

WHY THINK THIS IS TRUE

Can Rational, Critical, Thinking, Intelligent, and Logical Person Genuinely Believe?

Note: Why should we believe that God is love? Can a thinking person really believe in God to begin with and then further, can a thinking person really believe that God looks like Jesus? Can a thinking person actually believe that Jesus reveals God?

This is the most fundamental question. This question is as foundational as it gets. The answer to this question is everything. My life hangs on the one core conviction that Jesus Christ is the decisive clue as to the fact that there really is a God and to the decisive clue as to what God is like, AND to what I am like. He reveals true God and true Humanity. I wouldn't mind if I was wrong about everything else. I have some passionate conviction about theology and interpretations of certain passages, I've written a book that deals with some of these subjects, and I like getting involved in discussions on some of these topics. But I don't have any source of life in any of that. My sense of worth and self esteem and fullness of life doesn't depend on any particular opinion that I have. I think that's really an important reality to have, because if that's not the case, our theology becomes our god and we begin worshiping our theology instead of God and our theology becomes a source of life to us. And that's when Christians become jerks is because now being right is more important than manifesting God's love.

All our eggs are to be in one basket. And that is the core conviction about who God is like. The core conviction that He is as loving as Jesus reveals Him to be . . .

The question is, "Is this really true?"

This study shares a little bit of why I am convinced that the Jesus story in the Gospels is true, why I believe that Jesus really is the decisive revelation of God.

*Jesus existed - Pliny, Tacitus, Josephus
James and Ananias - Josephus
Wonder worker - Josephus, Celsus
Wise man, Teacher - Josephus

The things he says are very different from what any other teacher has said. Others say, 'This is the truth about the universe. This is the way you ought to go,' but He says, 'I am the Truth, and the Way, and the Life.' - C.S. Lewis

Undisputable Facts: Sometime in the first third of the 1st Century (30,40,50 A.D.) there is a band of Jewish folks who went out into the world proclaiming a message. (A lot of different sources.*) That Jesus Christ, who was a contemporary of theirs, lived an extraordinary life, to the point where he had a reputation of being sinless. They claimed that he did these miracles, they claimed that he made these outrageous claims (especially in a Jewish environment) that he had come down from heaven and that he was the son of God, and most importantly they claimed that he rose from the dead. They went out into a hostile environment, starting in Palestine and then very quickly spread throughout the Roman empire. They went out and proclaimed that he was the Savior of the World. And they suffered a lot of persecution because of it. We know from Tacitus (Roman Historian) that Christianity had grown so large and so fast that by the year 62,63, 64 AD, that the Roman Emperor Nero could plausibly blame the burning of Rome on these Christians. And that justified trying to exterminate them on his campaign to try and kill all the Christians. (And it was as brutal as anything in history affords us.) Even the hardened Tacitus comments that Nero's treatment of the Christians was barbaric even according to Roman standards. We find the basic message of the early Christians in the Gospels and Paul's Epistles (the earliest writings) These folks were willing to die for this message that this contemporary of theirs, Jesus, made Divine claims, rose from the dead, and lived an extraordinary life, and did these miracles to verify the claims he was making.

The Lie Theory

Question 1: Why would these men do this?

No Motive.

Heretical by traditional Jewish Standards

Publius (or Gaius) Cornelius Tacitus (AD 56 - AD 117)

Question 2: Could they have pulled this lie off?

"God Is Love"—1 John 4:8

*All texts quoted from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.

Followers regarded as Divine - Pliny
Crucified - Tacitus, Lucian, Josephus
Pontius Pilate/Tiberius - Tacitus, Josephus
Darkness of Crucifixion story- Thallus
Catalyst for Growth - Tacitus
Claudius in 49 A.D. - Suetonius
Nero in 60's A.D. - Tacitus
Governor of Bithynia in 100 A.D. - Pliny

Easily Falsified

Not long, long ago, in a place far, far away.

Jesus was a fellow Jew whom they knew and they presumed their audience knew. (James Jesus' brother)

Lived in Palestine where they were preaching.

Died very recently

Big names are used (Pilate the Governor, Caiaphas the High Priest, Joseph of Arimathea)

No evidence that they were the kind of people who would lie.

Christianity was seen as a pernicious cult that needed to be stamped out and although there are many charges against Christianity in the first Century, never is the charge made that they made it all up! (They don't deny that Jesus did miracles.) We can't find any ancient person who accuses the early Christians of making the whole thing up!

Question 3. Why are there no deserters?

"Watergate involved a conspiracy to cover up, perpetuated by the closest aides to the President of the United States—the most powerful men in America, who were intensely loyal to their president. But one of them, John Dean, turned state evidence, that is, testified against Nixon, as he put it, "to save his own skin"—and he did so only two weeks after informing the president about what was really going on—two weeks! The real cover-up, the lie, could only be held together for two weeks, and then everybody else jumped ship in order to save themselves. Now, the fact is that all that those around the President were facing was embarrassment, maybe prison. Nobody's life was at stake."—Chuck Colson

Questions 4: Why do the Gospels read the way they do in regards to their counter cultural dimensions?

One example is Jesus' treatment of women.



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