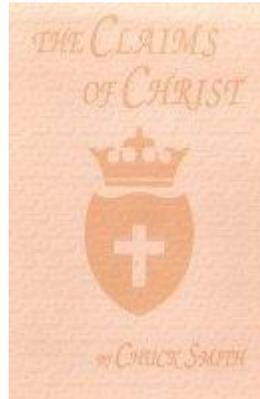


## THE CLAIMS OF CHRIST

by Chuck Smith



Death is not the end of human existence. The Bible states that it is appointed unto man once to die, and after that comes the judgment. After the judgment every person will find themselves forever in heaven or in hell. Your eternal destiny will be determined by whether or not you believe the claims of Jesus Christ.

In John 12:44 we read, "Jesus cried and said, 'He that believes on Me, believes not on Me, but on Him that sent Me. He that sees Me, sees Him that sent Me. I am come as a light into the world, that whosoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness. If any man hears my words and believes not, I judge him not, for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. Whoever rejects Me and receives not My words has one that judges him; the word that I have spoken shall judge him in that last day. For I have not spoken of Myself, but the Father which sent Me, He commanded Me what I should say and what I should speak. I know that His commandment is life everlasting. I speak whatever the Father said unto Me to speak.'"

Let's look at the radical claims that Jesus has made concerning Himself in these few verses.

1. He said believing upon Him was equivalent to believing the One who sent Him, or upon the Father. Over and over, He avowed that God sent Him.
2. To believe on Him was equivalent to believing in God.
3. He said to see Him was the same as seeing God.
4. He claimed to come as a light into the world.
5. Those who believe in Him do not abide in darkness.
6. He stated that He came to save the world.
7. He claimed that those who do not believe in Him will be judged by the word that He has spoken.
8. He claimed that His teaching did not originate with Him, but that He spoke the words that the Father commanded Him to speak.
9. He declared that His words are life everlasting.

These are the claims of Jesus. There is no denying the fact that they are quite radical. The extreme nature of Jesus statements concerning Himself presents every person with a choice to be made. We must either accept or reject His claims. We must either believe or disbelieve Him. It is not an option to simply ignore or try to evade such radical statements. What Jesus said demands that we form an opinion, and our opinion will ultimately fall into one of two camps. He was either telling the truth or He was lying. He was either the Son of God and the greatest person who ever lived or He was a deceiver and a fraud. You may be more kind and say, "I believe that perhaps He believed those things, but He was deluded and if He were living today, He would probably be institutionalized." But the issue remains, are His claims true or false? Jesus is who He claimed to be, or He isn't.

In the New Testament, we read of many signs that Jesus did to substantiate the claims that He was making. In the fourteenth chapter of John, Jesus reiterates some of these things that He has claimed here, but also adds a few more such as, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and no man can come to the Father except through Me."; "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father"; and "Believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me, or else believe for the very works sake." In other words, Jesus not only claimed to be God in human flesh, the perfect source of truth and the One who grants eternal life, but offered conclusive proof through the miraculous deeds or "works" He was doing. In the Gospel of John, Jesus said that John the Baptist bore witness of Him, but that there was a greater witness than that of John. This greater witness was the works that the Father had given Him to do. Among these authenticating signs was Jesus' power over the elements. He turned the water into wine, He walked on the water, and He calmed a raging storm by His word. He showed His power over disease for He healed the suffering with a touch. He cleansed those with leprosy. He caused the lame to walk, opened the eyes of the blind and even raised the dead. He called upon these works to verify that His teaching was true.

At another time when huge crowds had gathered around Him, Jesus said, "A faithless and perverse generation seeks a sign, but no sign will be given, except that of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Thus His resurrection would constitute the basic sign to an unbelieving world, that He was all that He claimed to be.

When Jesus cleansed the temple of the money changers, He was asked by the Jews for a sign of authority to do what He had done. His response was, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will rebuild it." John tells us that He was referring to His own body as a temple thus the resurrection from the grave three days after His death.

In Acts 1:3 we read that Jesus showed Himself alive after His death by "many infallible proofs." The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is one of the most factually verifiable events in history. It is confirmed by the testimony of many eyewitnesses such as Mary, Peter, the other Apostles and more than five hundred people at one time. If there is any validity to our system of jurisprudence, which establishes fact on the basis of

eyewitness testimony, then the resurrection must be accepted as fact. "But," you may argue, "there was no cross examination of the witnesses!" Are you certain of that? Let it be noted that the vast majority of these witnesses were violently killed for their testimony, and none recanted, though doing so could have spared their lives. (For more information see Foxe's Book of Martyrs) So many gave their lives for what they had seen and heard that the Greek word "martus" (which meant one who bore legal testimony) came to mean those who suffered death for the Christian witness.

But along with His miraculous works and His historical resurrection from the dead, we have to also take into consideration the multiplied prophecies concerning the Messiah that Jesus fulfilled. Throughout the Old Testament, there were more than three hundred predictions concerning the Messiah that were fulfilled in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ. What would be the odds of one person fulfilling those prophecies by chance? The number is so astronomical, that it puts chance out of the picture. In his book *Science Speaks* [1], Peter Stoner estimates the odds of one person fulfilling just eight of these Messianic prophecies as being one in ten to the seventeenth power. How overwhelming is this probability? Stoner illustrates this by "supposing that we take ten to the seventeenth power silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. They will cover all of the state two feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must pick up one silver dollar and say this is the right one. What chance would he have of getting the right one? Just the same chance that the prophets would have had of writing these eight prophecies and having them come true in any one man, from their day to the present time. It is clear that chance had nothing to do with the fulfillment of these three hundred predictions. It is also important to note that the design spelled out in prophecy was far beyond any one person's ability to control. From the place of the Messiah's birth to the amount of money offered for His betrayal, we find factors that were out of any person's ability to arrange. Jesus could not by chance or by His own personal effort have fulfilled those three hundred predictions. It had to be by God's design.

Peter lived in close association with Jesus for three years and was with Him on some of the most momentous occasions of His ministry. Many times when the other disciples were excluded, Peter was brought in to see the special work of God. When they came to the house of Jairus, whose little daughter had died, Jesus put all of the people out. Yet He took Peter and John into the room that they might be witnesses of His power to bring her back to life. When He was in the area of Caesarea Philippi, and was transfigured on the high mountain before His disciples, it was Peter, James and John who were selected by the Lord to witness the event. In his second epistle, Peter writes about this experience and describes Jesus with His raiment shining like the sun, and seeing that glory of the eternal God coming forth from Him. He said, "We were not following cunningly devised fables when we declared to you the glory of the Lord." It wasn't some cunningly devised story. He said, "We were actual eye witnesses of His glory when we heard the voice of God there on the Mount." But even as significant as this experience was, Peter pointed to "the more sure word of prophecy" as the secure

foundation of our faith.

When predictions are made about the future, there is a governing principle known as the Law of Compound Probabilities. This principle states that the more conditions placed on a prediction, the greater the chance that it will not come to pass.

Let us say that Newport Beach in California is shaken by an earthquake on an average of once every two years. If I should predict that there will be an earthquake in Newport this year, my chances are 1 in 2 of being right. If I said it will happen on June 13th, then there being 365 days in a year, the chances of it happening the 13th of June would be 1 in 365. If I said it would happen this year on June 13th, the chances would be  $2 \times 365$  or 1 in 730. If I then declared it would happen this year, on June 13, at 2:05 in the afternoon, there being 1,440 minutes in a day, the likelihood of accuracy would then be  $2 \times 365 \times 1,440$  or 1 in 1,051,200. Now if I wanted to be very daring and say that the quake would strike at 2:05 and 15 seconds, I would increase the chances tremendously, for there are 86,400 seconds in a day  $\times 1,051,200$  and thus the chances of it happening as predicted are 1 in 90,823,680,000. This is just considering 4 factors. If I added more factors to the prediction, such as magnitude, epicenter, and the money needed to repair the damage, until I had 300 conditions, can you imagine what the odds against such a prediction being fulfilled would be? If they all came to pass you would have to conclude that I was either a true prophet, or else had inside information. This is exactly the situation we face with the prophecies concerning Jesus. He fulfilled over 300 conditions prophesied of Him. No wonder Peter called it the more sure word of prophecy!

There is certainly sufficient evidence and proof that the claims of Jesus were true. If you do not believe these claims, it is not because they are unbelievable, or because they are lacking in evidence, but because you don't want to believe them. Why would a person not want to believe the glorious claims of Jesus? He is claiming that He came to save you. He is claiming that His words will bring you everlasting life. But He is also declaring that if you don't believe, one day you will stand before God in judgment. He would not judge you, but you would be judged by the words that He spoke, because you didn't believe them. He said that He came that you might have life, and that more abundantly. Why would a person not want to believe that? Jesus loves us and died to save us from the penalty of sin, which is death. He loved us and died in our place that we might have eternal life. Why would a person not want to believe that? Many times a person doesn't want to believe because faith in Christ would require that they change their lifestyle. They are living after their selfish desires and they love their way of life. The commandments that Jesus gave are not pleasant for a person who wants to live after his fleshly lust. Jesus said if you would come after Him, you should deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Him. He condemned adultery, but many desire to have affairs. He condemned stealing, but so many want to steal. He condemned immoral sexual expression, but so many desire to throw off any and all moral restraints.

This world says, "Indulge yourself!" There is so much emphasis today upon self indulgence. People don't like to hear that they have to deny what they may want at a

given moment. Thus, they don't want to believe on Jesus because it would require a change of lifestyle. Jesus said that people will not come to the light because one of the characteristics of light is exposing that which is in darkness. The secret hidden things are covered by darkness. Thus He said they will not come to the light because their deeds are evil. They hate the light and don't want to be exposed by the light. Have you ever noticed how places like bars are kept purposefully dark? People there want to hide. They really don't want to be seen. They love the darkness rather the light because their deeds are evil. Jesus said that was the reason many will not believe in Him.

If you do not believe in the claims of Jesus, I would be very interested in hearing the reasons why. Why don't you believe them? Some will say, "Well, I don't believe those things because if salvation was such a wonderful thing then everyone would be saved." That sounds rather logical, yet does that mean you don't believe in soap, because there are a lot of dirty people in the world? Would you like to make an argument that soap is of no value at all? Look at all the dirty people in the world. If soap was so good, why isn't everyone in the world clean?

Some have said they believed until God failed to answer their prayers. In fact, Ted Turner claims that at one time in his life he was a Christian. His sister was very sick when he was a boy and he prayed that God would heal her, but she died. After that incident, he no longer believed in God. There are many people like Ted Turner, who have been disappointed because God did not answer a particular prayer. When God did not answer, they concluded that He did not exist. Of course, God is not obligated to answer our every prayer. In reality, I would not want God to answer any prayer of mine that wasn't according to His will. I wouldn't want to force God to do something that He was reluctant to do. So often we think that God is like a Santa Claus that is suppose to respond to our every whim. To reject God because He didn't answer a prayer is as childish as saying, "Well if I can't be the chief of police, I'm not going to play with you anymore! I'm going home! If you don't do it my way, then you won't have me for a friend." This is at best an immature basis for a relationship.

Yet that is the kind of relationship many people try to have with God. "As long as God plays along with my wishes and my desires, I'll believe in Him and I'll play along with the game. But let Him cross me once and that's the end. I won't believe anymore. I'll take my marbles and go home."

Ignorance can also be a factor in rejecting Christ. I heard of a man who said he believed in God and in the Bible until one day he read a section in Leviticus concerning the animals that were unclean to eat. It was telling the factors that determine whether a species was clean or unclean. Mentioned in this section was the hare (which he interpreted to be a rabbit) which according to the passage was a cud chewing animal. Believing that rabbits don't chew cud, he concluded that the Bible contained an error of fact and was therefore not trustworthy. So he quit believing in God after he read in the Bible that the rabbit chews the cud. Interestingly, a bit of research could of cleared up this problem.

Some Hebrew scholars question whether the word in this passage actually refers to a rabbit. The Hebrew word arnebeth (translated here) is of uncertain derivation. Biologists have also come to the conclusion that rabbits do exhibit a behavior very similar to chewing cud. But the more important point is to note how easily some people will dismiss the entire message of Scripture based upon the misunderstanding of a relatively insignificant particular. Imagine what it would be like to stand before God on Judgment Day with this kind of attitude. "Well, I used to believe in You until I read in Your Bible that the rabbit chews the cud." Could you imagine hearing God reply, "That's not a hare. That's an arnebeth. It's not even in the rabbit family."

I have encountered many people who have tossed out the faith based upon some supposed contradiction or error they have found in Scripture. Many of these problems can be avoided by an understanding of certain rules of biblical interpretation that we need to know and follow. First of all, let me say that I don't pretend to understand everything that is in the Bible. There are a lot of things in the Bible that I quite frankly will confess to you that I don't understand. If I were smarter, I might. However, if my interpretation of a passage is blatantly contradictory to another verse of scripture, then my interpretation is wrong. The scripture isn't wrong, my interpretation is wrong. So many people are ready to say, "Well, the Bible is wrong, because look..." No, the Bible isn't wrong. The interpretation is at fault.

I have encountered many people with faulty interpretations of scripture. If your interpretation of a scripture would cause it to seem ridiculous or foolish, then your interpretation of that scripture is wrong. God didn't say anything that was ridiculous or foolish. Rather than pointing the accusing finger at Scripture, it is more helpful to identify the basic problem with my limited understanding. It is far more productive to confess that the meaning of a passage eludes us than to throw up our hands and cry out, "Hopeless contradiction!" We must make every effort to understand what God is saying. We can be assured that when we discover the proper interpretation of a verse it will be reasonable and rational and will not contradict the rest of the Scriptures.

It is crucial to remember that many of our problems with Scripture are a result of our own personal assumptions and biases. For instance, the Bible says, "Spare the rod and spoil the child." That means that if you don't spank your child, you'll spoil him. It's just a statement of fact, if you spare the rod, you'll spoil the child. When he was young, my son interpreted that as a commandment. He said, "You're supposed to spare that rod and spoil me." Wrong interpretation, son. So there are many passages that can have a dual interpretation based on one's point of view. We may be looking at it in too limited a fashion, rather than considering the verse in its context. When a person comes up to me with a question about a passage, I immediately read the context. Most generally, I catch in its context the correct interpretation and show them that it reads in an entirely different way than what they were thinking.

Jesus declared that in the last days, those who don't believe in Him and do not believe His words will have to stand before God to be judged. He said He's not going to judge them. He didn't come to judge the world. He came to save the world. This brings to

mind His conversation with the religious leader Nicodemus. Jesus told him, "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world, through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned." He reiterates the same point here, "I didn't come to judge the world, I came to save it." He affirms His mission was that of saving the world. He said in another passage, "I've come to seek and save that which was lost." To believe on Him is to have everlasting life. It is to be saved from the penalty and the consequence of sin. It is to be saved from the judgment and the wrath of God that is to come against all the unrighteousness of men, even those who have held the truth of God in unrighteousness. "He that believeth on Me," Jesus said, "is not condemned." Paul the apostle said, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those that are in Jesus Christ" It is important to note that Paul did say to the church, "We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." But the kind of judgment Paul speaks of is one of rewards for the things we have done while we are in these bodies. It is like the judge's seat at the Olympics, where the various participants come up to receive medals for the victories they have won in the particular event. So we will stand before Christ to receive our rewards.

For those who don't believe in Jesus, it is a different story. They will stand before the judgment seat of God to receive sentencing for their failure to believe the words of Jesus, and for their failure to receive the forgiveness that God offered them through Christ. I am certain that God will give each person a chance to plead their case. But I'm sure at that time every excuse that people might seek to offer will sound so totally ludicrous, most will be unable to even say a word.

So we have seen the claims of Jesus Christ, radical, spectacular, and glorious. He has claimed that He has come to save you. He has claimed that you can have eternal life through believing His words and following His commandments.

The longer I live and the more I see of what the world has to offer the more vain it seems. I see the emptiness that people experience who seem to have attained more worldly goods than the rest of us. In light of the hopelessness of even the best this world has to offer, Jesus' offer of life is too good to turn down. I have no intellectual problems with this whatsoever. In fact, I would have great intellectual difficulties in not believing Jesus Christ, because somehow, I would have to rationalize His miracles. I would have to come up with an explanation for His ability to walk on the water, to raise Lazarus from the dead, and His own resurrection. I'd have to explain how one Man could, by accident, fulfill all three hundred of the Messianic prophecies. I would find myself very hard pressed to try to rationalize these things away. I would have tremendous difficulty giving some kind of an explanation that would be rational or plausible.

Many years ago, I, like most people, experienced a time of doubt. I thought, "Well maybe I'm an atheist. Maybe God doesn't exist. Maybe it is all just the figment of man's imagination. Man needs something to believe in, so he invented a god, and the Bible is simply a collection of stories expressing man's concepts and ideas of a supreme being." That lasted for around a half hour until I started to critically evaluate this point of view.

The moment I started thinking, and tried to explain the existence of universe apart from God, I had to yield to reason. To hold on to an explanation of life apart from God would require a mindless state akin to idiocy. I couldn't put myself in that kind of unreasonable state of mind. I would have to believe all kinds of absurdities. I would have to believe that such patently miraculous features of life such as the marvelous ability to see, were created by thousands of fortuitous accidental circumstances. I would have to buy the idea that the perfect structure and function of the eye began with the sun beating down on a little worm and creating a mutation on its forehead. (I don't know how a worm would know what was his forehead and what was not.) But gradually over a process of time, through billions of years and countless mutations, this aberration formed into an eye. So then living things gained the ability to see. This same little worm scraped its tissue so often that it formed scar tissue that became legs complete with fully developed feet. Now our worm is a salamander and can see and walk. Is that rational? Give me a break!

The fool has said in his heart there is no God. A person must take a very mindless position to try to argue away the evidence of design in creation. In my own experience, I found it was easier to believe in God than to deny His existence. Not to believe in God brought forth too many difficulties. I believe in the existence of God, which according to scripture proves I'm not a fool. But every man has to make the choice to believe or not to believe. Jesus has made the claim that if you've seen Him, you've seen the One that's sent Him. If you believe on Him, you believe on the One who has sent Him. He claims that He came to save, that His words are eternal life and that they are not his words, but the words of the Father. The Father is the One who told him what to say and what to speak to us. If you don't believe, you're abiding in darkness and one day you will stand before God at the great judgment. I want to believe! I do believe! I have no problem with my belief.

Father, we thank you that you have provided such an abundance of evidence that any thinking, rational man can be completely satisfied in having faith in Jesus Christ. We can easily believe that He is the Son of God who came to save the world from sin. He came as light into this darkness, and those who hear his words and follow Him, do not walk in darkness but have the light of life. Thank you Lord for the many infallible proofs that confirm the claims of Jesus. Father, we pray for those who have been wrestling with this issue. Help them to see, Lord, that there is no neutral ground. They either believe or they don't believe. I pray, Father that you will bring them to a solid, strong faith and you will confirm in their hearts that position of faith by your Holy Spirit bearing witness of the truth. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Footnotes:

[1] Stoner, Peter W. *Science Speaks*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1963.

