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Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things. (Philippians 4:8)

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The skeptic through prejudice rejects the only primary source we have for the historical Jesus and is thus both confused and ignorant of Christ. He does not accept the facts of Jesus' life, does not understand their significance, and fails to acknowledge who the Lord is. His stubborn adherence to unbelief leaves him incapable of knowing the real Jesus.

The informed Christian accepts the Jesus of the gospels, not through blind, unreasoning faith, but because of the evidence from multiple, unimpeachable, primary sources. Thus, Christians alone truly know the historical Jesus, the real Jesus, the risen Lord of glory. He is the Christ the Son of the living God, God who became flesh and dwelt among us.

Skeptics vainly inquire, Will the real Jesus please rise?
Christians triumphantly declare, He is risen! - Keith Sharp

QUESTION FROM AMERICAN SAMOA

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Question

God doesn't dwell with sinners, but Jesus the Son of God came & dwelt among the people in the flesh?

Answer

God is "holy, holy, holy" (Revelation 4:8), absolute in holiness, i.e., separation from sin. He cannot be tempted to sin (James 1:13). He is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness" (Habakkuk 1:13). He cannot fellowship (share) in sin nor sinners in their sin (1 John 1:5-6).

Jesus, even when He walked upon the earth, was and is "the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31) and "my Lord and my God" (John 20:28). But Jesus not only walked among sinners, He sought out sinners (Luke 15:2).

But Jesus is not only God. When He came to earth He "became flesh" (John 1:1-3, 14). He became a man (1 Timothy 2:5), the Son of man (Hebrews 2:6-9). He came to the earth as a man in order to seek and to save lost sinners (Luke 19:10).

When the Pharisees and scribes complained that Jesus "receives sinners and eats with them," He related three parables to illustrate the attitude of God toward sinners: The Lost Sheep (Luke 15:3-7), The Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10), and The Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32). Each has the same primary point - "there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7).

God is "holy, holy, holy." But He is also love (1 John 4:8, 16). "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

THE BEATITUDES (7)

Patrick Farish | Lancaster, Texas, USA

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." (Matthew 5:9)

Who are "the peacemakers," according to the teaching of Jesus? They are those who, being justified by faith, have "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1-2).

They bear the fruit of the Spirit, "love, joy, **peace**, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." Possibly peacemakers are included in this list because "against such things there is no law" (Galatians 5:22).

They pursue peace, Hebrews 12:14. They do not always achieve it, but they are always receptive to it, Romans 12:18.

James writes that "the wisdom from above is first pure, then

peaceable..." (3:17), and next says "a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (3:18). Those who make peace, reap righteousness.

Paul speaks in Galatians 3:26-27 of those who in Christ Jesus "are called sons of God through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Obedience to the gospel of Christ is part of the process of being "peacemakers."

MIRACLES, SIGNS, AND WONDERS (1)

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

Jesus' last words to his disciples are known as "The Great Commission," which is recorded in Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15-18. Verses 17-20 in Mark's record have been used by some denominations as proof that these miraculous manifestations are still in operation today. It is the purpose of this study to examine these claims.

These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed..."

The apostle Paul enumerated some of these signs or miraculous gifts in First Corinthians 12:8-10:

"For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues."

Jesus had earlier in his ministry promised his twelve disciples that miraculous powers would be given to them.

"And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give" (Matt. 10:7-8). "for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now...but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both

in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:5, 7).

It is generally agreed that this baptism in the Holy Spirit was a reference to receiving the ability to perform miracles.

How was the power to perform miracles acquired?

Jesus told the disciples that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. We see this happening on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 at the fulfillment of prophecy in the establishment of the church or kingdom of God.

“And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance” (Acts 2:2-4).

We are aware that the disciples had been able to perform miracles before as was cited in Matthew 10, but there is another aspect of this power which the disciples evidently had not had before—the ability to pass on the gift of miracles to others. We have the record of events that transpired in Samaria when the gospel was being preached there. Among the converts was Simon, who had been practicing sorcery.

“Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed. Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:13-19).

We remember that Peter severely rebuked Simon, upon which Simon repented and asked forgiveness. But the point to be made is seen in that fact that Simon came to understand that these miraculous gifts were “bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands.” We see the same thing with respect to Paul and young Timothy: “For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (2

Timothy 1:6). The only other reference to the reception of any miraculous gifts is in the case of the household of Cornelius in Acts 10 as Peter was preaching to them.

"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, 'Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?'" (Vs. 44-47)

It is significant to note that it had been perhaps nine or ten years since Pentecost in Acts 2, and multiplied thousands have been baptized into Christ during this period of time. But with respect to Holy Spirit baptism, Peter had to go all the way back to Pentecost to find a similar experience. Evidently none of the thousands who became Christians from Acts 2 to until Acts 10 had experienced this. And we find no like experience after Acts 10.

What was unique about Cornelius? He was the first Gentile convert. We know that Gentiles were "unclean" to the Jews, and God is using this occasion to prove in a powerful demonstration that Gentiles are now accepted. Peter expounded on this as he related the event to fellow Jewish Christians in Acts 11:15-18.

"And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way? When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, 'Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.'"

The evidence shows that baptism in the Holy Spirit occurred only twice—once upon the apostles in Acts 2 and once upon the household of Gentile Cornelius in Acts 10. All others who may have possessed miraculous gifts received it through the laying on of hands of the apostles—Acts 8:13-19 and 2 Timothy 1:6.

As a further indication that only the apostles had the ability to impart to others gifts through the laying on of hands, we note that in Acts 8, it is evident that Philip (the evangelist, not Philip the apostle) did not have the power to pass on miraculous gifts, even though he had the power to perform

miracles himself. That had to wait until Peter and John arrived (Acts 8:13-19). This then brings the question as to how those who claim miraculous powers today obtained them. The Scripture shows (1) that only the apostles and the household of Cornelius received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and (2) that only the apostles had the ability to pass on the power to impart miraculous powers to others through the laying on of hands, and (3) those people have all died. Therefore the Bible provides no other way for people today to receive miraculous powers.

What was the purpose of miraculous gifts?

It should be obvious to all that the main purpose of gifts was not to heal the sick in the world or give sight to all the blind, etc. If that was the purpose, then there was a great failure. Christ could have spoken one word, and every malady in the whole world would have been eliminated. Christ's purpose in performing miracles was to establish his credentials and identity as the Messiah, the Son of God, not to heal all the ills in the world.

The familiar story of Christ healing the paralytic man in Matthew 9:2-8 illustrates this clearly.

"And they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, 'Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven.'" And some of the scribes said to themselves, 'This fellow blasphemes.' And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, 'Why are you thinking evil in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" -- then He said to the paralytic, 'Get up, pick up your bed and go home.' And he got up and went home. But when the crowds saw this, they were awestruck, and glorified God, who had given such authority to men."

There had been others through the years who claimed they were the Messiah. Gamaliel had so testified before the counsel as he cautioned them as they were about to inflict punishment upon some of the apostles (cf. Acts 5:34ff). And now we have Jesus claiming that he is the true one. When Christ told the man his sins were forgiven, there was no black cloud over his head that dispersed or any other visible sign of this happening, and Christ understood that his words alone could not establish his claim. But he knew a way to get their attention."But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" --then He said to the paralytic, 'Get up, pick up your bed and go home.'"

The main purpose of the miracle was not to cure the paralytic, but to certify his identity. On another occasion

when John the Baptist was in prison, he sent his disciples to confirm that Christ was indeed the Messiah, “the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

*“Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to Him, ‘Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Go and report to John what you hear and see: the **blind receive sight** and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the **poor have the gospel preached to them**’” (Matthew 11:2-5).*

Thus we see that the purpose of Christ’s miracles was to establish his identity.

Well, what about the miracles that the apostles performed? They really had much the same purpose. We go back to Mark 16 and the Great Commission where Jesus promised they would perform different miracles, and then in verse twenty the record says “And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed....”

What were the miracles for? To confirm the word! Peter and the others were preaching to the multitude on Pentecost in at least 16 different languages. When the people were puzzled about this, Peter reminded them of the prophecy in Joel 2 and cited that day’s events as fulfillment of the prophecy. This was a sign or miracle that he was speaking truth.

When Paul or others of the apostles went into some city and began to proclaim that the Messiah had come, many were probably thinking, “Yeah, we’ve heard this before.” So what was different this time? Their preaching was “confirmed...by the signs that followed...”

Question. Has the word been confirmed? The answer is an emphatic “Yes!” Over and over again. We don’t need to confirm it again. Consider an example. We believe John Wilkes Booth assassinated Abraham Lincoln. The evidence has been presented and affirmed. It has been proven, and we do not need to have a new trial and present evidence every time the matter is discussed. We can present the evidence that has already been established. The same is true of the Bible, the word of God. The evidence has been presented and the word has been confirmed. We don’t need any more miracles today to “reconfirm” the word. That would be a denial of the evidence God has already given, and be telling him that he didn’t do enough.

How long would the miraculous age last?

It has been shown that the only way miraculous powers could be conferred upon others (besides the apostles and Cornelius) was through the laying on of the apostles' hands (Acts 8 and 2 Timothy 1). There is no evidence given that those who received the gifts could then pass them on to others. Thus, by the time the last person died upon whom an apostle had laid his hands, then miracles would have ceased. That would have been either late in the 1st Century or early in the 2nd Century.

There is evidence that supports this.

"Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away" (1 Corinthians 13:8-10).

Paul says the gift of prophecy would be done away. Tongues and (miraculous) knowledge would cease and be done away. When? "When the perfect comes." Now, some claim that refers to the coming of Christ, and thus miracles will continue until he returns.

But notice the text says "the perfect," not "the perfect one," nor "he that is perfect." Other translations read "that which is perfect." Christ is not a "that." He is a person, not an inanimate object.

The point Paul is making is quite clear. During the 1st Century, the revelation was not complete. It took perhaps 50 years for the writings of the New Testament to be completed, as there is evidence John wrote the book of Revelation in the 90s. This is why the proclaimers of the gospel had to be "inspired" by the Holy Spirit to know what to write and preach. Christ told the apostles that after he had gone, the whole of God's truth would be made known to them.

"I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you" (John 16:12-14).

Question. Did the Spirit of truth guide the apostles "into all the truth?" If "yes," then there is no more truth to be revealed, and therefore no more need for inspired revelations from the Holy Spirit. If "yes," then there are no more prophecies from the Lord. The prophets have spoken. The apostle John elaborates on this in closing the book of Revelation.

"I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God

will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book” (Revelation 22:18-19).

It cannot be clearer that there are no more prophecies—no more revelations. A prophet is one who speaks forth a revelation from the mind of God. God’s word makes it clear that prophecies have ceased. Paul said that would happen when the revelation was completed. He said “gifts of prophecy will be done away.” Yes, there are self-proclaimed prophets today, but they are all false prophets if we can believe what the Bible says. In fact, John warns us about them in First John 4:1: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

Jude adds weight to the matter in declaring that we are to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 1:4). If it has been “once for all handed down,” then there is neither nothing else nor nothing new to be revealed.

If the answer is “no” to the Holy Spirit having guided the apostles into all the truth, then we are in big trouble, for Christ’s promise did not come to pass.

WHAT I'VE LEARNED AS A PREACHER

Tanner Campbell | Piggott, Arkansas, USA

I have been preaching for ten years, and I know less about preaching than I thought I did ten years ago. I do not believe myself an expert that is able to impart great wisdom to the reader, but I have learned a number of lessons as a preacher, and I’d like to mention a few of them to you.

Fire and brimstone preaching. This style of preaching is effective among some, but not all. Many among the older generation of the church really enjoy this style. I think some of them do not think it was a good sermon unless there was shouting from the pulpit. I think there is a time and a place for this style of preaching sometimes, as long as it is done out of sincere passion. But generally, I’ve found it best to control passion and emotion in the pulpit, and direct it in a more profitable way. Fire and brimstone preaching, although a joy to some, will come across as words with a lack of love and concern for the struggles and challenges that the listeners face in their lives. This style is very straightforward, which presents a problem because not everything in life is cut and dry. I think the preacher is mistaken sometimes when he preaches on a solution to a problem in our lives as cut and dry, because the listeners

see the same solution, but only at the end of a challenging road with much peril in the way. I'd like to further comment that this style of preaching may not be suitable for evangelizing the lost. It often comes across as a hatred for the lost, when the well-meaning preacher doesn't hate the lost, only the sinful choices they make. But these lines are often blurred. Looking to Jesus, we find Him implementing different styles of teaching in order to produce the effect He desired. To some, Jesus spoke more harshly (Matthew 23:13), while to others, He spoke with complete compassion (Mark 10:21).

Patience. In my opinion, one of the most important qualities of a preacher is patience. It is difficult to not be frustrated after spending a week studying for a sermon, only for someone to disagree with you after you preach. I guess we preachers think we are such good presenters of material that we expect every Christian in the congregation (from the 13 year old to the 100 year old) to accept in 35 minutes what took us a week to study! I've been in some congregations where there is one man that had something to disagree with almost every time I stepped out of the pulpit; this is tiring for any preacher. And I would like to note that patience on the pew side is much appreciated by every preacher. If you disagree with something in the sermon, take a bit more time in study before addressing the preacher, instead of bringing the disagreement up while the preacher is talking to a visitor from the community. At any rate, the work of patience is a grace that would be beneficial to both sides.

One scripture that I hope to never forget is 1 Thessalonians 5:14, "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all." Paul wrote these words of the Holy Spirit to the congregation, but I want to look at the preacher's responsibility to this text. It is the goal of the preacher to get the unruly, the fainthearted, and the weak to heaven. With these different situations come different approaches: warning, comforting, and upholding. But the quality behind these approaches remains the same: "be patient with all" of them! People don't change at the snap of the fingers; many situations in life make change more difficult than that. As much as I'd love to see visible change in the lives of the congregation after each and every sermon, it is not realistic. This scripture really gives us the sense of what is needed for people to change: time, effort, and love. Without these things, the preacher is just a warm body everyone sees only a few minutes each week standing behind the pulpit.

May every preacher always remember why he is a preacher, to get as many as we can to heaven! Galatians 6:2 tells us to "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the

law of Christ.” What does that mean? The purpose of the law of Christ is to bring one into a relationship with God through obedience. The purpose of the law is for one to keep their relationship with God for eternity. The “burdens” of Galatians 6:2 are that which hinder our relationship with God and thus hinder our eternal life. It is the duty of every preacher (as well as every other Christian) to make the burdens of each other’s lives light enough to not be a hindrance in our obedience to Christ. We fulfill the law of Christ by getting to heaven. We fulfill the law of Christ by getting others to heaven. This is the work of a preacher and we use the powerful resource of the Word of God, along with patience and love, to fulfill the work that Christ would have us to do.

BLAMING GOD

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

We all know what it is like to blame God for our problems. “You have the power to help me, but you won’t deliver me. Why won’t you help me? Why did you let this happen?” On and on we go with charging God with wrongdoing, but if we could see reality we would know that we are unqualified to charge God with anything, let alone in failing to care for or love us.

The Scriptures ask: “But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’” (Romans 9:20). We live by the mercy of God and are unable to challenge Him on anything. He who formed the universe and makes it possible for life to exist wherever He wants is beyond man’s realm of debate and competition. God needs to explain His actions to us as much as a potter needs to explain himself to the clay. Fortunately, God loves us and is willing to sacrifice Himself in every way necessary to save and provide for us (John 3:16). But if He did not, we could do nothing about it.

Frankly, we are incapable of understanding all of life’s events. Sometimes tragedy is a product of living in a world where man is given freewill, which includes our own actions and decisions, while at other times it is a result of the laws of this universe. Yet at other times there is no explanation. Jesus dealt with all of these factors in Luke 13:1-5 and concluded with man’s need to trust and obey God. If we are wise, we will see this as the only meaningful response to adversity (James 1:2-4). Certainly, “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all” (Romans 8:32) is a God we can lean on when hardships come. He is our only hope when life seems unbearable (Acts 16:29-34).

A GOOD NAME

Ananias & Sapphira | Acts 4:34-5:11

from the e-book, "...And They Shall Become One Flesh..."

William J. Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

*A good name is to be chosen rather than riches,
loving rather than silver and gold. (Proverbs 22:1)*

Keeping Up With The Joneses

Usually folks speak about keeping up with the Joneses, but in the first century, at least for Ananias and Sapphira, the challenge may have been keeping up with a man named Jose.

After the establishment of the church, many who had travelled to Jerusalem for the feast remained, learning the apostles' doctrine, and worshipping God with fellow Christians. Though they had not prepared for such a long stay in Jerusalem, other Christians rose to the occasion, providing for those in need (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32, 34-35). Among those who shared their goods was Jose, a Levite, whom the apostles nicknamed Barnabas (meaning 'Son of Encouragement').

We do not know what motivated Ananias and Sapphira's gift, as it is not revealed. What we do know is that they, like Barnabas and several others, sold a possession, and brought a portion of the proceeds to lay at the apostles' feet for distribution among those who were needy. Did they feel pressure to give, seeing so many around them doing so? Did they see others receiving recognition (and really cool nicknames) for their gifts, and want the same? Did they feel compassion for those who had nothing, and want to share a portion of what they had to minister to them? Whatever the initial motivation, we know that it did not end well.

It is always good to do good (James 4:17; Hebrews 13:16; 1 Timothy 6:17-19). We should have a focus for good works, not just as individuals, but as married couples. At times one spouse will be aware of a need that the other does not see. Perhaps one spouse has more of a heart for giving than the other, and can thus help the other to grow in the expression of benevolent care. But let's make sure that we are giving from good and honest motives; not to be seen by men (Matthew 6:1-4).

Sharing In A Lie

That Ananias and Sapphira gave is good, even if it may have come from wrong motives. Paul acknowledged that some preach the gospel from wrong motives, but nonetheless, rejoiced that Christ is preached (Philippians 1:15-18). Their gift was good, and beneficial to the saints, even if their reason for giving it and the occasion of giving it was not.

The issue with Ananias and Sapphira was not that they kept back a portion of the proceeds (Acts 5:2). Peter clearly recognized their right to do so,

"While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." (Acts 5:4)

They had agreed together to deceive people about their actions. If the same misrepresentation were perpetuated today, it might be counted as a "white lie." After all, this little stretch of the truth wasn't going to hurt anyone, right? No one would know. The needy would get the provisions they needed, and the couple would get the recognition they desired. A win-win situation, right? Perhaps that is what Ananias and Sapphira thought before they came to the apostles.

Couples sharing a lie together is not a new thing. For of the couples we've discussed thus far in our series did so:

- Adam and Eve were not the source of the lie about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but they bought into it when the serpent shared it with them (Genesis 3:6)
- Abraham and Sarah agreed to lie about their relationship to Pharaoh (Genesis 12:11-20) and Abimelech (Genesis 20:1-14)
- Isaac and Rebekah agreed to lie about their relationship to Abimelech (Genesis 26:7-10)
- David and Bathsheba agreed to lie about their night of adultery (2 Samuel 11:5-15)

When a husband and wife agree to lie, what they have done is conspired against one another's soul, to invite the wrath of God. Lying is an abomination before God (Proverbs 6:16-19), and removes one from the presence of God (Psalm 101:7).

Lying destroys our integrity, before God, before our fellow man, and in our marriage. If a spouse is willing to share a lie for mutual gain, what is to say that he or she will not lie alone, for personal gain?

SAVING FAITH

Sean P. Cavender | Bradley, Arkansas, USA

Grace, the Basis of Faith

When Adam and Eve first sinned in the Garden of Eden, God quickly responded with the plan that would redeem mankind from sin. With God's favor upon us, motivated by His love for mankind, He sent His only begotten Son to this world to sacrifice Himself for our sins (John 3:16; Romans 3:21-26).

Clearly, this act of grace was undeserved. However, because of God's love for us while we were sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). This act of God's grace justifies and credits righteousness to those who believe and have faith in His only Son, Jesus Christ. "Now it was not written for his (Abraham's) sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead" (Romans 4:23-24). We learn that Abraham was "fully convinced" (Romans 4:21) of the promise of an heir from his wife Sarah, even when it seemed impossible (Romans 4:19-20). The promise of our salvation, our justification, and our righteousness is our assurance in God; those are the promises He has made to those who have faith in His Son.

Faith is not a blind faith, it is based on evidence (Hebrews 11:1). "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible" (Hebrews 11:3). The handiwork of God is before us on a daily basis, giving us a glimpse of His awesome and magnificent power. He is the same God that has the power to save our souls! We can put our trust in His saving power to redeem our souls.

Faith, the Condition of Salvation

Because of God's act of love and mercy, the appropriate response for us is the obedience of faith (Romans 1:5; 16:26). "For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God..." (Ephesians 2:8).

Some have mistakenly used Ephesians chapter two, verse eight to teach that faith is a miraculous gift bestowed on God's chosen elect people. This verse teaches no such thing! In fact, this verse teaches that we are saved by God's grace (not by our own works) and the gift that He gives is that of salvation by which we are saved through faith. Grace and salvation is what God has offered; we must respond to that grace by our faith in order to be saved.

The phrase "through faith" indicates the condition that man must meet in order to receive the gift of salvation. The word "through" is defined as 'by means of an intermediary or agent.' Grace is God's part in our salvation; faith is man's part.

W. E. Vine defines faith as a firm persuasion and a conviction based upon hearing. Faith is not a miraculous manifestation bestowed upon the elect, rather faith comes by hearing the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 10:17), which has the power to save men's souls (Romans 1:16). Hearing the glad tidings of the gospel is the source of our faith in Christ which ultimately leads to

our salvation.

The Working of Faith

Some have wrongly concluded all that is necessary in order to obtain salvation in Christ is faith. When told that one must repent of his sins, confess Jesus as Lord, and humbly submit to baptism they say that is salvation by works and earning your salvation. Certainly we agree that we cannot earn our salvation, for we have been saved by God's grace. But the fact that we are saved by God's grace does not nullify the fact that we must exercise our faith in obedience. "For by grace you have been saved through faith..." (Ephesians 2:8).

Genuine faith in Christ includes the exercise of that faith (Romans 1:5; 16:26). When we fully trust God and are convinced of the promise of salvation He has graciously made available, we will respond with the appropriate exercise of faith.

During the conquest of the land of Canaan, the Lord told Joshua that the Israelites would have success in conquering the land and He had given the children of Israel the city of Jericho (Joshua 1:6-9; 6:2). The Lord proceeded to give careful instructions on how the children of Israel were to take the city of Jericho. Because of their faithful obedience, the walls of Jericho fell by faith (Hebrews 11:30). However, the children of Israel did not receive instruction concerning the conquering of the city of Ai, and they faced initial defeat there. Would the children of Israel have faithfully conquered the city without obedience to the instructions God had given? The Lord had graciously given them the land of Canaan--did they have to fight any battles to take the land? Of course they had to fight and faithfully obey the instructions from God!

We see in the cleansing of Naaman, God promised to heal Naaman of leprosy if he would dip seven times in the Jordan River. Naaman initially responded by asking if he could dip in a better, cleaner river (2 Kings 5:12). Eventually, Naaman dipped seven times in the Jordan River and was healed of the leprosy. Obviously, no matter how much cleaner the other rivers might have been, if Naaman had not dipped in the river Jordan, then he would not have been healed. It took an act of trusting God's unmerited favor and faithfully responding to His grace in order for Naaman to be healed.

In the Lord's blessing upon Abraham, we see that by his faith Abraham obeyed (Hebrews 11:8). God used Abraham's example of faith and fulfilled the promise that "by your Seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Hebrews 11:12). The extent of Abraham's faith cannot be fully grasped until one considers his offering of Isaac, that heir of promise. Abraham considered God's power and ability and

therefore trusted God completely and was willing to offer his son of promise (Hebrews 11:19).

In each example of faith, we see two threads of commonality. First, God's unmerited favor and promise of success. Secondly, we see the exercise of faith, based upon God's grace and promises. Our faith is made perfect, or complete, by our works (James 2:22). Thus, we are not saved by faith alone (James 2:24).

The role of repentance, confession and baptism are all exercises of our faith. Without faith, even if we performed those actions, it would be rendered useless. Those with genuine faith will not question the necessity of repenting of one's sins, confessing Jesus as Lord, and submitting to water baptism.

The Goal of Faith

Our faith in Christ will not be in vain, rather it will be rewarded. The Hebrew writer warns of not casting away your confidence, or faith, because it has a great reward (Hebrews 10:35). We must run the race of faith with endurance, for our doing the will of God will lead to our ultimate victory and reception of the promise of glory. The Hebrew writer warns of drawing back into perdition and losing our faith in Christ, which, instead of being rewarded, would be punished (Hebrews 10:38,39).

The apostle Paul compares the afflictions of this world as being "light" compared to the "eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17). In this context, Paul is encouraging those who walk by faith (and not by sight) to not lose heart, nor to become discouraged. By focusing our sight on the eternal weight of glory and by looking at the things which are temporary distractions, our spirits will be renewed.

Distractions are easy for those who are walking by sight (and not by faith). We may become distracted to the point that we become so nearsighted that we forget we have been cleansed from our sins (2 Peter 1:9). By keeping in mind that the things that might distract us are only temporary and will not last for eternity, we can be motivated to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). We can have the confidence that we will one day be present with the Lord, which is the ultimate goal of our faith (2 Corinthians 5:8).

As the Hebrew writer said concerning our faith in God, "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). Without trusting the very being of God, the promises He has made and the favor of grace that He has shown, we cannot be

pleasing to the Father. But by our faith we may be justified and that He will reward us for our faith!

LOCAL CONTROL

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Central to the nondenominational nature of the church of Christ is the principle of local control. What does this mean?

It certainly does not apply to legislative (i.e., law making) power. Christ is the only Head of the church (Ephesians 1:22-23) and its only Law Giver (James 4:12). No man or group of men may make laws and bind them on Christians as a test of fellowship, whether they act within or without the confines of the local church. Christians must neither draw up nor recognize human creeds or uninspired statements of faith as binding. To do so is to usurp the authority of Christ.

Rather, by “local control” I mean that decisions about the execution of the will of Christ must be made completely within the local church and must not be surrendered, partially or completely, to any outside control. Elders are to be appointed within each local church (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5). These elders (also called bishops, i.e., overseers, or pastors, i.e., shepherds - Acts 20:17,28; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-2) have the oversight of the congregation of which they are members (1 Peter 5:1-2). There they rule under the authority of Christ, the Chief Shepherd (1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Peter 5:1-4). No passage of Scripture broadens their authority. The elders of the local church have no right to oversee anything other than the work of the local church where they are members. There is no authority for a congregation to allow any man, group of men, or organization outside the local church to oversee all or any part of its function.

This principle applies to every facet of the work of the congregation. Each local church selects its own leaders (Acts 6:1-6), governs itself within the limits of those things Christ has authorized (1 Peter 5:1-4; Colossians 3:17), determines its own program of work and selects the arrangements to carry it out (cf. Acts 11:22; Romans 16:1; 1 Corinthians 16:3; 2 Corinthians 8:23; Philippians 2:25), controls the use of its own resources (Philippians 4:15-16; 2 Corinthians 11:8), and disciplines its own sinful members (1 Corinthians chapter 5).

This does not mean congregations cannot cooperate with each other. The church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to the young church in Antioch to encourage them (Acts 11:22-23; cf. 13:1-3; 14:21-23, 26-28; 15:22-31,40; 18:22; Colossians 4:16). A local church may send scriptural teaching to any person or group of people anywhere (1 Thessalonians 1:8).

When a local church sends a teaching paper to other churches, or when a congregation pays the way of an evangelist to preach a gospel meeting for a small congregation or to preach overseas, this is scriptural congregational cooperation.

A congregation may act alone in supporting a preacher in another place (Philippians 1:3-5; 2:25,30; 4:14-18). Or, several churches may independently and directly support a preacher working in another place (2 Corinthians 11:8-9). Thus, when several churches send directly to a preacher to work with a small church or to send that preacher to another nation, they are scripturally cooperating in evangelism.

The Lord authorizes many churches to send to one for benevolent needs within the receiving church (Galatians 2:10; Romans 15:25-28; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians chapters 8-9; Acts 24:17) and for one church to send funds to several for benevolence inside the receiving congregations (Acts 11:27-30). But there is no authority for a church or churches to send to another church or other churches to do the work of evangelism.

This also involves the principle of local control. Each congregation has the responsibility to assist its own needy members (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35; 6:1-3). Local churches may assist a church unable to relieve its own needy members until the congregation is able to do so (2 Corinthians 8:13-15). The work of the sending church is to help the needy church, and the work of the receiving church is to assist its own indigent members. Thus, equality of congregations relative to oversight and local control within each local church are maintained, in that oversight of the work of each congregation is completely within that local church, and each local church is able to do its own work.

But each congregation has equal responsibility in the work of evangelism in keeping with its own ability (Matthew 28:19-20). Thus, when churches send funds to another church to do the work of evangelism, the oversight of the work of all the churches involved is within the receiving church. Sending churches sacrifice oversight of part of their work and give up local control.

The sponsoring church system, the “overseeing eldership” plan, and church supported human organizations corrupt the organization of the church, alter the divine pattern for congregational cooperation, destroy local control, and lay the groundwork for denominationalism. Furthermore, these human schemes just don’t work. By sacrificing local control the Christian Church went from being several times larger than the church of Christ to half the size of the church of

Christ in 150 years (**Handbook of Denominations in the United States**. 107,111). The last generation has seen a dramatic increase of sponsoring churches, overseeing elderships, and church supported human organizations for evangelism among churches of Christ, just as the Christian Church has practiced for over 150 years. As the result of following a similar path of centralization of rule, growth of churches of Christ virtually ceased in the last generation.

This dramatically demonstrates the superiority of divine wisdom to human (Isaiah 55:8-9; Romans 11:33-36; Ephesians 3:8-11). By the amazingly simple plan revealed in the New Testament, in stark contrast to the elaborate organizational schemes of men, the first century church took the gospel to the whole world in one generation (Mark 16:15; Colossians 1:5-6,23). How could mere men possibly improve on this divine plan? God's way is both right and best.

WILL THE REAL JESUS PLEASE RISE?

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"Jesus was very likely 'a party animal', somewhat shiftless, and disrespectful of the fifth commandment: Honor your father and mother" (Johnson. 15). Such quotations could be multiplied, some perhaps even more shocking and blasphemous, representative of the currently faddish "quest for the historical Jesus." We are led to inquire. Who is the real Jesus?

How Do You Define "Expert"?

From 1985 to 2006 newspapers occasionally carried articles chiefly notable for their shock value about the "Jesus Seminar." These self-styled scholars on the "historical Jesus" held seminars at various sites chosen for publicity value, invited only those who agreed with them to speak, and gave out flamboyant press releases designed to lead unsuspecting people to think that modern scholarship has destroyed the evidence for the existence of the Jesus of the New Testament as an historical figure. With the death of Funk in 2006 the "Jesus Seminar" effectively ended, but the modern, liberal bias against the Christ of the gospel is abundantly demonstrated by the 1970 rock opera "Jesus Christ Superstar" and the 2003 novel (followed by the film) "The Da Vinci Code."

Criticizing the Critics

The word "criticism" just sounds bad. But even the most ardent believer engages by necessity in biblical criticism of a constructive sort. When we reject the apocryphal books of the Catholic translations of the Bible and object to loose or slanted translations that pervert the Scriptures, we are engaging in criticism.

Biblical criticism is divided into two categories: Higher and Lower. These divisions don't mean one is better or more important than the other.

'Lower criticism' deals strictly with the text of Scripture, endeavoring to ascertain what the real text of each book was as it came from the hands of its author; 'higher criticism' concerns itself with the resultant problems of age, authorship, sources, simple or composite character, historical worth, relation to period of origin, etc. (ISBE. 2:749)

It should be obvious that "higher criticism" potentially leads to destructive criticism, where the critic undermines faith in the inspiration of the Scriptures. This is the case to the extreme among liberal theologians.

Form criticism, as a kind of higher criticism, arose in Germany after World War II.

The form critics assume that the Gospels are composed of small units or episodes. These small units (pericopes) were circulated independently. The critics teach that the units gradually took on the form of various types of folk literature, such as legends, tales, myths and parables.

According to Form Criticism, the formation and preservation of the units were basically determined by the needs of the Christian community.... In other words, when the community had a problem, they either created or preserved a saying or episode of Jesus to meet the needs of that particular problem.

Therefore, these units are not basically witnesses to the life of Christ but rather are considered to be the beliefs and practices of the early Church.

This criticism proposes that the evangelists (writers of the four Gospels - KS) were not so much the writers as the editors of the four Gospels. They took the small units and put them in an artificial framework to aid in preaching and teaching.

(McDowell. 189)

Basically, Form Criticism is the product and tool of infidelity. It begins with the assumption that the gospel story of Jesus is legendary. It assigns the gospel a place alongside the myths of false religions, what in a university would be called the study of Comparative Religion, assuming a natural and evolutionary origin to them all.

The conclusions of the form critics run head long into the facts. First and perhaps most glaring is the comparison of

the gospel to folklore.

Normally, the accumulation of folklore among people of primitive culture takes many generations: it is a gradual process spread over centuries of time. But in conformity with the thinking of the form critic, we must conclude that the gospel stories were produced and collected within little more than one generation. (Kistemaker. 48-49)

Form criticism fails to account for the existence of eyewitnesses to the life of Jesus at the time the four gospel accounts began to circulate, especially of hostile witnesses.

... eyewitnesses of the events in question were still alive when the tradition had been completely formed; and among these eyewitnesses were bitter enemies of the new religious movement. Yet the tradition claimed to narrate a series of well-known deeds and publicly taught doctrines at a time when false statements could, and would, be challenged. (McGinley. 25)

Other contradictions of the facts are glaring as well. The destructive critics assume the New Testament writers made no distinction between what Jesus said and what they themselves said, whereas the inspired writers were meticulous in distinguishing between the words of the Lord and their own words (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:10,12,25).

Furthermore, if the teaching the gospel accounts impute to Jesus was really legend perpetrated by the writers, then the apostolic teaching ought to have the same forms and terminology as that ascribed to Christ. Why, then, is the teaching of Jesus in the synoptic gospels overwhelmingly parabolic (cf. Matthew 13:34-35), whereas parables are absent from the remainder of the New Testament? Why does Jesus characteristically refer to Himself as the "Son of man," doing so eighty times in the gospel accounts, whereas this designation is only used four other times in the remainder of the New Testament?

In history as well as in a court of law, the most powerful witnesses are those who, while confirming the testimony in question, are either disinterested or hostile. The apostle Paul qualifies as a hostile witness, for, as Saul of Tarsus, he "persecuted ... to the death" the disciples of Christ and, before those who could refute his testimony if it were false, called upon the high priest and elders of the Jews as his witnesses to this fact (Acts 22:4-5). Yet, Paul's own letters confirm the truth of the gospel story (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1-8).

Josephus, the great Jewish historian contemporary with Paul, qualifies as a neutral witness. Leaving out the part of his

notice of Jesus that negative critics claim Christians later added, Josephus testified:

At this time there appeared Jesus, a wise man.... For he was a doer of startling deeds, a teacher of people who receive the truth with pleasure. And he gained a following both among many Jews and among many of Greek origin.... And when Pilate, because of accusation made by the leading men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who loved him previously did not cease to do so.... And up until this very day the tribe of Christians, named after him, has not died out. (Johnson. 114)

The parts of the quote from Josephus which are omitted confess Jesus to be more than a man, to be the Messiah, and to have appeared to the disciples after His death in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophets. The quote actually reads smoother with those portions still intact, and there is just as much textual evidence for them being the words of Josephus as to the portion quoted. But the quote which even the negative critics allow testifies that Jesus lived, was a wise teacher who worked great deeds, taught the truth, gained a wide following, was crucified by Pilate at the instigation of the Jewish leaders, and still had a wide following of people named after Him.

Finally, the form critic cannot account for the most important fact of all concerning the witness of the gospel writers. Why were they willing to be savagely persecuted and even killed for their testimony, when they had nothing earthly to gain for telling it? (cf Acts 4:1-31; 5:17-42; 6:8 - 8:4) Not even one of the apostles of Christ ever changed or recanted His testimony, although tradition assigns a violent death at the hands of persecutors to all but John, who was exiled to a lonely, barren, rocky ancient Alcatraz (the island of Patmos) for his faith.

Gi'me Your Best Shot

Professor E.P. Sanders, Arts and Sciences Professor of Religion at Duke University, has been called "America's most distinguished scholar in the field of Jesus research today" (Professor John B. Meier, Catholic University, quoted on fly leaf Sanders). He has his Th.D. from Union Theological Seminary and formerly taught at Oxford. He has written two award winning books on Jesus, and is a fellow of the British Academy. Pretty heady stuff.

Sanders is no friend to believers in the Jesus of the gospel. While intending to answer the radical nonsense of the Jesus Seminar, he concludes of Jesus:

... from time to time individuals stood up and claimed to be the truest representatives of God, In general terms, this is where Jesus fits. He was

an individual who was convinced that he knew the will of God (Ibid. 48).

The professor sees nothing unique about Jesus. "There may have been numerous people who felt as close to God as Jesus did" (Ibid. 239). Sanders farther claims, "Thus there is no certainty that Jesus thought of himself as bearer of the title 'Messiah.' On the contrary, it is unlikely that he did so..." (Ibid. 242).

Sanders is a form critic. Of the gospel accounts as primary historical sources, he asserts:

The main sources for our knowledge of Jesus himself, the gospels in the New Testament, are, from the view of the historian, tainted by the fact that they were written by people who intended to glorify their hero. (Ibid. 3)

He further concludes of the gospel narratives, "Moreover, the early Christians also created new material; they made things up" (Ibid. 62).

He completely discounts the historical value of the book of John.

... the teaching of the historical Jesus is to be sought in the synoptic gospels and... John represents an advanced theological development, in which meditations on the person and work of Christ are presented in the first person, as if Jesus said them. (Ibid. 71)

The synoptics gospels - Matthew, Mark, and Luke - fare little better. The safest conclusion is that the synoptic gospels, especially Matthew and Luke, are 'mythological elaboration based on fact" (Ibid. 117). Sanders professes to find numerous glaring contradictions between the three accounts and historical inaccuracies throughout the synoptics. Sanders concludes, "There are no sources that give us the 'unvarnished truth'; the varnish of faith in Jesus covers everything" (Ibid. 73).

Achilles' Heel

But Professor Sanders makes an admission which is fatal to negative criticism. As he assesses the historical value of the witnesses who claimed they had seen Jesus after He was raised from the dead, Sanders observes:

I do not regard deliberate fraud as a worthwhile explanation. Many of the people in these lists (lists of witnesses to the resurrection - KS) were to spend the rest of their lives proclaiming that they had seen the risen Lord, and several of them would die for their cause (Ibid. 279-80).

If the witnesses were not liars, how do we explain their consistent testimony that they had seen the risen Lord? Sanders candidly admits, "That Jesus' followers (and later Paul) had resurrection experiences is, in my judgment, a fact. What the reality was that gave rise to the experience I do not know" (Ibid. 280).

Why, herein is a wonder! Professor E.P. Sanders is heralded by liberal theologians as the greatest American expert on the historical Jesus. And yet, when it comes to the central issue of Jesus, that upon which both Jesus and His apostles were willing to stake their claims (Matthew 12:39-40; Romans 1:1-4), the professor is unable to come to grips with the question.

Skepticism thus confesses itself impotent to speak concerning the historical Jesus. No wonder, as hypercriticism throws away passage after passage from the New Testament accounts of Jesus, nothing but doubt is left concerning anything from the Master's life. No wonder each participant in the radically liberal Jesus Seminar felt the liberty, with boundless imagination and scanty facts, to reconstruct Jesus into a teacher suitable to his leftist agenda.

Christ in Court

Now let us put Jesus of Nazareth on trial. His disciples aver He is the Christ the Son of God (John 20:30-31). According to their testimony. He made this claim for Himself (e.g., Matthew 16:13-17). They and He assert that the ultimate proof of this fact is that God demonstrated His approval of Jesus by raising Him from the dead. They claim to be witnesses of this fact (Acts 2:32). How shall we account for their testimony?

We shall abbreviate the trial and omit the fact of the empty tomb, a fact the skeptic cannot explain away, to concentrate on the testimony of the witnesses.

We have the first hand testimony of Matthew, Peter, and John (Matthew 28:16-17; John 20:1-10, 19-29, 21:1-24; 1 Peter 1:3, 20-21; 2 Peter 1:16), all of whom were intimate with the Lord during His ministry. We have the historical record of Luke, who researched his subject by interviewing the eyewitnesses (Luke 1:1-4, New American Standard Bible; Luke chapter 24; Acts 1:1-11). Luke records sermons by both the apostle Peter and the apostle Paul, in which they testify to having seen Jesus after He was risen (e.g., Acts 2:32; 3:14-15; 22:1-10). Paul records his own eye-witness testimony (e.g., 1 Corinthians 15:1-8).

How shall we explain their testimony? Certainly, the appearance of Jesus was no illusion. Unlike those who imagine a vision of Mary, they did not expect to see Him,

even after His crucifixion (e.g., John 20:9). They were still skeptical even after some had seen Him (Mark 16:14; John 20:24-25). They actually spoke to Him, ate with Him, and touched Him (e.g., John 21:1-14; 20:26-27).

As Sanders acknowledges, they utterly lacked motive to lie. Why would Peter leave his prosperous fishing business to endure a life of extreme persecution and eventual martyrdom? (John 21:3, 15-19; Acts 5:17-42; 2 Peter 1:12-16) Why would Paul abandon a life of prominence in Judaism to be ridiculed and persecuted by his own people and eventually executed for his testimony? (Acts 22:3; Galatians 1:13-14; 1 Corinthians 4:11-13; 2 Corinthians 11:23-27; 2 Timothy 4:6-8)

So much more could be said, but surely it takes no Sherlock Holmes to follow the evidence and reach a verdict. Surely, we must acknowledge that Peter spoke the truth when he claimed, "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" (2 Peter 1:16).

Then who is the historical Jesus, the real Jesus? Assuredly Paul was right when he proclaimed that Jesus Christ our Lord was "declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." (Romans 1:4)

So, Why the Skeptics?

If the case for Christ is so strong (And this study only briefly touches on the evidence), why do the skeptics reject Jesus Christ the Son of God as an historical reality? Sanders states it thus:

The view espoused by Cicero has become dominant in the modern world, and I fully share it. Some reports of 'miracles' are fanciful or exaggerated; the 'miracles' that actually happen are things that we cannot explain, because of ignorance of the range of natural causes. (Ibid. 143)

Do the skeptics with unbiased fairness just follow the facts where they lead? Hardly! Their naturalistic philosophy that denies even the possibility of a miracle blinds them to the facts.

Is it good history to deny all testimony of miracles because of philosophical bias against the miraculous? Perhaps no greater church historian has lived than Philip Schaff. He well described the historian's craft: "The purpose of the historian is not to construct history from preconceived notions and to adjust it to his own liking, but to reproduce it from the best evidence and to let it speak for itself" (1:175).

So prejudiced is Professor Sanders against miracles that, although he admits the honesty of the gospel writers, he discounts their testimony. "We doubt things that agree too much with the gospels' bias, we credit things that are against their preference" (Ibid. 94). How can one who refuses to accept the testimony of the only primary sources for the historical Jesus, even when he admits their honesty, ever hope to know the real Jesus?

Will the Real Jesus Please Rise?

The skeptic through prejudice rejects the only primary sources we have for the historical Jesus and is thus both confused and ignorant of Christ. He does not accept the facts of Jesus' life, does not understand their significance, and fails to acknowledge who the Lord is. His stubborn adherence to unbelief leaves him incapable of knowing the real Jesus.

The informed Christian accepts the Jesus of the gospels, not through blind, unreasoning faith, but because of the evidence from multiple, unimpeachable, primary sources. Thus, Christians alone truly know the historical Jesus, the real Jesus, the risen Lord of glory. He is the Christ the Son of the living God, God who became flesh and dwelt among us.

Skeptics vainly inquire, Will the real Jesus please rise?
Christians triumphantly declare, He is risen!

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