Apologetics

Tuesday May 2, 2017
Sunday January 1, 2017

Tweet

Most often, we can simply present the gospel and it will do its work. But sometimes, you will encounter a person who has been so deceived by false teachings that he or she will need more than a presentation of the scriptures which plainly contradict what he or she has been taught. In such cases, we must be prepared to give reasons for accepting the gospel message as true. Paul met many such skeptics in his ministry. In this handout we will focus on not only presenting the gospel, but also defending its truthfulness (that is, presenting "evidences" or "proof" that support the gospel message). In particular, we will focus on historical reasons to accept the resurrection of Christ to be factual. In other words, we are time and time again that the apostles preached and defended the Resurrection of Christ as the core of the Gospel, and could confidently and boldly do so because it was a fact. Acts 2:22-24; Acts 13:26-31 Let's begin by focusing on the resurrection, because it is where the Christian Faith is based.

Apologetics can be defined simply as "the defense of the gospel." For our purposes in this class, we are going to think of it simply as presenting evidence for the resurrection of Christ, much like Paul does in his sermons (see Acts 17:31).

The Minimal Facts Approach

Contrary to some other apologetic approaches, we will not begin with the Bible as our ultimate or internal ground for proof. This is a distinctively Reformed approach presented by Gary Habermas and his disciple Mike Licona in The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus. This particular approach concludes only those facts that are so strongly attested historically that they are granted by nearly all scholars, even those who do not believe the Christian worldview. Habermas and Licona argue that they are evidenced and nearly every scholar accepts these facts are the Post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus to various individuals, the conversion of James, the conversion of Paul, the empty tomb of Jesus, and the disciples' belief that they saw the risen Jesus.

Since we are dealing with facts, we can simply do a cross-examination of the evidence. Since we are dealing with facts, we can simply do a cross-examination of the evidence.

1. Jesus' disciples sincerely believed he rose from the dead and appeared to them.
2. External evidence and events support the authenticity of the Resurrection Narratives in the Gospels and the Book of the Acts.
3. Since no plausible opposing theories exist that can account for the historical facts, Jesus' resurrection is the most plausible explanation.

"If the resurrection is true, then Christianity follows. No other factors can change that." - Gary Habermas

The 5 Facts (4+1)

1. Jesus Died by Crucifixion
2. The Disciples' Believed that Jesus Appeared
3. The Persecutor Paul Converted to Christianity
4. The Skeptic James Converted to Christianity
5. The Tomb was Found Empty

Explanation and Historical Sources for the Five Facts

1. Jesus Died by Crucifixion (All Non-Christian Sources)

- All 4 Gospels (Mark 15:21; Luke 23:33; Matt. 27:35; John 19:18)
- Josephus (Wars 5.451-451)
  - "Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works—a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew many both of the Jews and the Gentiles after him. This was the Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this time."(Wars 5.451-451) Quoted in Bernhard, C. A., ed. The Resurrection Evidence of Jesus, Josephus, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, Lucian, Mara Bar Serapion, Thallus, Phlegon, and Others (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995). *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987 Print).
- Cornelius Tacitus (Annals 15.44)
  - "But of human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the work of incendiaries. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, underwent the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition was checked for the moment, again to break out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every quarter find a central home and become popular. Accordingly, those who confessed were seized at first; and after all had given a plausible story, they were convicted not so much on the charge of firing the city as of hatred of the human race. Mockery was added to their doom, so that wrapped in the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished; or were nailed to crosses; or were doomed to the flames and burned, to serve as a mighty illumination when daylight had vanished. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the rabble in the dress of a charioteer. Hence, though the victims were of the criminals who deserve extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed." (Quoted in Bernhard, C. A., ed. The Resurrection Evidence of Jesus, Josephus, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, Lucian, Mara Bar Serapion, Thallus, Phlegon, and Others (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995). *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987 Print).
- Lucian of Samosata (Passing Peregrinus 11)
  - "The unfortunate and deluded survivors of these sects, and of the Christians, believed firmly that they would live forever, wherefore they despised death and even voluntarily gave themselves up to it. Moreover, their first lawgiver had persuaded them that they are all brothers, and every one who has once transgressed, denying the gods of the Greeks, and worshipping the crucified sophist and living according to his laws, such he thinks himself and others are. Accordingly they despise all things equally, and they consider the matter of no consequence." (Quoted in Bernhard, C. A., ed. The Resurrection Evidence of Jesus, Josephus, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, Lucian, Mara Bar Serapion, Thallus, Phlegon, and Others (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995). *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987 Print).
- Mara Bar Serapion
  - "What advantage did the Athenians gain from putting Socrates to death? Famine and plague came upon them as a punishment for their crime. What did the people of Samos gain when they burned Pythagoras? In a moment their country was covered with sand. What did the people of Greece gain when they put to death Socrates? Immediately after their crime they were compelled to stop their war. What did the people of Israel gain when they slew their wise king? Just after that their kingdom was abolished. God punished these three wise men for the wrongs done to them by the persons were responsible for their death. They died ruined and driven from their land, but in complete dispersion. But Socrates did not die for good; he lived on in the teaching of Plato and his disciples. Pythagoras did not perish in Samos; C. A., ed. The Resurrection Evidence of Jesus, Josephus, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, Lucian, Mara Bar Serapion, Thallus, Phlegon, and Others (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995).
- Talmud (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 43a)
  - "Jesus was hanged on the Passover eve. For forty days before the execution, a herald went before him, crying, 'He is being led out to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel into apostasy. Let everyone who can anything in his favor come forward and plead on his behalf.' But since nothing was brought forward in his favor, he was hanged on the Passover eve." (Quoted in Bernhard, C. A., ed. The Resurrection Evidence of Jesus, Josephus, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, Lucian, Mara Bar Serapion, Thallus, Phlegon, and Others (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995).

2. The Disciples Believed that the Risen Jesus had Appeared

A. They Claimed that the Risen Jesus had Appeared (Paul, Oral Tradition, Written Tradition, P.O.W., Luke)

Paul said the Disciples Claimed the Risen Jesus had Appeared
Paul said that the Disciples Claimed that Jesus

- 1 Cor. 15:11
- Galatians 1:8-10

Paul said the Disciples Claimed the Risen Jesus had Appeared

- He claimed this authority (1 Cor. 15:8; 9:1-5; 1 Thess. 1:9; A.J. 2 Thess. 3:4; Philemon 1,21)
- Paul's Conversion (Acts 9:1-22; Galatians 1:13-17)
- Claimed that the Gospel (Acts 5:42) became more clear/ Element of Surprise (Acts 9:22)
  - "Let us set before you the great disciples. (6) There were those who, because of emulagious jealousy, endured even to our very hearts, were the most having given the greatest examples even to us. (7) Through jealousy and strife Paul by his example pointed out the way to endurance. (8) Because of jealousy and strife he had been seven times in chains, had been driven into exile, had been stoned, and had preached in the East and in the West, he won the glorious glory of his faith, (9) Having taught righteousness to the whole world, and having come to the limits of the West, Finally, and having borne witness before the rulers, he thus departed from the world and went to the holy place, having become an outstanding example of patient endurance." (Michael Williams Holmes, The Apostolic Fathers Greek Texts and English Translations Updated ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 191)

Phrases (Rec. Pub. 1:2) Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ Messiah and his life and death (Rec. Pub. 1:2)

- The neither I nor anyone like me can keep pace with the wisdom of the blessed and glorious Paul, who was among you and in the presence of the men of renown, for he used to write accurately the word concerning the truth. And when he was absent he wrote you letters.(1) If you study them carefully, you will be able to build yourselves up in the faith that has been given to you, which is the mother of us all.(2) Hope follows and love for God and Christ and for our neighbor leads the way. (3)
- (Michael Williams Holmes, The Apostolic Fathers Greek Texts and English Translations Updated ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 191)

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the brother of the Lord5 because he was known as a son of Joseph, and Joseph was supposed to be the father of Christ, because the Virgin, being betrothed to him, "was found with child by the Holy Ghost before they came together," as the account of the holy Gospels shows. But Clement in the sixth book of his Hypotyposes writes thus: "For they say that Peter and James and John after the ascension of our Saviour, as if also preferred by our Lord, strove not after honor, but chose James the Just bishop of Jerusalem." But the same writer, in the seventh book of the same work, relates also the following things concerning him: "The Lord after his resurrection imparted knowledge to James the Just and to John and Peter, and they imparted it to the rest of the apostles, and the rest of the apostles to the seventy, of whom Barnabas was one."
(Eusebius of Caesaria, Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine, 1890, 1, 104.)

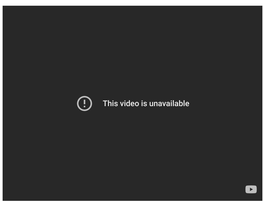
5. The Tomb was Found Empty (JET)

Habermas calls his "Five Facts" the "4+1." This is because while the first four facts are essentially universally accepted by all historians, the question of whether the tomb was found empty is debated by some. Nonetheless, the empty tomb is accepted by some 3/4 of historians, regardless of their religious belief. It thus still meets the requirements of being a "minimal fact." There are at least three factors that make the historical claim that the tomb was found empty a historically credible one. These can be helpfully remembered with the acronym JET.

1. **Jerusalem Factor**
   - It would have been impossible for Christianity to survive and expand in Jerusalem if the body of Jesus was still in the tomb. In order to defeat the new religion, the enemies would only have to produce the corpse.
2. **Enemy Attested**
   - In claiming that the disciples stole the body, his enemies indirectly affirmed that the tomb was in fact empty. They would not have claimed that the disciples stole the body if the body was still there. (Matt. 28:12-13)
3. **Testimony of Women**
   - Women are listed as the primary witnesses to the empty tomb. It's unlikely that the disciples would have invented the story of women finding the empty tomb, since in their day a women's testimony was not highly regarded and in fact would have been damaging to their claim. (Luke 24:11).

Watching the Five Facts Work Together

How do these five widely accepted facts of history work together to create an argument for the Resurrection? How does the Resurrection provide explanatory power for them? The brief video here attempts a summary of the logic;



But we need also to beware the mistaken assumption that setting out historical facts can ultimately compel faith. Only God's Spirit can draw hearts to Himself. N.T. Wright perceptively notes this reality in words with which we can end:

> "That is why, though the historical arguments for Jesus' bodily resurrection are truly strong, we must never suppose that they will do more than bring people to the questions faced by Thomas, Paul and Peter, the questions of faith, hope and love. We cannot use a supposedly 'objective' historical epistemology as the ultimate ground for the truth of Easter. To do so would be like lighting a candle to see whether the sun had risen. What the candles of historical scholarship will do is to show that the room has been disturbed, that it doesn't look like it did last night, and that would-be 'normal' explanations for this won't do. Maybe, we think after the historical arguments have done their work, maybe morning has come and the world has woken up. But to investigate whether this is so we must take the risk and open the curtains to the rising sun. When we do so, we won't rely on the candles any more, not because we don't believe in evidence and argument but because they will have been overtaken by the larger reality from which they borrow, to which they point, and in which they will find a new and larger home. All knowing is a gift from God, historical and scientific knowing no less than that of faith, hope and love; but the greatest of these is love."
> (Tom Wright, Surprised by Hope, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2007), 85–86.)

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