

*Christianity is a message that rests upon an historical event.*

*The message is that man can be made right with God by turning from his sin to the Savior (Acts 3:19; 1 Thes 1:9). The event that it rests upon is the Resurrection. If Jesus Christ didn't rise from the dead, then the message isn't true and Christian faith is fiction (1 Cor 15:17).*

It's ironic that one of the most influential books on the Bible wasn't written by a Christian. Walter Bauer published *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* in Germany just before the outbreak of WWII. He argued that what we know today as Christianity is just the version that happened to win out in the early church. As for the losers? They and their works were destroyed.

The book is a "survival of the fittest" approach to church history. Though you may not be familiar with Bauer, you've likely seen his influence on *The History Channel*, for instance. It's often suggested that Christianity started as a hodgepodge of variant communities—one faith community taught *this* about Jesus while another taught *that*. Each had their own books, churches, leaders, and beliefs. What one considered orthodox was heresy to another and vice versa.

Hearing this for the first time, you might wonder why you never heard anything like this at church: *What else are they keeping from me?!* Well, nothing. There isn't any evidence behind Bauer's work. He discounted all the books of the New Testament in his research, and even his most ardent supporters acknowledge his work was an argument from silence.

The books of the New Testament circulated throughout the first century. It wasn't until well into the second and third centuries that other Christian-like groups with their books came along. By this time, Scripture had been finished, the apostles had long been dead, and what it meant to be a Christian was well established from present-day India to Spain, Russia to Egypt.

If evidence matters, we would say that other "Christianities" with their books weren't destroyed in the first century—they never existed. What we have in the Bible isn't one community's writings, but the original orthodox root of Christianity itself.

## TO THE SOURCE

*Ad fontes!* It's a Latin phrase used to sum up the Renaissance: "To the sources." Rather than rely upon translations and traditions, scholars of the Renaissance hungered to read the ancient classics with their own eyes.

The spirit of the Renaissance flowed into questions about the Bible. Yet, the only translation at the time was the Latin *Vulgate*. It's a good work, but a growing chorus wanted to read the oldest manuscripts they could find. They wanted to rediscover the Bible in its original Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic languages.

The Renaissance was a time of questioning and relearning much that had been lost. Sometimes we should do the same on a personal level. Go back to source, so to speak—question your beliefs to see if they rest upon anything solid. Christianity, for instance, is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone" (Eph 2:19).

The apostles and prophets wrote a variety of books that have been handed down to us as the 66 books of the Bible. These books were not written at once, but progressively over a period of 1,500 years by more than 40 different men.

Though the Bible is diverse in style and subject, an amazing unity from Genesis through Revelation is apparent. The Old Testament prophets looked forward to the day when God would send messiah. The New Testament apostles rejoiced that messiah had come and then looked back on what He had accomplished.

*2 Peter 1:21—"For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."*

These 66 books are God's gracious self-disclosure. The apostles and prophets didn't conceive of a god and then produce a set of religious literature for their community. Rather, they were like Abraham who didn't even know God until God revealed Himself. He spoke and moved within them. They wrote. None of us would know anything about the Lord had He said nothing.

# What is Christianity?

---

Unlike an idol that is seen but cannot speak, the Living God isn't seen, but He speaks. In the pages of His written Word we can read what He's said. Scripture is church's foundation; it's the foundation of Christianity itself, Christ being its cornerstone.

## THE MESSAGE

True Christians do good works. In fact, James said that pure religion involves caring for the orphans and widows in your midst (James 1:27). To see a need and look the other way is part of what Jesus denounced in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37).

Christians do good, but doing good isn't the essence of Christianity. Jesus said many would come to Him on Judgement Day calling Him "Lord," showing Him their spiritual resume: *Look at all the good deeds I did.* "And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you.'" (Matt 7:21-23). Never knew them? They believed they would enter Heaven because of all the good they had done.

Christianity isn't about our good works; it's a message about Christ's good work on our behalf. At its most fundamental level, Christianity is a message that explains how sinners can be made right with God. Good works follow, but they aren't the focus.

---

**"THE LOVE OF GOD MADE A WAY FOR THE WISDOM  
OF GOD TO SATISFY THE WRATH OF GOD WITHOUT  
COMPROMISING THE JUSTICE OF GOD"**

— JOHN PIPER.

---

The mortality rate today is 100%. You and I are going to die. And why? Because we're sinners. Each day we live is time borrowed from a gracious and patient God. It's true that God is love (1 John 4:8), but it's also true that He is just and deeply offended by each of us. Have you ever lied? Of course—we all have! Compared to one another, we don't seem so bad. Compared to the Living God, it's hard to tell the best from the worst of us. We're sinners, through and through (Rom 3:10-18).

To stand before God is utterly hopeless. What could we possibly say to justify all of our sinful actions and thoughts? Each sin individually carries the sentence of eternal condemnation—what about all of them combined? That it's possible to receive a pardon and be right with God is good news. That's the message of Christianity.

*2 Corinthians 5:21—"For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."*

A substitution occurred when the Father sent His Son. Christ Jesus willingly came and died as the sinner's sacrifice. He received the penalty for the sins of all who would believe in Him; they receive His righteous standing by believing it is so (Rom 8:1, 2 Cor 5:21).

It's quite an exchange that took place on the cross, and it doesn't become yours because of a prayer, a good life, baptism, etc. God saves sinners who believe Him (Gen 15:6; Rom 10:9). *But how can I know I'm saved?* Assurance comes from walking with Christ (1 John 2:3). Saving faith is made evident in a Christian's life (James 2:17).

## THE EVENT

Why would you believe any of this if Jesus remains dead? Without the Resurrection, there is no good news, no salvation, no future hope. In fact, as Paul told the church in Corinth, if Jesus didn't rise from the grave "your faith is futile."

*1 Corinthians 15:17—"And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins."*

Jesus, raised from the dead, is the central event of Christian faith. It tells us as Christians that our Lord's death actually did something. The Resurrection showed that the Father was pleased with His Son's sacrifice (Rom 4:25). It was enough, and this is the event that Christ sent His disciples to tell the whole world about (Matt 28:18-20).

The mission is a message. We're ambassadors of Christ (2 Cor 5:20), called to tell the world how to be made right with God. It's because Christ lives that we actually have something worth saying.