

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“... Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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“YOU ASK ME HOW I KNOW HE LIVES ...”

by Lee Moses

In a recent debate with atheist Christopher Hitchens, theist William Lane Craig sought to demonstrate the truth of God's existence. In his opening speech, he utilized a number of good arguments, including the cosmological argument, the teleological, or “design,” argument, the moral argument, and the resurrection of Jesus. Unfortunately, Craig added to these arguments “the immediate experience of God.” He describes this as “the inner voice of God speaking to our own hearts.” Craig acknowledged, “This really isn't an **argument** for God's existence; rather, it's the claim that you can **know** that God exists wholly apart from argument simply by experiencing Him.” Needless to say, Hitchens jumped all over this non-argument.

It is much like the song which some well-meaning but misguided brethren have sung, which repeats the question, “You ask me how I know He [Christ] lives?” To this, the answer is given, “He lives within my heart.” This is a very unsatisfactory answer to the question. Could not someone else answer, “Well, I feel in my heart that He does **not** live.” Does that person therefore **know** He does not live? Feelings in one's heart do not impart knowledge; feelings in one's heart prove nothing. Jacob's feelings in his heart convinced him that his son Joseph was dead, though he remained alive (Genesis 37:31-35). As Jeremiah said, “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*” (Jer. 17:9).

Yet the truth that Jesus Christ lives is crucial to the truth and efficacy of Christianity. As the apostle Paul affirmed, “*And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your*

faith is also vain....And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17).

Does a Christian have to respond that the way he knows Christ lives is because “He lives within my heart”? Does he have to trust his knowledge of such a crucial truth to a source that is “*deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*”? Should anyone ask how one knows Christ lives, consider the following.

By the Nature of Deity

Jesus proved His Divine approval and origin by means of the miracles He performed (John 3:2; 20:30-31; Acts 2:22). Jesus Christ is Himself Deity (John 1:1-3). Although He as man was killed by means of crucifixion, was it possible that Deity could remain in the grave? By inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Peter said, “No”: “*Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it*” (Acts 2:24).

Peter preached on Solomon's Porch that the Jews were guilty of killing the “*Prince,*” or **Author**,¹ “*of life*” (Acts 3:15). They had demanded the release of one who **took** life, and demanded the execution of the One Who **gave** life.

But as He had power to give life at Creation, so had He power to give life at His death:

Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This

commandment have I received of my Father (John 10:17-18).

The psalmist asked, “*What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave?*” (Psalm 89:48). No man can deliver his own soul from the grave. But God can, as Deity has life-giving power. Although Jesus' body was entirely human, yet He was entirely Divine (John 1:14). Deity is self-existent and eternally existent. Jesus could not have remained in the grave.

Scripture, authored by God (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21), had foretold that Christ would be raised from the dead (Genesis 3:15; Psalm 16:10). God cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18); therefore, Christ had to be raised from the dead. He simply could not remain in the grave—the nature of God would not allow it.

By the Previous Importance Christ Placed on His Death and Resurrection

Throughout His earthly ministry, Christ manifested His foreknowledge of His impending death and subsequent resurrection. “*Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up....But he spake of the temple of his body*” (John 2:19, 21). Jesus also stressed that both His death and resurrection were necessary. “*And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit*” (John 12:23-24).

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That Jesus spoke of the necessity of both His death and resurrection indicates His certainty that both would take place. He was correct in naming the perpetrators of His death and the means by which He would die (Matthew 20:18-19; John 12:32-33). Such specificity of foreknowledge about His death demonstrates His predications about His resurrection would likewise prove true, and He specifically stated that He would rise the third day (Matthew 16:21; 17:23; 20:19).

Beyond this, when Christ placed such importance upon His resurrection, He also voided any significance that might be attached to His death were He not also to be raised from the dead. He could have equivocated, and merely made Himself a martyr. It might be granted that one might die in order to make a name for himself. And dying is not that difficult to do. But Christ was willing to stake everyone's belief in Him on His resurrection. Without being resurrected, He would have made Himself a liar. Without being resurrected, He could not be Lord.

"For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living" (Romans 14:9).

By the Empty Tomb

Two days following the Lord's death, there was no body to be found (Luke 24:1-3). The only possible explanation for its absence is that Jesus was resurrected from the dead.

Some claim that Jesus never actually died upon the cross, but "swooned." This unconscious man was placed in a tomb, but when He revived, He allegedly rolled away the stone from the tomb door and left. However, the Romans who crucified Him took steps to ensure He was dead (John 19:31-34). Pilate, the Roman procurator of Judea, verified with the commanding centurion that Jesus was dead (Mark 15:44-45). It is laughable to assert that such experienced experts in crucifixion would be unable to discern whether one of their victims were dead. And it is impossible for someone who had just been through the trauma of crucifixion, including having His hands or wrists pierced through with nails, by Himself to roll away a stone so large that several women could not move it (Mark 16:3-4).

Neither could any other human being have removed the body from the tomb. Roman soldiers had been placed on guard around the tomb to ensure this did not happen (Matthew 27:62-66). The soldiers agreed to spread the story that Jesus' disciples stole the body while the soldiers slept (28:11-15), but it was a preposterous story. Roman soldiers were some of the hardest men on earth, well-trained and battle-tested—they were not going to fall asleep during their watch. And to fail in their duty would have cost them their lives (Acts 12:19). The fact that the Jewish leaders felt compelled to spread such a far-fetched story only demonstrates their incapability to produce a body.

These Jewish leaders were deeply troubled about the rapid spread of the Gospel. When Peter preached his sermon on the day of Pentecost, he appealed to the empty tomb of Jesus (Acts 2:29). Had they been able to

produce a body, they could have nipped Christianity in the bud. Yet because there was an empty tomb, Christianity grew exponentially.

By the Testimony of Reliable Witnesses

Just as the testimony of reliable witnesses provides some of the most airtight evidence in court cases, so the testimony of those who witnessed the resurrected Saviour assures us that He lives. They were reliable witnesses whose accounts cannot be denied.

The apostles were men of good character. They were not wealthy or educated, yet they earned favor among the people by means of their blameless conduct and miracles which they performed (Acts 2:47; 4:21, 33). Incidentally, the miracles that they performed were testimonies from **God** that what they said was true (Mark 16:20; Acts 5:32; Hebrews 2:3-4). But consider the apostles' conduct—they taught the necessity of holy living, setting themselves forward for all to see as examples (Philippians 3:17). And no one could say a word against their exemplary character and conduct (1 Thessalonians 2:1-12). If they had been lying about the resurrection of Jesus Christ the whole time, they would have condemned no one as severely as they condemned themselves. They staked their reputation and the veracity of everything they taught upon the truth of the resurrection. While addressing what the implications would be if there were no resurrection, neither general nor specifically of Jesus Christ, Paul wrote, *"Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not"* (1 Corinthians 15:15).

And what did they gain by telling people that Jesus was raised from the dead? They never became wealthy, but they did receive the privilege of being persecuted throughout their lives. All but one of the apostles were killed because of what they taught. And what could possibly have motivated Saul of Tarsus to turn from Judaism to Christianity? He profited immensely as

a rising leader among the Jews (Galatians 1:14), yet he left it all when he claimed he received a vision from the resurrected Christ (Philippians 3:4-8). Thereafter, he likewise received the apostles' lot of persecution and death. Surely the apostles had better motivation to teach the resurrection of Jesus Christ than this. Might they have been motivated to such a degree because they knew what they taught was **true**? As Peter and John explained, "*For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard*" (Acts 4:20). One can certainly find people willing to suffer and die for something others have **deceived** them into believing true. However, these men all acted based upon what they had seen and heard themselves. Of course, if what they taught was true, they gained infinitely—they gained eternity in heaven (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10).

And the testimony came from numerous witnesses. Paul was able to refer to different groups who had seen the resurrected Christ (1 Corinthians 15:5-8), and he did not mention them all (Mark 16:9, 12-13; Matthew 28:9-10). Paul mentioned a group of five hundred who had witnessed a resurrection appearance, most of whom were still living at the time he wrote and able to confirm any doubts one might have about the resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:6). And the evidence was not only visible to those who had been disciples of Christ prior to his death. Paul said, "*I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner*" (Acts 26:26). Even those who had not seen the resurrected Christ themselves saw facts and evidence around the situation that could only lead them to one conclusion—Jesus had been raised from the dead. The accusers of Christ could not even produce **two** witnesses whose testimony agreed as to any alleged crime He had committed (Mark 14:55-59). Yet testimony regarding the resurrection of Christ sprung up from numerous different groups—and their testimony was all in perfect harmony.

The witnesses of the resurrected Christ were also previous skeptics. His

disciples did not expect an empty tomb. The only people who correctly understood His predictions of His resurrection were His enemies. When the disciples began hearing reports of others seeing a risen Christ, none except perhaps John (John 20:8) believed until they had seen Jesus with their own eyes (Mark 16:11, 13; Luke 24:23-24). Saul of Tarsus had been an extreme skeptic, and a violent one at that, before his conversion (Acts 26:9-11). Something significant happened to change the minds of these skeptics, and they all claimed that something was seeing the resurrected Christ.

All these factors come together to create a very sound, reliable base of testimony.

Conclusion

Can one know that Jesus Christ lives? Most certainly. And one does not have

to rely upon untrustworthy feelings of the heart to know it. When we claim this is how we know Jesus lives, we build upon a flimsy foundation. We act like those who say, "I wouldn't trade this feeling I have in my heart for a whole stack of Bibles." Thankfully, one does not have to trust the feelings of his heart, he can trust the **facts** the Bible provides—facts on which true faith is built (Romans 10:7; Hebrews 11:1). Do you ask me how I know Christ lives? I know because the evidence proves it.

¹ *Archēgos*, here translated "Prince" by the KJV and ASV, is elsewhere rendered "Author," as in Hebrews 12:2: "Looking unto Jesus the **author** and finisher of our faith . . ." As *archēgos* can mean "one who has a preeminent position," it can also mean "one who begins or originates" (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000. pp. 138-9).

FORCED FELLOWSHIP

by Roelf L. Ruffner

In American religious circles, the race is on to legitimize homosexuality in their ranks; much as it is in American secular society. Recently the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) **voted** at their biennial national convention to allow unrepentant, non-celibate homosexuals in their clergy. A few years ago, the Episcopal Church of the United States did the same thing and now has a homosexual bishop.

By so doing they disregard clear condemnation of homosexuality by a **multitude of passages** in the Old and New Testaments. But when has the Scriptures ever been a source of authority for any denomination? For years they have clung to man-made religious tradition in the areas of church names, ecclesiastical office, abuse of the Lord's Supper, the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship, church government, infant

baptism, the ordination of women, etc. Yes, some denominations, such as the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, strongly condemned this action of the ELCA while clinging to many other religious delusions mentioned above.

Meanwhile the ELCA is advising its members who oppose the recent changes to be patient and accepting. Many of these folks have grown up in this denomination and feel comfortable there. They have family and friends there and do not wish to leave them. Instead of leaving, the ELCA advises them to talk, talk and talk. Isn't that what religious liberals (even in the churches of Christ) always advise? Some folks get so tired of talking that they finally submit and are effectively silenced. They reach the point of accepting their "gay brothers and sisters". **This forced fellowship is hated by Jesus Christ** (compare with Revelation 2:12-23).

Friends, this is why the faithful Christian should abhor denomination-ism. Like the builders at Babel of old, they erect a **human organization** so they might reach heaven – “*and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth*” (Genesis 11:4). In their conven-tions, conclaves, synods and assemblies they seek to bypass the word of God by legislative means. Like their secular counterparts, they slap backs, twist arms and conjure up ways to circumvent the will of God by majority vote. **Yes, the divine has been reduced to a popu-larity contest.** The will of man becomes the authority, not the will of God. (Is the false doctrine of Elder Re-evaluation/Reaffirmation practiced by some of our brethren any different?) And many claim this was all done with the help of the Holy Spirit!

Dear reader, God did not take a vote when He bequeathed the Old Covenant to ancient Israel through Moses. And Jesus Christ did not call a solemn assembly of sinners to ratify His New Covenant. It was ratified by **His own precious blood** (Hebrews 9:22-28). The will of God is found in His word – the Bible. “*All scripture is given by inspira-tion of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). It is our responsibility and joy to rightly divide the Scriptures (2:15), and to seek to do all things by Christ’s authority (Colossians 3:17).

To our religious neighbors we humbly request that they go back to the Bible. Please leave all human devices and human attempts to circumvent the word of God at the foot of the cross. Someday the word of God will judge us all. “*He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day*” (John 12:48).

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GOD’S AUTHORIZED WORSHIP

- COLOSSIANS 3:17

1. **LORD’S SUPPER** - The New Testament and early church history record that Christians met on the first day of every week (Sunday) to worship God and remember Christ (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11:23-34; 16: 1-2).
2. **PRAYERS** - (Acts 2:42; Philippians 4:6-7; I Thessalonians 5:17-18).
3. **SINGING** - God’s word authorizes only vocal music and specifically singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colos-sians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12). The New Testament shows no use of mechanical instruments of music in worship to God by the church Christ established. Church history notes no such use for nearly 700 years after the New Testament was completed. It is an innovation of men, not of God.
4. **GIVING** - Free-willed, cheerful, generous, and every week (Acts 20:35; I Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9).
5. **PREACHING OF THE WORD** - The gospel of Christ, not men’s doctrines nor entertainment, saves and strengthens us (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Romans 10:17; I Corinthians 1:18-23).

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