

▸ 9. The Reliability of the New Testament Documents

from John Warwick Montgomery, “Sensible Christianity” [an audio series]

Outline by Scott L. Keith (Concordia Univ. Irvine, Fall 1996)

I. ▸ Introduction

- A. ▸ According to military historian Sanders, in order to show that *any* ancient document is sound, three basic tests are required:
 - 1. ▸ the “Bibliographical test,”
 - 2. ▸ the “Internal test,” [and]
 - 3. ▸ the “External test.”

II. ▸ An Embarrassment of Textual Riches

- A. ▸ In the case of the first test (the “Bibliographical test”) we ask whether the document has come to us successfully.
 - 1. ▸ (that is, whether through copying and re-copying prior to the invention of printing, the document has successfully survived and actually represents what was first written)
- B. ▸ non-scholars can easily get the impression that, because there are so many manuscripts of the New Testament, we have an “uncertain” Greek NT text.
 - 1. ▸ On the contrary, we have such a tremendous amount of strong NT texts that we are embarrassed by the riches of it!
 - a. ▸ Our trouble actually comes from having *too much material* to collate (rather than too little of it).
- C. ▸ A comparable situation:
 - 1. ▸ The time separating the writing of Plato’s *Dialogues* from the first complete text of the *Dialogues* is about thirteen hundred years.
 - 2. ▸ In the case of the New Testament materials, the time span (even without benefit of later papyrus discoveries) is only about three hundred years!
- D. ▸ Dr. Montgomery: “I majored in classics and philosophy as an undergraduate at Cornell, and we went through Plato’s *Apology of Socrates* in the Greek until we were blue in the face.”
 - 1. ▸ We exegeted those materials “from-stem-to-stern.”
 - 2. ▸ “But I never remember any of my classics professors pointing out that the text we were studying in that degree of detail was actually written thirteen hundred years after the original writer had presented it!”
 - 3. ▸ What could have happened in those thirteen hundred years?
 - a. ▸ a tremendous number of things!
 - b. ▸ And yet the assumption was that accurate copying would have taken place.

III. ▸ Close to the Source

- A. ▸ In the case of the New Testament documents, (again) there is a period of only three hundred years!

1. ▶ (and this without counting the very early quotations, selections, lectionary readings, and papyrus fragments which so bridge that period that we can practically reconstruct the entire Gospel content just from those writings alone).
 2. ▶ For example, we have fragments of the Gospel of John that have to be dated at the end of the first century or at the very beginning of the second century.
 - a. ▶ (in other words, within just a few years of the time John claimed to have written that Gospel)
 3. ▶ Thus, we have certain materials that press right back to the time of the original writings themselves.
- B. ▶ Just before his death in the 1940s, Sir Frederick Kenyon (Principle Librarian of the Bodleyan Library) made an even stronger statement that that, namely, that “. . .in the light of new discoveries, *any* question as to the authenticity or the general integrity of the New Testament materials has been finally removed.”
1. ▶ Kenyon underscores the words “authenticity” and “general integrity,” and he was recognized as the greatest authority in his field in this generation.

IV. ▶ **The Validated Text**

- A. ▶ Bibliographically speaking, then, the New Testament text is in *great* shape.
1. ▶ That is why most Bible translations are almost identical—whether they are early or late.
 2. ▶ And that is why the text (if not the English vocabulary) of the latest translation “hot off the press” is so similar to that of the King James Version.
 3. ▶ Why? Because all the Greek texts are so good.
 4. ▶ The King James Bible was translated from Erasmus’s *Greek Text of the New Testament*, the first printed edition of the Greek New Testament (done in 1516).
 - a. ▶ Erasmus was as selective as possible in favor of the older manuscripts to which he had access.
 - b. ▶ After Erasmus prepared his critical text, the King James scholars translated it into English and Luther translated it into German, and those translations become normative until the end of the nineteenth century.
 5. ▶ At the end of the nineteenth century, Tischendorf and Westcott & Hort in England began careful scientific examination of the dates of early manuscripts.
 - a. ▶ They prepared a critical text which was immensely more sophisticated than anything Erasmus did, and then the revisers produced the English Revised Version and later the American Revised Version (and still later the Revised Standard Version and the other modern versions that we are familiar with).
 - b. ▶ Yet despite all that work, the result today is almost exactly the same as it was three centuries earlier!
 - c. ▶ Why? Because all the texts were so good that Erasmus could hardly have gone wrong.
- B. ▶ Again, bibliographically speaking, the New Testament is in great shape.
1. ▶ You don’t have to like this fact [but]

2. ▶ then you've got to dislike *all* of what you encounter in the ancient texts of the classical world!
3. ▶ In a debate at the University of British Columbia a number of years ago, I argued that if you're going to dump the New Testament documents, you can do it—but *first* you've got to dump your knowledge of the classical world!
 - a. ▶ The professor opposing me said, "All right then, I'll dump my knowledge of the classical world!"
 - i. ▶ At that, a colleague of his jumped up and said, "No, George! Not that! That's your field!"
 - ii. ▶ That colleague recognized that this was surely not the answer.
- C. ▶ Notice that this is our fundamental technique again:
 1. ▶ Use the same techniques you must employ *outside* the Christian questions, then apply them to Christian questions, and you find that the answers come up in favor of the Christian position.

V. ▶ **Internal Evidence**

- A. ▶ How about the second test, the test of "Internal evidence?"
 1. ▶ test deals with the documents' claims regarding authorship by eyewitnesses or by associates of eyewitnesses
 - a. ▶ (in other words, whether the documents are what historians call "primary source" materials).
 2. ▶ Let us say that you are working with your manuscript asserting that Julius Caesar wore red underwear, and in this case you've got a good textual tradition.
 - a. ▶ As you read the document, you notice that at the bottom it says, "In case you are wondering who is writing this, I am Alphonso, a Spanish plumber of the fourteenth century."
 - b. ▶ You're not going to be very impressed, because Alphonso the plumber is not going to be the very best person to inform you as to the tonsorial habits of Julius Caesar.
- B. ▶ On the other hand, if the document is signed, "Markos, Chief Underwear Purchaser for Julius Caesar," then you at least have internal reason to think that the document is of value.
 1. ▶ In the case of the New Testament documents, the writers claim that they actually had contact with the events themselves, or, at worst, that they knew people who had such contact and checked them out.
 2. ▶ Peter, for example, says, "We have not followed cunningly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We were eyewitnesses of his majesty."

VI. ▶ **I Saw, I Touched, I Heard**

- A. ▶ In the Gospel of John (which many people try to put in the category of a late theological interpretation rather than a factual presentation of Jesus' life), the writer says over and over again, "I saw, I heard, I touched."
 - 1. ▶ The empirical language of the Gospel of John is one of the most *striking* characteristics of the book:
 - a. ▶ "The Word became flesh . . ." (Jn. 1:1) [and]
 - b. ▶ "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (Jn. 1:14)
- B. ▶ The idea was of Jesus coming right down into our midst so that we could have tactile contact with Him.
 - 1. ▶ What did Thomas say?
 - a. ▶ "Unless I can see the nail prints, and until I can thrust my hand into His side, I will *not* believe."
 - b. ▶ And Jesus graciously satisfied those conditions for Thomas.
 - c. ▶ The whole point of this is that the evidence was empirical.

VII. ▶ **External Evidence**

- A. ▶ But of course there is always the possibility that whoever wrote the document was lying, and that he didn't really have contact with the events at all.
 - 1. ▶ Therefore, "External evidence" (the third test) is also important.
 - 2. ▶ We want to see if there are data *outside* the documents themselves that confirm the claims which the documents make.
 - 3. ▶ We want to see if there are people *outside* the writers themselves who confirm that these documents really did arrive in the way claimed for them.
 - a. ▶ In the case of the New Testament, we are once again in a powerfully advantageous position.
- B. ▶ Two very striking examples of this:
 - 1. ▶ We have the account of two people who were students of the Apostle John: Papias and Polycarp [details below].
 - a. ▶ Independently both say that John told them he wrote the Gospel that bears his name, and that "Matthew" was written by Matthew, and that "Mark" was written by Mark, and that "Luke" was written by Luke.
 - i. ▶ (in other words, that the Gospels were written by the authors to whom they had been traditionally ascribed)
 - b. ▶ They also say that the author of Matthew was the tax collector who was the apostle, that the author of Mark's Gospel was John Mark who was an associate of Peter's, and that Luke's Gospel was written by the physician who accompanied the Apostle Paul on his missionary journeys.
 - c. ▶ Who were these students?
 - i. ▶ Well, one of them was Polycarp of Smyrna (Smyrna is the present city in eastern Turkey.)
 - ii. ▶ second was Papius, Bishop of Hierapolis

- (1). ▶ He claims the same thing—and he says this *independently* of Polycarp.
 - (2). ▶ (In other words, Papias wasn't "stealing" from Polycarp nor Polycarp from Papius.) Polycarp's assertions to this effect are presented by the greatest and most reliable of the early manuscripts.
 - (3). ▶ The statements that Papius makes are given to us by the greatest early historian of the church, Eusebius of Caesarea (early fourth century, at the time of the Council of Nicea).
- C. ▶ In summary, the evidence that John gives is presented to Polycarp, and Polycarp's statements on the subject are provided to us by Irenaeus.
1. ▶ The same statements about John are independently given by Papius, and Papius's statements are recorded for us by Eusebius.
 2. ▶ This is a *tremendously strong* evidential chain.
 3. ▶ We can see that Eusebius is not in any way altering the assertions that Papius made.
- D. ▶ There is another line of very interesting external evidence, namely, very strong evidence to the effect that Peter and Paul died in the Neronian persecution in the year 64.
1. ▶ The Book of Acts is obviously an account of Paul's missionary journeys and his lifework in general.
 2. ▶ If you are going to write a biography of someone's life and work, but the person has died before you write, are you going to mention his death? Of course you are!
 3. ▶ However, the Book of Acts does *not* include any mention of Paul's death.
 - a. ▶ Paul is left in Rome, but nothing is said about his dying. So there is powerful reason to hold that the Book of Acts was written before 64, the year that Paul died in Rome.
- E. ▶ But the opening words of Luke and Acts show that the Gospel of Luke was written *before* Acts.
1. ▶ Even people who have some doubts about who wrote Luke and Acts hold that they both were written by the same person (since they are both addressed to Theophilus and both have the same vocabulary).
 2. ▶ But most scholars now agree that Luke relied in part on Mark, so Mark must have been written *before* both Luke and Acts.
- F. ▶ Notice what is happening here.
1. ▶ Acts, Luke, and Mark were written successively earlier than the year 64, but Jesus died in approximately the year 30.
 2. ▶ Therefore, these writings are pushing right back to the life of Christ Himself!
 3. ▶ In other words, these writings confirm very nicely the claims of the documents that they were written by eyewitnesses.
 4. ▶ And they confirm the kind of "External evidence" of authorship that we have from Polycarp and Papius.
- G. ▶ The upshot of all this is that the New Testament documents are in excellent condition on all three counts: bibliographical, external, and internal.

VIII. ▶ **The Higher Critics**

- A. ▶ But someone says, “I have the impression that theologians today do not consider the NT materials all that good. I’ve heard of something called “higher criticism,” and higher criticism seems to say that these documents are really not very reliable.”
 - 1. ▶ Reply: That’s right. The higher critics *do* assert that the NT documents are not reliable.
 - 2. ▶ And the principle of higher criticism is the following:
 - a. ▶ claims that the early church edited the material(s) about Jesus
 - b. ▶ claims that the documents we have today do *not* necessarily reflect the actual life of Jesus
 - c. ▶ Higher critics claim that what the documents instead reflect is “the faith experience of the early church.”
 - i. ▶ And, say the higher critics, there are different accounts because there were different churches and different “faith experiences.”
 - d. ▶ Fragmentary materials were put together (“cut-and-paste” edits) by the early church, so we cannot rely on the historicity of this stuff.
- B. ▶ What’s the trouble with this reasoning?
 - 1. ▶ There simply was *not enough time* to do all this compiling and editing.
 - 2. ▶ These documents press right back to the time of Christ Himself.
 - 3. ▶ People got very excited about Jesus’ life.
 - a. ▶ Jews recognized that if Jesus were actually the Person He claimed to be, it would mean the end of historic Judaism!
 - b. ▶ So the Jewish religious leaders had every reason to destroy early Christianity, or to show that early Christianity was “off base.”
 - c. ▶ Remember that when these early Christians went to the synagogue, they went there to hit the opposition right at the center.
 - i. ▶ If they were mistaken, the religious leaders would have said, “I was in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover when all of that happened, so you can’t pull that on me. Jesus wasn’t like that at all. Why, you have turned Jesus into a reflection of yourselves!”
 - d. ▶ But none of those who had every reason to say that actually *did* say it.
 - i. ▶ There was *no attempt* to refute the accounts as they were circulated, and those accounts are the very ones that we have today.

IX. ▶ **Subjective Analysis**

- A. ▶ When the higher critics call themselves “documentary critics,” it sounds as if they are dealing with documents.
 - 1. ▶ What they are actually dealing with are documents that have been given to them by the “textual critics.”
 - 2. ▶ As the higher critic sits down with the document and begins reading it, he sees what appears to him to be inconsistency in style or change in vocabulary, and he says, “Aha! Obviously this document is an edited document that was originally different!”

3. ▶ The only way he makes this decision is by a *subjective* analysis of the complete document, saying to himself, “That doesn’t sound like it should have originally.”
- B. ▶ This has been proven to be quite a doubtful method of operation, and I refer you to an essay by C. S. Lewis entitled “Biblical Criticism” (included in C. S. Lewis’s posthumous *Christian Reflections*).
 1. ▶ Lewis says, “People have tried this on me and my writings. But they *never* have succeeded—not even once. Not even by chance have they hit what was actually true.”
 2. ▶ “Now if that is the situation with them, operating in my own time scheme and culture, in the present, what gives people the idea that they can go back two thousand years and figure out what documents must have underlain the documents that have come to them?”
 - a. ▶ that is, in an *alien* language and in an *alien* culture!
 - b. ▶ “How do they think they can manage this?”

X. ▶ **The MacGregor and Morton Fallacy**

- A. ▶ Let me give you an illustration of the kind of thing that shows the intellectual difficulties with this method.
 1. ▶ MacGregor & Morton did a computer analysis of Saint Paul’s letters.
 2. ▶ They started with Romans and Galatians (which everybody agrees were written by Paul) and fed the style of these two epistles into a computer, thereby establishing a stylistic standard of comparison.
 3. ▶ Then they fed the other (so-called!) Pauline letters into the computer to see if the style compared adequately.
 4. ▶ The conclusion was that six or seven people had actually written these letters – *not* one single author.
 - a. ▶ Then some students at Harvard took MacGregor and Morton’s book on the subject, fed the style of the preface and first chapter into a computer, and then checked the other chapters against it.
 - b. ▶ The results showed that five people had written their book!
- B. ▶ The assumption that there needs to be a single consistent style is obviously fallacious, just as the assumption is fallacious that if you read a book and find that the transitions are not the way *you* would do them or the shifts in argument are different from the way *you* would have done them, then the book could not have been an original document.
 1. ▶ The fact is that there are many ways you can write a book.
 2. ▶ There are many different styles to choose from and a great choice of vocabulary.
 3. ▶ Style and vocabulary prove very little about authorship!
 4. ▶ If you compare your love letters with your term papers, for example, I hope you’ll find a considerable difference between them!

XI. ▶ **John Versus John**

- A. ▶ The Gospel of John is written in a deliberate, planned way.

1. ▶ “. . . but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life through his name.”
 - a. ▶ The author used a definite principle of selection and a direct and formal style.
2. ▶ On the other hand, the *Revelation to St. John*, the last book of the Bible, is not that way at all.
 - a. ▶ Sentences hang in the air, and the writer is obviously going at tremendous speed, attempting to cram onto papyrus things that he can hardly understand. What is the difference here?
 - b. ▶ The Spirit hit him over the head and said, “Write!” So he wrote at tremendous speed. And, *of course*, the style and vocabulary are different from that of the Gospel of John.
- B. ▶ 90 percent of contemporary New Testament scholars claim that the *Revelation to St. John* could not have been written by the same person as the Gospel of John.
 1. ▶ The trouble with these higher critical arguments is *not* particularly theological, but instead intellectual.
 2. ▶ We just don’t know enough about the interior life of a writer two thousand years ago to conclude that he couldn’t have written a book in a particular way.
 3. ▶ We must stop with the best complete text that we have, and not engage in speculation that cuts back behind that. Such speculation gives no certain results at all.

XII. ▶ **Who Wrote *The Odyssey*?**

- A. ▶ This method was tried in other academic fields and was found wanting.
 1. ▶ was tried in reference to Homer’s *Odyssey* in the 19th century
 2. ▶ Dr. Montgomery: “I had a professor who was quite a wag – Harry Kaplan, a fine classicist.”
 - a. ▶ And Kaplan said, “You know, in the nineteenth century, we tried to get at the real sources of the *Odyssey* – the sub-documents. And we never could agree as to which ones they were. Nobody could agree as to where one source stopped and the other began. And so we finally concluded that ‘. . . if the *Odyssey* was not written by Homer, it was written by someone of the same name who lived at about the same time!’”
- B. ▶ The people who are continuing this kind of nonsense are people in the Biblical field, and the reasons for this are various.
 1. ▶ The method is more important than anything else, and so “the method stays—no matter what!”
 2. ▶ Another thing that contributes is the fact that these people have contact only with each other.
 - a. ▶ It’s a sort of mutual back-scratching: They all go to the Society for Biblical Literature and Exegesis each year and “scratch each other’s scholastic backs.”

- b. ▶ When you deal with higher criticism, please don't think you are dealing with a scholarly area, because you're not – you're dealing with an area of conjecture, and conjecture is a very dangerous kind of practice.

XIII. ▶ **The Historical Jesus**

- A. ▶ If these documents are sound, what do they say?
 - 1. ▶ In the nineteenth century, people did “life-and-times-of-Jesus”-type biographies. And in these writings Jesus turned out to be a typical evolutionary product of the nineteenth century!
 - 2. ▶ The miracles were pushed aside and the emphasis was placed on “the moral teachings of Jesus.”
 - 3. ▶ Then Schweitzer came along in *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* and said, “This man, according to the documents, thought he was coming on the clouds of heaven with all the heavenly hosts. At the crucial point in his trial, when he was asked whether he was the Messiah, he said, ‘You have said this correctly; you will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with all the heavenly host.’ [‘the Son of Man’ is a reference to Daniel 7, one of the high apocalyptic passages of the Old Testament concerning God coming to earth to clean up history.] That’s what Jesus thought. But of course he was wrong. Jesus wasn’t that; He was just an ordinary man, but he really thought he was that kind of person.”
- B. ▶ Schweitzer did a medical dissertation at Strasbourg entitled *A Psychiatric Examination of Jesus*, in which he tried to show that Jesus, even though He mistakenly thought He was the apocalyptic Son of Man, God come to earth to clean up history, nevertheless was sane.
 - 1. ▶ Overholzer says, “Schweitzer was really not successful here. I’ve known religious nuts who have ideas like that, and this really isn’t very successful.”
 - 2. ▶ But the point is that Schweitzer shows that if you take the data, you *do* find Jesus making claims like that.
 - 3. ▶ Those claims run all the way through the New Testament, and there is simply no way to get away from them.

XIV. ▶ **Liar, Lunatic, or Lord?**

- A. ▶ In other words, you can't have “a simple, humanistic Jesus” on the basis of the text of the Gospels.
 - 1. ▶ This means one must face a choice:
 - 2. ▶ You must either acknowledge Jesus as God Almighty or dismiss Him as a nut – a person who really thought He was God but wasn't.
 - a. ▶ Consider the story of Jesus healing the paralytic (Mk. 2). Jesus said to him, “Be of good cheer! Your sins are forgiven.”
 - b. ▶ Pharisees started mumbling, “Who can forgive sin but God only?”
 - c. ▶ Jesus did not say: “Oops! Sorry! I surely didn't mean that *I* can forgive sin. All I mean is that I'm here to proclaim that your Father in heaven forgives sin.”

- d. ▶ Instead, the text says, ““In order that you may know that the Son of Man has power to forgive sins, He said to the paralytic, ‘Take up your bed and walk.’”
- e. ▶ And the paralytic took up his bed, and the people concluded that Jesus *had* forgiven his sins and they glorified God.
- B. ▶ Again the expression “Son of Man” is used—“. . . in order that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins, . . .”
 - 1. ▶ No orthodox Jew could hear that phrase without knowing that the speaker was claiming *deity*.
 - 2. ▶ Remember that Jesus ended up being crucified on the charge of *blasphemy*, because the people who heard Him recognized that He was claiming deity and nothing less than deity.

XV. ▶ **Was Jesus God or Not?**

- A. ▶ So in these reliable historical records Jesus claims to be God.
 - 1. ▶ The simple question is, “*Was* He God or *wasn't* He?”
 - 2. ▶ Jesus claimed that He would die and rise again.
 - 3. ▶ According to the accounts, that’s exactly what He did.
 - 4. ▶ Jesus having been crucified stone dead, and then, subsequently, during a forty-day period, He was seen again and again in the most intimate kind of situations in which direct, tangible, empirical proof was possible.
- B. ▶ We have already mentioned the confession of “doubting Thomas,” but the other disciples needed some firm evidence, too.
 - 1. ▶ They (the disciples) had gone back to their old trade of fishing.
 - 2. ▶ So when Jesus came along the shore, they thought they were seeing a ghost!
 - 3. ▶ But the “ghost” said, “Does a ghost have flesh and bones, as you see that I do? Do you have anything here to eat?”
 - 4. ▶ They gave Him some fish, and He ate it before them.
- C. ▶ It is also inconceivable that these hardheaded people in so many different walks of life could have been deceived by that sort of trickery.
 - 1. ▶ And how exactly would such a deception have gone undetected during a three-year ministry in which miracle after miracle was recorded, and in which Christ’s resurrection was given in the kind of detail indicated?
 - 2. ▶ Remember, these accounts were circulating while hostile witnesses were still alive—people who certainly and gladly would have “blown the whistle” if the materials had not turned out to be accurate.

XVI. ▶ **What Happened to Christ’s Body?**

- A. ▶ The conclusion of all this is that if you don’t go along with Jesus’ claims to deity on the basis of His resurrection, you simply can’t handle this material.
 - 1. ▶ Plus, you’ve got to somehow explain the missing body.
 - a. ▶ *Something* must be done with that problem following the crucifixion.
 - 2. ▶ And there were only three interest groups in the situation:

- a. ▶ the Romans,
 - b. ▶ the Jewish religious leaders, [and]
 - c. ▶ the disciples.
3. ▶ Granted, people have died for a lot of crazy things in the course of history, and dying for something doesn't make it true. But it is *one* thing to die for something that you think is true but isn't, and *another* thing entirely to die for something you know isn't true.
- B. ▶ One of those three groups must have made off with His body.
- 1. ▶ But the Romans certainly did not (since they wanted to keep His presence quiet in Palestine at all costs).
 - 2. ▶ And the Jewish religious leaders were the *last* ones to want the body taken (that is why they had a heavy stone put in front of the tomb, and told Rome that if it was smart, it would station a guard or guards at the tomb).
 - 3. ▶ That leaves the disciples of Jesus. But if the disciples took the body, why would they have gone out and intentionally died for what they *knew* to be untrue?!

XVII. ▶ **The “Swoon Theory”**

- A. ▶ Of course, there are other explanations offered for this, such as the “Passover Plot” theory and the “Chariots of the Gods” type of explanation, and I will just comment on these quickly.
- 1. ▶ Schonfeld's *Passover Plot* theory says that Jesus did not die on the cross, but only swooned. (“Swoon theory”)
 - 2. ▶ According to this theory, He later awoke in the cool tomb in a much-weakened condition, but remained alive just long enough to give people the idea that He rose from the dead.
 - a. ▶ If you can believe *that*, you should have no trouble at all with the resurrection of Jesus!
 - 3. ▶ Crucifixion was a hideous and common method of punishment, and the medical description of it has led medical observers to say that Jesus most definitely died.
- B. ▶ Second, even if you believe the “Swoon theory,” then what happened to Jesus after He really did die?
- 1. ▶ You've still got the problem of accounting for His missing body.
 - 2. ▶ Surely it doesn't help you in accounting for all those observations (including ascending into heaven, which is very difficult for a weakened person after hours on the cross, to say nothing about a *healthy* one!)

XVIII. ▶ **Von Daniken's Space Man**

- A. ▶ Von Daniken's *Chariots of the Gods* view is that Jesus really did leave the tomb, but only because He was a man from outer space who had knowledge and abilities that go beyond that of ordinary human beings.
- 1. ▶ The “spaceman Jesus” must have been so cleverly disguised as the real Jesus that nobody knew He wasn't.

2. ▶ How does Von Daniken know he was a space man instead of the real Jesus?
 3. ▶ I agree that this is hypothetically possible, but then it's also possible that Von Daniken is nothing but a space man so cleverly disguised as Von Daniken that nobody can tell the difference!
 4. ▶ You cannot attempt to understand the world by mere *possibilities*; you can only understand the world by *plausibilities*, and plausibilities are those explanations that have some relation to the data.
- B. ▶ Actually, the "Von Daniken" theory is a technically meaningless argument, because no evidence can ever count against it!
1. ▶ Von Daniken says, "Jesus was perfectly the picture you get in the New Testament, and nobody thought He was anything but that."
 2. ▶ So no matter what you say about the effectiveness of that portrait, Von Daniken can say, "Yes, yes, yes. Of course!"
 3. ▶ There isn't *any* way you could possibly refute the position Von Daniken sets forth.

XIX. ▶ **Jesus Is Alive**

- A. ▶ The conclusion to all this is that Jesus *did* in fact rise from the dead, and this in turn evidences His claims to be God.
1. ▶ The objector's question is put like this: "Just because Jesus rose from the dead, does that mean He was God?"
- B. ▶ Let me suggest an answer to this.
1. ▶ It's quite true that performance of just any old miracle would not necessarily lead to the affirmation of deity.
 2. ▶ Let's say that I come to lecture to your group. I get off the plane wearing a long white robe and a beard, and when the lectures begin I say, "One thing that wasn't put in the preliminary announcements is this: I am God. And to demonstrate this, I am going to grow hair on a billiard ball."
 3. ▶ I produce a billiard ball from under my robe and I shout "Wham!" and bushy hair sprouts on the billiard ball.
 - a. ▶ I doubt very much if this would result in a general religious conversion.
 - b. ▶ It's not quite the kind of thing that meets man at his point of existential need; and it isn't the sort of thing that changes lives.
 - c. ▶ It changes billiard balls, but it doesn't change human lives, and thus you have to say that, although all miracles are equal in one sense, "some are more equal than others."

XX. ▶ **The Significance of Death**

- A. ▶ The point of affirming Jesus' deity by His resurrection is that death is an overarching human problem—in fact, it may be the most *basic* human problem of all.
1. ▶ It is a common experience that we are concerned with our own death to a far greater extent than we are willing to admit even to ourselves.

- 2. ▶ This is part of our unconscious life. It is vital to our complete understanding of ourselves.
- B. ▶ Under these circumstances, if somebody comes along and says, “I am going to conquer death for you,” and then He goes ahead and does it, if there’s any reason for worship that is *it!*
 - 1. ▶ If there were anything that anybody could do to warrant worship, that would certainly be the thing. A genuine resurrection impels this kind of belief.
 - 2. ▶ If Jesus’ only miracle had been cursing the fig tree, for example, it would be very difficult to argue this kind of claim.

XXI. ▶ **Death and Baldness**

- A. ▶ I had a discussion with a professor of philosophy at Roosevelt University some years ago, and after I finished talking about the resurrection, he said, “Really, I don’t see why you have to get so excited about death. Death is like pattern baldness.”
 - 1. ▶ I replied, “Suppose the faculty secretary comes to the door right now and says, ‘Professor, I don’t know how to tell you this, but we’ve just received a call from the Chicago police. Your wife and three children have been killed in an automobile accident.’ Would you say, ‘Think nothing of it! It’s just like pattern baldness?’”
- B. ▶ My reason for putting it that way is that no one who is honest with himself can relegate death to that category.
 - 1. ▶ You can make the propositional assertion that “death is perfectly natural,” but we all know that death is far more significant than that.
 - 2. ▶ Death is something we can’t just dismiss that way. And if you can’t dismiss death that way, you can’t dismiss a resurrection that way, either.
 - 3. ▶ So when Jesus comes along and says, “I’m going to deal with this, and I’ll deal with it not only for Me, but also for you,” it is essential that we pay attention, for if we don’t pay attention here, we’ve made the maximal mistake, and we lose at the point of our greatest need.