

Evidence for Inerrancy: The Christological Argument - Part 1

Volume 4 - Unit 5

I. Circular Reasoning?

II. The Historical Reliability of the Gospels

Note: I am here reproducing (in summary form) a paper which I presented to the national meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Santa Barbara, California.

*The plan is to subject the New Testament documents to the same canons of criticism that are used to evaluate any other ancient document. The methodology to be used is taken from a standard text on the historical method, used in many graduate schools in courses in historical research: *Understanding History* by Louis Gottschalk, Professor of History, The University of Chicago, Alfred A. Knopf, Publisher, New York, 1964. Dr. Gottschalk categorizes the evidence as external and internal.*

A. External Evidence

1. Is the document genuine? Does it actually come from the time period represented? What do we know of the author? Etc. No real problem here. Even the most liberal of critics credit Paul with several epistles, agree that Luke wrote the third gospel. No question that these documents arose from actual people writing in the first century A.D.

2. Do we have the original document or accurate copies? This is the problem of textual criticism. We now have approximately 5,000 N. T. manuscripts (not all complete, of course), and textual criticism has established an extremely accurate text. (Cf. works of Tacitus -only 2 manuscripts, Thucydides - only 8 manuscripts.) Sir Frederick Kenyon, foremost authority on ancient manuscripts: "Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established. "

B. Internal Evidence

Gottschalk: "To him (the historian) any single detail of testimony is credible - even if it is contained in a document obtained by force or fraud, or is otherwise impeachable, or is based on hearsay evidence, or is from an

interested witness - provided it can pass four tests: (1) Was the ultimate source of the detail (the primary witness) able to tell the truth?, (2) Was he willing to tell the truth?, (3) Was he accurately reported with regard to the detail under examination?, and (4) Is there any independent corroboration?"

1. Was the primary witness able to tell the truth?

a. Nearness

(1) In space. Eyewitness best. Geographical nearness. 3 of the gospels give eyewitness accounts. Luke did research among eyewitnesses. Even re John's gospel -Israel Abrahams, noted rabbinical scholar: "My own general impression, without asserting an early date for the Fourth Gospel (many do today), is that the Gospel enshrines a genuine tradition of an aspect of Jesus' teaching which has not found a place in the Synoptics. "

(2) In time. Chronological nearness, i. e. how soon recorded after the event? N. T. attestation excellent here. Manuscripts begin shortly after end of first century. Complete manuscripts from 4th century. (Cf. Caesar's Gallic War, earliest manuscript. 900 years later. Tacitus, 2 manuscripts, 9th and 11th centuries. Herodotus, 1, 300 yrs. to earliest manuscript.)

b. Competence. Degree of expertness, state of mental and physical health, age, education, memory, narrative skill, etc. Again, no doubts re N. T. writers. Take Luke, for example. Sir Wm. Ramsay (and others since) found Luke to be careful scholar, accurate historian. -Paul, great rabbinical scholar, etc.

c. Degree of attention. Possibility of distraction, deception, unbalanced account, etc. Was witness aware of what was really happening? No historical evidence has ever been brought forward to demonstrate any such thing re New Testament writers. Everywhere there is evidence of genuine eyewitness testimony, local color, etc.

d. Danger of leading or loaded questions. Forced or guided testimony is suspect. No evidence of any such thing in N. T. Luke states that he did careful, original research - after the fact.

e. Reasoning in a circle? Gottschalk applies mainly to unsigned documents, assigning them to certain witnesses on questionable bases. No real problem in N. T. Gospels are all unsigned, but doesn't affect historical witness.

f. Egocentrism. Overplaying one's own role in a historical event. Just the opposite in N. T. usually. Note anonymous gospels, etc. Writers frequently present themselves in bad light.

2. Was the primary witness willing to tell the truth?

a. Interested witness? Stands to profit from deliberate perversion of truth. Some have charged this - cf. Hermann Reimarus (1694-1768), disciples decided to perpetuate "a good thing" in spite of Christ's death. Evidence is strongly against such a view. None ever recanted - even when facing martyrdom. Psychologically impossible. Their "best interest", humanly speaking, would have been to renounce Jesus as Christ.

b. Bias? Unknowing perversion of truth, arising from religion, politics, race, nationality, region, family, other ties. Natural bent of an orthodox Jew would have been against Jesus - cf. Saul of Tarsus. Becoming a disciple involved ostracism from Jewish community. Thus if there was bias, it would have been against Jesus. Belief meant nothing but trouble.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE - Mark 13:31 – “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”