someone who did not exist. They hated His guts, and they did everything they possibly could to destroy the reputation of Him, and that is what the writing is.

Incidentally, in their writings there is one thing that they always attack. They try to undermine who He said He was: God. Because if He is God, everything He says has to be obeyed. So that is the one thing they always try to destroy. You know how they try to do it? By getting people to

believe that the virgin birth did not occur. They felt that if they could destroy any aspect of Christ's image, they could destroy Christ—and they felt that was the easiest one to attack. So they castigated Mary as being an adulteress, and they castigated Christ as being a bastard.

It is also in the Mishna, which is a commentary on the Hebrew law, and He is mentioned there in much the same light as He is in the Talmud.

There is one thing that Jesus did in reference to identifying Himself that nobody else—no really recognized religious leader—did before or after Him. It is *going* to be done, but Confucius never claimed to be God. Buddha never claimed to be God. Muhammad never claimed to be God. Moses, Paul, never claimed to be God. No really recognizable religious leader has ever claimed to be God. Jesus Christ claimed to be God, and in the right way He challenged men to prove otherwise. I am sure that He hoped that they would challenge it in a positive way and prove that He *was* God, rather than try to prove that He was *not* God. We are going to see this as we go along here.

You know that in II Thessalonians there is one coming who is going to set himself up claiming to *be* God. This is going to be a recognizable religious leader. But up until this time, it has not occurred yet. Lunatics have claimed to be God. But no religious leader who had an apparently sound mind ever claimed to be God. But Christ did.

II Timothy 1:8-12 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

Can you say that with Paul—that you are not ashamed? That you know that Jesus of Nazareth is God? That He is everything that He claims to be? That in Him dwelt all the fullness of the divine nature bodily? That we are not cheated in any way—that every claim that He made for Himself was absolutely true? That every way He acted was exactly right?

That He was the embodiment of truth in every area of life—every facet of character; every word that He spoke? That He was the revelation of God, showing you and me what the mind of God is, what the heart of God is, what the character of God is, what the purpose of God is? So that as we grow and overcome, we can come to know what our decision needs to be in every case, in order to be subject to the will of God.

II Timothy 1:12b-13 . . . nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know

whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him [our life, our time, our energy] Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

The historicity of Jesus is established beyond doubt—I mean the fact that He really did live, that He was a man, that He walked among us, that He held a job, that He preached for 3 ½ years, that He was crucified, that He was the founder of Christianity. So He cannot be rationalized away. I know that you do not want to do that. And yet, brethren, we do just that. I know that you do not want to do it, but we do, because so frequently, when push comes to shove, when we get into a tight spot, when our faith is really on the line, and we have to trust God, or else—so frequently we rationalize Him away.

We rationalize His power. We rationalize His intent. We begin to think, "It does not really matter this time," or "Maybe God does not really expect me to do that," or "Maybe this time it will not be so bad—I will make up for it another time," "I know God is merciful, and I will slide by." You see, you do not want to do that, but you do do it. You rationalize it away.

That is why I am going through this. I want you to see that there is solid basis for believing what Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John say. Jesus of Nazareth really *is* God. There is no need to be ashamed. What He has shown that He will do for those people who He walked, and talked, and lived among, and worked with, and healed, and whatever, He will do for you and me too. He will do it. That is why Paul said, "I *know* who it is that I believe. He will preserve what I have committed to Him." We have committed our life.

His existence and His life are just as well established as Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great, Augustus Caesar, or any great figure of the past. If I really wanted to go into this in detail, I could show you how well documented the Bible is. Do you realize—I will give you just one idea—in the whole New Testament, there are only 20 words that are in question? Think about that. I forget how many words there are in the New Testament, but there are only twenty words that are really in question. No other author of any book can even begin to approach to that—I mean any book that was written as long ago as the Bible was.

Do you know what the average length of time is between the autograph—that is what the author writes—and the first extant copy that was made by somebody else later on is? With the Bible, it is less than 125 years. The closest of any Greek writer was 900 years between the writing of the original piece and the first copy that we are able to find out of antiquities. There are around 1200 and 1400 years between the writing of Homer's *Iliad* and the copies that we have of it. The Bible is so accurate, it is beyond doubt. Do we trust His Word? That is a decision that each person has to make.

Let us begin to zero in on this. What was the main issue in all of Christ's life? They could not deny what He did. They could not deny what He said. I have already told you what it was. What they tried to deny was *who* He was. The miracles, the healings, the casting out of demons—they could not refute that. They could not refute the feeding of the 4,000 or the 5,000; there were too many witnesses to that. They could not refute, basically, the truth of His teachings, either.

So what the Jews were always trying to do was trying to undermine His authority by trying to break His claim that He was God.

Let us go to the book of Mark 14. I am going to spend the rest of the time here, and it looks like it is going to take the whole next Bible Study. I am going to show you how the Bible shows that Jesus was who He claimed to be. This is when Jesus was on trial. I am reading this so you understand what the issue was.

Mark 14:60-64 And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying, "Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?" But He kept silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, "Are You the Christ [are you the Messiah?], the Son of the Blessed?" [That was the same as saying, "Are you the Son of God?"] Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power [that is another reference to God], and coming with the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?" And they all condemned Him to be worthy of death.

Christ actually condemned Himself—we will see a little bit more of this later—because they were having trouble proving anything against Him. They could not find anything wrong with His behavior. They could not find anything wrong with His teaching. So in a sense He had to condemn Himself. We are going to see where He said, "No one takes My life from Me; I lay it down." So He admitted to them that He was the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

I want you to notice very carefully that He did not say, "I am *a* Son." In every case, He says, "I am *the* Son," meaning that He was the only one. He did not mean it in the sense that "I am merely begotten." The way He said it left no doubt in the Jews' minds that He was making Himself equal with God. He was not saying here that He was a son of God as you and I are sons of God. He was saying, "I am equal with God." The way that He said that left absolutely no doubt for the Jews that He had committed the crime of blasphemy.

If you would look in the Old Testament, you would find that that was punishable by stoning. But because of the political situation, they could not carry it out. They had to leave it the way it was, and let the Romans carry out the death penalty. But He made very sure that they understood.

I am going to add to this a little more. Let us go back to the book of Matthew. I want you to see Matthew's account added to this. We will see several verses here, just so you see that He made a distinction.

Matthew 25:34 Then the King will say to those on His right hand,
'Come, you blessed of *My Father* . . .'

When you pray, how do you pray? If you use that, you always say "*our* Father," do you not? Jesus *never* said that. To the best of my knowledge, you can never find that anywhere. He

always said, "My Father." Not "ours," but "My." He never put Himself on the same level as the other Jews. He always made that distinction. "It is *My* Father."

He told them, in dozens of different ways, "I am God." That is what infuriated them. It left them with no alternative. They either had to accept what He said and what He was, or they had to knowingly reject Him. As Mr. Contardi said in his sermon in Glendale last week, these people are being held responsible by God. How responsible, we do not know. But they are responsible for rejecting Him. There *wasknowledge there*. They were not ignorant of what Christ was saying. It was not being done in a corner. Even the pagan Agrippa, Paul said, knew these things. They were not done in a corner.

Matthew 26:29 But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.

Here He had a wonderful opportunity to say "our Father" because He was talking to the disciples. You see, He did not even put *them* in the same category. Again, even to them it was "My Father," not "our Father." He was letting them know.

John 5:17 But Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working."

Notice the way He said that—"My Father." Notice how the Jews picked up on that:

John 5:18 Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.

See, that is the issue. If they can destroy His claim that He is the Messiah—if they can destroy His claim that He is God—they destroy His works. They destroy what He said, because He merely becomes another man. If they *cannot* destroy it—if they cannot break that—then they are confronted: we either have to obey it, or reject it. If we reject it, we are guilty as charged. If we obey it . . . that is humbling. You know what they chose.

This confronts us, too. Maybe not in quite the same kind of situation, but it is the issue. Is Jesus worthy to be worshipped and obeyed? Is He worthy of that honor?

John 10:30-33 "I and My Father are one." Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?" The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God."

When He said, "I and My Father are one," He did not mean here that "We are the same person." He meant—the Greek makes it very clear—that they were one nature, one essence, one mind. They were equal.

Are you beginning to get the picture? It was really not what Christ *did* that was on trial. It is who He was—His identity. That is what was put on trial.

Matthew 27:43 He trusted in God [here are the scornful words that came while He was hanging there on the stake]; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.' [That was the issue.]

I am only scratching the surface so you will have a basis for understanding what the issue was.

John 8:58 Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."

Do you see how He keeps coming at them from every different direction? "My Father." "I AM."

John 8:59 Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

There is something here that is interesting, and it is right at the beginning of verse 58. My Bible says, "Most assuredly." The King James says, "Verily, verily." That is the equivalent of us saying today, "Amen, amen." It was the strongest affirmation a Hebrew could make—a double affirmation. They would not have used the word "affirmation"; they would have used the word "oath." A double oath. What Jesus used was the very strongest affirmation that was available in (probably) the Aramaic language. So He was saying, "I say to you, and I say it again, I AM." It would be interesting to know the inflection that was in His voice here—whether it came out like thunder, or whether He said, "I say to you, I AM." I do not think He said it like that at all.

To make matters even worse, He uttered the name that the Jews would not name—that they would not say. He uttered the incommunicable name—the YHVH; the Tetragrammaton. However it is pronounced, I do not know: Yahweh, or whatever it is; Yahwah, Jehovah, Yahveh, or whatever—that is the name He used.

Do you see what He was telling those people? They would immediately think of today what we think of as Exodus 3:14, where God said to Moses, "I AM that I AM." What that essentially means is "the Self-Existent One." It means, "I AM—there is no beginning, there is no middle, there is no end." He just always is the self-existent One.

He was claiming by that that He was their Creator. He was the one who knelt down in the clay and formed Adam, and breathed into his mouth the breath of life. He was the one who created Eve. He was the one who spoke to Cain and to Abel and to Abraham and Isaac and

Jacob, and spoke from the mountain. They knew immediately what He was claiming to be. They knew what it says in Isaiah 43:10. Let us go to that—that is a good verse. Just apply this to yourself.

Isaiah 43:10-12 "You are My witnesses," says the Lord, "And My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the Lord, and besides Me there is no savior. [This was Jesus of Nazareth speaking.] I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, and there was no foreign god among you; therefore you are My witnesses," says the Lord, "that I am God.

That is our responsibility to the world. The work of Elijah was to reveal the true God to Israel. That is what the work of Elijah is doing. That is what God expects you and me to do in our lives. We have to grow to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. We cannot do that unless we are motivated that we are really copying *thereality*. Not a facsimile; not a Moses, not a Paul, not a Peter, not a Herbert Armstrong, not a Joseph Tkach—it is God who is our model. Jesus of Nazareth.