

# SCRIPTURAL APOLOGETICS

Winning Souls, Not Arguments

**Leader's Guide**



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## A NOTE TO THE LEADER

Apologetics offers you as the leader an amazing opportunity. This topic is the perfect tool for: winning over students to the Catholic Church, building up students in their knowledge of the faith, *and* sending out students to share the faith with their peers. Few topics can so quickly ignite a fire that can leave a deep and lasting impact. Knowledge is empowering, and when someone comes to know the reasons for their beliefs, they can be transformed in their faith—from apathetic to exuberant, from fearful to courageous, from a spectator to a leader. Your job as the leader is to tap into the power of apologetics as much as possible. This study will provide several ways to help you in this endeavor. Are you ready?

### **The Lay of the Land**

This study covers seven different apologetics topics; one topic is aimed at a dialogue with non-Christians while the other six are directed towards a Protestant-Catholic dialogue.

In several ways, this study functions differently than any other FOCUS study. We want to emphasize that this study is not simply learning apologetics—it is putting apologetics into practice through learning the art of dialoging about the faith. Our goal is not to win arguments; it is to win souls to Jesus Christ and His Church. As St. Peter states, “Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3:15).

Each chapter of the study begins with what the Church believes about a particular doctrine and a summary of reasons for why it believes what it does. The bulk of the chapter aims to go into further detail concerning these reasons for the Church’s doctrine. Finally, we have placed sample objections at the end of each chapter to help participants practice the information

they just learned. These objections, along with the Apologetics Training Cards included with the studies, are there to help participants practice apologetics with one another through mock apologetic dialogues during or outside of study and/or for individual practice. You are free to use these in any manner that you find most effective. More information on how these mock dialogues work is found in Chapter One under the “Practical Objections” section.

In each chapter there are several resources for you and your participants on each topic. They include: Scripture verses, Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) paragraph numbers, specific sections from *Made for More* by Curtis Martin, books and articles, and readings for the next apologetics topic. Again, use your discretion on how you use these resources. *Made for More* by Curtis Martin could be particularly helpful to you as a leader as it usually sums up key apologetics points or gives you further insight on the topic in a concise manner. Also, you may want to have your participants read Scripture ahead of time before each study or memorize an apologetics verse together.

### Preparing for the Study

- Give yourself time before the study to think and pray about the material. Know the arguments well and be able to answer the objections.
- Work through the Leader Guide on your own and make notes in the margins about how you want to ask particular questions or how you want to emphasize certain points.
- Anticipate how your group might respond to the content. Some sections will need more clarification than others. Perhaps your group will want to spend more time discussing a particular point that is especially relevant. This Bible Study is meant to provide a basic introduction on each topic. *Each chapter is not meant to be exhaustive.*
- Be sure every person in your group has the Student Guide. *This study assumes that your students have not gone through the Student Guide before they come each week.*

### On How to Use the Leader Guide

- The Leader Guide that you hold includes all of the instructions you will need to lead the study along with snapshots of every page in the Student Guide. Please see an example from your Leader Guide below to see how this works:

• In this example, the number 8 prompts you to ask the participants to read 2 Thessalonians 2:15. Then, there is a prompt by the number 9 that tells the leader to ask a question. Some questions will be in the Student Guide, others will only be in the Leader Guide. Teal-colored instructions in the Leader Guide indicate an action by the leader whether it be a question, explanation, or story etc. for the group. Also, notice the number in the box in the right hand corner – this indicates which page of the Student Guide you are viewing.

**8** *Ask: Could someone please read 2 Thessalonians 2:15?*

**9** *Ask: How does this verse support the Catholic belief about Tradition?*

**10** *Ask: St. Paul not only notes that Tradition or teachings exist, but also that they should be passed on to others. Could I have someone please read 2 Timothy 2:1-2?*

**8** Read 2 Thessalonians 2:15

**9** How does this verse support the Catholic belief about Tradition?

**10** Read 2 Timothy 2:1-2

**3**

Answer: It shows that the apostles did not just put everything down in writing, but that they also expected early Christians to follow their oral instructions as well.

**10** *Say: This is the whole idea behind Sacred Tradition. The apostles take what they learned from Jesus Christ and teach it to others who, in turn, pass it on to others. This Word of God passed on is what Catholics call Tradition.*

• If you have any comments or suggestions on this study or maybe you have found another effective way to convey apologetics please send them to us at [focusequip@focus.org](mailto:focusequip@focus.org). We continue to improve our materials and would love your feedback. Who knows... you might help us improve our study, and as a result, touch a soul for all eternity through your suggestion.

• You may also find that there is too much material to cover during one week. This is where experience is helpful. As time goes on, you will be able to determine how much material to cover, what to skip, and what to add that isn't in the Leader Guide. You will also learn which tangents are helpful, and which ones take you off course.

## Thank You

Thank you for leading this study. Please know you have our gratitude and prayers as you undertake this exciting endeavor.



## Welcome

1 *Ask: Could someone please read the “Welcome” section?*

### 1 Welcome

What comes to mind when you think of a Catholic apologist? An author with a bestselling book? A radio personality that knows the answer to every question? What about yourself?

The purpose of this Bible study is to help **you** become an everyday apologist—an ordinary person who is able to share the beliefs of the Catholic Church in truth and love.

How is this study going to help you do this?

1. Give you a vision for what apologetics is.
2. Show you seven principles to use when you dialogue with others about the faith.
3. Outline seven key topics on the Catholic faith and give you specific Scripture verses and reasons for what the Catholic Church believes on these topics and why.

Below is an introduction to these three subjects before we dive into the study.

2 *Ask: Could someone please read “What is Apologetics” section?*

## 2 What is Apologetics?

St. Peter encourages his listeners in 1 Peter 3:15 to know how to defend their faith: “Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you.” This defense of the faith comes from the Greek word—*apologia*—the root word for apologetics. Scripture calls us to know how to defend what we believe.

St. Peter goes on in 1 Peter 3:15-16 to say “yet do it with gentleness and reverence; and keep your conscience clear.” We must know the truth, but we must also share it in love. Our goal is not to win arguments; it is to win souls.

St. Francis was an amazing witness in sharing the faith in truth and love. He is often quoted as saying: “Preach the Gospel always, and if necessary, use words.” St. Francis’ personal example of holiness was vital. His poverty and humility amidst the extravagant clergy of his day was a monumental testimony that moved many to follow Jesus Christ more deeply.

At the same time, what most people may not realize is that St. Francis preached with words almost every day—to people in his town, to the rich at their elaborate parties, and to several Muslim countries despite turbulent travel. He must have found preaching to be necessary!

3 Ask: Could someone please read “Seven Apologetic Principles” section?

### 3 Seven Apologetic Principles

If our goal is to win souls with apologetics, we can't just know arguments; we must know how to convey these arguments in convincing and charitable ways. This could be described as the art of apologetics.

Here are seven principles designed to help you learn this art of apologetics.

**1. Show you are open to dialogue:** By being cool, calm, and collected in the face of any objection, the other person will be more open to dialogue.

**2. Focus on just one issue at a time:** Rather than addressing several objections all at once, agree on one specific area to discuss.

**3. Restate their objection and understand their logic:** Make sure you understand what they are really saying and see the argument from their perspective.

**4. Ask thought-provoking questions:** Really good questions can be more effective than rattling off every reason you have for a particular belief.

**5. Correct misunderstandings:** One of the best things you can do is to correct the false ideas about the Catholic faith or Catholics themselves.

**6. Build on common ground:** It is easy to see what separates us, but dialogue is also furthered when we realize the issues agreed upon as well.

**7. Be a witness, not a converter:** Instead of trying to just win the argument, view yourself as trying to give a witness to the Catholic faith.

This may seem a lot to download all at once. Don't worry! Each chapter, you will focus on just one principle and over time will add them to your apologetic repertoire.

**4** *Ask: Could someone please read “How does the study work?”*

**4** **How does this study work?**

In each chapter, you will learn about a particular topic and why the Church believes what it does. Then, as a small group you will have the chance to respond to some common objections to that topic with your Apologetics Training Cards (found in the back of this study). We want you to not just know apologetics; we want you to put it into practice. Similar to riding a bike, the art of apologetics develops with practice and persevering through failures.

Both the reasons for believing in the teaching of the Church along with the objections against them are not exhaustive. They are there to give you a foundation for learning more about that topic. Resources are given at the end of each chapter for you to dive deeper into particular topics.

Finally, do not be afraid! You don't need a degree in Theology or to be a world class debater to be an effective Catholic apologist. You need the desire to learn, the courage to speak up for your faith, and a heart for souls as you speak the truth in love. Thank you for taking the time to learn how to defend the Catholic faith—it is an invaluable tool in our world today.

# Chapter One

## SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

### The Word of God

#### What the CHURCH says...

**1** *Ask: Could someone please read “What the Church says...”?*

#### Note to Leader:

This concept of Tradition might take some time to digest. As the chapter goes on, it should become clearer. If not, an In-depth Insight section and resources can be found at the end of the chapter.

#### **1** What the CHURCH says...

The Catholic Church believes that the **Word of God** is handed on in two ways: **Sacred Scripture** and **Sacred Tradition**.

**Sacred Scripture** is the **Word of God** that was written down “by those apostles and other men associated with the apostles who, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation to *writing*” (CCC 76, emphasis added).

**Sacred Tradition** is the **Word of God** handed down “by the apostles who handed on, by the spoken word of their preaching, by the example they gave, by the institutions they established, what they themselves had received” (CCC 76). **Sacred Tradition** is sometimes referred to as oral Tradition.

This idea of Tradition can be confusing. Tradition (big T) is different than the traditions of the Church (small t). Traditions (small t) include praying the rosary or using Advent candles. These are important to our Church, but can change over time. Sacred Tradition (big T) is the **Word of God** passed on from Jesus to the apostles and to us today—this does not change over time.

Another important factor that plays a role in God’s word is the **Magisterium**. The Magisterium is the teaching authority of the Church given to the apostles and their successors by Jesus Christ. These successors would be the bishops of the Catholic Church, including the Pope, the bishop of Rome. The task of the Magisterium is to

**1**

give an authentic interpretation of the **Word of God**. And yet, the Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant (see CCC 86). Through the Holy Spirit, it hands on the Word of God.

**2**

### Why the CHURCH believes this...

**2** Ask: Could someone please read “Why the Church believes this...”?

### Not Just in the Gospels

**3** Say: Let’s look at the first reason for Sacred Tradition. The Gospel writers themselves tell us that not everything about Jesus was written down.

**4** Ask: Could someone please read John 21:25?

Say: Think about it. Jesus did so many things that weren’t recorded in the Bible. This didn’t mean that they weren’t important. In fact, let’s look at a time when St. Paul uses a phrase by Jesus not recorded in the Gospels.

**5** Ask: Could someone please read Acts 20:35?

Say: The phrase “It is more blessed to give than to receive” is not found anywhere in the Gospels and yet St. Paul assumes that his listeners knew this phrase.

**6** Ask: How could they have known this phrase already if it were not in the Gospels?

Answer: They heard it through Tradition. At this time, John’s Gospel hadn’t even been written yet. Early Christian communities relied heavily on Tradition. It is all that they had at first.

### Why the CHURCH believes this...

**2** There are several reasons why the Church believes in both Scripture and Tradition. Since this is a Scriptural Apologetics Bible Study, we are going to look at how Scripture itself attests to the idea of Tradition. Below are two reasons that we will examine further in this chapter.

- 1.** The New Testament writers speak of other things that Jesus did and said that were not recorded in the Gospels.
- 2.** St. Paul goes into further detail about written and oral Tradition and how it is passed down to others.

### Not Just in the Gospels

**3** **1.** The New Testament writers speak of other things that Jesus did and said that were not recorded in the Gospels.

**4** **Read John 21:25**

**5** **Read Acts 20:35**

**6** How could they have known this phrase already if it were not in the Gospels?

**2**

## Passing It On

### Passing It On

**7** *Say: St. Paul also talks about*

**7**

**2.** St. Paul goes into further detail about written and oral Tradition and how it is passed down to others.

**2**

*Tradition. Let's turn to St. Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians.*

**8** *Ask: Could someone please read 2 Thessalonians 2:15?*

**8**

**Read 2 Thessalonians 2:15**

**9**

How does this verse support the Catholic belief about Tradition?

**9** *Ask: How does this verse support the Catholic belief about Tradition?*

**10**

**Read 2 Timothy 2:1-2**

**3**

Answer: It shows that the apostles did not just put everything down in writing, but that they also expected early Christians to follow their oral instructions as well.

**10** *Ask: St. Paul not only notes that Tradition or teachings exist, but also that they should be passed on to others. Could I have someone please read 2 Timothy 2:1-2?*

*Say: This is the whole idea behind Sacred Tradition. The apostles take what they learned from Jesus Christ and teach it to others who, in turn, pass it on to others. This Word of God passed on is what Catholics call Tradition.*

**Note to Leader:** In almost every chapter, we included a section called “In-depth Insight.” These sections detail a particular point in a more concentrated or even academic way. Depending on your group or time available you may want to skip or come back to this section later.

**11** Ask:  
Could someone  
please read the  
“In-depth  
Insight”?

**11** In-depth Insight

Here is another way to look at Scripture and Tradition. In regards to Scripture, all Christians agree on what the Bible says, but we do not agree on what the Bible means. Tradition helps us see how the apostles understood Jesus and how they lived and what they taught as a result. It provides the historical context for understanding what the Word of God means.

A practical example might help illustrate. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus clearly tells his apostles to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” But, people in the early Church and even in the Church today ask the question, should we baptize infants? There is not direct teaching in Scripture for or against infant Baptism. Tradition tells us the apostles baptized infants. Although not in Scripture, the apostles were either told or shown to do this by Jesus or told this through the Holy Spirit. In turn, the Catholic Church uses this form of the Word of God as its basis for baptizing infants today.

The Tradition of the Catholic Church is a beautiful resource to have. Much of this Tradition is contained in the works and writings of the Early Church Fathers, men who lived in the first centuries after Jesus. Because Tradition helps us understand what Scripture means, many Protestants have turned to Catholicism through the writings of these men. For an introduction to Early Church Fathers, see *The Early Church Fathers* by Mike Aquilina.

3

## Conclusion

**12** Ask:  
Could someone  
please read the  
“Conclusion”?

**12** Conclusion

The idea of Scripture and Tradition brings up two important apologetic points pertaining to the Protestant belief in Sola Scriptura (basing all their beliefs off on the written Word of God alone).

First, when we study Tradition, we realize that Tradition had to come before Scripture. The Word of God was spoken by the apostles and their successors even before the Bible was completed. When we examine the early Church it is also apparent that no set canon or what we know as the books included in the Bible was established officially until the end of the fourth century. It would be hard for the early Christians to rely solely on Scripture.

Second, the Protestant acceptance of *sola scriptura* is really a rejection of the authority of the Catholic Church and its ability to interpret Scripture and to pass on Tradition. They believe that one can come to a correct understanding of Scripture through the Holy Spirit. This naturally leads to the question: If this is the case for all people seeking truth who read the Scriptures, why are there 30,000 denominations with competing doctrines about grace, morality, etc.? With charity, this is an important question for us to pose to Protestants to encourage them to grapple with the consequences that occur without authority.

4

Whereas Scripture itself claims in 1 Timothy 3:15, “...if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which acts as the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.” St. Paul points to the Church as “pillar and bulwark [or safeguard] of the truth,” that is a guide for Christians. We will look more into the authority of the Church next chapter.

When we examine the Scripture, Church history, and logic, the idea of Tradition and the Church’s authority is not only reasonable, but essential to our Christian faith.

4

More Scripture verses: 1 Corinthians 11:2; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 John 1:12; 3 John 1:13-14; 2 Peter 1:20-21  
 CCC: 78, 80-84, 95, 113, 120

*Made for More:* p. 103-108

Extra Resources:

*By What Authority: An Evangelical Discovers Catholic Tradition* by Mark Shea  
*Why Is That in Tradition?* by Patrick Madrid

Reading for next time: Matthew 16:13-20; Isaiah 22:15-24; Acts 1:15-26

## Practical Objections

**Note to Leader:** For more information on the Practical Objections—read the introduction in the Student Guide (found on the next page). Feel free to read this as a group or explain it to your group. For information on how you can help facilitate practical objections, see below.

When going through the objections as a group, rather than publically correcting the one giving the answer, refer them to the answer key in their Student Guide and ask them what they did well and what they could improve. If appropriate, you can add a word or two of encouragement and improvement as well. As the leader, you have all the answers directly after the objection.

Some objections will be answered by simply using the information learned previously. Other times new information will be needed to answer an objection or to address the objection itself. This gives the respondent a chance to think on their feet. If they don't know the answer or aren't able to come up with a reasonable answer, it is good to learn to respond, "I'm not sure, let me ask someone/do some studying and I will get back to you.")

**13** Ask: For the "Practical Objections" section, we are going to learn how to answer some common objections while also learning one of the seven principles. Could I have someone read the apologetics principle and definition for this chapter?

Ask: What are some ways that we can act out this principle during an apologetics dialogue?

**Practical Objections**

The purpose of the "Practical Objections" section is to introduce a few of the most common objections to that apologetics topic.

While you are answering these objections, your group will be working on one of the seven apologetics principles of dialogue. For chapter one, the principle is: Show that you are open to dialogue. As a group, brainstorm ways to enact this principle in an apologetics conversation.

When you are going through the actual objections, you can use these objections in a few ways. Someone can volunteer to answer the objection in a straight forward manner. Or, you can have a mock dialogue in front of the whole study. Or, you can split up into partners and all practice a mock dialogue. Also, if you run out of time, begin the next study by using the objections of the previous study. This provides a good review of the topic from last time.

**13 Apologetics Principle #1: Show you are open to dialogue:** By being cool, calm, and collected in the face of any objection, the other person will be more open to dialogue.

What are some ways that we can act out this principle during an apologetics dialogue? **5**

**14** Ask: Could someone please read Objection 1?

Ask: Who would like to try to respond?

**Response:**  
That's a great question. Talking about the faith can be difficult at

**14 Objection 1**  
The Catholic Church's reliance on and belief in tradition is opposed to Jesus' words in **Matthew 15:6**: "For the sake of your traditions, you have made void the word of God."

Answers to every objection can be found in the Appendix of this Bible study. **6**

times, but I believe it is the most important thing to discuss. So, I really enjoy it when people ask me questions about the faith.

It is important to realize what Jesus means when He says tradition. He is speaking of manmade traditions that have come about over the course of history. When Catholics speak of Tradition we are talking about the Word of God handed on from Jesus to the apostles and to their successors and us today. This Tradition is not manmade; it is the Word of God passed on orally. This Tradition never goes against Scripture or “makes void the word of God.”

Scripture attests to this type of Tradition: In **2 Thessalonians 2:15**, St. Paul says, “So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.” Clearly, St. Paul is not against handing on instructions and practices “by word of mouth or by letter,” and certainly not against Christians holding to them.

### 15 *Ask: Can someone please read Objection 2?*

*Ask: Who would like to try to respond?*

15

#### **Objection 2**

Why would we need Tradition? Scripture alone is sufficient as **2 Timothy 3:16** says, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

6

**Responding to the objection:** Catholics do believe that Scripture is profitable, but this verse does not say that Scripture alone is sufficient for us. Also, St. Paul says “for every good work.” This would not include all matters of *faith*.

In this same letter, St. Paul exhorts Timothy to pass on the teachings that Timothy had heard from St. Paul, not just the ones he wrote down (2 Timothy 2:2).

#### **Response from additional information:**

Was St. Paul referring to the New Testament Scriptures? In v. 15 he says: “From childhood, you have been acquainted with the sacred writings...” Because the New Testament had not been written in their childhood, this can only refer to the Old Testament. If Protestants want to claim that St. Paul is speaking about using these Scriptures alone, then they would only use the Old Testament.

**16** *Ask: Can someone please read Objection 3?*

*Ask: Who would like to try to respond?*

**Response:**

When John makes this statement, he is only speaking

about the book of Revelation. He could not have known that this statement would be at the end of the Bible. Also, in **Deuteronomy 4:2**, the same type of statement is made: “You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it.” If this statement is interpreted like Revelation was then we should not read past Deuteronomy.

**16**

**Objection 3: Think on your feet**

Catholics have added practices and beliefs to the Christian faith that are not found in Scripture. At the end of the Bible, John warns against adding anything to Scripture in **Revelation 22:18**: “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if any one adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book...”

**7**

# Chapter Two

## THE KINGDOM, AUTHORITY, AND THE PAPACY

### What the CHURCH says...

**1** *Ask: Could someone please read the first paragraph under “What the Church says...”*

### Why the CHURCH believes this...

**2** *Ask: Could someone please read “Why the Church believes this?”*

#### **1** What the CHURCH says...

Jesus, as king, established His kingdom here on earth. As He left this world, Jesus passed His authority over this kingdom to His apostles. In particular, the apostle Peter was granted a unique role in the kingdom. The Catholic Church believes that these roles were passed down through the centuries through our bishops and Popes.

#### **2** Why the CHURCH believes this...

**This chapter will walk through the points above in four stages:**

- 1.** As the Messiah, Jesus established a kingdom on earth which alludes to the Davidic kingdom.
- 2.** Jesus passed the authority of this kingdom to His apostles and, in a particular way, to the apostle Peter.
- 3.** Isaiah 22 can help us understand the words of Jesus to Peter more clearly.
- 4.** Scripture and Church history attest that the offices of St. Peter and the other apostles were not only granted to the apostles, but also to successors.

## The Kingdom

**3** *Say: Our understanding of the Pope begins with our understanding of Jesus as the Messiah.*

**4** *Ask: Could someone please read the next two paragraphs starting with “The Jewish people...”?*

### St. Peter in the New Kingdom

**5** *Say: Let’s look at this exchange between Jesus and St. Peter. Here is where Jesus passes on the authority of the kingdom to St. Peter.*

**6** *Ask: Could I have someone read Matthew 16:13-20?*

**7** *Ask: The most important aspect about this passage is St. Peter’s declaration of Jesus as the Messiah. However, in regards to St. Peter, what are some key phrases to consider?*

### The Kingdom

**3** 1. As the Messiah, Jesus established a kingdom on earth which alludes to the Davidic kingdom.

**4** The Jewish people had been waiting for a king to restore the Davidic kingdom that had been temporarily suspended through their captivity by several nations. They called this expected king, the *Messiah* or *Christ*, meaning “the anointed one.”

In the Gospels, it is clear that Jesus is portrayed as this Messiah. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus keeps His identity hidden during much of His ministry. In Matthew 16, He asks His apostles—“Who do you say that I am?” St. Peter’s answer to this question and Jesus’ response forms the Scriptural foundations for our understanding of the Pope.

### St. Peter in the New Kingdom

**5** 2. Jesus passed the authority of this kingdom to His apostles and, in a particular way, to the apostle Peter.

### 6 Read Matthew 16:13-20

**7** The most important aspect about this passage is St. Peter’s declaration of Jesus as the Messiah. However, in regards to St. Peter, what are some key phrases to consider?

1.

2.

3.

Answer:

1. “You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church and the powers of death shall not prevail against it” (v. 18).
2. “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (v. 19).
3. “Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (v. 19).

*Say: The phrase about St. Peter being the rock is fairly straight forward. Jesus permanently changes Simon’s name to Peter (meaning rock) and tells St. Peter that upon this rock (Peter) Jesus will build His Church. This seems fairly clear from the text.*

*In order to understand what Jesus is referring to in the next two phrases, we have to dive deep into the Old Testament to see how the Davidic Kingdom works.*

**Note to Leader:** Some Protestants do make objections to Peter being the Rock despite the evidence from the text. This chapter focuses on the more contested verses in this passage.

## Isaiah 22

**8** *Say: To understand Jesus’ words to Peter more clearly, let’s look at Isaiah 22.*

**9** *Ask: Could I have someone please read Isaiah 22:15-24?*

**10** *Ask: Who are the characters in this story and what offices do they hold?*

<b>8</b>	<b>Isaiah</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>3.</b> Isaiah 22 can help us understand the words of Jesus to Peter more clearly.
<b>10</b>	<b>Read Isaiah 22:15-24</b>
	Who are the characters in this story and what offices do they hold?
	<b>11</b>

Answer: The two characters are Shebna and Eliakim and they hold the office of one over the household.

**Note to Leader:** In some translations, the office is called master of the palace or one over the household. All of these titles come from the Hebrew word *al-bayit* which is a prime minister-like office.

**11** *Ask: What about this office sounds similar to Jesus' commands to St. Peter in Matthew 16?*

**11** What about this office sounds similar to Jesus' commands to St. Peter in Matthew 16?

**11**

Answer: v. 22:

“And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.”

This is similar to Jesus' message to St. Peter: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19).

*Say: We believe that Jesus alludes to this office seen in Isaiah with Peter who serves as the first Pope.*

*Jesus possesses all authority. A key is a sign of authority in the ancient world. We still use this today in a symbolic way when mayors give the key to the city over to someone as a sign of recognition.*

*When Jesus gives Peter the key He gives Peter and His successors His authority to be administrated on earth.*

*The language of opening and shutting along with binding and loosening all speak of authority as well. Specifically, the idea of binding and loosening was used by rabbis in Jesus' day about the authority to allow or disallow interpretations of the Jewish law.*

*This is why we believe that the Pope today has the authority that comes from Christ to instruct the Church regarding faith and morals.*

**12** *Ask: Could I have someone read the “In-depth Insight” section?*

**12** **In-depth Insight**

Let’s take a look at some other characteristics of this office in **Isaiah 22** (the passage with Shebna and Eliakim) and how this affects the office of the Pope throughout the history of the Church.

v. 23— “And I will fasten him like a peg in a sure place, and he will become a throne of honor to his father’s house.”

A throne is a place of authority where a king makes declarations for the kingdom. In the Jewish tradition this is seen with Moses (Exodus 25:20-22) and the Pharisees (Matthew 23:2). The concept of a throne and authority is carried out by the Pope (and bishops) today. This throne or chair (cathedra in Latin) is where the Pope or **11**

bishop makes declarations for the faithful. This is why the bishop’s church is called a cathedral—it is the Church that contains his cathedra or throne.

v. 24— “And I will fasten him like a peg in a sure place...And they will hang on him the whole weight of his father’s house.”

In a tent, the peg holds the entire structure together. This is why the passage says that the whole weight of his father’s house will hang on him. His house represents the entire kingdom. Similarly, Jesus gives St. Peter the authority to His entire universal kingdom, the Church.

We also know from other ancient sources that this position of prime minister took over for the king if the king left the kingdom.

After Jesus talks to St. Peter, He heads straight to Jerusalem to die. He knows He can now die, rise, and ascend into heaven.

**12**

## The Apostles and Their Successors

**13** *Ask: As we saw above, Jesus first hands on His authority to St. Peter. Later, Jesus will hand on this authority to the other apostles as well in Matthew*

**The Apostles and Their Successors**

**13** **Read Matthew 18:18**

**13**

**14** **4.** Scripture and Church history attest that the offices of St. Peter and the other apostles were not only granted to the apostles, but also to successors.

**15** **Read Acts 1:15-26**

**13**

*18:18. Can someone please read Matthew 18:18?*

*Say: So the apostles are given a share of St. Peter’s authority as they are told that they also have the power to bind and loosen. We believe that the bishops of the Church are the successors of the apostles.*

**Note to Leader:** They do not have the exact same authority—they don’t receive the keys.

**14** *Say: Let’s look at the last point. While these offices were established, the Catholic Church also believes these offices were passed on through the centuries to the modern day.*

**15** *Ask: Could someone please read Acts 1:15-26?*

*Ask: Could someone please describe what happens in this passage?*

*Answer: St. Peter stands up among the disciples and apostles and notes that since Judas died someone needs to take his office as an apostle. They cast lots and Matthias is “enrolled with the eleven apostles.”*

*Say: So, we see that the office of apostle is passed on. It does not just end with the death of the apostles. This is why we believe these offices continue on today with our Pope and bishops.*

**16** *Ask: Could someone please read about St. Clement and the quote by him as well?*

**16** In the first century, St. Clement writes about this idea of passing on authority. St. Clement was a contemporary of the apostles. He was the fourth Pope. St. Peter along with Linus and Cletus, the second and third Popes, had all been martyred. Clement would be killed as well, but not before giving us some of the most ancient and reliable explanation of life of the early Church.

**13**

## Conclusion

**17** *Ask: Could someone please read the “Conclusion”?*

“Through countryside and city [the apostles] preached, and they appointed their earliest converts, testing them by the Spirit, to be the bishops and deacons of future believers . . . Our apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife for the office of bishop. For this reason, therefore, having received perfect foreknowledge, they appointed those who have already been mentioned and afterwards added the further provision that, if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry.”  
—St. Clement, Letter to the Corinthians 42:4-5, 44:1-3).

## Conclusion

**17** Few doctrines spark more debate than the Papacy. While this claim is outrageous to some, if it is true, the Catholic Church is the only Church that fulfills this bold claim. This is why it is so important to know the Scriptural, historical, and logical reasons for this belief.

**14**

More Scripture verses: Luke 10:16; Luke 22:31-32; John 16:13; John 21:15-19;  
Acts 15:6-11; 1 Timothy 3:1-7. 14-15  
CCC: 880-892

*Made for More:* p. 57-72

Extra Resources:

*Pope Fiction* by Patrick Madrid

*Upon This Rock: St. Peter and the Primacy of Rome in Scripture and the Early Church* by Stephen K. Ray

“Peace of the Rock” in *Reasons to Believe* by Scott Hahn

Reading for next time: John 6:35-71 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-31

## Practical Objections

**18** *Ask: Could I have someone read the apologetics principle and definition for this chapter?*

**18**

### Practical Objections

**Apologetics Principle #2: Focus on just one issue at a time:** Rather than addressing several objections all at once, agree on one specific area to discuss.

**14**

What are some ways that we can act out this principle during an apologetics dialogue?

**15**

*Ask: What are some ways that we can act out this principle during an apologetics dialogue?*

**19**

### Objection 1

Most Catholic beliefs were invented in the Middle Ages. All of this talk about Mary and the Saints, the Pope and Purgatory. Where are these in the Bible?

**15**

**19** *Ask: Can someone please read Objection 1?*

*Ask: Who would like to try to respond?*

**Response:** You brought up a lot of great issues. I think I could answer most of them or find the answer, but for the time being, could we just concentrate on one topic? Would you be willing to let me show you some Scripture behind the Church's belief about the Papacy?

As Catholics we believe the office of the Pope is rooted in Scripture.

In Matthew 16, Jesus changes Simon's name to St. Peter (rock) and tells St. Peter that on this rock He will build His Church.

Jesus hands him keys as a symbol of authority and gives him the power to bind and loosen. This is a term referring to authority. We believe this verse sets the foundation for the Papacy and this office given to St. Peter was passed down in the early Church and up until today.

Note: If you want to show more Biblical evidence for the Pope, use Isaiah 22.

**20** *Ask: Can someone please read Objection 2?*

*Ask: Who would like to try to respond?*

**Response:**

As Catholics, we believe that this idea that the apostles' authority passes on to bishops is both historical and scriptural.

**20**

**Objection 2**

Jesus may have given particular leadership roles to the apostles at the beginning of the Church, but the Pope and today's bishops do not have that sort of authority.

**16**

In Acts 1, St. Peter stands up among the disciples and apostles and notes that since Judas died someone needs to take his office as an apostle. They cast lots and Matthias is “enrolled with the eleven apostles.”

Plus, St. Clement, a contemporary of the apostles, attests that the apostles appointed bishops to take their place after they died. These are just a couple of reasons of why we believe the apostles' authority has been and continues to be passed on to bishops.

# Chapter Three

## THE EUCHARIST

### What the Church says...

**1** *Ask: Could someone please read “What the Church says...” on the Eucharist?*

### Why the CHURCH believes this...

**2** *Ask: Could someone please read “Why the Church believes this...”?*

#### What the Church says...

**1** From the time of Christ, the Catholic Church has taught that the Eucharist is not just a symbol of Jesus; but truly is Jesus’ body, blood, soul, and divinity and the representation of Jesus’ Sacrifice on Calvary.

In contrast, many non-Catholic Christians have some sort of communion or remembrance of the Last Supper, but most see it only as symbolically representing Jesus.

#### Why the CHURCH believes this...

- 2**
1. This teaching flows from the words of Jesus at the Last Supper (Matthew 26) and the Bread of Life discourse (John 6).
  2. It also flows from the teaching and practices of the apostles (1 Corinthians 11) and the clear evidence from historical Christianity.

#### The Last Supper

- 3**
1. This teaching flows from the words of Jesus at the Last Supper (Matthew 26) and the Bread of Life discourse (John 6).

**4** **Read Matthew 26:26-28**

17

### The Last Supper

**3** *Say: The Catholic belief in the Eucharist flows directly from the words of Jesus.*

**4** *Ask: Could someone please read Matthew 26:26-28?*

**5** *Ask: Why do you think this supports the Catholic position on the Eucharist?*

Answer: Jesus clearly states that the bread is His body and that the wine is His blood. He makes no clarification to indicate that

He is speaking symbolically (Similar passages are also found in Mark 14:22-24, Luke 22:17-20, and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

**5** Why do you think this supports the Catholic position on the Eucharist?

**6** Why do you think some people might not think this passage supports the Eucharist?

### Bread of Life Discourse

**7** Read John 6:35-71

18

**6** *Ask: Why do you think some people might not think this passage supports the Eucharist?*

Answer: Jesus could be only symbolically speaking about His body and blood as it relates to His sacrifice on the cross.

### Bread of Life Discourse

*Say: In the Gospel of John, we have a passage on the Eucharist found nowhere else in the Gospels. Here, Jesus elaborates on His teaching concerning eating His body and drinking His blood one year to the day before the Last Supper.*

**7** *Ask: Could I have three people to volunteer to read sections of John 6:35-71? (Break the reading into three sections: 6:35-51; 52-59; 60-71)*

**Note to Leader:** Be sure to include the questions below that accompany each section.

(Have someone start by reading 6:35-51)

**8** (After reading, 6:35-51) *Ask: What does Jesus say about Himself in this passage?*

**8** What does Jesus say about Himself in this passage? (6:35-51)

18

Answer: Jesus says, “I am the bread of life” (v. 35). More specifically, I am living bread that came down from heaven (v. 51). Eating this bread, which is His flesh, will lead to eternal life (v. 51).

(Have someone continue this passage by reading 6:52-59)

(After reading 6:52-59) *Ask: In verse 52, what is the Jews’ objection to Jesus’ teaching?*

Answer: They say, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

*Ask: At this point, what do the Jews think Jesus is teaching? What is their understanding of what He is saying?*

Answer: Their understanding is that Jesus is asking them to literally eat His flesh.

**9** *Ask: In verses 53-59, what is Jesus’ response to this question? Does He back down from His original message?*

**9** What is Jesus’ response? Does He back down from His original message? (6:52-59)

19

Answer: No, He continues to preach the same message and notes that His flesh is food indeed and His blood is drink indeed.

(Have someone continue this passage by reading 6:60-71)

*Ask: At this point in time, Jesus has many disciples and followers. What is their reaction to His teaching?*

Answer: They reject His teaching. It is a hard saying and many of His disciples no longer follow Him.

**10** Ask: What is Jesus' reaction? Does He correct His teaching?

**10** What is Jesus' reaction? Does He correct His teaching? (6:60-72)

19

Answer: Jesus does not run after them and correct Himself that He meant something else. There is no hint of anyone thinking that Jesus is speaking only symbolically. He not only lets them go, but turns to the apostles and asks them if they are going to abandon Him as well. Jesus was not going to bend on this teaching!

**11** Ask: Could I have someone please read the "In-depth Insight" on this passage?

## Throughout History

**12** Say: Let's look at how Jesus' teaching was practiced in the early Church by turning to 1 Corinthians, chapter 11.

### 11 In-depth Insight

The original Greek that **John 6** was written in gives us a deeper understanding of Jesus' teaching on the Eucharist.

In verses 50-58 of chapter six, John uses the word "eat" eight times. However, John employs two different Greek words which are both translated as "eat" in English.

*Phago* is used in verses 50-53. It means "to eat" or "consume." This word in the Greek can be used to eat symbolically.

19

*Trogo* is used in verses 54-57 when Jesus answers the Pharisees' objection and clarifies exactly what He means. Trogo is more graphic—it means "to chew" or "to gnaw."

*Trogo* cannot be used symbolically in the Greek language. Therefore, we have to take it to mean to literally eat the flesh of Jesus, and this graphic word is used to emphasize this very fact.

**Apologetics Tip:** Take a blue pen and a black pen and circle the use of eat in v. 50-53 in black and the uses of eat in 54-57 in blue. Write in the margin, black=*phago* and blue=*trogo*. This will allow you to easily explain this concept from your Bible when you are talking about this subject. It will come in handy in the future!

### Throughout History

**12** 2. It also flows from the teaching and practices of the apostles (1 Corinthians 11) and the clear evidence from historical Christianity.

20

**13** Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-31

**14** How does this verse strengthen the argument regarding the Eucharist?

**15** “I desire the Bread of God, the heavenly Bread, the Bread of Life, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became afterwards of the seed of David and Abraham; I desire the drink of God, namely His blood, which is incorruptible love and eternal life” (St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Romans*, 7).

20

**13** Ask: *Could I have someone please read 1 Corinthians 11:23-31?*

*Ask: After recounting the Last Supper, what does St. Paul tell the Corinthians concerning the body and blood of Jesus?*

Answer: St. Paul tells them that whoever eats or drinks unworthily will be guilty of profaning Jesus' body and blood.

**14** Ask: *How does this verse strengthen the argument regarding the Eucharist?*

Answer: If the Eucharist were merely a symbol, then there would not be such grave judgments against someone for profaning Jesus' body and blood.

**15** Ask: *There is clear evidence that this teaching was taught in the early Church. Could someone please read the quote from St. Ignatius of Antioch who wrote in 110 AD?*

## Conclusion

**16** *Ask: Could someone please read the “Conclusion”?*

### Conclusion

**16** The Church’s belief in the Eucharist is easy to understand, but, at times, hard to accept. Even Our Lord’s followers in the Gospel confess that “this is a hard saying” (John 6:60)! And yet, what a beautiful teaching! Jesus wants to give His whole self—body, blood, soul, and divinity—to us in the Eucharist. We are given a representation of Jesus’ Sacrifice on Calvary so that we can be in communion with Him and the whole Church.

The Eucharist doesn’t separate us from a relationship with Jesus; it binds us closer to him in the most intimate way. Because of this reality, many non-Catholic Christians become attracted to the Catholic Church. They want this intimacy with Jesus and we should be excited to tell them about it!

Knowing the basic Scripture passages and arguments to defend this teaching as well as your own testimony of the power of the Eucharist in your life are vital in helping all people know the true worth of the Eucharist.

21

More Scripture verses: Mark 14:22, 24; Luke 22:19-20; Acts 2:42  
CCC: 1322-1419

*Made for More:* p. 81-84

Extra Resources:

*The Lamb’s Supper* by Scott Hahn

*The Mass of the Early Christians* by Mike Aquilina

*Catholic for a Reason III: Scripture and the Mystery of the Mass* edited by Scott Hahn and Regis J. Flaherty

Reading for next time: Matthew 9:1-8 and John 20:19-23

## Practical Objections

**17** *Ask: Could I have someone read the apologetics principle and definition for this chapter?*

### Practical Objections

**17** **Apologetics Principle #3: Restate their objection and understand their logic:** Make sure you understand what they are really saying and see the argument from their perspective.

21

*Ask: What are some ways that we can act out this principle during an apologetics dialogue?*

What are some ways that we can act out this principle during an apologetics dialogue?

18

**Objection 1**

In my Church we celebrate the Lord's Supper, but it is a symbolic representation of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for us. Why do Catholics believe in the Eucharist? Why do you think it is literally the body and blood of Jesus?

18

*Ask: Can someone please read Objection 1?*

22

*Ask: Who would like to try to respond?*

**Response:** So, what I hear you saying is that you believe that Jesus intended for the Lord's Supper to be taken symbolically. Is this correct?

Would you be willing to look at John, chapter 6 and explore with me why Catholics believe what they do about the Eucharist?

In John 6, Jesus claims that He is the bread of life that came down from heaven and that anyone who eats this bread will have eternal life (v. 40). When questioned by the Jews on this teaching, rather than telling them it is a metaphor, Jesus emphasizes that His flesh is food indeed and His blood is drink indeed (vv. 55-56). In fact, in Jesus' response to their objections, the Greek used is *trogo* which is a very graphic term for eating and is not used in a symbolic manner. It must be taken literally. When many of His followers abandon Him because of His response, He doesn't clarify His teaching, but allows them to leave (v. 66).

**19** *Ask: Can someone please read Objection 2?*

*Ask: Who would like to try to respond?*

**19**

**Objection 2: Think on your feet**

Jesus never intends for His followers to believe they were really eating His flesh. He was speaking metaphorically: In **John 6:63**, Jesus says “the flesh is of no avail,” meaning He intends us to understand His words as conveying a spiritual reality.

**22**

**Response:** Regarding verse 63, we need to understand what Jesus means by “flesh” and “spirit.” Jesus would not say that His flesh is of no avail; He took on flesh to save the world. His flesh is extremely important. Rather, “the flesh” usually refers to the human, worldly way of seeing and behaving. To accept what Jesus proclaims in John 6 requires the spiritual gift of faith. The worldly thinking prevents Jesus’ hearers from understanding His teaching. For more examples of this, see Mark 14:38 and John 3:6.

# Chapter Four

## THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION

### What the CHURCH says...

- 1 *Ask: Could someone please read “What the Church says...” on the Sacrament of Confession?*

### Why the CHURCH believes this...

- 2 *Ask: Let’s examine why the Church believes men have the power to forgive sins. Could someone please read “Why the Church believes this” section?*

#### What the CHURCH says...

- 1 Jesus Christ gave His the apostles the ability to forgive sins. Today, bishops—who are the successors of the apostles, and priests, who receive this power from the bishops, have the ability to forgive sins of men (cf. CCC 1461). This is known as the Catholic sacrament of Confession, also called Reconciliation or Penance.

#### Why the CHURCH believes this...

- 2
  1. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus Christ hands His authority over to His disciples.
  2. In the Gospel of John, Jesus hands over the authority to forgive sins.

## Authority to Men

**3** *Say: Let's look at reason number one. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus Christ hands His authority over to His disciples.*

### Authority to Men

- 3** 1. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus Christ hands His authority over to His disciples.
- 4** The theme of Jesus handing over His authority to men is carried out in the Gospel of Matthew. In chapters eight and nine, Jesus heals several people and casts out demons. Then, in chapter ten, Jesus gives this same authority to heal and cast out demons over to the apostles. While Matthew's Gospel does not *directly* state that the ability to forgive sins was given to the apostles, it alludes to it in chapter nine.

23

**4** *Ask: Could I have someone please read the next paragraph?*

**5** *Ask: Could I have someone please read Matthew 9:1-8?*

### 5 Read Matthew 9:1-8

24

*Ask: What is this passage primarily about?*

Answer: Jesus' ability to forgive sins on earth (v. 8).

*Ask: How does it allude to His apostles forgiving sins?*

Answer: In v. 9, the crowds glorify God, "who had given such authority to men." Notice that the Holy Spirit inspired St. Matthew to use the plural—men—not just man.

## The Peace of Forgiveness

**6** *Say: Let's look at a more direct example of how Jesus gave His apostles the ability to forgive sins.*

### The Peace of Forgiveness

- 6** 2. In the Gospel of John, Jesus hands over the authority to forgive sins.

24

**7** *Ask: On the first Easter Sunday, Jesus meets the apostles for the first time after the crucifixion. Jesus comes to forgive sins here on earth and then He extends this authority to His apostles. Could someone please read John 20:19-23?*

**7** **Read John 20:19-23**

**8** How do these verses relate to the verses in Matthew and how does it argue for the sacrament of Confession?

**9** **In-depth Insight**

In the sacrament of Confession, the Church believes in two types of sins that can be forgiven, mortal and venial. Mortal sins are deadly sins that cut off our relationship with God. Venial sins are everyday faults that harm our relationship with God, but do not destroy it (see 1 John 5:16-17). Confession is ordinarily necessary for mortal sins to be removed. However, the regular confession of venial sins is recommended by the Church. (For more on Confession, see CCC 1455-1460.)

24

**8** *Ask: How do these verses relate to the verses in Matthew and how does it argue for the Sacrament of Confession?*

Answer: Just like in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus hands over to the apostles what He is able to do. Here, Jesus specifically notes that they are able to forgive the sins of others.

**9** *Ask: Could someone read the "In-depth Insight" on Confession and how it applies to our lives today?*

## Conclusion

**10** *Ask: Could someone please read the "Conclusion"?*

**10** **Conclusion**

For Evangelicals who value a personal relationship with Jesus, this sacrament can be seen as another sign that Catholics follow a religion and not the person of Jesus Christ. And yet, when we take a look at Scripture and the sacrament itself, we will see that Christ desires men on earth to forgive sins in a very tangible way. Rather than separating us from the person of Christ, the sacrament of Confession gives a human connection. When the priest stands in the place of Jesus and forgives our sins, we can more easily imagine Jesus personally forgiving us.

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# Scriptural Apologetics Objection Training Cards

These cards are designed to help you role-play different objections to the Catholic faith. The cards can be used in a number of ways. One way is to have one person make an objection to the Catholic faith and the other give an answer. The one giving the answer can read straight off of the cards, or attempt to come up with their own answer to the objection. The cards can also be used for individual practice and review of apologetics arguments and principles.

During role-playing, we suggest you focus on a different apologetic principle each time and we have made a suggested principle to practice on each card. (All of the principles and a short explanation of each can be found on the back of this card). While there is just one principle per card, you may want to incorporate the principles you have already learned as you progress through the cards. For instance, on the second card, you can use both the principle found on that specific card and the principle you picked up from the first card.

We hope these cards are effective as you learn apologetics. Enjoy!

## 1. Scripture and Tradition Objection Principle: Show you are open to dialogue

**Objection:** The Catholic Church's reliance on and belief in tradition is opposed to Jesus' words in **Matthew 15:6**: "For the sake of your traditions, you have made void the word of God."

## 7 Apologetic Principles

- 1. Show you are open to dialogue:** By being cool, calm, and collected in the face of any objection, the other person will be more open to dialogue.
- 2. Focus on just one issue at a time:** Rather than addressing several objections all at once, agree on one specific area to discuss.
- 3. Restate their objection and understand their logic:** Make sure you understand what they are really saying and see the argument from their perspective.
- 4. Ask thought-provoking questions:** Really good questions can be more effective than rattling off every reason you have for a particular belief.
- 5. Correct misunderstandings:** One of the best things you can do is to correct the false ideas about the Catholic faith or Catholics themselves.
- 6. Build on common ground:** It is easy to see what separates us, but dialogue is also furthered when we realize the issues agreed upon as well.
- 7. Be a witness, not a converter:** Instead of trying to just win the argument, view yourself as trying to give a witness to the Catholic faith.

### 1. Scripture and Tradition

#### Example Answer

#### Principle: Show you are open to dialogue

**Response:** That's a great question. Talking about the faith can be difficult at times, but I believe it is the most important thing to discuss. So, I really enjoy it when people ask me questions about the faith.

It is important to realize what Jesus means when He says tradition. He is speaking of manmade traditions that have come about over the course of history. When Catholics speak of Tradition we are talking about the Word of God handed on from Jesus to the apostles and to their successors and us today. This Tradition is not manmade; it is the Word of God passed on orally. This Tradition never goes against Scripture or "makes void the word of God."

Scripture attests to this type of Tradition: In **2 Thessalonians 2:15**, St. Paul says, "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter." Clearly, St. Paul is not against handing on instructions and practices "by word of mouth or by letter," and certainly not against Christians holding to them.

## 2. The Kingdom, Authority, and the Papacy Objection

**Principle: Focus on just one issue at a time**

**Objection:** Most Catholic beliefs were invented in the Middle Ages. All of this talk about Mary and the Saints, the Pope and Purgatory. Where are these in the Bible?

## 3. The Eucharist Objection

**Principle: Restate their objection and understand their logic**

**Objection:** In my Church we celebrate the Lord's Supper, but it is a symbolic representation of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for us. Why do Catholics believe in the Eucharist? Why do you think it is literally the body and blood of Jesus?

## 2. The Kingdom, Authority, and the Papacy Example Answer

**Principle: Focus on just one issue at a time**

**Response:** You brought up a lot of great issues. I think I could answer most of them or find the answer, but for the time being, could we just concentrate on one topic? Would you be willing to let me show you some Scripture behind the Church's belief about the Papacy?

As Catholics we believe the office of the Pope is rooted in Scripture. In **Matthew 16**, Jesus changes Simon's name to Peter (rock) and tells St. Peter that on this rock He will build His Church. Jesus hands him keys as a symbol of authority and gives him the power to bind and loosen. This is a term referring to authority. We believe this verse sets the foundation for the Papacy and this office given to St. Peter was passed down in the early Church and up until today.

Note: If you want to show more Biblical evidence for the Pope, use **Isaiah 22** to show how Jesus is restoring this office and how it shapes who the Pope is in the Catholic Church (succession, position of prime minister, called father, throne of authority, head of universal church).

## 3. The Eucharist Example Answer

**Principle: Restate their objection and understand their logic**

**Response:** So, what I hear you saying is that you believe that Jesus intended for the Lord's Supper to be taken symbolically? Is this correct? Would you be willing to look at John, chapter 6 and explore with me why Catholics believe what they do about the Eucharist?

In **John 6**, Jesus claims that He is the bread of life that came down from heaven and that anyone who eats this bread will have eternal life (v. 40). When questioned by the Jews on this teaching, rather than telling them it is a metaphor, Jesus emphasizes that His flesh is food indeed and His blood is drink indeed (vv. 55-56) In fact, in Jesus' response to their objections, the Greek used is trogo which is a very graphic term for eating and is not used in a symbolic manner. It must be taken literally. When many of His followers abandon Him because of His response, He doesn't clarify His teaching, but allows them to leave (v. 66).

## 4. Confession Objection

### Principle: Ask thought-provoking questions

**Objection:** Why not go to God directly? Besides, men on earth do not have the power to forgive sins—only Jesus can. **1 John 1:9** says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” This does not say anything about a priest.

## 5. Mary Objection

### Principle: Correct misunderstandings

**Objection:** Why do Catholics worship Mary?

## 4. Confession

### Example Answer

#### Principle: Ask thought-provoking questions

**Response:** That is a good question. Do mind if I asked you a question as well? Would you agree that God uses people to help us with the faith as well? I mean someone has to tell us about the faith, someone has to baptize us, God chose men to write the Scriptures for us. Would you be willing to look at some Scripture with me?

Read **John 20:19-23**. In verse 21, Jesus says, “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.” Then, in verse 23, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” Jesus intended men to forgive others sins on earth. Now, remember the original objection and its use of **1 John 1:9**. John wrote both the passage above in his Gospel and 1 John. Thus, John would be assuming that we confess our sins to one who has the authority to forgive sins, namely a priest.

## 5. Mary

### Example Answer

#### Principle: Correct misunderstandings

**Response:** There are many misconceptions about Mary. Some people believe that Catholics worship her as we would Jesus or that we choose Mary over Jesus. The Catholic Church believes that all of our beliefs and actions regarding Mary in fact lead us closer to Jesus. We honor Mary in imitation of Jesus and we imitate Jesus in honoring Mary.

## 6. Justification Objection

### Principle: Build on Common Ground

**Objection:** Catholics seems to be always trying to work their way to heaven.

**Ephesians 2:8-9** says, “For by grace you have been saved by faith; and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not because of works lest any man should boast.”

## 7. Who Is Jesus? Objection

### Principle: Be a witness, not a converter

**Objection:** I don't understand Christians. How can a man be God? I think this is something that people made up. I don't think He ever explicitly claimed to be God.

## 6. Justification

### Example Answer

#### Principle: Build on Common Ground

**Response:** I am glad you asked this. This is a common misunderstanding between Catholics and Protestants. Let's look at what the Catholic Church actually teaches. Before we look at some Scripture, I want to make something very clear: Just like Protestants, the Catholic Church does not believe that we are saved by our works. This is a heresy called that the Church condemned in the early Church. We are saved through God's free gift of grace, not our own doing. We have always taught and believed this.

And yet, we do need to respond to God's gift of salvation through faith and works. Let's look at **James 2:18-26**. James tells us that faith without works is dead. Our response to God should include both faith and works as a sign of our belief in God.

The way that Catholic and Protestants talk about this issue often uses different terms, but the actual beliefs of both groups are very similar.

## 7. Who Is Jesus?

### Example Answer

#### Principle: Be a witness, not a converter

**Response:** As Christians, we do believe Jesus explicitly claimed to be God; numerous examples exist in Scripture. In **John 8:58**, Jesus says, "Before Abraham was, I am." Jesus claims to have lived before Abraham. It is also significant that Jesus uses the phrase, I am. As we know from **Exodus 3:14**, God's self-revelation to Moses is the name 'I AM.' The Jews present fully understand the message that Jesus is conveying and in **John 8:59**, the Jews decide to stone Jesus for blasphemy.

Also, in **John 10:30**, Jesus says "I and the Father are one." In verse 31, the Jews again decide to stone Him. Clearly, Jesus' audience understood Him to be claiming divinity.

**Testimony:** I don't know if this argument can fully convince you about the divinity of Jesus. But, what I can tell is my experience of Jesus in my own life... (See testimony section in the Appendix of the Scriptural Apologetics Bible Study).

More Scripture verses:

*On Confession:* Matthew 18:18; James 5:14-16

*On losing salvation:* 1 Corinthians 10:12; Philippians 2:12; Hebrews 4:1; Romans 11:21-22; Hebrews 6:4-8; Hebrews 10:26-29; 2 Peter 2:20-21

CCC: 1422-1498

*Made for More:* p. 85-88

Extra Resources:

*Lord, Have Mercy: The Healing Power of Confession* by Scott Hahn

Reading for next time: Luke 1:26-31; Luke 1:39-56; 1 Kings 1:11-17; 1 Kings 2:13-21.

## Practical Objections

**13** *Ask: Could I have someone read the apologetics principle and definition for this chapter?*

*Ask: What are some ways that we can act out this principle during an apologetics dialogue?*

### Practical Objections

**13** **Apologetics Principle #4: Ask thought-provoking questions:** Really good questions can be more effective than rattling off every reason you have for a particular belief.

What are some ways that we can act out this principle during an apologetics dialogue?

25

**14** *Ask: Can someone please read Objection 1?*

*Ask: Who would like to try to respond?*

**14**

**Objection 1**

Why not go to God directly? Besides, men on earth do not have the power to forgive sins—only Jesus can. **1 John 1:9** says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” This does not say anything about a priest.

26

**Response:** That is a good question. Do mind if I asked you a question as well? Would you agree that God uses people to help us with the faith as well? I mean someone has to tell us about the faith, someone has to baptize us, God chose men to write the Scriptures for us. Would you be willing to look at some Scripture with me?

Read John 20:19-23. In verse 21, Jesus says, “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.” Then, in verse 23, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” Jesus intended men to forgive others sins on earth. Now, remember the original objection and its use of **1 John 1:9**. John wrote both the passage above in his Gospel and 1 John. Thus, John would be assuming that we confess our sins to one who has the authority to forgive sins, namely a priest.

# Chapter Five

## MARY

### What the CHURCH says...

**1** *Ask: Could someone please read “What the Church says...” about Mary?*

#### What the CHURCH says...

**1** One of the biggest aspects of the Catholic faith that sets us apart is our beliefs about Mary. In this chapter, we will focus on the specific Catholic belief about Mary as Queen Mother and Intercessor. This chapter will lay out the Scriptural reasons for this Catholic belief.

There are many misconceptions about Catholic devotion to Mary that we should keep in mind when discussing her. Some people believe that we worship her as we would Jesus or that we choose Mary over Jesus. It is important to note in our discussions about her that we do not worship Mary, we honor her. All Catholic devotions are intended to lead us closer to Jesus and assist us in imitating Him and giving Him greater honor. Mary shows us how to accept Jesus into our lives just as she accepted Jesus into her own life as His mother. Likewise Jesus as a faithful Jew honored His mother and father. This is why we honor her and use her intercession.

Catholics believe that Mary holds the specific office of queen mother in the kingdom that Jesus established here on earth. One central aspect of this office is intercession on behalf of the people in the kingdom. Mary held this office here on earth and continues this office and intercession in heaven. (St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5:19:1; Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 62.)

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## Why the CHURCH believes this...

**2** *Ask: Could someone please read “Why the Church believes this” section?*

### Old Testament Queen Mother

**3** *Say: Let’s look at the role of queen mother. To understand this role, one has to know a little bit about the Davidic kingdom. Remember, Jesus came to re-establish the Davidic kingdom here on earth. Mary’s office in this kingdom affects our beliefs and doctrines about her.*

### Why the CHURCH believes this...

- 1. The role of queen mother in the Davidic Kingdom acts as an intercessor for the people.
- 2. The New Testament confirms that Mary held this office as queen mother.

### Old Testament Queen Mother

- 1. The role of queen mother in the Davidic Kingdom acts as an intercessor for the people.

A key to the Davidic kingdom, and most ancient kingdoms, is that the queen was not the wife of the king; instead, the queen was the mother of the king. Many kings had multiple wives. In order to have only one queen, the mother of the king was the queen, also known as the queen mother. This queen mother had a position of honor and authority in the kingdom and was an intercessor for the people to the king. The greeting for the queen mother was “mother of my lord.”

### In-depth Insight

A few passages in the Old Testaments help to reveal some characteristics about the position of queen mother.

Take for instance the example of Bathsheba, the wife of David. Let’s see how David treats her when she is just his wife by reading the beginning of a story in 1 Kings, chapter 1. In this passage, Bathsheba is asking David to protect her son Solomon’s right to the throne.

#### Read 1 Kings 1:11-17

How does Bathsheba approach David?

**4** *Ask: Can I have someone please read the next paragraph?*

### In-depth Insight

**5** *Ask: Could someone please read the “In-depth Insight”? (Feel free to pass on the reading of Scripture verses and the answers of questions to others in the group)*

## New Testament Queen Mother

**6** *Say: The office of queen mother in the Old Testament is where we get our beliefs about Mary's intercession. Logically, the office of queen mother makes sense for Mary because she is the mother of Jesus who is king. But, the New Testament also gives evidence to this belief.*

**7** *Ask: Could someone please read Luke 1:39-45?*

*Ask: What does Elizabeth call Mary in v. 43?*

Answer: She calls her the "Mother of my Lord."

*Say: "The Mother of my Lord" is royal court language of the time and culture of Mary and Elizabeth used to address the queen mother of the reigning king. With this background, it helps us see that the New Testament points out Mary's office as queen mother.*

*Just like other queen mothers, Mary's role in the kingdom is to intercede for the people. And the king and all of his subjects were called to honor her. Unlike the other Davidic kings who died, Jesus rose from the dead and lives forever. Mary, His mother, lives because of Him. Since she still lives, we continue to honor her as a queen mother and use her intercession.*

*Ask: Any questions about Mary as queen mother and intercessor?*

**5**

Now, let's look at how Bathsheba acts before the king when her son Solomon is the king and she has the position of queen mother.

**Read 1 Kings 2:13-21**

How does King Solomon treat his mother Bathsheba?

In the first passage, Bathsheba bows and prostrates herself before her husband, King David. In the second passage, Solomon, Bathsheba's son, rises to meet her and bows to her. He has a throne brought in for her.

These two passages show that it is the queen mother in the kingdom who has the authority, not the king's wife/wives. The authority is represented by the throne and the actions of the king. Also, the passage shows that a key part of her role was to be an intercessor to the king.

**29**

### New Testament Queen Mother

**6**

2. The New Testament confirms that Mary held this office as queen mother.

**7**

**Read Luke 1:39-45**

**29**

## Conclusion

**8** *Ask: Could someone please read the “Conclusion”?*

### Conclusion

**8** Marian devotion is viewed as a pagan-ish practice by many Protestants, often because they confuse the bestowal of honor with deification. Many also find it difficult to swallow that she had such special role bestowed upon her. However, we might just easily question the ‘scandal’ of the Incarnation. It is important to continually return to the question—“What does this show us about Jesus?” As you discuss these issues—everything we say about Mary refers back to Christ and shows forth His glory (see CCC 487). **30**

More Scripture verses: John 2:1-5; Revelation 12:1-6, 13-17

CCC: 963-975

*On her Immaculate Conception:* 490-492

*On her Assumption:* 966, 974

*On her intercession:* 969, 975

*Made for More:* p. 57-72 (p. 68-72)

Extra Resources:

*Beginning Apologetics: How to Explain and Defend Mary* by Fr. Frank Chacon and Jim Burnham

*Hail, Holy Queen* by Scott Hahn

*Queen Mother* by Edward Sri (Academic)

Reading for next time: Ephesians 2:1-9; Acts 2:37-39; 1 Peter 3:18-22; James 2:18-24.

## Practical Objections

**9** *Ask: Could I have someone read the apologetics principle and definition for this chapter?*

*Ask: What are some ways that we can act out this principle during an apologetics dialogue?*

### Practical Objections

**9** **Apologetics Principle #5: Correct misunderstandings:** One of the best things you can do is to correct the false ideas about the Catholic faith or Catholics themselves. **30**

What are some ways that we can act out this principle during an apologetics dialogue?

**31**

**10** *Ask: Could someone please read Objection 1?*

*Ask: Who would like to try to respond?*

**10**

**Objection 1**

Why do Catholics worship Mary?

**31**

**Response:** There

are many misconceptions about Mary. Some people believe that Catholics worship her as we would Jesus or that we choose Mary over Jesus. The Catholic Church believes that all of our beliefs and actions regarding Mary in fact lead us closer to Jesus. We honor Mary in imitation of Jesus and we imitate Jesus in honoring Mary.

**11** *Ask: Can someone please read Objection 2?*

*Ask: Who would like to try to respond?*

**11**

**Objection 2**

Why do Catholics pray to Mary? Why not just pray to Jesus?

**32**

**Response:** (If

the person is a Christian) Can I ask you a question?

Have you ever asked someone else to pray for you? Why did you do this instead of going directly to Jesus?

Catholics don't pray to Mary to ask for her to change a situation under her own power. We ask her to pray for us just as you ask a friend to pray for you. However, she is the queen mother who plays a central role of intercession within the kingdom of God.

In regards to Mary specifically, Catholics believe that Scripture points out that she has a very specific office in the kingdom that includes interceding on the behalf of Christians.

**(To show this evidence in Scripture, use the passages above in the Mary as queen mother and intercession section.)**

# Chapter Six

## JUSTIFICATION

### What the CHURCH says...

- 1 *Ask: Could someone please read “What the Church says...” on salvation?*

### Why the CHURCH believes this...

- 2 *Ask: Could someone please read “Why the Church believes this”?*

#### What the CHURCH says...

- 1 Justification is an absolutely unmerited and free gift from God made possible through Jesus Christ’s death on the cross (cf. CCC 2010). We are adopted into God’s family through God’s grace. The idea that we can save ourselves by our own actions is a heresy called Pelagianism and is condemned by the Catholic Church (cf. CCC 406).

We do believe that in order to be saved we must *respond* to God’s invitation of salvation (cf. CCC 2002). We begin this pilgrimage of salvation through our Baptism and continue the process by responding with faith and works (cf. CCC 1253-1254).

#### Why the CHURCH believes this...

- 2
1. St. Paul clearly states that God initiates His grace towards us before we make any response. We cannot be saved without this free gift.
  2. New Testament writers such as St. Peter show that Baptism and faith begins our response to God’s saving grace.
  3. The Letter of James shows the need for faith and works in this process. St. Paul’s letter to the Philippians points out that our salvation is a process.

## Free Grace

**3** *Say: Let's start with reason number 1—justification, the first step in salvation, is a free gift from God.*

### Free Grace

**3** **1.** St. Paul clearly states that God initiates His grace towards us before we make any response. We cannot be saved without this free gift.

**4** **Read Ephesians 2:4-9**

34

**4** *Ask: Could someone please read Ephesians 2:4-9?*

*Ask: What stuck out at you in this passage on salvation?*

Answer: God initiates our justification while we were still sinners. We have been saved by His grace.

## Baptism

**5** *Say: Just as we did not begin or merit our natural life—it is given to us. As we saw above,*

**5** **2.** New Testament writers such as St. Peter show that Baptism and faith begins our response to God's saving grace.

**6** **Read Acts 2:37-39**

**7** What does this passage tell us about Baptism?

34

*we do not begin or merit our spiritual life. But, once given, we will be held accountable as to how we live it. Let's look at how Scripture supports Baptism as our initial response in living out this gift.*

**6** *Ask: After Jesus rose from the dead, the apostles received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The apostles, led by St. Peter, preach to the crowd about Jesus and the crowd asks what they should do in response. Could someone please read Acts 2:37-39 for St. Peter's response?*

**7** *Ask: What does this passage tell us about Baptism?*

Answer: St. Peter instructs them to be baptized. This Baptism isn't just a symbol; St. Peter tells them it removes their sins and gives them the gift of the Holy Spirit. (For more, see 1 Peter 3:18-22 and Matthew 28:18-20.)

## Faith and Works

**8** *Say: While the Catholic Church teaches that Baptism*

*provides justification, one needs to continue their response to God's free gift of salvation through faith and works.*

**8**

### Faith and Works

**3.** The Letter of James shows the need for faith and works in this process. St. Paul's letter to the Philippians points out that our salvation is a process.

**34**

**9** *Ask: Could someone please read James 2:18-24?*

*Ask: What caught your attention in this passage about faith and works?*

Answer: St. James tells us that both faith and works are

necessary for our justification. Particularly, he notes that we are not justified by "faith alone." This is key because one tenant of Protestantism is that they are justified by faith alone. The only time this phrase appears in Scripture is when it says we are *not* justified by *faith alone*.

**9**

### Read James 2:18-24

**35**

**10**

### In-depth Insight

Why does St. Paul seem to condemn works in many passages, like Ephesians 2:9? In many cases, when St. Paul uses the term "works," it is short for "works of the law." "Works of the law" were required practices by the Jews as a sign of their covenant with God. The works included circumcision, dietary restrictions, holy days, and other ceremonial laws. If St. Paul ever appears to be contrasting faith with works, it is usually because he is referring to these "works of the law" that were a sign of the Jewish covenant. After Jesus, God's covenant is open to everyone and so the "works of the law" are no longer needed. Each time St. Paul contrasts faith with works look at the surrounding passages. Ephesians 2:8-9 is a great example. Read on in vv. 10-15 and see what St. Paul is really talking about.

**11**

### Read Philippians 2:12

**35**

**10** *Ask: Could someone read the "In-depth Insight"?*

**11** *Ask: Catholics believe that our faith is an on-going process. Scripture attests to this in Philippians 2:12. Could someone please read this passage?*

*Say: This passage shows that our salvation is an ongoing process. We start the process with Baptism, we continue the process with faith and works and we will complete the process when we reach heaven with God.*

**12** *Ask: Could someone please read a summary of the Catholic position on salvation?*

**12**

To sum up the Catholic position on justification:

A Catholic apologetics website, Catholic Answers, puts it this way: "I am already saved (Rom. 8:24, Eph. 2:5-8), but I'm also being saved (1 Cor. 1:18, 2 Cor. 2:15, Phil. 2:12), and I have the hope that I will be saved (Rom. 5:9-10, 1 Cor. 3:12-15). Like the apostle Paul I am working out my salvation in fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12), with hopeful confidence in the promises of Christ (Rom. 5:2, 2 Tim. 2:11-13)."

**35**

## Conclusion

**13** *Ask: Could someone please read the "Conclusion"?*

**13**

### Conclusion

The issue of justification is a complex topic within Scripture and Theology. Whenever examining passages, remember to keep all of Scripture in mind. The Catholic view is not constructed based upon one verse, but by a comprehensive examination of *all* of Scripture's teaching on the subject and the constant teaching of the Church throughout history.

Also, when discussing this with Protestants, the topic of justification is more often about clarifying what we believe as Catholics as opposed to asserting why our position is the correct one. Misunderstandings on both sides can cause a great deal of confusion and false perceptions. (For instance, many Protestants think that Catholics rely solely on works. Catholics can perceive that Protestants discount works entirely.) Be sure to explain that the Catholic Church does *not* believe that we work our way into heaven. Just like Protestants, we totally rely on God's grace to be saved.

Our response to this gift is faith and works. Usually, this formula regarding faith and works is very similar to what many Protestants profess to believe, but they may phrase things differently. (Catholics emphasize faith and works together as a response. Protestants see works coming naturally out of a true faith.) However, Catholics and Protestants do understand Baptism and the reception of grace differently. (For more, see the document "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," which can be found on the internet.)

**36**

More Scripture verses:

*On Baptism:* John 3:5; Romans 6:4; Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16; Titus 3:5-8

CCC:

*On Baptism:* 1213-1284

*On Justification:* 1987-2029

*Made for More:* p. 76-81 (On Baptism)

Extra Resources:

*The Salvation Controversy* by Jimmy Akin

Reading for next time: John 8:54-59

## Practical Objections

**14** *Ask:*  
*Could I have someone read the apologetics principle and definition for this chapter?*

**14** **Practical Objections**

**Apologetics Principle #6: Build on common ground:** It is easy to see what separates us, but dialogue is also furthered when we realize the issues agreed upon as well.

What are some ways that we can act out this principle during an apologetics dialogue?

**37**

*Ask: What are some ways that we can act out this principle during an apologetics dialogue?*

**15** *Ask: Can someone please read Objection 1?*

**15** **Objection 1**

Catholics seem to be always trying to work their way to heaven. **Ephesians 2:8-9** says, “For by grace you have been saved by faith; and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not because of works lest any man should boast.”

**37**

*Ask: Who would like to try to respond?*

**Response:** I am glad you asked this. This is a common misunderstanding between Catholics and Protestants. Let's look at what the Catholic Church actually teaches. Before we look at some Scripture, I want to make something very clear: Just like Protestants, the Catholic Church does not believe that we are saved by our works. This is a heresy that the Church condemned in the early Church. We are saved through God's free gift of grace, not our own doing. We have always taught and believed this.

And yet, we do need to *respond* to God's gift of salvation through faith and works. Let's look at **James 2:18-26**. James tells us that faith without works is dead. Our response to God should include both faith and works as a sign of our belief in God.

The way that Catholics and Protestants talk about this issue often uses different terms, but the actual beliefs of both groups are very similar.

## 16 *Ask: Can someone please read Objection 2?*

*Ask: Who would like to try to respond?*

16

### Objection 2

Baptism is merely an action that symbolizes a faith commitment to Jesus Christ. It is a beautiful symbol, but is not the God given means of granting us new life and justification.

38

### Response:

In Acts 2:38,

St. Peter speaks to a group of Jews gathered in Jerusalem. They hear his message about Jesus and ask St. Peter how to respond. He tells them to “repent and be baptized...for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” St. Peter points to Baptism as the correct response, and this Baptism, along with repentance, is what forgives our sins and gives us the Holy Spirit.

**Response from additional information:** Also, in 1 Peter 3:18-22, St. Peter notes that Baptism saves a believer. Jesus Christ mandates Baptism in Matthew 28:19-20 when he says, “Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

## Chapter Seven

# WHO IS JESUS?

**Note to Leader:** We recommend reading the article “Are the Gospels Myth” by Carl Olson (found in the Appendix) before you lead this chapter.

**1** *Ask: Could I have someone please read the introduction for this topic?*

**1** Who is Jesus? The answer to this question is highly contested. Some claim He was God. Some claim He was a fraud. Some claim He was only a prophet. Some claim He never existed. This argument is not simply an intellectual exercise; it has enormous ramifications—if someone claims that Jesus is truly God, it should change his life forever.

The audience for this particular topic can vary significantly. Surely, this argument is helpful in discussing the faith with atheists and agnostics. More often we find people in America who are lukewarm in their faith or who have distanced themselves from Christianity. It is important to get to the heart of the matter by having them consider Jesus’ true identity.

For each audience, different objections will arise from this argument. We have provided some resources at the end of the chapter and in the Appendix to help address some potential objections.

39

## What the CHURCH says...

**2** *Ask: Could someone please read “What the Church says...” about the identity of Jesus?*

### Why the CHURCH believes this...

#### **2** What the CHURCH says...

Here is an ancient summary of what the Church believes about Jesus:  
 “I believe...in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
 the Only Begotten Son of God,  
 born of the Father before all ages.  
 God from God, Light from Light,  
 true God from true God,  
 begotten, not made,

39

**3** *Ask: Could someone please read “Why the Church believes this?”*

### A Divine Claim

**3**

consubstantial with the Father;  
 through him all things were made.”  
 (Nicene Creed, Roman Missal, third edition, approved in 2010)

Specifically, we will be focusing on answering the question—was Jesus God?

#### Why the CHURCH believes this...

1. In Scripture, Jesus explicitly claims to be God.
2. If we look at the evidence in Scripture, someone only has four options in regards to Jesus: He was either God and Lord as he claimed or He was a liar, a lunatic, or a legend. Logic will show that the most probable answer is that Jesus was Lord.

#### A Divine Claim

**4**

1. In Scripture, Jesus explicitly claims to be God.

**5**

**Read John 8:54-59**

40

**4** *Say: First, let’s look at where Jesus claims to be God in Scripture.*

**5** *Ask: Could I have someone please read John 8:54-59?*

**6** Ask: What claim does Jesus make in this passage and what does this mean?

Answer: In John 8:58, Jesus says, “Before Abraham was, I am.” Abraham lived centuries before Jesus and yet Jesus claims to have lived before him. This is an amazing claim.

**6**

What claim does Jesus make in this passage and what does this mean?

**7**

What do the Jews do in reaction to Jesus’ statement?

40

*Say: Not only that, Jesus is also using a significant phrase from the Old Testament. In Exodus 3:14, God appears to Moses. Moses asks for God’s name to which God replies “I am who I am.” When Jesus says “before Abraham was, I am,” He is not just claiming to live long ago, but He is taking on the very name and identity of God.*

**7** Ask: What do the Jews do in reaction to Jesus’ statement?

Answer: They decide to stone him.

*Say: Think about this. Have you ever heard someone say something you didn’t agree with? You might have wanted to argue with them or even yell at them. But, the Pharisees go so far as to want to kill Him. They fully understood Jesus’ words—He was claiming to be God.*

## The Four L's

**8** *Say: Now, let's look reason number two—based on Jesus' claim to be divine—He had to be either Lord, a liar, a lunatic, or a legend. Let's see why this is the case.*

**9** *Ask:  
Could I have  
someone  
please read  
the first two  
paragraphs  
about why  
Jesus cannot  
be a good  
moral  
teacher?*

**10** *Ask: Could  
someone  
please read  
the rest of this  
argument?*

### The Four L's

**8** **2.** If we look at the evidence in Scripture, someone only has four options in regards to Jesus: He was either God and Lord as he claimed or He was a liar, a lunatic, or a legend. Logic will show that the most probable answer is that Jesus was Lord.

**9** Some answer the question—who is Jesus?—by ignoring His divinity and claiming that Jesus was only a good man and a good moral teacher. The argument that follows seeks to go after this claim and prove that this is not an option when talking about Jesus Christ.

With any reasonable definition of “good,” we cannot hold that Jesus was “a good man” or “a good moral teacher” who also happened to be wrong about being God Incarnate. The reasons are as follows:

**10** **(1)** If Jesus wasn't God, but was convinced that He was, then He was insane. If He was delusional to the extent of wrongly claiming divinity, then He is disqualified from being a reliable moral authority. One cannot be both a lunatic and a moral authority.

When we examine the sayings of Jesus like the Beatitudes of Matthew 5-7, He does not sound like a lunatic. It is hard to believe that someone who is crazy could speak such truth in such a beautiful way.

**(2)** Another option is that if Jesus wasn't God and knew it, but deceived people into believing Him to be, then He was a liar. If He was trying to deceive people into believing a lie, He proves Himself not to be a “good moral teacher.”

If Jesus is a liar, what did He have to gain? Throughout the Gospels, He refuses to be made a king and, at the end of His life, He willfully goes to the cross to die.

If we want to claim that Jesus was consistently good and a teacher of the truth, then we are inclined to believe His claim to be divine.

**11** *Ask: Could I have someone please read the “In-depth Insight” about the legend or myth aspect of this argument?*

**11** A very popular argument today claims that the accounts we have of Jesus in Scripture are merely legends made up by early Christians rather than a true account of who Jesus is. Some take this idea farther and claim Jesus is simply a myth and never even existed.

If one proposes these ideas, it is important for him or her to be faced with some questions.

If the apostles or very early Christians made Jesus into something He was not, why would they do this? They had little to gain. Peter Kreeft, Catholic philosopher, elaborates on what the early Christians would have gained *if* they had made up this story: “Their friends and families scorned them. Their social standing, possessions, and political privileges were stolen from them by both Jews and Romans. They were persecuted, imprisoned, whipped, tortured, exiled, crucified, eaten by lions, and cut to pieces by gladiators.”

If someone after the apostles and early Christians made Jesus into legendary status, we would have seen some type of conflict over these significant changes about His divinity or miracles. No such conflict seems to exist historically nor do the Gospels seem to present conflicting characteristics of Jesus.

For more on this, see Carl Olson’s article “*Are the Gospels Myth?*” in the Appendix.

42

## Conclusion

**12** *Ask: Could someone please read the “Conclusion”?*

**12** **Conclusion**

The main purpose of this argument is to center on the most important aspect of Christianity—who is Jesus? Rarely, do non-Christians or even fallen-away or lukewarm Christians really sit down and think this through from a Christian perspective. By presenting these basic arguments, the non-believer will have to wrestle with the identity of Jesus Christ. Surely, other questions and objections will follow, but centering the conversation on this essential question is the first step in a conversion—for all other arguments depend on Jesus’ very identity. Be sure to add your own personal testimony to any logic that you may use. Sometimes this can be the most effective “argument.” It is hard to refute someone’s personal experience. For more on how to give your personal testimony see the information in the Practical Objections and the section in the Appendix.

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Resources on this topic:

More Scripture verses: Read John 10:30, John 14:6; John 20:26-29; John 8:23; John 8:46

CCC: 430-455

*Made for More*: p. 13-26; 41-56

In the appendix of this study: “*Are the Gospels Myth?*” Carl E. Olson

Extra Resources:

On the reliability of the New Testament: read chapter 2, “Can You Believe What You Read” in *Made for More* by Curtis Martin

*Jesus of Nazareth* by Pope Benedict

*Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels* by Craig A. Evans

“The Divinity of Christ” in *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* by Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli

*The Jesus Legend* by Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd (Academic)

*The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* by Craig Blomberg (Academic)

*Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* by Richard Bauckham (Academic)

*The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel

## Practical Objections

**Note to Leader:** For the practical objections, you have three options. You can: Use the objections below, have the group work on their personal testimonies (information on this is in the Appendix) or you can do both.

**13** *Ask: Could I have someone read the apologetics principle and definition for this chapter?*

### **13** Practical Objections

**Apologetics Principle #7. Be a witness, not a converter:** Instead of trying to just win the argument, view yourself as trying to give a witness to the Catholic faith.

**43**

*Ask: What are some ways that we can act out this principle during an apologetics dialogue?*

What are some ways that we can act out this principle during an apologetics dialogue?

44

**14** *Ask: Can someone please read Objection 1?*

**14** **Objection 1**

I don't understand Christians. How can a man be God? I think this is something that people made up. I don't think He ever explicitly claimed to be God.

44

*Ask: Who would like to try to respond?*

**Response:** As Christians, we do believe Jesus explicitly claimed to be God; numerous examples exist in Scripture. In **John 8:58**, Jesus says, “Before Abraham was, I am.” Jesus claims to have lived before Abraham. It is also significant that Jesus uses the phrase, I am. As we know from **Exodus 3:14**, God’s self-revelation to Moses is the name ‘I AM.’ The Jews present fully understand the message that Jesus is conveying and in **John 8:59**, the Jews decide to stone Jesus for blasphemy.

Also, in **John 10:30**, Jesus says “I and the Father are one.” In verse 31, the Jews again decide to stone Him. Clearly, Jesus’ audience understood Him to be claiming divinity.

**Testimony:** I don't know if this argument can fully convince you about the divinity of Jesus. But, what I can tell is my experience of Jesus in my own life...(See testimony section in the Appendix of the Scriptural Apologetics Bible Study).

**15** *Ask: Can someone please read Objection 2?*

*Ask: Who would like to try to respond?*

**15** **Objection 2**

Jesus was certainly a good moral teacher, but I don't think He was actually divine.

45

**Response:** If we look at the evidence in Scripture, someone only has four options in regards to Jesus: He was either God and Lord as He claimed or He was a liar, a lunatic, or a legend. Logic will show that Jesus must have been Lord.

With any reasonable definition of “good,” we cannot hold that Jesus was “a good man” or “a good moral teacher” who just happened to be wrong about being God Incarnate.

First, if Jesus wasn’t God, but was convinced that he was, then He was insane. If he was delusional to the extent of wrongly claiming divinity, then He is disqualified from being a reliable moral authority.

Second, if Jesus wasn’t God, but deceived people into believing Him to be, then He was a liar. If He was trying to deceive people into believing a lie, He proves Himself not to be a “good moral teacher.”

If we want to claim that Jesus was consistently good and a teacher of the truth, then we are inclined to believe His claim to be divine.



# APPENDIX

## 7 Apologetic Principles

- 1. Show you are open to dialogue:** By being cool, calm, and collected in the face of any objection, the other person will be more open to dialogue.
- 2. Focus on just one issue at a time:** Rather than addressing several objections all at once, agree on one specific area to discuss.
- 3. Restate their objection and understand their logic:** Make sure you understand what they are really saying and empathize with their logic.
- 4. Build on common ground:** It is easy to see what separates us, but dialogue is also furthered when we realize the issues agreed upon as well.
- 5. Ask thought-provoking questions:** Really good questions can be more effective than rattling off every reason you have for a particular doctrine.
- 6. Be a witness, not a converter:** Instead of trying to just win the argument, approach the conversation as someone giving witness to the Catholic faith.
- 7. Correct misunderstandings:** One of the best things you can do is to correct the false ideas about the Catholic faith or Catholics themselves.

## Recommended Apologetics Books

*A Biblical Defense of Catholicism* by Dave Armstrong  
*Born Fundamentalist, Born Again Catholic* by David B. Currie  
*Catholic for a Reason I*  
*Catholic for a Reason II*  
*Catholic for a Reason III*  
*Catholic for a Reason IV*  
*Crossing the Tiber: Evangelical Protestants Discover the Historical Church* by Stephen K. Ray  
*Evidence that Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell (Protestant)  
*Fundamentals of the Faith: Essays in Christian Apologetics* by Peter Kreeft  
*Handbook of Christian Apologetics* by Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli  
*Reasons to Believe* by Scott Hahn  
*Search and Rescue* by Patrick Madrid  
*Will Catholics Be Left Behind: A Critique of the Rapture and Today's Prophecy Preachers* by Carl E. Olson

## Giving Your Testimony

Objective: To help one prepare or revise a three to five minute personal testimony, and share it with another person within two weeks.

### Outline

#### I. Definition of a personal testimony

A personal testimony is a Christ-centered witness to God's actions in a person's life.

#### II. Why give a testimony

- A. The call to evangelize is universal (Matt. 28:18-20).
- B. Jesus specifically tells us to do it (Luke 8:38-39).
- C. People will come to faith through our witness (John 4:28-30, 39-40).
- D. We should always be prepared to give a reason for the hope within us (1 Pet. 3:15).

- E. When well-prepared, it is concrete and non-threatening to non-Christians. It is harder for others to deny our experience as a Christian than if we were to present abstract ideas.
- F. It is one of the most natural ways to share the Gospel (easily conversational, can be put into writing).

### III. Basic progression of a personal testimony (based on Acts 26)

- A. My life before I knew Jesus Christ (26:1-11)
  - What kind of a person was I socially, spiritually, and emotionally?
  - Unifying theme to testimony should be introduced (familiarity with Christ, but never knew Him personally; loneliness in college; spiritual hunger; the Fatherhood of God; etc.). Paul's unifying theme: his devotion to Judaism.
- B. How I came to know Jesus Christ (26:12-18)
  - What happened? Even if conversion was gradual, the testimony should still give one concrete moment or turning point for audience to “hang onto.”
  - If other people were involved in bringing about conversion, care should still be taken to make sure this section is Christ-centered and not agent-centered.
  - Avoid over-dramatization.
- C. My life in Jesus Christ (26:19-23)
  - What changes have occurred in my life? How am I living my relationship with Jesus?
  - Care must be particularly exercised here with regards to language. Avoid using loaded words and phrases (“follow the Spirit,” “indwelling of the Trinity,” “vocation,” “sacraments,” “quiet time,” “dark night of the soul,” etc.). If you do use them, define what they are.
  - Avoid extremes: try not to come across as a perfected saint, but, at the same time, don't dwell on struggles and failures.
- D. Challenge/Invitation to audience (26:27-29)
  - Ask audience (implicitly or explicitly), “How will you respond to Jesus Christ?”

## IV. Elements of a good testimony (CAST)

- E. **Concreteness:** The audience is given “handles” to the testimony. Experiences, places and persons are described accurately and unambiguously, yet without obsession to detail. The turning point (how one came to know Jesus Christ) is identifiable and specific (even if it is just one of many turning points).  
The person giving the testimony comes across as real and ordinary.
- F. **Accessibility:** The experiences are described in such a way that the audience can relate to or understand them. Language chosen is free from lingo and dense terminology (“sin,” “tabernacle,” “Eucharistic adoration,” etc.).
- G. **Simplicity:** The “plot” or “thread” of the testimony is clear and follow-able, without confusing tangents and complex details. Jesus Christ is at the center of this testimony and is its hinge.
- H. **Thematic:** There is one overarching theme or analogy used. Every point of the testimony should in some way be related to this singular theme.

## IV. Conclusion

- I. Every Christian should have a memorized and a written testimony.
- J. The testimony is a powerful, yet simple tool.
- K. Action point: Prepare a testimony and practice it in your Bible study.

**“Are the Gospels Myth?” by Carl E. Olson**

January 11, 49 B.C. is one of the most famous dates in the history of ancient Rome, even of the ancient world. On that date Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon River, committing himself and his followers to civil war. Few, if any, historians doubt that the event happened. On the other hand, numerous skeptics claim that the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are myth and have no basis in historical fact. Yet, as historian Paul Merkley pointed out two decades ago in his article, “The Gospels as Historical Testimony,” far less historical evidence exists for the crossing of the Rubicon than does for the events depicted in the Gospels: There are no firsthand testimonies to Caesar’s having crossed the Rubicon (wherever it was). Caesar himself makes no mention in his memoirs of crossing any river. Four historians belonging to the next two or three generations do mention a Rubicon River, and claim that Caesar crossed it. They are: Velleius Paterculus (c.19 B.C.–c.A.D. 30); Plutarch (c.A.D. 46–120); Suetonius (75–160); and Appian (second century). All of these evidently depended

on the one published eyewitness account, that of Asinius Pollio (76 B.C.–c. A.D. 4)—which account has disappeared without a trace. No manuscript copies for any of these secondary sources is to be found earlier than several hundred years after their composition. (*The Evangelical Quarterly* 58, 319-336) Merkle observed that those skeptics who either scoff at the historical reliability of the Gospels or reject them outright as “myth” do so without much, if any, regard for the nature of history in general and the contents of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in particular.

## The Distinctive Sign

So, are the four Gospels “myth”? Can they be trusted as historical records? If Christianity is about “having faith,” do such questions really matter? The latter question is, I hope, easy to answer: Yes, it obviously matters very much if the narratives and discourses recorded by the four evangelists are about real people and historical events. Pope Benedict XVI, in his book *Jesus of Nazareth*, offers this succinct explanation:

For it is of the very essence of biblical faith to be about real historical events. It does not tell stories symbolizing suprahistorical truths, but is based on history, history that took place here on this earth. The factum *historum* (historical fact) is not an interchangeable symbolic cipher for biblical faith, but the foundation on which it stands: *Et incarnates est*—when we say these words, we acknowledge God’s actual entry into real history. (*Jesus of Nazareth*, xv)

Christianity, more than any other religion, is rooted in history and makes strong—even shocking—claims about historical events, most notably that God became man and dwelt among us. Of course, some Christians of a less-than-orthodox persuasion are content to discard large chunks of the Gospels as unnecessary (or even “offensive”) or to interpret as “mythological” or “metaphorical” nearly each and every event and belief described therein. But such is not the belief of the Catholic Church (or of the Eastern Orthodox churches and most conservative Protestants). As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* flatly states: “Belief in the true Incarnation of the Son of God is the distinctive sign of Christian faith” (CCC 463).

It is, ultimately, this distinctive sign—the conviction that Jesus of Nazareth was and is truly God and man—that is the focal point of attacks on the historical credibility of the Gospels and the New Testament. Over the past few centuries many historians and theologians have sought to uncover the “historical Jesus” and to peel away the many

layers of what they believed were legend and theological accretion. Many abandoned hope that any historical (never mind theological) fact could be extracted from the Gospels.

## A Work of Fiction

There were many complex reasons for this state of affairs, one of them being the Enlightenment-era doctrine that purely scientific, objective history could not only be found, but was necessary. Empirical data became for many scholars—men such as Isaac Newton, Francis Bacon, and René Descartes—the key to all scholarship, including the study of history. It became the accepted wisdom that supernatural or miraculous elements could not be considered scientific and truly historical and that they had to be rejected. Anything outside the realm of empirical data was liable to be labeled “myth” and “legend.”

Fast-forward to our day. The results of this approach are all around us, both in the scholarly and popular realm. Not long ago, a young filmmaker named Brian Flemming produced a documentary titled *The God Who Wasn't There*. Its purpose, he explained in an interview, is to demonstrate that the “biblical Jesus” is a myth. Asked to summarize the evidence for this stance, Flemming explained: It's more a matter of demonstrating a positive than a negative, and the positive is that early Christians appeared not to have believed in a historical Jesus. If the very first Christians appear to believe in a mythical Christ, and only later did “historical” details get added bit by bit, that is not consistent with the real man actually existing. . . . I would say that he is a myth in the same way that many other characters people believed actually existed. Like William Tell is most likely a myth, according to many folklorists and many historians. Of course, [Jesus] is a very important myth. I think that he was invented a long time ago, and those stories have been passed on as if they are true. (David Ian Miller, “Finding My Religion,” [www.sfgate.com](http://www.sfgate.com))

Here “myth” is synonymous with “fiction” or even “falsehood,” reflecting the Enlightenment-era bias against anything bearing even trace amounts of the supernatural. “All I'm saying,” remarked Flemming, “is that [Jesus] doesn't exist, and it would be a healthy thing for Christians to look at the Bible as a work of fiction from which they can take inspiration rather than, you know, the authoritative word of God.”

## “Serious Unicorns”

Thus the Gospels, according to skeptics such as Flemming, are compilations of “nice stories” or “silly tales,” just like stories about unicorns and the Easter Bunny. Some skeptics mock Christians for holding fearfully onto childish tales while the truly mature people (self-described by some as “brights”) go about the business of making the world a better place. “Meanwhile, we should devote as much time to studying serious theology,” stated well-known atheist Richard Dawkins in column in *The Independent* (Dec. 23, 1998), “as we devote to studying serious fairies and serious unicorns.” Fellow God-basher Daniel Dennett, in his book *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, wrote,

The kindly God who lovingly fashioned each and every one of us and sprinkled the sky with shining stars for our delight—that God is, like Santa Claus, a myth of childhood, not anything [that] a sane, undeluded adult could literally believe in. That God must either be turned into a symbol for something less concrete or abandoned altogether. (18)

## Smarter than Thou

Such rhetoric rests both on the assumption that the Gospels are fanciful myth and that the authors of the New Testament (and their readers) were clueless about the difference between historical events and fictional stories. There is an overbearing sense of chronological snobbery at work: We are smarter than people who lived 2,000 years ago. Yet the Second Epistle of Peter demonstrates a clear understanding of the difference between myth and verified historical events: “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Pet. 1:16). The opening verses of Luke’s Gospel indicate that the author undertook the task of writing about real people and events: Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed. (Luke 1:1-4) And the fourth Gospel concludes with similar remarks: This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things; and we know that his testimony is true.

But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. (John 21:24-25)

These quotations do not, of course, prove the historicity of the New Testament. Rather, they suggest that the authors, far from being knuckle-dragging simpletons, set about to write works depicting real people and events—especially since they believed the narratives they recounted had meaning only if they really did occur. As such, their historical content should be judged not against tales of unicorns and Easter bunnies, but against other first-century works of history and historical narrative.

### What is a Gospel?

The word *gospel* comes from the Greek word *euangelion*, meaning “good news” and refers to the message of Christian belief in the person of Jesus Christ. There has been much scholarly debate about the genre of “gospel” and how it might relate to other forms of writings found in first-century Palestine and the larger ancient world. Obviously, they do contain biographical details, and some scholars have argued in recent years that the gospels are as biographical in nature as anything in the ancient Greco-Roman world.

“The majority of recent specialized studies,” writes Evangelical biblical scholar Craig L. Blomberg in *Making Sense of the New Testament*, “has recognized that the closest parallels are found among the comparatively trustworthy histories and biographies of writers like the Jewish historian Josephus, and the Greek historians Herodotus and Thucydides” (28). In his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, Catholic theologian and biblical scholar Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis writes: We must conclude, then, that the genre of the Gospel is not that of pure “history”; but neither is it that of myth, fairy tale, or legend. In fact, evangelion constitutes a genre all its own, a surprising novelty in the literature of the ancient world. Matthew does not seek to be “objective” in a scientific or legal sense. He is writing as one whose life has been drastically changed by the encounter with Jesus of Nazareth. Hence, he is proposing to his listeners an objective reality of history, but offered as *kerygma*, that is, as a proclamation that bears personal witness to the radical difference that reality has already made in his life. (*Fire of Mercy, Heart of the Word, Vol. II: Meditations on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 44)

Many early Christian authors, such as Justin Martyr, referred to the Gospels as memoirs of the apostles. Blomberg has used the descriptive “theological biographies,” which captures well the supernatural and human elements found within them.

## The Historical Evidence

Those supernatural elements—especially the miracles of Jesus and his claims to divinity—are, as we’ve noted, why skeptics call the Gospels “myth” while remaining unruffled about anything written about Julius Caesar and the Rubicon by Velleius Paterculus, Plutarch, Suetonius, and Appian. Yes, Suetonius did write in his account (*Lives of the Twelve Caesars*) about “an apparition of superhuman size and beauty . . . sitting on the river bank, playing a reed pipe” who persuaded Caesar to cross the river, but it has not seemed to undermine the belief that Caesar did indeed cross the Rubicon on January 11, 49 B.C. But, for the sake of argument, let’s set aside the theological claims found in the New Testament and take a brief look at the sort of data a historian might examine in gauging the reliability and accuracy of an ancient manuscript.

First, there is the sheer number of ancient copies of the New Testament. There are close to 5,700 full or partial Greek New Testament manuscripts in existence. Most of these date from between the second to 16th century, with the oldest, known as Papyrus 52 (which contains John 18), dating from around A.D. 100–150. By comparison, the average work by a classical author—such as Tacitus (c. A.D. 56–c. 120), Pliny the Younger (A.D. 61–113), Livy (59 B.C.–A.D. 17), and Thucydides (460–395 B.C.)—has about 20 extant manuscripts, the earliest copy usually several *centuries* newer than the original. For example, the earliest copy of works by the prominent Roman historian Suetonius (A.D. 75–130) date to A.D. 950—over 800 years after the original manuscripts had been written.

In addition to the thousands of Greek manuscripts, there are an additional 10,000 Latin manuscripts, and thousands of additional manuscripts in Syriac, Aramaic, and Coptic, for a total of about 24,000 full or partial manuscripts of the New Testament. And then there are the estimated one million quotes from the New Testament in the writings of the Church Fathers (A.D. 150–1300). Obviously, the more manuscripts that are available, the better scholars are able to assess accurately what the original manuscripts contained and to correct errors that may exist in various copies.

## When Were They Written?

Closely related is the matter of dating. While debate continues as to the exact dating of the Gospels, few biblical scholars believe that any of the four works were written after the end of the first century. “Liberal New Testament scholars today,” writes Blomberg, “tend to put Mark a few years one side or the other of A.D. 70, Matthew and Luke–Acts sometime in the 80s, and John in the 90s” (*Making Sense of the New Testament*, 25). Meanwhile, many conservative scholars date the synoptic Gospels (and Acts) in the 60s and John in the 90s. That means, simply, that there exist four accounts of key events in Jesus’ life written within 30 to 60 years after his Crucifixion—and this within a culture that placed a strong emphasis on the role and place of an accurate oral tradition. Anyone who denies that Jesus existed or who claims that the Gospels are filled with historical errors or fabrications will, in good conscience, have to explain why they don’t make the same assessment about the historical works of Pliny the Younger, Suetonius, Julius Caesar, Livy, Josephus, Tacitus, and other classical authors.

Secondly, historical details are found in the Gospels and the other books of the New Testament. These include numerous mentions of secular rulers and leaders (Caesar Augustus, Pontius Pilate, Herod, Felix, Archelaus, Agrippa, Gallio), as well as Jewish leaders (Caiaphas, Ananias)—the sort of names unlikely to be used inaccurately or even to show up in a “myth.” Anglican scholar Paul Barnett, in *Is The New Testament Reliable?*, provides several pages’ worth of intersections between biblical and non-biblical sources regarding historical events and persons. “Christian sources contribute, on an equal footing with non-Christian sources,” he observes, “pieces of information that form part of the fabric of known history. In matters of historical detail, the Christian writers are as valuable to the historian as the non-Christian” (167).

Then there are the specifically Jewish details, including references to and descriptions of festivals, religious traditions, farming and fishing equipment, buildings, trades, social structures, and religious hierarchies. As numerous books and articles have shown in recent decades, the beliefs and ideas found in the Gospels accurately reflect a first-century Jewish context. All of this is important in responding to the claim that the Gospels were written by authors who used Greek and Egyptian myths to create a supernatural man-god out of the faint outline of a lowly Jewish carpenter.

## Pay Dirt

Various modern archeological discoveries have validated specific details found in the Gospels:

- In 1961 a mosaic from the third century was found in Caesarea Maritima that had the name “Nazareth” in it. This is the first known ancient non-biblical reference to Nazareth.
- Coins with the names of the Herod family have been discovered, including the names of Herod the king, Herod the tetrarch of Galilee (who killed John the Baptist), Herod Agrippa I (who killed James Zebedee), and Herod Agrippa II (before whom Paul testified).
- In 1990 an ossuary was found inscribed with the Aramaic words, “Joseph son of Caiaphas,” believed to be a reference to the high priest Caiaphas.
- In 1968 an ossuary was discovered near Jerusalem bearing the bones of a man who had been executed by crucifixion in the first century. These are the only known remains of a man crucified in Roman Palestine, and verify the descriptions given in the Gospels of Jesus’ Crucifixion.
- In June 1961 Italian archaeologists excavating an ancient Roman amphitheatre near Caesarea-on-the-Sea (Maritima) uncovered a limestone block. On its face is an inscription (part of a larger dedication to Tiberius Caesar) that reads: “Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judaea.”

Numerous other finds continue to demolish the notion that the Gospels are mythologies filled with fictional names and events.

## The External Evidence

Third, there are extra-biblical, ancient references to Jesus and early Christianity. Although the number of non-Christian Roman writings from the first half of the first century is quite small (just a few volumes), there are a couple of significant references.

Writing to the Emperor Trajan around A.D. 112, Pliny the Younger reported on the trials of certain Christians arrested by the Romans. He noted that those who are “really Christians” would never curse Christ:

They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but

not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. (*Letters*, Book 10, Letter 96)

The historian Tacitus, in his *Annals*—considered by historians to be one of the finest works of ancient Roman history—mentioned how the Emperor Nero, following the fire in Rome in A.D. 64, persecuted Christians in order to draw attention away from himself. The passage is noteworthy as an unfriendly source because although Tacitus thought Nero was appalling, he also despised the foreign and, to him, superstitious religion of Christianity:

Hence to suppress the rumor, he falsely charged with the guilt, and punished Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius: but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular. (*Annals*, 15:44)

Robert E. Van Voorst, author of *Jesus Outside the New Testament*, offers a detailed analysis of scholarly controversies about this passage, and then states, “Of all the Roman authors, Tacitus gives us the most precise information about Christ” (45). This includes Tacitus’s understanding that “Christus”—not Paul or someone else—was the founder of the Christian movement. He notes that Christ was executed under Pilate during the reign of Tiberius, and that Judea was the source of the Christian movement. All of which further confirms the historical reliability of the Gospels.

### Conclusion

As Pope Benedict XVI noted in his book on Jesus, there is much that is good about historical-critical and other scientific methods of studying Scripture. But these approaches have limits. “Neither the individual books of Holy Scripture nor the Scripture as a whole are simply a piece of literature” (*Jesus of Nazareth*, xx).

The Christian apologist should not be embarrassed to admit that he has a certain bias when it comes to reading and understanding the Gospels. He should point out that everyone has biases, and that the skeptic’s bias against the supernatural and the miraculous shapes how he reads and understands history, especially the historical data

found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The Christian, in other words, should have no problem with an honest historical examination of the Gospels. But why do so many skeptics shy away from a candid examination of their philosophical biases? That is the question apologists should pose and demand (politely, of course) to be answered.

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