

# OpenTheo

## Why I Am Still a Christian (Part 1)



### Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg, a Christian of over 50 years, explains why he still believes in Christianity. He argues that emotional reasons may play a role in why some people stop professing their faith, and that Christianity centers on Jesus Christ rather than fear of the unknown or death. Gregg believes that evidence for and against the Bible has remained largely unchanged and that being a Christian involves following the evidence, not blindly accepting dogma or tradition. He cites eyewitness accounts of the life of Jesus Christ found in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and argues that their authenticity is supported by the testimony of early Christians who were willing to die for their beliefs.

### Transcript

I always need to explain, I always need to rethink why I'm still a Christian. I was raised a Christian. I became a Christian as a child.

I've been a Christian all my life. I've been teaching Christians since I was 16 years old. It's been 50 years now since that happened and I'm still a Christian.

But a lot of people that I knew who were raised as Christians and who were zealous Christians back in the 70s and 80s, they don't appear to be Christians anymore now. They don't even profess to be Christians. There's a lot of people who were raised in Christian homes who stopped professing to be Christians in their late teens or when they went to college or sometime like that.

And my curiosity has always been to know why. What did they find wrong with Christ? Now, I have a feeling they found things wrong with people or with some other thing, but I seriously doubt that anybody has ever found any basis for being upset with Jesus Christ. And yet, Jesus Christ is all that matters in terms of whether I'm a Christian or not.

It doesn't matter how bad the church is. It doesn't matter how many times I've been betrayed by Christians or whatever. That has nothing to do with being a Christian.

Everything that has to do with being a Christian is Jesus. And I've never yet met anyone who could really pin anything on Jesus that would justify saying, yeah, I don't want to be

a Christian anymore. In fact, I first gave this talk over a decade ago after reading again, every once in a while I reread it, an old lecture given by Bertrand Russell, who around the early 20th century was one of the leading atheist philosophers of the time.

And he had a very famous essay called, Why I am not a Christian. And I've read it several times because he was considered a great philosopher. I was not very impressed with his reasons.

He might be a good philosopher in some other areas, but he certainly did not show his skills in this essay. I don't think. I thought it was very poorly argued, actually.

Yet, most people would not know that it was poorly argued because I find that not many people these days have really any interest or maybe ability to assess arguments, to evaluate evidence. It's funny because in that essay, Bertrand Russell made this statement. He says, I do not think that the real reason why people accept religion has anything to do with argumentation.

They accept religion on emotional grounds, he said. Well, I'm sure there are people who accept religion on emotional grounds, and maybe even some who accept Christianity on emotional grounds. But Christianity, to my assessment, is the only viewpoint that can be accepted on other than emotional grounds.

That is to say, I can't speak for the reasons why any given person becomes a Christian, and some may be Christians for emotional reasons. That certainly isn't my reason for being a Christian, not even related to it. But, I don't know of any reason to be an atheist except emotional.

And I've read all the modern atheists. Bertrand Russell is not a modern atheist, still very respected in the atheist community. But the modern atheists who publish books, I've read them all.

Well, not all of them, but all the main ones. And it strikes me that they don't have anything other than emotional grounds for their rejection of God. They emotionally respond to what they don't like in religion or religious people.

That's not exactly the same thing as having a rational argument. And the fact that they don't realize this is one thing that causes me to lose respect for them. The same thing is true of virtually any other religion.

Any religion for which there is no evidence, but is accepted anyway, is apparently accepted on emotional grounds, rather than rational. Atheism would be one of those religious positions that's based on irrational emotional grounds. Christianity is not in that category, although it may be for some people.

I want to read a few of his statements and comment on them, and I want to tell you the

reasons why I'm still a Christian. Obviously, the title, Why I'm Still a Christian, is a response to his essay, Why I'm Not a Christian. He said, Well, there's a fair number of, I think, non-sequiturs in this particular statement.

But he said fear is the basis of the whole thing in religion. Fear of the unknown, fear of the future, fear of mysterious things, fear of defeat, fear of death. Well, I want to ask Bertrand someday, if I ever have a chance to see him.

I don't think it will be in heaven when I see him. But if I could talk to him, I'd like to ask him, what do you suggest in answer to these fears? What do you have instead? Yes, there is such a thing as fear of death. Most people have it.

Fear of the unknown. Fear of defeat. Most people at one time or another fear these things.

That certainly is not the reason why I hold my religious views, but I'd just like to know, what do you have as an answer to these fears, a credible answer to these fears? He actually gives an answer. He says, Science can help us get over this craven fear in which mankind has lived for so many generations. Science can teach us, and I think our own heart can teach us, no longer to look around for an imaginary support, no longer to invent allies in the sky, but rather to look to our own efforts here below to make this world a better place to live instead of the sort of place that the churches in all these centuries have made it.

I wonder how that's working out. The truth is that since Bertrand Russell's time, Christianity has receded in influence in Western civilization. Western Europe hardly has any real vigorous Christianity left in it.

There are some, but it certainly has died down. Certainly there are more people who are zealous about Islam there, and probably more who are avid atheists. I don't know the statistics, but just from what you read and what you hear.

I don't think Christianity is the primary cultural influence in any country in Western Europe, and it's greatly diminished in its influence in American culture over the past century. And because of that, we can look at society and say, how has this worked out? We've had science all that time. We don't need God to confront whatever fears we may have.

Science will do the job. What job? What job does science do in that area? Okay, well, if you're afraid you may get some kinds of diseases, science can help you there. Not all diseases.

They can't help you with all of them. There's still cancers and even the common cold that can't be cured yet. But, you know, science can help in some limited way.

But if people are afraid of unknown sicknesses in the future, one thing I've never been afraid of, but many people are, there's certainly no guarantees that science can give that the sickness you will have is one that science can cure. Furthermore, science hasn't only given us medical help. It has given us a lot of conveniences, but I'm not sure that they help us against fear.

Having indoor plumbing and electrical lights is, I mean, I guess, I wouldn't say that those address the existential fears of humanity so much. There's been a lot of progress in science, but not all of that is very encouraging. Frankly, we've got some high-tech surveillance that science has brought us so that we don't have any privacy anymore and we're never 100% sure that those who are surveilling us are friendly.

There's high-tech weaponry which can wipe us all out, which didn't exist before science. I'm not saying science is bad. I just don't see any reason to think of that as a very good substitute for whatever service people found in religion that he thought they had.

He thought they were fearful and that's why they chose God. Well, if that is why they chose him, I'd say they were more rational than the person who's trusting in science because if there's a God, he certainly can do things for you that science cannot. But I would take issue with Bertrand Russell on the whole issue of whether fear is the whole thing.

By the way, if it is, it's not unwise, but it is only emotional. Fear is emotional and people who choose to believe certain things because they alleviate their fears are not necessarily making the most rational choice. Now, when I say why I'm still a Christian, the word still I emphasize because I might not have still been a Christian.

I was raised a Christian and by the way, Bertrand Russell said he thought that most people became Christians because they picked it up at their mother's knee. Well, I did. I won't deny that.

I don't think there's any guarantees that what your mother taught you is a lie. My mother also taught me some basic mathematics that still holds true. If some new evidence comes out that what my mother or my father taught me is untrue, I'm certainly not blindly loyal to everything my parents taught me.

I've changed my views on many things, but I have to have evidence to depart from it, not just a mood. I don't just have to get older and be in a mood to disagree with my parents. I think that that's frankly why most people who are raised Christians don't remain Christians.

They just don't like it. It doesn't ring their chimes. They're not in the mood.

It's all emotional. It's strictly emotional. The departure from Christ has always got to be emotional because there's no rational reason for it, and I'm going to demonstrate that.

And why I'm still a Christian is because it's frankly rational, and I've always been the kind of person who likes to have evidence for what I believe, likes to be able to defend what I believe against any arguments. If I ever hold a belief that any solid argument can be brought against, I want to re-examine that, and that's the kind of person I am. In other words, I'm interested in the truth, and the reason I'm still a Christian is because I am interested in truth.

Now, whatever reasons there may be for people to not still be Christians who once were, I'm sure I've had those too, because there aren't any good ones. I'm aware of them, and they're not going to move me. One of the reasons that people are not Christians is because they say that we live in an age that's outgrown that.

I think Dawkins' most recent book was called *Outgrowing Religion*, or *Outgrowing Faith*, or something like that. I think outgrowing is in the term. That the society is that we've learned too much to still have all those superstitious ideas about God, angels, demons, all that stuff, heaven and hell.

That's all superstition, and we've outgrown that. Well, outgrown it. In what sense have we outgrown it? Well, of course, Dawkins, who's a scientist, would say we've outgrown it because we've got scientific discovery.

Really? What scientific discoveries have come along to prove there's no God? I've read Dawkins' book, *The God Delusion*, and other books of his. The Blind Watchman, he's got a lot of books. I've heard him lecture, I've heard him debate.

I haven't heard him give anything that's ever turned up that's a proof there's no God. There might not be a God, as far as he knows, but he certainly has nothing like proof of it. Now, most people, Bertrand Russell, Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and others who deny God, they usually do so by surveying the Christians' arguments for God and picking them apart.

Well, you believe in God because of this, but that's not necessarily the case because we can argue this way about that. In other words, the best they can do is look at the arguments that are brought up for God and say we find them unconvincing. We find them unconvincing.

My position is everybody's entitled to find any argument unconvincing. That isn't convincing. On the other hand, one cannot deny that the majority of people who've ever lived, they're not always right, but have found arguments for God to be convincing.

There's been very few atheists, comparatively, in history. Of course, there are a lot of pagans who believe in lots of gods and things like that, obviously. And there's a lot of people who are not Christians who believe in gods.

But most people have felt that there's evidence and reason and arguments to believe in

God. Now, most people are not, they don't determine truth. Truth is never determined by a majority vote.

But when an atheist says these are not compelling arguments, all he should say, or she should say, is they're not compelling to me. And then I'd like to find out what it is really at the root of their atheism that makes them find such arguments unconvincing because none of the arguments for God are foolish or fallacious. Some of the best scientists, some of the best philosophers in the world have seen value in these arguments.

Nobody else is required to see value in them. But let's face it, it doesn't take a stupid person to believe them. In fact, there's a number of atheists, and one of them I read recently, Thomas Nagel, in his book *Mind and Cosmos*.

His subtitle of his book *Mind and Cosmos* is *Why the Neo-Darwinian Theory of Origins is Almost Certainly Wrong*. He's an atheist. And he's talking about new evidence.

I mean, this is the point. Sometimes when they say, well, we've outgrown belief in God, that gives the impression we've learned so much now that defeats any former belief in God that we can't believe anymore. They are not paying very much attention to what we're learning.

All the evidences that can be presented that make people wonder about why we believe in God have been around for centuries. They're not new evidences. But what is new is sometimes leading atheists to believe in God, like Anthony Flew, who was the leading atheist for 50 years in America.

And he became not a Christian, but he became a believer in God. He died shortly after that, but he became a deist. That's somebody who believes that God had to make everything, although he didn't believe God has ever intervened in history, but he believed that there is a God in the world for 50 years.

He wrote more on it. He's kind of a mentor to all the younger atheists, but he came out and said at the end of his life, there is a God. And where did he get that? From new discoveries in science, from discoveries in the latter part of the 20th century about how complicated the living cell is, how it's like no other planet.

I mean, there's all kinds of things he was looking at and saying, yeah, you know, I think there had to be designer. Now, not all atheists follow him, but not all atheists don't. New discoveries have challenged atheism more than they've challenged any religion.

So it may be that we're actually outgrowing atheism, not outgrowing religion. It may be that they have been deluded into thinking that there is now more reason not to believe in God because of what modern discovery, than there was back when more people believed in God. No, it's not based on evidence.

The evidence for God is no different than it was. And the evidence against atheism is surmounting, or I should say it's mounting and it's surmounting the objection. Another reason, of course, and aren't still Christians, is as they got older, they began to have doubts about the Bible.

This is another matter because it's not just a question of whether God exists, but whether the Bible is in any sense a revelation from God. If it's not, then whatever God may be, we don't know much about him. And certainly if it's not from God, then we may not trust anything that Christianity teaches because it's based on the Bible.

And thirdly, there has been no new evidence against the Bible to arise in 100 years. The arguments against the inspiration of the Bible have been around since before I was born. I've encountered them when I was young.

They're fallacious. Better scholars who know more about the subject usually have pointed out the errors of these arguments. If there was a reason to believe the Bible was true when I was a kid, the same reasons exist now.

There's really nothing has changed. Time Magazine back in, oh, it was about 1972 or sometime like that, Time Magazine had a cover story about the Bible. Now, Time Magazine is not favorable toward Christianity or the Bible, as you may know.

And I think the closing line, I've quoted enough that I can almost quote it verbatim, of the article in Time Magazine was, despite 200 years of the biggest guns of skeptics being brought against the Bible, the Bible still persists. It says, after 200 years of challenge to the Bible on the critics' own grounds, science and history, the Bible seems more credible today than it did before the attacks began 200 years ago. That was, of course, a few decades ago.

But I watch. I'm paying attention. There hasn't been any new come up since the 70s or in the past 250 years that would make the Bible more credible than it is today.

What we have is increased ignorance. What we have is increased illiteracy of the Bible. Most people who reject the Bible have a vague idea of what it says.

They know some stories that they object to. There are things that God has done in history that are recorded there that are just hard to embrace. And, of course, the Bible has a moral standard that it claims to be absolute, and that's where people want to live right now.

That might have something to do with it, too. In other words, to reject the Bible is not based on rational evidence. It's based on emotional evidence.

My preference would be not to follow biblical morality if I didn't have to. But if the Bible's true, you better have to. And so lots of people just decided that it isn't true.

Or their friends have decided it isn't true, or they've studied it, they just picked it up from their parents, their parents never told them why, and therefore they succumbed to their friend's influence who didn't know any more than they did, but who claimed to. And the other reason I find that some people are not still Christians is that a Christian has betrayed them, or they've learned about scandals in the church, or certain ministers have done horrible things. But in many cases, Christians are bitter.

It's not that they have a rational reason for thinking Christianity is untrue, it's that they're bitter enough about it that they don't want it to be true. If it is, they don't want to acknowledge it to be true. And this kind of bitterness is seen very frequently, especially in what we call the angry atheists.

You know, if a person was an honest atheist, they would just see belief in God as, you know, kind of a dumb thing that some people hold to. But the angry atheists hate God. They hate Christianity.

You can see it, you can hear it in their voice. I mean, you can't hide hatred very well. And they're bitter.

Now, I'll tell you, I'm still a Christian because none of those things make sense to me. I am rational. I'm not a genius, but I can think straight.

And I happen to know, because I can analyze an argument, that we do not have any new discoveries that make the Bible less credible than before. And frankly, if I've been wronged by Christians, believe me, I have. I've been rejected by Christians.

I've been rejected by people who have been very indebted to me over years. People who have been very committed to me as friends. And over, in many cases, I mean, I'm not saying I've been perfect, but in many cases, I've lost friends and had people betray me who couldn't give a reason.

One of them said he was just jealous of me. You know, well, I can't help that. But people who have turned on me, who were Christians.

So, that doesn't prove Jesus wrong. Jesus said there would be people who would do that. So, that kind of proves him right.

I can't reject Christianity on the basis that Christians have behaved just the way the Bible prepared me to expect some Christians to behave. In other words, there's nothing rational about the rejection of Christianity, and the rejection of the Christian. The truth is, I am evidence-based in my thinking about the Bible as well as virtually anything else that I think about.

And, I'm a Christian who believes that we should go with the evidence, not with emotion. And therefore, I'm just on the opposite position than Bertrand Russell, who thinks that



Christians are Christians for emotional reasons. I can't deny that some may be.

I haven't always found my Christianity emotionally gratifying. I don't know about you. Sometimes, it's a little depressing holding the positions I hold in a world like this.

Sometimes, it's restrictive. Sometimes, I don't know. It's just not always an emotional gratification.

That's irrelevant. If you're trying to decide that's why I'm still a Christian, as you see. I actually know too much to be anything else.

I've always been very concerned to know and to conform my life to the truth. And, I'm determined to be a follower of the evidence. Now, we ought to decide what we call a Christian anyway.

Because in many cases, people think of a Christian as someone who believes the Bible or truth. And certainly, Christians ought to believe the Bible. But there are people who say they believe the Bible who are not what the Bible would call Christians.

The devil believes the Bible is true. He's not a Christian. A person who is a Christian is a person who has trust in Christ, who follows Christ, who knows Christ.

And by knowing, I mean knowing like you know a person. What I think people often do not have in their Christian faith is knowledge of Christ. They have belief in Christ.

But the encounter with Christ is what's lacking. They do not know him other than by hearsay. They learned of him from their parents, Sunday school teachers, or a friend in high school or college.

But they only know about him by hearsay. Now, if somebody only knows about Christ by hearsay, there's a good chance they're not what I'm calling a Christian. It's not what I think of myself as a Christian.

I don't know God by hearsay. I know God by experience, by encounter, by living and interacting over the decades with somebody who's really there and really interacts. Now, some might call that an emotional thing.

I'm not talking about emotions. I'm talking any more than I... I know my wife exists. Why? Well, because I live with her.

I interact with her. We have a relationship. Is that emotional? That has nothing to do with my knowledge of my wife.

Now, one might say, but you can see your wife and you can't see God, so God may be imaginary. You may be imagining. Well, I don't know that not being able to see someone is a reason for doubting their existence.

Some people actually have pen pals they've never met overseas. They write letters, they get letters back. They get gifts from people.

Now, some might say, well, you've never seen them, you don't know who's really there. Well, somebody's there. Somebody's sending those letters, those gifts, somebody's there.

I have no reason to doubt that it's the person that claims to be. Now, if I was online, you'd have every reason to doubt it. That's why I use pen pals instead of Facebook friends or somebody on a dating site or something like that.

You never know who you got there. The good thing is you can have a relationship with someone you've never seen. There can be kids who've never met their father because he's a POW.

He went away to war before they were born and they've never seen him. But they know who he is without even interaction. But then if he gets freed and he writes some letters to them coming home, they recognize that's who it is.

Now, people who've never had can't apparently imagine or picture what this is like. But people who do know God do know. I mean, I can't say it any differently than that.

I happen to know God other than by hearsay. I've lived with him for over 60 years of my life and he's been there and there's been things going on between me and him and all of them point the same direction. That is to, he is the father of Jesus Christ and who has adopted me and he's my father.

Now, let me talk about my reasons, my special reasons for being a Christian still. I said I have lots of reasons. I have all the evidence.

I'm going to try to summarize this under five heads, five general categories. Some of these I'll get to in this session. Some will have to await the next session.

The first reason that I am still a Christian or became a Christian at all in any mature sense is because of a fair-minded approach to the sources. Whatever we know, we know from sources. The sources might be our own eyes, our own ears, our own senses may tell us things.

But if we don't have, if we don't see something, for example, we never saw the Battle of Waterloo, we never saw the American Revolution, there's many things we haven't seen. I've never seen Papua New Guinea. There's many things that I've never seen, but I fully believe it, and I have every good rational reason to because I have sources of information from people who did see these things.

Virtually everything you know about history before you were born, you know from

sources. Everything you know about science that you have not proved by your own personal experiment in the laboratory to be true, you know from sources. The geography of any place you've never personally been, you know because of sources.

When Richard Dawkins continually says that Christians don't have any evidence for their faith, and Sam Harris, another modern atheist, said in his letter to a Christian nation, he said, does it bother you Christians, do you sleep well at night knowing that the Muslim has all the same reasons for believing in his God as you have for believing in yours? Well, Mr. Harris, that's just a mistake. The Muslim does not have the reasons for believing in his God that I have, and I know the reasons and the evidence that a Muslim has, and I know the evidence I have, and it's not the same. Now, when Dawkins said Christians don't have any evidence for God or for their faith, he means scientific evidence.

He's a scientist. He cares about, he thinks science is God. So, you know, if I can't go to a laboratory and prove that God exists by some experiment in a test tube, well then, I don't have any evidence.

Well, when it comes to physical evidence for a non-physical entity, exactly what kind of evidence would you expect to be available? A Geiger counter? Is God here somewhere? You know, litmus paper? Is that going to show God up as present or absent? Of course not. God is, if he exists at all, he exists in a different realm than that which science can access. He's not discoverable by science, but science is not the only kind of evidence there is, notwithstanding Dawkins' mistaken notions.

I just mentioned, if you believe in Papua New Guinea, if you believe in the American Revolution, if you believe in the atom, if you believe in the sun, you believe that not because you've shown it to be true by evidence, but because you've had what you consider to be reliable sources. The real question is, what are the sources? Now when it comes to believing in Christ or not believing in Christ, we have some very good sources and I take a fair-minded approach. So I'm a Christian because I take a fair-minded approach, not a gullible approach, but fair-minded.

for the first 300 years or so. They had the four Gospels, they had some letters, and they were not bound together in a book. They didn't have what we call the Bible.

They just had separate documents floating around but written by different people. Among them were what we call the four Gospels. When we look at the four Gospels, we don't have to assume, as many Christians do, we don't have to assume that they're inspired by God in order for them to be credible.

In order to find them credible. Because I've read many historical documents that were never inspired by God but are still credible. What makes a historical document credible is that the person who wrote it is competent, has knowledge of the subject, and is honest.

If you read something in a newspaper about something that happened where you were not there, one thing you're going to be interested in is was this person there? Do they have good sources? Are they trying to pull something on me? Are they slanting this so that I'll understand it their way? That's the questions we ask when we have to say, are the sources good? Can we rely on these sources? Well, who wrote them? What were their qualifications? How honest were they? Did they have any ulterior motives that they might want to fool me? These are the questions that you have to ask a fair-minded person to take them into consideration. Now, let's look at the stories that they recorded. Two of them were actually apostles who spent most of the time with Jesus and saw with their own eyes and heard with their own ears most of what they recorded.

None of them were in the desert with Jesus when he was tempted by the devil. They must have gotten that information from Jesus himself. But the majority of the stories that are recorded in Matthew or in John were witnessed by Matthew and John.

They're eyewitness accounts. He said he was a researcher. He said there were other eyewitness accounts that he was acquainted with.

He had talked to the eyewitnesses. He had researched it thoroughly and he had a thorough knowledge of the subject and therefore he said he could write authoritatively on it. That's how he opened his book.

He doesn't claim to be an eyewitness but he said he was the next best thing. He's lived with the eyewitnesses. He's picked their brains.

He's gotten the stuff right from them. That makes a pretty good source. All scholars seem to agree because we have early witness of this and some of the people who received that gospel originally from Mark said that Mark got it from Peter.

That Mark was writing Peter's account of the story of Jesus. Mark traveled with Peter. Peter preached probably in Hebrew and Mark was said to be his interpreter.

And Mark wrote down the gospel as most scholars would say according to Peter. Well that's another person who saw most of the stories happen. So we've got pretty good stuff.

Now eyewitnesses aren't always right but the more eyewitnesses you consult who write independently and say the same things the better the credibility. Now I'm not arguing that we have to take the gospels as being 100% true, although I do. I'm just, I'm talking to somebody who doesn't perhaps have adequate reasons for doing so.

So what do we have in them? We have four independent historical accounts by people very close to the situation. Either eyewitnesses or people who were well acquainted with the eyewitnesses and had access to them. That's pretty good sources.

You don't have, there's no other person in ancient history that we fully believe in. Whether it's Cleopatra or Attila the Hun or Napoleon. We don't have as many eyewitness accounts of their careers as we have of Christ.

Now, that usually doesn't make us doubt their careers. For the most part, historians are not expected to be eyewitnesses. They have sources that go back and go back but our primary sources are the gospels and they were right there at that time.

Okay, now I realize that there are critics who say, oh you're assuming certain things about the gospels. You're assuming they were really written by those people. You're assuming they were really written by people who knew Christ.

But many modern scholars would say, there are of course liberal scholars who are trying to debunk Christianity, but many liberal scholars will say that they were written a generation later or maybe in the second century and they weren't written by eyewitnesses. Or even if they were written early, they still weren't written down until say 30 or 40 years after Christ ascended. So how can we trust what's in them? But first of all, let me just talk about when they were written.

The internal evidence is very strong that they were written in the first century. Luke, for example, was not the first gospel to be written. Luke mentions there were several before his.

He wrote the book of Acts also. Luke was his first book, Acts was his second. The book of Acts ends in a flowing narrative of Paul's life in the year 62 AD.

It kind of leaves the author, I mean the reader, on a cliffhanger because he doesn't know that he's been following Paul's trip to Rome where he's going to stand trial for his life before Nero. And the story ends with him waiting for that trial. Luke doesn't tell the reader how it turned out.

All he says at the very end is that Paul was in Rome for two years waiting for his trial. Now that's not a very finalized ending. And there's every reason the only reason he ended that way is because it had been two years.

It had to have been or else he wouldn't know it was two years. It had not been more than two years because he wouldn't have said two years if it was more than two years he would have said two and a half or three. We know, in other words, from the best evidence in Acts it was written in the year 62 AD.

But that wasn't his first book. That was his second book. In the beginning of Acts he says in my first treatise of Theophilus I wrote of everything that Jesus said to him.

In our Acts, which was written no later than 62, there was another book. Whether it was written the previous year or a couple of years earlier, we don't know. But we can suggest

that Luke's gospel was no doubt written right around 60 AD, give or take a year.

And it was not the first gospel written. Almost all scholars believe Mark came earlier. And many think Matthew did.

Which means that the documents show every evidence of what they claimed to be written in the time that they were claimed to have been written. And, frankly, if you say, well, why do we know that these were written by the people that they say they were written by? Well, who do you think they were written by? The books are actually written anonymously. None of the four gospel writers mentioned his own name.

Those names that we have, the gospel according to Matthew, gospel according to Mark, etc., are written in the earliest documents. In other words, the church knew who wrote them. The authors didn't really mention their names.

They didn't have to. The church knew who gave them those books. They were with them, you know.

If someone hands you a book and says, here's a book I wrote, you'd probably remember who it was, especially if it was a friend of yours, especially if it was a famous friend of yours. Now, what's interesting about this is that if Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John did not write these books, why would they lie about it? And why would they? Why would the church leaders want to deceive themselves and others as to the source of the documents that they're basing their whole life on if they knew? Do we know of any religion or any group, any philosophical school that does that? Why would we have reason to doubt? Now, admittedly, we could argue that people could do such a deceptive thing. The real question is, do we have any reason to believe they did? And that's the point.

The a priori evidence is that they were written by the people who they say they were written by. And another support for that is that Mark and Luke, whose names appear on the second and third Gospels, were very obscure men. If they didn't write those books, why didn't, and someone put a name on them to make them impressive, why didn't they use an impressive name? Mark and Luke are familiar names to us from those Gospels.

But in the stories recorded in, for example, Acts, which is contemporary of Mark and Luke, there is their lives, Mark is extremely obscure. He's mentioned a couple of times and not necessarily altogether favorably. Luke is never mentioned by name in the book of Acts, though he is the author and he's very obscure as far as he never mentions his name.

But he traveled with Paul and certainly if the church had some documents that were not written by Mark and Luke and they're thinking of, well, what name shall we put on these documents? I know, let's use Luke's name. Well, why would you want to do that? Why

not use somebody impressive? Why not use someone who's famous and influential in the church? You know, there's no explanation can be given why Mark's Gospel and Luke's Gospel would be so named if they weren't written by those particular men. And there's no evidence that they weren't.

Luke's Gospel, for example, remember he wrote Acts, we know that the author traveled with Paul. Will Luke travel with Paul? We know that he wasn't Timothy or Aristarchus or some of these other guys that traveled with Paul because they are named as separate people in the book of Acts. The author mentions himself only in a vague way of saying and we went here and we went there.

He doesn't say who he is, but he's traveling with Paul. And as we know, Luke is the best candidate. And why not? The early church who received the book from the author believed it was from Luke.

In other words, while we have no absolute proof and anyone can doubt infinitely whenever they want to doubt, the evidence is all in favor of the traditional authorship and time of writing of these books. And anyone who says, well, I don't think it was them, all they can say is, I'm skeptical. Okay, be skeptical.

I don't think it was written by him. No, there's no evidence for any other view. They might say, well, I'm not convinced of the evidence that you just gave that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote those books.

Okay, at least I have some. What evidence do you have that they didn't? Zero. There has never been a single shred of evidence presented that would make it impossible or suggest that it was untrue that those men wrote those books.

So we have a fair-minded approach. And I'm not overly skeptical. I'm fair-minded.

Usually when I read something that somebody wrote telling their stories or telling some story, even the newspaper, I don't even know the person writing. In most cases, I'm going to take their word for it unless I see reasons to believe that he's got this slant on it or I've heard something contrary from someone more reliable. Then you do doubt things when you have reason to.

There's nothing in the Gospels that gives any indication that these guys are deceptive. Now, therefore, I am not bound as an unbeliever by prejudice. The only reason a person would see these Gospels claimed by the early church and by Christian tradition by these guys and see that there is some evidence that that's who did in fact write them, the only reason some would say I don't believe it is out of some prejudice against it because there's no evidence against it.

You have to have some reason for rejecting the kind of evidence that you would not reject about some other book. The truth is, if you read the histories of Thucydides or

Herodotus, if you read Seneca or Cicero, you don't know 100% that they wrote those things, but you don't have any questions about it. There's no reason to doubt them.

The real question is, is there reason to doubt them? There is not, except for, let me tell you the reasons that some people give, and I would say all of them depart from a fair-minded approach to the sources. One reason they give is that they say they were written long after the events. Well, okay, even by my theory of Luke being written in 60 AD even the most conservative scholars would say the earliest of the Gospels probably was not written down before 50 AD.

That's 20 years after the events. How could they remember the events for 20 years? Well, let's think a little bit here. Do you remember anything from 20 years ago? Do you have anyone who made a profound impression on your life 20 years ago and you can remember the conversations you had with them, you can remember the things you did with them, the places you went with them? Yeah, 20 years is not really very long, nor is 30 or 40.

If none of them were written until 70 AD, that's still only 40 years. Now, when you're under 40 or maybe you're under 30, you might say, 40 years? That's the eternity. No one could remember stuff that long.

When you get my age, you know that, hey, I can remember graphic stories that happened to me when I was four and five years old. That's more than 60 years ago. My parents have been married for over 70 years and they remember their courtship.

Really? How can they remember something so very long ago? You know, when people say, well, these things weren't written down until a long time after, what, 30 years is a long time, 40? The things I remember from 50 years ago were not as remarkable things as the thing these guys were recording that they saw Jesus do. I'd say it'd be a little hard to forget those things. To say, oh, they're written down too long.

What? Are you not thinking if you say that? Of course it's not too long afterwards. And when you realize that the Gospels were before they were written down being preached day by day in different venues by the apostles, these stories were being retold verbally almost every day of their lives for however many years it was before they were written down. How do you forget something that you're retelling the story every day? So, I mean, having this ridiculous idea oh, you can't trust the Gospels are written too late.

There's no proof they were written very late. And if they were written as late as 40 years after the events, that's not really very late either. That's real easy to remember that when you get old.

You can remember that far until you get Alzheimer's, of course, or something. Then you start, well, even then you remember the old stuff. So there's no reason to doubt the



Gospels because they were written long after the events.

One of, of course, the reasons that people by default doubt them if they do is because they were written by Christians. The people who wrote them were believers and advocates of Christianity so you can't trust them when they tell about Jesus the way they do. Well, what else would they have been? I mean, just for the sake of argument, let's suggest the stories are true.

And these guys saw these things happen and recorded them. What would they have been but Christians? How could you see those things? And what motive would you have for advocating Jesus if you'd seen those things? If you weren't a believer, how would you not be a believer? And does anyone have any rational reason to suggest that believers in Christ are the only people incapable of writing reliable history? The truth is, my experience has been that though not all Christians are completely honest, most of them are. If they're real Christians, they don't even believe that dishonesty is allowable.

Liars will have their place in the lake of fire is one of the things that Christians believe. So, the fact that convinced Christians, if we're arguing that they are believers, they are convinced Christians, well, then they would have scruples against lying. But in my opinion, I've been told more by unbelievers than by believers.

So, I have no reason to be prejudiced against the account given by a believer. Yeah, they're advocating for it. Yeah, they're big fans of Jesus.

No question about that. What would you be if you'd seen all those things? You know, I would hope that if I'm reading a history that's important for me to know is accurate, that I would be reading a sympathetic account from someone who was there and was impacted by what happened. That's what we have.

We don't have any reason that the writers wanted to fool anybody. What did they have to gain? I know people who lie, but they usually have something to gain. What did these guys have to gain? Now, when people say, well, they have power and money, well, maybe after Constantine, you know, maybe when the church became a powerful thing in the Roman Empire, that was three centuries after Christ.

The Gospels were written at a time when the people who wrote them were facing martyrdom simply for being Christians. And that situation prevailed for 300 years after they were written. These guys had no gain to receive by lying about this stuff.

They didn't make money because it was against the Christians' convictions to ask for money. Do you know that? In the early Christian church, they had a manual called the Didache that still is around. And it said, if a preacher comes and he asks for money, he's a false prophet.

This is not something Christians did in those days. They didn't do it for money. They

didn't take salaries.

They lived by faith. And they lived in poverty for the most part. Paul speaks about his own poverty in 1 Corinthians 4 and how it contrasts with that of some of the Christians that he'd converted who were not that way.

But these guys didn't make money. They didn't gain power. They didn't even get to wear those pointy hats for another several centuries.

These were not high church officials. These were peasants, fishermen, former tax collectors who had become on-fire believers in what they were saying and they wrote it down. They had nothing to gain but their own martyrdom and that's what most of them gained.

Most of them died as martyrs because they would not recant what they had said. Now, I had a debate with an atheist on a program called The Infidel Guy. It's online.

And it was a long interview. And I mentioned, you know, one reason I believe the Gospels is because these guys were willing to die for their witness. The guys who wrote them died for their witness.

And the atheist said, that's no big thing. People die for their faith all the time. Muslims die for their faith.

Lots of people die for their faith. I said, well, I didn't say anything about them dying for their faith. They died for their witness, their testimony.

Believing something is one thing. Being able to testify to it is a different thing. Testimony is what you saw.

A Muslim who blows himself up is dying for his faith but he never saw anything that would convince him that Islam is true. He's heard stories about Muhammad. He never saw Muhammad.

He can believe it and people can be deluded in their beliefs and are deluded enough to die. But people do not die for what they know is a lie because they saw what really happened and they're saying something else happened. If there's some advantage they can have from lying, then maybe some people will lie.

If there's no advantage in it, they usually don't. And if they do anyway, they'll usually stop lying when you've got a gun to their head. Or when you're going to crucify them upside down or something or feed them to the lions.

Let's face it. Everything we know about human psychology, everything we know about literature, everything we know about anything related to the subject tells us the evidence is excellent. That these guys were who they said they were and they saw what

they said they saw.

That they're telling the truth. Any suggestion they were anyone else or that they were dishonest is simply someone who's got a prejudice because there's no evidence. It's prejudice against Christians.

And the fact that these were written by Christians is no rational argument against accepting them. I take a fair-minded approach to the sources and that's why I'm a Christian still. I will say this.

I think most people who doubt the Gospels to be true don't do so on any historiographical reasons. But more for, as I said, emotional reasons. Two of them.

One of them is that they don't believe in miracles. Now, a lack of believing in miracles is not rational. It's emotional.

It's based on the fact that it seems surreal. That someone would walk on water or rise from the dead or the virgin could conceive and have a child. It just seems surreal.

I just can't picture it. That's too far out of my comfort zone. Too far out of my realm of experience.

I've never seen a miracle. Some atheists have told me in debate, I've never seen a miracle. Well, the Bible doesn't tell me that you would necessarily be expected to see a miracle.

I'm not sure I've seen a miracle. I mean, I've seen things that are no doubt divine providence. I've seen things that are no doubt, we could say they're miraculous.

There's some supernatural basis for them. Even our own conversion could be said to be a miracle in a sense. But in the sense of a visible change in natural law, as would be required for walking on water or for rising from the dead.

I've never seen a miracle like that. Nor do I expect to. I mean, I believe they happen.

I just don't believe they happen very often. The Bible doesn't say they happen very often. In 4,000 years of Old Testament history, there were only three seasons of the miraculous.

In the time of the Exodus, in the time of Elijah and Elisha, and then in the New Testament, the time of Jesus and the Apostles. Now, I believe in miracles still, but those were three seasons in all of 4,000 years of history where there were intense miracles. And even then, not everyone saw them, but there were a lot of them in the life of Moses, in the life of Elijah and Elisha, and in the life of Jesus and the Apostles.

Those seasons are separated by centuries between them. Almost every year that is

recorded in Scripture or passed over without record in Scripture was a year where there's no recorded miracles. The Bible does not teach that if miracles are true, you're going to see one necessarily or it's going to happen where you are.

Now, some Christians believe that we should be working miracles all the time by faith. I have a different understanding of it. I do believe miracles still happen, but I don't think they are necessarily expected to happen.

I think miracles in the Bible were exceptional events at the time. I think they'd be exceptional now. And so not having seen a miracle has no relation to whether I believe miracles can happen.

I've never seen most of the wars that I've read about in history or even wars that are fought in the same way as those. But that doesn't give me any reason to doubt that they happen. Someone saw them.

That somebody saw something is the best reason to believe it if they're reliable. You see, you can't prove a miracle in a laboratory because laboratories only can test things that recur. Any miracle that, if it ever happens, is a single event in history.

And just like any other single event in history, you can't just go, let's go repeat that a few times and see if we can test that. We don't test historical events that way. We test them by reliable testimony, which we certainly have.

Now, to say, well, I don't accept your testimony because I don't believe miracles. I have to say, on what basis do you not believe miracles? Certainly not scientific evidence. You can't just prove by science that miracles occur because a miracle is by definition something that deviates from the kinds of things that science studies.

Science studies natural law. Miracles are interruptions in natural law. C.S. Lewis said, you can't predict a train wreck by looking at the train schedules because the train schedules talk about how things regularly go.

A train wreck's an exception. He also gave another illustration. He said, you know, if I put four pennies in a drawer today and tomorrow I put four more pennies in the drawer, how many pennies will be there? He was talking to a skeptic.

The skeptic said, well, there'll be eight pennies there if there's not been a thief in the drawer in the meantime. And Lewis said, that's exactly the point I'm making. There's no guarantee that there'll be eight pennies in the drawer, but there will be if there's no interruption in the natural laws of math.

But whether there will be a thief in the drawer or not is a different issue. You can't study mathematics to know whether there's going to be a thief in the drawer. Math tells you how many pennies will be in the drawer if no one interferes.

Math talks about regularities just like laws of science do. But no scientist who studies laws of science can tell you whether or not there's going to be interference from a supernatural realm. And therefore, any solid rejection of miracles has to be based on one thing only, prejudice.

Prejudice against the supernatural. Nobody has ever seen evidence that there's no supernatural. How would you get evidence of that anyway? But if people have seen the supernatural things, well, then there's evidence for that.

So, what we're really saying is that most people are unbelievers. All they're saying is, I don't like your evidence, you Christians. But they don't have any evidence that's wrong.

And the evidence we have is at least something, which is better than nothing. And I think it's not only something. I think it's great evidence.

Let me just tell you something about a man that I'm going to take a break here and then we'll have our second session later on in the day. A man named Simon Greenleaf who's a Christian. He's also the founder of Harvard Law School and an expert on evidence.

In fact, he wrote the, I think it was a two-volume set of Harvard Law School's textbook on the rules of evidence. He's an expert on legal evidences. And he was a Christian.

And he wrote a book called something like, I think it was called The Testimony of the Four Evangelists, if I'm not mistaken. I have the book, it's just a title I don't remember offhand. I took this particular quote from it.

The whole book is excellent. But this tells you something about whether the Gospels, as far as evidence goes, should be trusted or not. Now people can distrust things even before there's evidence.

But if we're going to follow the evidence, here's what one of the greatest experts on evidence said. He said, The presumption of law is the judgment of charity. It presumes that every man is innocent until he is proven guilty.

That everything has been done fairly and legally until it is proved to have been done otherwise. And that every document found in its proper repository and not bearing the marks of forgery is genuine. Now this is precisely the case with the sacred writings.

If any document concerning our public rights were lost, copies which have been as universally received and acted upon as the four Gospels have been, would have been received in evidence in any of our courts of justice without the slightest hesitation. Now the main point he makes there, of course, is that when you're looking at anybody's claims, let's say the claims of the Gospels, the presumption of law would be the presumption of charity. I don't know these people to be liars.

I haven't caught them in a false statement. I don't know them to be bad men. Therefore, my presumption would be they may be telling the truth.

And although I could be moved from that view by evidence, by solid evidence, evidence that they're not telling the truth, evidence that they didn't really write this, or whatever, I can't be moved from it fair-mindedly without such evidence. And so the first reason I'm still a Christian is because I take a fair-minded approach to the sources, which are the Gospels. And by the way, they're not the only sources.

There are secular sources from the first centuries also that talk about Jesus, but not as much as the Gospels. All right, we're going to take a break there and we're going to come back to the other four, which we won't take.