

# Sermon on the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ

## SERMON ON THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

Good morning and thank you for being with us on this glorious day.

Let's begin with a question, one might even say, one of the most important questions of the ages...

### **What is the basis for hope in the Christian Life?**

TODAY WE ARE GOING TO ANSWER THAT QUESTION AS WE FINISH OUR STUDY ON THE GOSPEL OF MARK FOCUSING ON the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ)

My goal today: WITH THE ENABLEMENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, IF YOU ARE A BELIEVER I WANT YOU TO WALK OUT TODAY HAVING FULL ASSURANCE OF YOUR HOPE IN THE RESURRECTION event and the power of God in your life for eternity. IF YOU ARE A SKEPTIC, I WANT YOU TO WALK OUT TODAY HAVING HEARD THE TRUTH ABOUT THE SINGLE GREATEST EVENT IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD

The Bible has much to say about hope- Paul actually addresses this concern in the church in 1 Th 4:13+

"But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope."

The apostle Peter, eyewitness to the Resurrected Christ, says in 1 Peter 1:3+,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (FROM THIS PASSAGE WHY IS OUR HOPE LIVING? BECAUSE OF JESUS' RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD)

For many of us, we (FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CHRIST) have a hope that is blessed (Titus 2:13+ - looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus), "the hope of eternal life, which God, Who cannot lie, promised long ages ago" - Titus 1:2),

Now in case your sitting there thinking, yea but can I trust Scripture? Yes Christian Scripture has withstood 2000 yrs of critique, a true, reliable, and historical account of the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, who is no ordinary Man, a Man whose death and resurrection changed the course of history for the entire world, a Man whose moral teachings echo into almost every known part of the world, a Man Who claimed divine origin and status, doing things reserved only for the divine. Billions of people throughout history have testified that their lives were dramatically changed for the better by believing in Him. Jesus is the Reason for the Easter season. He is the reason we are here today. He is the reason some of you were invited. He is the Blessed Hope of the believer. Our hope is not a "hope so",but a Hope sure! In Jn 11:25-26 Jesus says to Martha,

"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" (Look at congregation)

**ILLUSTRATION** - There is a fascinating story from 18th century England in which two erudite, well known men set out to disprove Christianity. One was an English jurist and literary scholar named [Lord Lyttleton](#) and the other was an English poet named [Gilbert West](#). They agreed that if Christianity was to be discredited, two things were necessary: to disprove the Resurrection and to explain the conversion of Saul of Tarsus in a way that satisfied the skeptics. The two men divided these tasks between themselves, Lyttleton taking the problem of Saul and West agreeing to research the Resurrection. They invested over a year for their studies, then met together to compare notes. Each one was astonished to discover that the other had become a Christian. The evidence was too strong, the truth too undeniable. It still is.

So whether the details of this story are exactly as stated, they are close but more importantly **the principle is clear that an honest approach to examination of the evidence for and against the resurrection will leave one with little doubt that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is a true, historical event.** But such a glorious truth that Jesus has conquered death (1Co 15:55-56, 57+) for all who believe in Him demands **more than an intellectual response**, but calls for a response of one's heart, a response that truly will change the

eternal destiny of a man or woman's soul! Paul spoke the following command that, if obeyed, gives a sure promise, a sure hope, not a hope so! "**Believe** (a command) in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." (Acts 16:31<sup>+</sup>)

### Related Resources

- [Read the Letter Lord Lyttleton wrote to Gilbert West](#) - It deals with the conversion of Saul of Tarsus
- Here is the [full book Lord Lyttleton on the Conversion of St Paul](#) or here is a [free copy online](#)
- [Summary of Lord Lyttleton's study of the miraculous conversion of Saul of Tarsus to Paul of Jesus](#)
- Gilbert Best's 1747 book on his [Observations on the History and Evidences of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ](#)

Friends, in the following minutes I will give you TRUTH FROM GOD'S WORD to think about, to help you see that the RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST FROM THE DEAD IS A TRUE EVENT THAT OCCURRED IN HISTORY), (THAT HIS RESURRECTION IMPACTS US TODAY), so that we may all agree that the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is our blessed hope.

Let's pray – Today we are going to read from the Gospel of Mark starting in Mark 16:1+, let me give you some context

1. The roman army captain confirmed to Pilate that Jesus was dead, a corpse (see Mark 15:44-)
2. A Jewish follower of Jesus asked for the dead body of Jesus to give him a proper burial (Mt 27:58, Lk 23:51-53, Mk 15:45+)
3. Joseph of Arimathea placed Jesus wrapped in linen in a new tomb we pick up in! (Mark 15:45, 46+, Mt 27:57-60).
4. Women followers were watching (Mk 15:47+, cf Mk 16:1-8+)

Mark 15:40+ There were also women looking on from a distance (THIS REFUTES THE ARGUMENT THAT THEY WENT TO THE WRONG TOMB THE NEXT MORNING! cf Lk 23:55,56+). Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. 41 When He was in Galilee, they would follow Him and help Him. Many other women had come up with Him to Jerusalem. 42 When it was already evening, because it was preparation day (that is, the day before the Sabbath), 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Sanhedrin who was himself looking forward to the kingdom of God, came and boldly went in to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. 44 Pilate was surprised that He was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him whether He had already died. 45 When he found out from the centurion, he gave the corpse to Joseph. 46 After he bought some fine linen, he took Him down and wrapped Him in the linen. Then he placed Him in a tomb cut out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the entrance to the tomb. 47 Now Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses were watching where He was placed.

Mark 16:1+ When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so they could go and anoint Him. 2 Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week (OUR SUNDAY), they went to the tomb at sunrise. (Lk 24:1+, Mt 28:1) 3 They were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone from the entrance to the tomb for us?" 4 Looking up, they observed that the stone—which was very large—had been rolled away. (Mt 27:60-66) 5 When they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; they were amazed and alarmed. 6 "Don't be alarmed," he told them. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has been resurrected! He is not here! (LET'S READ THOSE WONDERFUL WORDS AGAIN! READ THEM WITH ME...THEN READ THEM SLOWLY SO THEY CAN READ WITH YOU..."HE HAS BEEN RESURRECTED. HE IS NOT HERE!" WHY IS HE NOT THERE?. THEN SPEAK BOLDLY TO THE CHURCH "HE IS RISEN!" HOPEFULLY SOMEONE WILL RESPOND -- IF ONLY ONE OR TWO DO, OR THEY DO IT VERY QUIETLY, PROMPT THEM TO SAY "HE IS RISEN INDEED!") See the place where they put Him. 7 But go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see Him there just as He told you.' " 8 So they went out and started running from the tomb, because trembling and astonishment overwhelmed them. And they said nothing to anyone, since they were afraid.

### IS THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST TRUE OR IS IT A HOAX PERPETRATED BY CHRISTIANS FOR THE PAST 2000 YEARS?

Paul (IN 1 COR 15:17+ UNDER THE INSPIRATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT MAKES A RADICAL STATEMENT ABOUT THE CHRISTIAN FAITH STATING THAT "**IF CHRIST HAS NOT BEEN RAISED, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.**" -- if it is a hoax, then your faith is useless, we are still in our sin. Christianity is not a religion of death, but of life. If Jesus did not rise,

then the cross means nothing.

Here are a few reasons why we can have complete confidence in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ!

**1. Empty tomb** – there is still no better understanding of that empty tomb than THE FACT THAT Jesus was dead, a corpse, and that His body came to life again and He left the tomb, leaving it empty. Why do we believe the angel's declaration "He has been resurrected. He is not here!"? Why do we believe in THE empty tomb?

**THOUGHTS ON EMPTY TOMB** - Consider the significance of the fact that NO ONE in first-century Judea disputed the empty tomb. FIRST CENTURY WITNESSES admitted the tomb was empty (WE'LL LOOK AT THAT MORE IN THE NEXT POINT). Second and more surprising, His enemies freely admitted that the tomb was empty, and they scrambled to fabricate an explanation for it. Never forget that both the Jews and the Romans—the enemies of Christ, the ones responsible for His death—never tried for one moment to dispute the empty tomb. They could not. They could have shut down the Christian movement in short order had they only produced Christ's body. But they could not, and they did not even try.

**2. The appearances of Jesus to many** – Remember that throughout history the testimony of eyewitnesses has been considered one of the most reliable pieces of evidence in a court of law. So let's look at a summary of witnesses that support the angel's words "He has been resurrected. He is not here."

In Acts 1:3+ Luke writes (and I am reading from the New Living Translation)...

"During the forty days after His crucifixion, He appeared to the apostles from time to time and proved to them in many ways that He was actually alive."

Paul expands on Luke's description in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8+ which as an aside is probably the best *definition* of the Gospel in the Bible.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He appeared to Cephas (Explain "this is another name for Peter"), then to the twelve. 6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; 7 then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; 8 and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.

Notice the phrase Paul repeated "according to the scriptures" - first remember that the word "scriptures" in the NT virtually always refers to the OT scriptures - so what is Paul doing? Clearly he is making an appeal to the witness of fulfilled OT prophecies that centuries earlier had predicted Christ's death, burial and resurrection - we don't have time to study these prophecies now but can say that their fulfillment is evidence of Christ's resurrection - in other words, if we put the OT Scriptures on the witness stand so to speak they would speak tell us the truth about the resurrection of Christ) (See Old Testament Messianic Prophecies).

#### LET'S SUMMARIZE -

Jesus appeared in his physical resurrected body to eyewitnesses - first to the women in Mark 16, then to Peter, then to the disciples, (some of whom doubted until he showed them the wounds in his hands and side - He proved He was not a ghost or a spirit but had a physical body by eating and drinking with them. And He did these and other things not for just one day but for 40 days.

**3. RADICAL CHANGE of LIFE IN THE APOSTLES** - PAUL WAS AS ORTHODOX A JEWISH MAN AS ANYONE WRITING "(I WAS) circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. (Phil 3:5-7+) (See [Summary of Lord Lyttleton's study](#))

AND YET WHAT DID PAUL SAY ABOUT ALL HIS ORTHODOX JEWISH CREDENTIALS AFTER HE HAD MET THE RESURRECTED CHRIST? He said "I count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ" (Phil 3:9+)

#### THAT'S A RADICAL CHANGE.

AND Acts 9:20-21+ SUMMARIZES PAUL'S RADICAL CHANGE - HE SAW THE RISEN JESUS IN ACTS 9:3-6+ (PROBABLY NEED TO READ THIS AS IT IS PAUL'S EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT OF THE RESURRECTED CHRIST)

As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; 4 and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" 5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, 6

but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.”

## **AND WHAT WAS THE EFFECT OF PAUL’S ENCOUNTER WITH THE RISEN CHRIST?**

Acts 9:20+ and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” 21 All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, “Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?”)

SO in one moment PAUL was transformed BY A VISION OF THE RISEN CHRIST from the greatest enemy the early church into the greatest missionary the world has ever known.

Add to PAUL’S EXAMPLE, THE RADICAL CHANGE THAT OCCURRED IN ALL THE APOSTLES AFTER SEEING THE RESURRECTED CHRIST A MAN NAMED **PETER THE THRICE DENIER** OF CHRIST BECAME FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST AND WAS TRANSFORMED INTO **PETER THE PROCLAIMER** OF CHRIST’S DEATH, BURIAL AND RESURRECTION.

Paul and Peter were willing to die for their belief in the resurrected Christ. [Extrabiblical evidence supports the fact that all 12 apostles were martyred](#) for the sake of the gospel.

**Why?** The tomb is empty, and Jesus is alive (Lk 24:6+)! Buddha is still in his tomb. Confucius is still in his tomb. Mohammed is still in his tomb. But as the angel SAID “HE IS NOT HERE!” **Why?** Because HE IS RISEN!

## **LET’S SUMMARIZE THE EVIDENCE FOR THE RESURRECTION:**

- 1) The empty tomb testifies to the truth of the resurrection of Christ
- 2) Many eyewitnesses including prophecies and people testify that Jesus is alive
- 3) Radically changed lives testify that Jesus is alive -- in fact every person in this room who has experienced a radically changed life is a living witness to the truth that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead and is alive.

## **WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES THE RESURRECTION MAKE TO GOD THE FATHER?**

When Christ died on the cross he uttered some of the greatest words ever spoken **“it is finished”** (which means “paid in full” -- in ancient times this exact phrase would be written across a bill of sale when the bill was paid. We all had a bill - the wages of sin (Ro 6:23+). Jesus paid our sin bill in full when he died on the cross in our place. His resurrection showed that god the father accepted the payment of his “precious blood, as of a Lamb unblemished and spotless.” (1 Peter 1:19+). In other words the empty tomb is the father’s cry of **“Amen”** to the son’s cry of **it is finished**, paid in full (Jn 19:30+)! The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead indicates that the Father is satisfied with the Son’s payment! And that is good news for all of us who are in Christ by grace through faith in Him (Eph 2:8-9+)!

What about me? What difference does THE TRUTH OF THE RESURRECTION, MAKE IN MY LIFE?

The resurrection provides us with POWER - supernatural power, resurrection power - you may be thinking there is no way that kind of power would be available to me. Sure, it was there for Jesus to raise Him from the dead, but for me in my day to day life. No way! Let’s see what the Bible says.

### **1) PAUL’S DESIRE FOR RESURRECTION POWER:**

Paul wanted to experience resurrection power declaring....

that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death (Phil 3:10+)

Question: Do you desire the power of His resurrection in your life?

### **2) PAUL DESCRIPTION OF RESURRECTION POWER:**

## **LET’S LOOK AT ROMANS 6:3-5+ PAUL BEGINS WITH A QUESTION...**

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into (IDENTIFIED WITH) Christ Jesus have been baptized into (IDENTIFIED WITH) His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life (MIGHT BE ENABLE TO LIVE A BRAND NEW QUALITY OF LIFE ONE WE WERE NEVER

ABLE TO LIVE BEFORE). 5 For (term of explanation - [youtube](#)) if we have become united with Him (in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection.

When we believed in Christ for salvation, in the mysterious divine working of redemption, we were crucified with Christ on the Cross (Gal 2:20+), we were buried with Him and we were raised with Him to “newness of life” in the likeness of His life. In short, believers now have access to resurrection power, a power which is activated or enabled by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

**Perhaps you are skeptical of everything I have said.** Let me give you an example of a man who was skeptical. His name is Lee Strobel an investigative reporter and Yale trained lawyer who sought to disprove the resurrection of Christ. With a well trained legal mind, he called the same witnesses to the stand as we did today -

- (1) The witness of the empty tomb
- (2) The eyewitness of Biblical prophecies and Biblical people and
- (3) the irrefutable witness of radically transformed lives of Paul and Peter among many others.

And what was the result of Strobel’s investigation? Did he disprove the resurrection of Christ? Like so many men and women before him who have looked honestly at the evidence for the resurrection, this once skeptical lawyer became a radical believer who chronicled his journey in the best selling book [THE CASE FOR CHRIST \(BORROW THIS BOOK\)](#), ([Here is the audio version of the book](#)) which has been released in as a [major motion picture \(free\) \(Watch associated documentary free\)](#). (Consider watching this movie with a skeptical unbelieving friend, one like Lee Strobel, and then having a dessert and a discussion!)

Recently, **Lee Strobel** spoke about our need for **resurrection power** explaining that

“before I bowed the knee to Jesus as Lord and received the Spirit of God, I was so angry and mean that my 4yr old daughter when she heard me opening the door upon coming home from work, would gather up all her toys from the living room and go to her room and shut the door. This is heart-breaking. Yet, some months after my conversion, my daughter too at church makes the announcement that she too wants to follow Jesus, because she wants what has happened to daddy to happen to her. RESURRECTION POWER matters today. You and I can’t break destructive patterns in our lives. We can’t forgive freely. We can’t defeat sin but He can, 1 John 4:4 “You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.”

**Question:** Are you relying on your natural power or supernatural resurrection power to live the Christian life? The former will result in futility, frequent failures and much frustration. The latter will lead to frequent victory over sin and frequent experiencing of the abundant John 10:10 life in Christ.

### 3) PAUL’S PRAYER FOR RESURRECTION POWER

Okay Pastor, so I desire this resurrection power and I believe it is available to me through the indwelling Holy Spirit. How? Prayer and the Word

Paul prayed for the saints at Ephesus to practically experience this supernatural, resurrection power. It’s a great prayer for us to pray for our spouses and each other. It’s a prayer I want to pray for you, depending on the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to make it real in your heart and your daily walk. Let’s read it first and then I will close by praying it for every follower of Christ who desires resurrection power. If you are not yet a follower of Jesus, but would like to experience God’s resurrection power, then the way is open to you today, by placing your faith in the Risen Redeemer Who died in your place, paying the bill for your sin debt in full, so that you might experience His resurrection power and a be enabled to live a resurrection life now and forever in eternity.

So here is Paul’s prayer for resurrection power...

Ephesians 1:18-20+ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope (absolute assurance) of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the surpassing greatness of HIS POWER toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might 20 which He brought about in Christ, when He RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places

*"We all need this resurrection power to live a supernatural life"*

**Short comment on power (dunamis)** - The Greek word for power in simple terms means the power to accomplish supernaturally what you cannot possibly accomplish naturally! And so, it is the power to obey commands like "husbands **love** (present imperative - continually!) your wives like Christ loved the church." (Eph 5:25+) Try to obey that one in your natural power! Or the command to

forgive one another just like God has forgiven you! (Eph 4:32+) Try that one relying on your natural power! You can see the point -- we all need this resurrection power to live a supernatural life!

Let's pray for a [Spirit filled church](#), a church filled with saints learning to daily rely on resurrection power so that the world will see that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead by looking at the supernatural lives of his followers.

Bow your heads with me.

### [Christ Arose | Robert Lowry](#)

Low in the grave He lay,  
Jesus, my Savior,  
Waiting the coming day,  
Jesus, my Lord!

Refrain:

Up from the grave He arose,  
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes,  
He arose a Victor from the dark domain,  
And He lives forever, with His saints to reign.  
He arose! He arose!  
Hallelujah! Christ arose!

Vainly they watch His bed,  
Jesus, my Savior;  
Vainly they seal the dead,  
Jesus, my Lord!

Death cannot keep his Prey,  
Jesus, my Savior;  
He tore the bars away,  
Jesus, my Lord!

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#### Related Resources:

- [Trial & Crucifixion of Jesus-Parallel Passages](#)
- [Who Moved the Stone? by Frank Morison](#) - Began a skeptic, ended as a believer!
- [Resurrection of Jesus Christ-Devotionals](#)
- [The Case For Christ - full movie free](#) - Lee Strobel's story of his efforts to crush Christianity!
- [The Case for Christ - borrow book](#)
- [The Case for Christ - audio version of the book](#) - free online and with a professional reader.
- [The Case for Christ - a related documentary](#) - Interesting background that led to Strobel's book and movie.
- [Resurrection of Jesus Christ - Don Stewart](#)
- [Shorter Argument for the Resurrection from Don Stewart](#)
- [Dr. J. Vernon McGee: Witnesses: After He Died They Saw Him Alive](#)
- [He's Alive by Don Francisco with lyrics](#)

## OBSERVATIONS ON THE CONVERSION AND APOSTLESHIP OF PAUL

By [Lord Lyttelton](#).

Analyzed and Condensed by J. L. Campbell, D. D.,  
Cambridge, Mass.

The object of this paper is to present in an abbreviated form the famous argument of Lord Lyttelton in defense of Christianity based on the conversion of the Apostle Paul. A few words about the man himself and about the interesting circumstances in which this treatise was written will properly introduce the subject.

[George Lyttelton](#) was born at Hagley, Worcestershire, England, January 17, 1709, and died on Tuesday morning, August 22, 1773, aged sixty-four years. He belonged to a distinguished "family of long descent and gentle blood, dwelling for centuries on the same spot." Educated at Eton and Oxford, he soon afterwards entered Parliament, "and for many years the name of George Lyttelton was seen in every account of every debate in the House of Commons." From this, he advanced successively to the position of lord commissioner of the treasury, and of chancellor of the exchequer, after which he was raised to the peerage. He was also a man of letters and his closing years were devoted almost wholly to literary pursuits. He was a writer of verse as well as prose and Dr. Samuel Johnson has furnished us with his biography in his "Lives of the Poets." Outside of his books, which comprise nine octavo volumes, his Memoirs and Correspondence make two additional volumes that were compiled and edited by Robert Phillimore in 1845.

The eighteenth century was the darkest period religiously in the history of England since the time of the Reformation. It was the age of the great deists, agnostics, rationalists and unbelievers, when "all men of rank are [were] thought to be infidels." Like so many of the literary men of his time, George Lyttelton and his friend Gilbert West were led at first to reject the Christian religion. On the Sabbath forenoon before he died, in an interview with Dr. Johnson, Lyttelton said, "When I first set out in the world I had friends who endeavored to shake my belief in the Christian religion. I saw difficulties which staggered me," etc. In his biography of Lord Lyttelton, Dr. Johnson adds, "He had, in the pride of juvenile confidence, with the help of corrupt conversation, entertained doubts of the truth of Christianity." His intimacy with Bolingbroke, Chesterfield, Pope and others of the same kind had no doubt influenced him in this direction. T. T. Biddolph tells us that both Lyttelton and West, "men of acknowledged talents, had imbibed the principles of infidelity. Fully persuaded that the Bible was an imposture, they were determined to expose the cheat. Lord Lyttelton chose the Conversion of Paul and Mr. West the Resurrection of Christ for the subject of hostile criticism. Both sat down to their respective tasks full of prejudice; but the result of their separate attempts was, that they were both converted by their efforts to overthrow the truth of Christianity. They came together, not as they expected, to exult over an imposture exposed to ridicule, but to lament over their own folly and to felicitate each other on their joint conviction that the Bible was the word of God. Their able inquiries have furnished two of the most valuable treatises in favor of revelation, one entitled 'Observations on the Conversion of St. Paul' and the other 'Observations on the Resurrection of Christ.'" West's book was the first published. Lyttelton's work appeared at first anonymously in 1747, when he was thirty-eight years of age. The edition which lies before me contains seventy-eight compact pages. It is addressed in the form of a letter to Gilbert West. In the opening paragraph he says, "The conversion and apostleship of St. Paul alone, duly considered, was of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a divine revelation." Dr. Johnson remarked that it is a treatise "to which infidelity had never been able to fabricate a specious answer." Dr. Philip Doddridge, who became Lyttelton's most intimate religious friend, speaks of it as "masterly," and, "as perfect in its kind as any our age has produced." Testimonials of this kind might be multiplied indefinitely.

Let us now turn to an examination of the book itself. Lyttelton naturally begins by bringing before us all the facts that we have in the New Testament regarding the conversion of St. Paul; the three accounts given in the Acts; what we have in Galatians, Philippians, Timothy, Corinthians, Colossians and in other places. (Acts 9:22-26; Galatians 1:11-16; Philippians 3:4-8; 1 Timothy 1:12-13; 1 Corinthians 15:8; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Colossians 1:1, etc.) Then he lays down four propositions which he considers exhaust all the possibilities in the case.

- 1. Either Paul was "an impostor who said what he knew to be false, with an intent to deceive;" or
- 2. He was an enthusiast who imposed on himself by the force of "an overheated imagination;" or
- 3. He was "deceived by the fraud of others;" or, finally,
- 4. What he declared to be the cause of his conversion did all really happen; "and, therefore the Christian religion is a divine revelation."

## 1. PAUL NOT AN IMPOSTOR

More than half his argument (about forty pages) is devoted to the first of these propositions, which is really the key to the whole situation. Is this story of Paul's conversion so often repeated in Acts and Epistles a fabrication, put forth by a designing man with the deliberate purpose and intention of deceiving?

Lyttelton at once raises the question of motive. What could have induced him while on his way to Damascus, filled with implacable hatred against this whole sect, to turn around and become a disciple of Christ?

1. Was it wealth?

No, all the wealth was in the keeping of those whom he had forsaken; the poverty was on the side of those with whom he now identified himself. So poor had they been, that those among them possessed of any little property sold whatever belonged to them in order to provide for the dire necessities of the rest. Indeed, one of the burdens afterwards laid upon Paul was to collect means for those who were threatened with starvation. Such was the humble condition of these early Christians, that he often refused to

take anything from them even for the bare necessities of life, but labored himself to provide for his scanty needs. To the Corinthians, he writes, "Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place; and we toil working with our hands." (1 Corinthians 4:11-12. See also 2 Corinthians 12:14; 1 Thessalonians 2:4-9; 2 Thessalonians 3:8, etc.) In his farewell to the elders of Ephesus, he appeals to them as knowing it to be true that, "I coveted no man's silver or gold or apparel. Ye yourselves know that these hands ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me" (Acts 20:33-34). He forsook the great Jewish hierarchy with its gorgeous temple and its overflowing treasuries, where his zeal in putting down the hated sect of the Nazarene would have been almost certainly rewarded with a fortune. He cast in his lot among the poverty-stricken disciples of Jesus Christ, among whom it was his ambition to be poor. Near the end of his life he presents to us the picture of an old man shivering in a Roman dungeon and pathetically asking for a cloak to be sent him to cover his naked and suffering limbs during the severity of an Italian winter.

## 2. Was it reputation?

No; those with whom he united were held in universal contempt; their Leader had been put to death as a criminal among thieves; the chiefs of the cause that he had espoused were illiterate men. On the other hand, the wisest and the greatest men in all the land indignantly rejected the teachings of this new sect. The preaching of Christ crucified was to the Jew a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness. There was no reputation for the great disciple of Gamaliel in parting with his splendid honors and identifying himself with a lot of ignorant fishermen. He would only be execrated [greatly loathed-Ed.] as a deserter and betrayer of the Jewish cause, and he might rest assured that the same bloody knife that slew the Shepherd of the scattered flock would soon be unsheathed against himself. All the reputation that he had so zealously built up was gone the hour that he went over to the new religion, and from that day on contempt was his portion. He was accounted as the filth of the world and the offscouring of all things. (1 Corinthians 4:13).

## 3. Was it power he was after?

We know what men have done to get into positions of prominence and dominion over their fellows. Mahomet, the popes, and many others, put forth spiritual claims so as to promote thereby their own temporal ends. How was it with Paul? His whole career was marked by a complete absence of all self-seeking. He had no eye to worldly ambitions. He interfered with nothing, "in government or civil affairs; he meddled not with legislation; he formed no commonwealths; he raised no seditions; he affected no temporal power." He assumed no pre-eminence over other Christians. He regarded himself as not worthy to be called an apostle, as less than the least of all saints, as the chief of sinners. Those engaged in like work he called "fellow-laborers" and "fellow-servants." Even if the truth was spread by those hostile to him, through "envy and strife," so long as Christ was proclaimed, "therein I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice" (Philippians 1:18). He did not lord it over the churches, even over those that he himself had founded. To the Pauline party in Corinth he exclaims, "Was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Corinthians 1:13). "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as *your servants* for Jesus' sake" (2 Corinthians 4:5). Those who, from selfish motives seek for influence over people pander to them and flatter them [as, e.g. did Absalom]. There was nothing of this with Paul. He rebuked the churches unsparingly for their sins, and did not hesitate, if need be, to incur their displeasure. Disclaiming all pre-eminence and position and power, he preached Christ and Him crucified as the head, and hid and buried self behind the cross. Earth to him was nothing. His eye was fixed on "the recompense of reward" (Hebrews 11:26).

## 4. Was his motive the gratification of any other passion?

Impostors have pretended to receive divine revelations as a pretext in order that they might indulge in loose conduct. Was it so here? No; for all Paul's teachings were in the most absolute antagonism to any such purpose. "His writings breathe nothing but the strictest morality, obedience to magistrates, order, and government, with the utmost abhorrence of all licentiousness, idleness, or loose behavior under the cloak of religion." Writing to the Thessalonians, he utters the challenge, "Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and righteously and unblameably we behaved ourselves toward you that believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:10). "We wronged no man, we corrupted no man, we took advantage of no man" (2 Corinthians 7:2). The whole teaching of the Apostle is in the sternest and most uncompromising hostility to everything but the highest and holiest ideals.

## 5. Was it a pious fraud?

That is to say, did Paul pretend to receive a divine revelation in order to give him prestige in advancing the teachings of Christianity? But Christianity was the one thing he had set out to destroy. To become a Christian was to incur the hatred, the contempt, the torments and the violent deaths suffered by Christians in that day. Why then this sudden change in Paul's own views regarding the unpopular teachings of the Nazarene? Would he have endured "the loss of all things" and exulted over it, for what he knew was a fraud? Would he have spent a life of the most arduous toil to induce others to make every earthly sacrifice while he knew that behind it all he was practising a delusion? It would be an imposture as unprofitable as it was perilous, both to himself the deceiver and to the others whom he deceived. The theory confutes itself. Only the sternest conviction that he had



received a divine revelation could have induced Paul to pass through what he himself had suffered, or to have asked others to do the same. "If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most pitiable" (1 Corinthians 15:19).

But had he practiced a deception, he could not have successfully carried it out. Men sometimes act capriciously. Suppose that Paul "just did it" without any motive that can be imagined; then he must have ignominiously failed in his attempt to perpetuate such a fraud. How could he, e.g., have become such an adept in the mysteries and secrets of the new religion as to be an authority and an apostle of it, if he had to depend for his special knowledge on information received from men who knew well by bitter experience that he was their capital enemy? It must have come in another way, and his own account makes it plain. "For neither did I receive it (the Gospel) from man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:12). Had he fabricated the story of his conversion he would certainly have located it in a place so remote or hidden that there could be no witnesses to refute. [Joe Smith, e.g., and the golden plates of the Book of Mormon]. Instead of that the miracle of Paul's conversion, with its great light from heaven exceeding the brightness of the sun, is placed in the public highway near Damascus; at noonday, when their senses could not be deceived, and when all the accompanying soldiers and commissioners were with him on the spot. Had there been a shadow of disproof, how promptly the Jews in Damascus would have nipped the falsehood in the bud by the testimony of the witnesses who were present with Paul at the time. Or, when the Apostle stood on the castle stairs in Jerusalem and told the whole story, why did not the Jewish authorities silence him at once and forever by showing that nothing of the kind had ever taken place, and proved it by the abundant evidence of the competent witnesses who were with him—if it were not true? It was an event that took place before the eyes of the world, and would be made at once a matter of the strictest scrutiny. And the truth of the fact was so incontestably established that it had become a matter of common knowledge. The Jews said the utmost they could against Paul before the Roman court, and yet Paul appealed directly to King Agrippa in presence of Festus as to his own personal knowledge of the truth of the story. "For the king knoweth of these things, unto whom also I speak freely; for I am persuaded that none of these things is hidden from him; for this hath not been done in a corner" (Acts 26:26)— "a very remarkable proof both of the notoriety of the fact, and the integrity of the man, who, with so fearless a confidence, could call upon a king to give testimony by him, even while he was sitting in judgment upon him." Moreover, how came it that Ananias went to meet such an enemy in Damascus, if the story of his conversion was made up? If Paul was an impostor, then all his miracles were simply tricks or sleight-of-hand. Nevertheless, he, a despised and hated Jew, set himself to the appalling task of converting the Gentile world—teaching doctrines that shocked every prejudice and at which they were wont to mock in derision. Arrayed against him were the magistrates with their policy and power, the priests with their interests and craft, the people with their prejudice and passions, the philosophers with their pride and wisdom. Could he by feats of jugglery in presence of a shrewd, hostile people strike Elymas the sorcerer, blind; heal a cripple at Lystra; restore the pythoness at Philippi; shake open with a prayer the doors of a prison; raise the dead to life, etc., So that thousands were converted and great pure churches renouncing all sin and dishonesty, established throughout the Roman world? Our author shows that this would be impossible without divine help and therefore he concludes that he has proven (1) that Paul was not a cheat telling a trumped-up story about his conversion, and (2) if he were, he could not have succeeded.

## **2. PAUL NOT AN ENTHUSIAST WHO IMPOSED ON HIMSELF**

This second argument covers twenty pages. Was Paul a deluded enthusiast whose overheated imagination imposed on him so that he imagined to be true that which had never really taken place? Lord Lyttelton makes an analysis of the elements that enter into the make-up of a man of this type. He finds these to be five.

(1) Great heat of temper.

While Paul had intense fervor, like all great men, yet it was everywhere governed by discretion and reason. His zeal was his servant, not the master of his judgment. He possessed consummate tact which proves self-control. In indifferent matters he became "all things to all men;" to the Jews he became a Jew, to them that are without law as without law, to the weak he became weak—all, that he might gain some. (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). "His zeal was eager and warm, but tempered with prudence, and even with the civilities and decorums of life, as appears by his behavior to Agrippa, Festus and Felix; not the blind, inconsiderate, indecent zeal of an enthusiast."

(2) Melancholy.

He regards this as a prominent mark of misguided zeal. He finds nothing of it in Paul. There is great sorrow over his former ignorant persecution of the church, but there are no gloomy self-imposed penances such as melancholy fanatics inflict upon themselves. He had a desire to depart and be with Christ, but there was nothing morbid about it. It was all based on the revelation that he already had of the rewards that awaited him in the life to come, He tactfully met the Athenians adroitly claiming to be the interpreter of "The unknown god" whose altar they themselves had erected. He never hesitated to avert injustice by claiming his privileges as a Roman citizen. He was the very antithesis of gloominess. In whatever state he was, he had learned to be content. Neither his actions, nor his writings, nor his interested greeting and salutations, show the slightest tincture of melancholia.

(3) Ignorance.

This charge could not be laid up against the Apostle. Brought up at the feet of the great Gamaliel, he appeared to be master not only of Jewish, but also of Greek (and Roman) learning.

(4) Credulity.

As a resident of Jerusalem, Paul could not be a stranger to the fame of the miracles wrought by Jesus. He had the facts of the resurrection of our Lord, of Pentecost and all the miracles wrought by the Apostles up till the death of Stephen. Far from being credulous, he had barred his mind against every proof and refused to believe. "Nothing less than the irresistible evidence of *his own senses*, clear from all possibility of doubt, could have overcome his unbelief."

(5) Vanity or self-conceit.

Vanity and fanaticism usually go together. Men of this type flatter themselves that on account of their superior worth they are the recipients of extraordinary favors and gifts from God, and of these they make their boast. There is not one word in his Epistles, nor one act recorded in his life, in which the slightest mark of this appears. When compelled to vindicate his apostolic claim from wanton attack he does it effectively, but in the briefest way and with many apologies for being compelled to speak thus of himself. (2 Corinthians 11:1-30). When he had a vision of heaven, he modestly withheld his own name and covered it up in the third person. For fourteen years he observed absolute silence in regard to this special mark of the divine favor. (2 Corinthians 12:1-12). Would this be the way a vain man would act? Neither is Paul that planteth, nor Apollos that watereth, anything, but God who gives the increase. (1 Corinthians 3:4-7). Instead of self-conceit, he writes of himself in terms of the most complete abnegation [denying oneself some rights, conveniences, etc.-Ed.]. Everywhere it is "not I, but the grace of God that was with me." (1 Corinthians 15:10). His modesty appears on every page.

(6) But now suppose that in some way wholly unaccountable, Paul had actually been swept away by enthusiasm at the time, and imposed on himself, by imagining the events that took place. Lyttelton's reply is that such a thing was impossible. He here uses the argument that has since been employed so effectively to dispose of Renan's vision theory of the resurrection of our Lord. In such circumstances men always see what they expect to see. An imagined vision will be in accord with the opinions already imprinted on one's mind. Paul's purpose was clearly fixed. At his own request he had been clothed with authority to persecute the Christians, and he was now on his way from Jerusalem to Damascus on this very errand. He looked upon Christ as an impostor and a blasphemer who had justly been put to death. All his passions were inflamed to the highest degree against His followers. He started on his northward journey "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1). "And being exceedingly mad against them. I persecuted them even unto foreign cities" (Acts 26:11) "There was the pride of supporting a part he had voluntarily engaged in, and the credit he found it procured him among the chief priests and rulers, whose commission he bore." In these circumstances a wild enthusiast might indeed imagine he saw a vision, but it would be one urging him onward to do the thing which he had started out to accomplish. With nothing having happened to change his opinions or alter the bent of his mind, it would be as impossible for him, in a moment, to have imagined the complete revolution that is recorded in the New Testament as it would be for a rapid river to "carry a boat against the current of its own stream." We might add, as well expect the mighty rushing river itself, without any cause to stop in its course and rush violently backward up a steep mountain side, as to expect the whole current of Paul's thought and feeling and imagination and purpose to be instantly reversed without any cause. It could not take place. And it would have been just as impossible for all those who were with him to have experienced the same delusion, for they also saw the light above the brightness of the noonday sun and they heard the voice from heaven, although they understood not the words. But suppose it were a meteor that burst upon them? How then account for the words that Paul heard speaking in the Hebrew tongue and the dialogue which followed? How account for his going to a certain spot in Damascus, in accordance with instructions here received? How account for the knowledge that Ananias had, and that led to their interview? How account for the miracle after three days whereby Paul's blindness was healed? And how account for the mighty works and wonders afterward wrought by Paul, all consequent on this first revelation? [Following the suggestion of, perhaps, Krenkel, a New England professor is credited with teaching that at his conversion Paul had simply an epileptic attack. But, had all the company that were with him a like attack at the same instant, for they all saw something? And, moreover, no disorder of this or any other kind can account for the facts in the case. Paul's marvelous life-work revolutionized the history of his age, and his influence is powerfully felt yet, after nearly two thousand years, all over the world. One is almost tempted to say that if such is the result of an attack of epilepsy, what a pity that such a professor as this had not a similar attack. Then possibly he, too, might yet be heard from in the world].

### 3. PAUL WAS NOT DECEIVED BY OTHERS

This third possible solution Lyttelton dismisses with a single page. The fraud of others could not have deceived him; for,

(1) It was morally impossible that the disciples of Christ could have thought of such a fraud at the instant of Paul's greatest fury against them.

(2) It was physically impossible for them to do it. Could they produce a light brighter than the midday sun; cause him to hear a voice speaking out of that light; make him blind for three days and then return his sight at a word, etc.? There were no Christians around when the miracle of his conversion took place.

(3) No fraud could have produced those subsequent miracles which he himself actively wrought and to which he so confidently appealed in proof of his divine mission.

#### 4. CHRISTIANITY A DIVINE REVELATION

Our author considers that he has furnished sufficient evidence to show (1) that Paul was not an impostor deliberately proclaiming what he knew to be false with intent to deceive; (2) that he was not imposed upon by an overheated imagination, and (3) that he was not deceived by the fraud of others. Unless, therefore, we are prepared to lay aside the use of our understanding and all the rules of evidence by which facts are determined, we must accept the whole story of Paul's conversion as literally and historically true. We have therefore the supernatural, and the Christian religion is proved to be a revelation from God.

Endeavoring as closely as possible to follow the original and yet considerably in my own language, I have sought to give the essence of Lord Lyttelton's matchless argument which has been blessed to thousands of doubting souls. May this outline lead to candid examination, as such an examination should inevitably lead to Him whom Paul saw in the midst of the glory near the gate of Damascus.

## HOW DID JESUS' APOSTLE'S DIE?

**QUESTION** - [Does the Bible record the death of the apostles? How did each of the apostles die?](#) Watch the [Accompanying Video](#).

**ANSWER** - The only apostle whose death the Bible records is James (Acts 12:2). King Herod had James "put to death with the sword," likely a reference to [beheading](#). The circumstances of the deaths of the other apostles are related through church tradition, so we should not put too much weight on any of the other accounts. The most commonly accepted church tradition in regard to the death of an apostle is that the apostle Peter was crucified upside-down in Rome in fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy (John 21:18). The following are the most popular "traditions" concerning the deaths of the other apostles:

Matthew suffered martyrdom in Ethiopia, killed by a sword wound. John faced martyrdom when he was boiled in a huge basin of boiling oil during a wave of persecution in Rome. However, he was miraculously delivered from death. John was then sentenced to the mines on the prison island of [Patmos](#). He wrote his prophetic book of Revelation on Patmos. The apostle John was later freed and returned to what is now modern-day Turkey. He died as an old man, the only apostle to die peacefully.

James, the brother of Jesus (not officially an apostle), was the leader of the church in Jerusalem. He was thrown from the southeast pinnacle of the temple (over a hundred feet down) when he refused to deny his faith in Christ. When they discovered that he survived the fall, his enemies beat James to death with a club. This is thought to be the same pinnacle where Satan had taken Jesus during the temptation.

[Bartholomew](#), also known as Nathanael, was a missionary to Asia. He witnessed in present-day Turkey and was martyred for his preaching in Armenia, being flayed to death by a whip. Andrew was crucified on an x-shaped cross in Greece. After seven soldiers whipped Andrew severely, they tied his body to the cross with cords to prolong his agony. His followers reported that, when he was led toward the cross, Andrew saluted it in these words: "I have long desired and expected this happy hour. The cross has been consecrated by the body of Christ hanging on it." He continued to preach to his tormentors for two days until he died. The [apostle Thomas was stabbed with a spear in India](#) during one of his missionary trips to establish the church there. Matthias, the apostle chosen to replace the traitor Judas Iscariot, was stoned and then beheaded. The [apostle Paul](#) was tortured and then beheaded by the evil Emperor Nero in Rome in AD 67. There are traditions regarding the other apostles as well, but none with any reliable historical or traditional support.

It is not so important how the apostles died. What is important is the fact that they were all willing to die for their faith. If Jesus had not been resurrected, the disciples would have known it. People will not die for something they know to be a lie. The fact that all of

the apostles were willing to die horrible deaths, refusing to renounce their faith in Christ, is tremendous evidence that they had truly witnessed the resurrection of Jesus Christ.[GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)

**Related Resources:**

- [How did the apostle John die? | GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)
- [How did the apostle Peter die? | GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)
- [How did the apostle Paul die? | GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)