

Sermon Series – Jesus’ Miracles and You

David “Dave” C. Shields

APOL810: Miracles, the Resurrection and Christian Ministry (B01)

February 18, 2024

Introduction

The miracles performed by Jesus during his ministry and through the power of God the Father are an integral part in the formation of a believer's understanding of faith. The society in which we live is hostile towards the faith and wants to seek every opportunity to break down, dissolve, and destroy the message that martyrs have died for. To be able to fully understand and defend our faith, we must be equipped to handle the naysayers. Throughout the course of this series, the goal is to identify the apologetic view of Jesus' miracles and provide the believer with the power to defend what they believe. We will discuss: Defending Miracles, The Importance of the Resurrection to Christians, The Theology of the Resurrection, Spiritual Formation Lessons from the Resurrection, and The Risen Jesus and the Church's Mission.

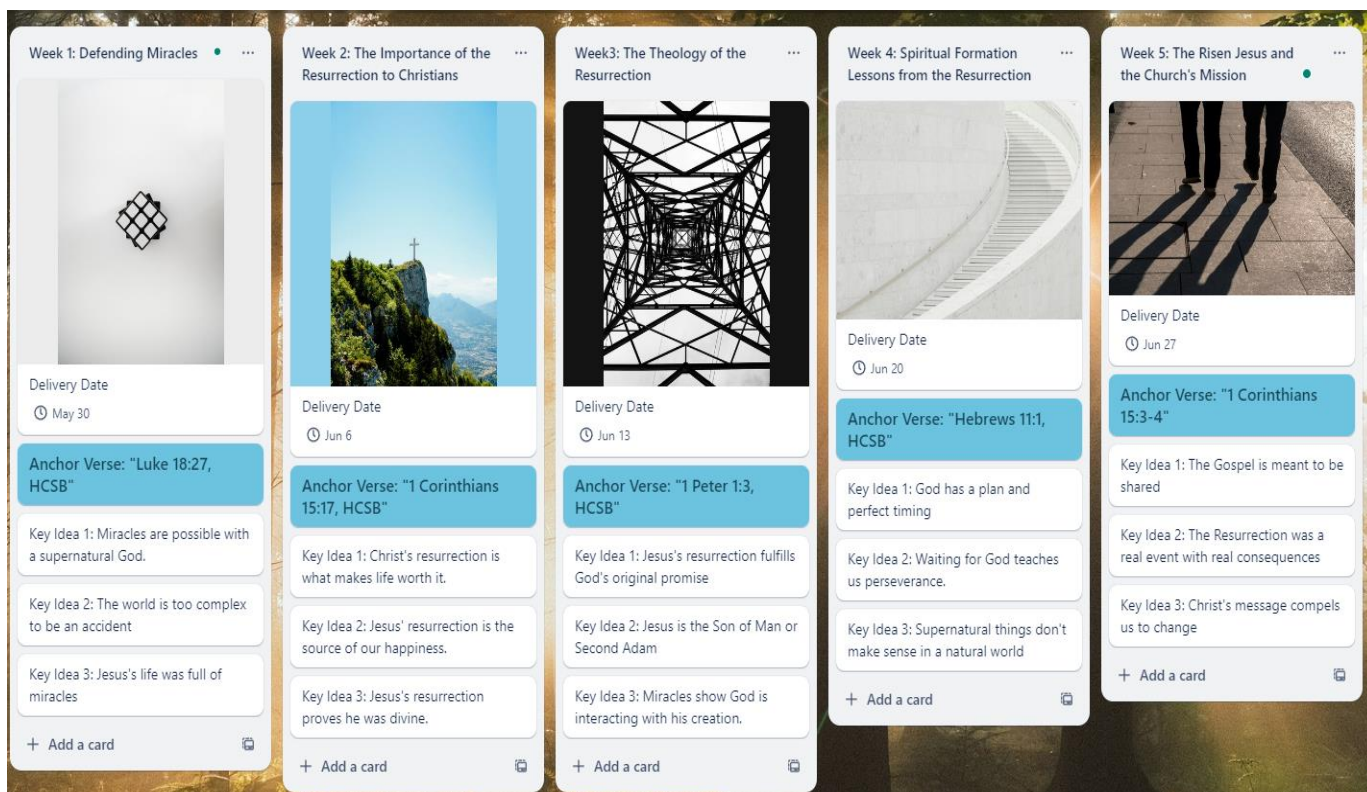
Format

The sermons of the church this author attends are planned out months, even years in advance so it is inconceivable that they could be presented to the pulpit in a reasonable time. However, this author happens to be the leader of a Men's Bible Study that meets on Thursday mornings and although there is a current plan that must be completed first, the author can present this material to the men's group over the course of a few weeks. The intended plan that follows will be based on the expected time to complete the existing series and provide one study each week in this new series.

Intended Plan

The lessons in this series will take place every Thursday morning for the next 5 weeks. Given the time required to go through each week's material, a lesson time of one hour for each lesson has been decided. Each lesson will feature an 'anchor verse' upon which the material for

the week will be based and the rest of the material will be shared in connection with the anchor verse. The proposed schedule is as follows:



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Lesson One: Defending Miracles

The very premise of Christian faith hinges on the belief in miracles, especially those that are related to Jesus Christ, his life, and his ministry. For Christians to be able to support what they believe in, they will need to not only understand the impact of miracles on our faith but also how to defend against those who claim that miracles are not real. This lesson focuses on how God allows miracles to be possible, how the world is too complex to be simply an accident, and the miraculous events in Jesus' life that help defend the faith.

¹ David Shields, personal screenshot, "Five Message Lesson Plan." February 18, 2024

The single greatest argument against miracles is that they cannot exist because our world is a closed box. This concept was made famous by noted philosopher (and Atheist), David Hume and is a philosophy known as ‘Naturalism².’ In Naturalism, the world is a closed box, and nothing exists beyond the box so there is no room for God inside. That would be a terrific explanation if we did not serve a supernatural God. God created the box and everything in it, so he does not need anyone else’s permission to change His box. Jesus approaches this concept when speaking to his disciples after the parable of the young ruler who wanted to follow God but refused to make a change. Jesus said, “For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God. Those who heard this asked, ‘Then who can be saved?’ He replied, ‘**What is impossible with men is possible for God**’.” (Luke 20:25-27, HCSB). The key takeaway is that the naturalist view does not work because God is supernatural.

Another common argument about miracles is that the laws of science and order do not leave any room for God. There is nothing wrong with science and its desire to understand things, but it uses man-made laws and those do not apply to a world that was not made by man. In fact, if one follows science, especially theoretical sciences, they will quickly find that science reaches a point where it runs out of answers³. This is because the world is too complex and organized for it to be a mere accident; this is also known as the teleological argument. God lets the world see His divine nature and there is little room for argument: “For His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being

² Douglas Geivett and Gary Habermas, *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God’s Action in History* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 62.

³ *Ibid.*, 101.

understood through what He has made. As a result, people are without excuse.” (Romans 1:20, HCSB).

So how does God show this eternal power and divine nature? The simplest way is to look at Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Jesus’s entire life was a collection of miracles from his birth to his knowledge, to the way he was killed and how he rose again. Not only was Jesus’s life composed of miracles, but he performed many amazing miracles throughout his life and gave God the glory each time. The Gospels are filled with these miracles, but one example is how he healed the blind men: “As Jesus went out from there, two blind men followed Him, shouting, ‘Have mercy on us, Son of David!’ When He entered the house, the blind men approached Him, and Jesus said to them, ‘Do you believe that I can do this?’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ they answered Him. Then He touched their eyes saying, ‘Let it be done for you according to your faith!’ And their eyes were opened.” (Matthew 9:27-30a, HCSB). All things are possible for those who have faith because miracles are one of the ways God interacts with us.

Lesson Two: The Importance of the Resurrection to Christians

Last week’s study focused on a simple argument against miracles – naturalism – and how Christians can defend against it since the God we serve is supernatural. Now that God can do and does miracles in our lives, we can agree that the greatest miracle of all – the resurrection – is completely possible. It is a good thing that this can be agreed upon because Jesus’ resurrection is the most important piece of our faith. Further unpacking this ideal, we can summarize it with three key points: Christ’s resurrection is what makes life worth it, Jesus’s resurrection is the source of our happiness, and it proves that Jesus was divine.

Let’s face the facts – life is painful and often bleak. It makes sense that people who do not believe in anything beyond this life would find it hard to get up each day, do their routines,

and try not to think about death. But Christians wake up each day with joy in their hearts because they know that a greater joy is coming for those who believe in Christ. We believe in miracles and therefore believe in the coming joy. Paul makes a stark explanation of this bleak and hopeless future in his first letter to the church at Corinth: “But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation is without foundation, and so is your faith. In addition, we are found to be false witnesses about God, because we have testified about God that he raised up Christ – whom He did not raise up if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, Christ has not been raised. **And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.**” (1 Corinthians 15:13-17, HCSB). My what a bleak future that would be! But we know that Christ has been raised so the life and the struggles are worth it because one day, Christians will be raised to new life and live forever with God.

If we can agree that Jesus’ resurrection is a miracle, we can also agree that the resurrection grants Christians the power over death. Now, this is not to say that the body of Christians is immortal – that would be a terrible thing; rather, the physical death of the body would normally mean the end of all things. But Jesus’ death and resurrection has allowed Christians to conquer spiritual death, once we leave this earthly body, we will be given new bodies in glory. In the same letter and even the same chapter, Paul provides more context about what this means: “Brothers, I tell you this: Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, and corruption cannot inherit incorruption. [...] Therefore, my dear brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord’s work, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:50 and 58, HCSB). Jesus took the corruption of the flesh and blood and died on the cross. This means that Jesus’s resurrection gives us a reason to be joyful in all things.

There is, however, one argument that we must address before we can count everything as joy – the truth of the resurrection. While Jesus walked the earth, he performed miracles, healed the sick, raised the dead to life, and even faced death himself to be risen in glory. There is little doubt that Jesus believed himself divine and acted on behalf of God, whom he lovingly called “Abba” or “Daddy⁴”. Throughout his ministry, Jesus always spoke of God the Father as first and himself as secondary yet also explaining that it was only through him that humans could reach his Father. What can Christians say about this relationship? The scriptures give us many examples of this such as the only time in the bible that all three members of the Trinity appeared when Jesus was baptized: “As soon as He came up out of the water, He saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on Him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my beloved Son; I take delight in You.’” (Mark 1:10-11, HCSB). We see God the Father speaking of Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit (often visualized as a dove) all present and something that miraculous must mean something! If that is not enough, what about the fact that God chose to raise Jesus to life after three days? Or what about the fact that Jesus appeared to thousands of people at different times after his death? Maybe the fact that he appeared to Paul and Paul instantly knew it was Jesus? Jesus’ entire life shows his divinity and his resurrection even more so as Gary Habermas so eloquently put it in *The Risen Jesus*, ‘By raising Jesus from the dead, God would especially be emphasizing Jesus’s primary message, for He would not have raised a heretic from the dead⁵.’

⁴ Gary R. Habermas, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope* (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 96.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 131.

Lesson Three: The Theology of the Resurrection

In this third lesson, we will go a bit deeper into the subject matter of the resurrection and look at it from a strictly theological view. When one hears the phrase ‘theology’ it is easy to conjure up images of complicated mathematic symbols or impossible diagrams scraped out on an old green blackboard while bespeckled priests eye it warily. While it is certainly possible to take yourself into a complicated series of arguments about God, better known as Systematic Theology, there are plenty of theological themes that everyone can understand and we will touch on a few this week including: Jesus’s resurrection fulfills God’s original promise, Jesus as the ‘Son of Man’ or the ‘Second Adam’, and Miracles as evidence of God interacting with His creation.

Throughout the bible, one can read about a series of covenants or ‘agreements’ that God enters with His people. The first and sometimes overlooked covenant was between Noah and God, also known as the “Noahic Covenant” (cf. Genesis 9:1-17), some time later after Noah’s lineage had all but died out, he made a covenant with Abram (Abraham) which is called (can you guess?) the “Abrahamic Covenant” (cf. Genesis 15), and finally, most Christians will remember the agreement that God made with Moses atop Mt. Sinai when He was handed the Ten Commandments – this was the “Mosaic Covenant” (cf. Exodus 24). But wait, there’s more! Everyone remembers the unique relationship that God had with David when He selected him to be Israel’s king, this agreement was known as the “Davidic Covenant” (cf. 2 Samuel 7:8-16) and it has a major impact in a moment.

In each of these covenants, God made a special contract with a believer that He would care for them and their descendants. However, the problem with these covenants is that they were dependent upon a flawed person who would eventually die. But, in the case of Jesus, God

made a much more powerful covenant not to a person, but to the people who believed in His son, Jesus, who – yes – came from the lineage of David. Through Jesus’s birth, death, and resurrection, God fulfilled his ultimate promise to us causing Peter to decree: **“Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to His great mercy, He has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead** and into an inheritance that is imperishable, uncorrupted, and unfading, kept in Heaven for you. You are being protected by God’s power through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1 Peter 1:3-5, HCSB). Through all these winding roads, we are led to the fact that Jesus’s resurrection fulfills God’s original promise to His people.

Even with such great news in mind, one must understand that even the most devout believers are still guilty of the ‘original sin’ which came about when Adam and Eve ate from the Forbidden Fruit. This means that all humans, from the moment sin entered this world, are guilty of sin – something that God cannot stand. This seems like a stark contrast to the happy emotions we think about when we discuss Jesus. How can Jesus truly free us from our sin? Yes, we have agreed that Jesus died and resurrected so that we can beat death, but we still carry the stain of sin. To this end, we come to an interesting title that Jesus assigned to himself – the Second Adam. Recall that the original Adam was formed from dirt – the low and disgusting material that we step on every day. True, God did breathe His life into his creature of dirt, but something that is from the dirt cannot expect to ascend to Heaven, right? On the surface, this is correct because, again, all who are formed from the dirt as descendants of Adam carry the original sin. However, thanks to Jesus, the “second Adam” or the “Son of Man” came to this earth – not of dirt, but of truly divine power that had never been tarnished by the sins of mankind. Paul discusses this concept quite intimately in Romans: “But there is a great difference between Adam’s sin and

God's gracious gift. For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness to many through this other man, Jesus Christ. And the result of God's gracious gift is very different from the result of that one man's sin. For Adam's sin led to condemnation, but God's free gift leads to our being made right with God, even though we are guilty of many sins." (Romans 5:15-16, NLT). Thankfully, Jesus chose to be the Second Adam and take the sin that the First Adam brought.

What other theological elements can we draw from Jesus's resurrection? Of course, this list could be a very long one but would cover far more material than we could fit into a single teaching. To drive this point home, we can think back to the Naturalist community we discussed in the earlier lessons. Jesus came into the world through completely supernatural methods, essentially punching a hole into the very fabric of the natural world. This proves that God is not a distant entity that created the world and then stepped away or fell asleep⁶. Jesus performed miracles during his lifetime and before he died, he said that all believers could do the same things: "In that day you will not ask Me anything. I assure you: Anything you ask the Father in My name; He will give you. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete." (John 16:23-24, HCSB). This does not mean that any believer can perform miracles (cf. Ephesians 4:10-13) but it does mean that Jesus's intercession between God and the sinful man shows that God still interacts with his creation.

Lesson Four: Spiritual Formation Lessons from the Resurrection

The previous lesson was a bit heavy since so much theology had to be discussed to build a solid structure, but this lesson will focus much more on the application of these items. Humans

⁶ Geivett and Habermas, *In Defense of Miracles*, 151.

are imperfect creatures and must work daily to grow in Christ. The process of daily growth is often referred to as “Spiritual Formation” and can be used to build one’s faith daily in different and unique ways. There is not enough space in this lesson to provide a comprehensive study guide for spiritual growth, but the resurrection provides us with some great spiritual growth concepts including: God’s plan and timing, waiting on God teaches perseverance, and supernatural things do not make sense in a natural world.

The vantage point of humans is a very narrow and limited one. I like to explain it like this: God is a master artist who has created a giant mosaic that encompasses all life, all past, present, and future. This painting was already completed by God when He created life, but humans are stuck somewhere in the middle of this complete painting as a brush stroke or pattern with a beginning and end and we cannot see the completed painting until we go to God in glory. Does a painting exist beyond the tapestry of the artist? Certainly not. Further, when we are viewing a complete painting in a museum, we have no concept of how long it might have taken the artist to complete each section of the painting or in what ways the artist chose to make their strokes, we only see the final product. The artist did not ask the paint when and where they should be placed on the canvas, but they are there and in the perfect place in the artist’s completed work. This should make it easier for us to realize that God has a perfect plan and a perfect time, and we must trust the process.

In their work, the author of Hebrews created a wonderful chapter, Chapter 11, that is known by most as the “Heroes of the Faith” wherein many of the most famous people in the Bible (Abraham, Moses, Solomon, Job, etc.) are discussed. Yet, a salient point here is that none of these people had any idea if their faith produced anything because they did not live to see it. Such a powerful section opens with a statement about our dependence on God’s plan and timing,

“Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen. For our ancestors won God’s approval by it. By faith we understand that the universe was created by God’s command, so that what is seen has been made from things that are not visible.” (Hebrews 11:1-3, HCSB). God’s plan is working, you just cannot see it yet. Jesus’ resurrection happened exactly when it needed to happen and that is why it was so impactful.

If being a Christian were easy all the time, everyone would be one and there would be no troubles in this world. Of course, such a thing is impossible (remember the original sin discussed earlier) and causes one of the greatest struggles for humans – namely learning to find joy in the struggles. A common misconception is that the word joy is equivalent to happiness, but this is not correct. Joy is not a state of constant happiness, this is called ‘mania’ and is a negative psychological diagnosis. Joy is better understood as finding happiness even when things do not work out like we expect them to. In fact, the book of James features a solid explanation about the purpose of trials: “Consider it great joy, my brothers, whenever you experience various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. But endurance must do its complete work, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.” (James 1:2-4, HCSB). The Israelites had to travel through the wilderness for 40 years and face many trials. At any time, God could have swept in and made everything right again, but because He did not, the Israelites learned how to trust God for everything. We too, can grow spiritually by waiting on God because it teaches us perseverance in a way that nothing else can.

Jesus was fully man and fully God (the hypostatic union as it is called), and even he was bound to certain time constraints as evidenced when he was at the wedding of Cana and Mary, his mother asked him to turn water into wine. Jesus’ response was simply “My time has not yet come!” When Jesus was arrested, his answer was not one of shock and surprise, he just said “The

hour of my betrayal has come.” Lastly, when his physical body died, his last words were: “It is done.” Not even Jesus rushed God’s timing.

One final lesson from the resurrection that can help us grow relates to how we understand the world. Much of this paper discussed the concept of the Naturalist view and this view is one that is likely the easiest for all people to accept. Why? Because it is the path of least resistance. It is very easy to believe in something that requires no effort on our part. However, being a Christian means that we must be willing to accept things that do not make sense. Why would God tell Noah to build an ark in the middle of the desert with no bodies of water nearby? Why would Abraham willingly take his only son to be a sacrifice? Why would God require His son, Jesus, to die this painful death on a cross when He could just as easily have sent the angels to protect him? Accepting Christianity means that we must accept that supernatural things do not make sense in a natural world. Thankfully, God knows better than we ever could. When He used the prophet Isaiah to explain His plan for Israel, he makes it clear that humans cannot grasp His way: “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways. This is the LORD’s declaration. For as heaven is higher than earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8-9, HCSB). We are not supposed to be able to understand why Jesus’ death and resurrection happened the way it did, but that’s okay because God planned it His own way. Few quotes explain this better than one by a pastor named Vernon McGee: “This is God’s universe, and God does things His way. You may have a better way, but you don’t have a universe.”⁷

⁷ Vernon McGee, “Vernon McGee Quotes”, Goodreads Quotable Quotes, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/8284138-this-is-god-s-universe-and-god-does-things-his-way>.

Lesson Five: The Risen Jesus and the Church's Mission

In the final lesson on this topic, it is time to move from an inward focused view on the importance of Jesus' resurrection and change to an outward focused view. If the message of Jesus was only important to first century Jerusalem and had no bearing on the modern world then there is no reason that God would have caused it to remain alive and well over 2,000 years later. No matter what religion one holds (or chooses to abstain from), there is no question that when Jesus was born, lived, ministered, died, and was resurrected, something critically important to the world happened. Not only did Jesus' life impact Christianity, but it also impacted Judaism and Islam⁸. This singular event should motivate the church to do and be so much more than we currently are. Of the many things that we can glean from this, I have chosen to focus on three items: The Gospel is meant to be shared, the Resurrection was a real event with real consequences, and Christ's message compels us to change.

Although the Church has many denominations and sub-denominations, much of the work of an Evangelical Protestant church is drawn from Jesus's final command. This command, called "The Great Commission" comes from the final thing that Jesus said just before he ascended to Heaven, not to return until the last times. Jesus had appeared to many people after his death and at one point he appeared to the 11 remaining disciples and told them to meet him on a mountain in Galilee (cf. Matthew 28:9-10). It was on this mountain where Jesus made his famous decree: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:18b-20a, HCSB).

⁸ Geivett and Habermas, *In Defense of Miracles*, 202.

Since this was one of the last things Jesus said, it seems clear that Jesus wanted the Gospel to be shared.

In the hearts of Christians, something like the Great Commission might cause people to jump up and go forth relentlessly sharing the Gospel. While we all should feel confident to do this, remember that the focus of this study has been about miracles and the resurrection. This means that we must be prepared to engage with the world in both the good and the bad. To be fully equipped for this task, we return to the fact that Christians must believe the resurrection was a real event and that its occurrence had real impacts on not only our modern world and time but also in the world and time in which it occurred.

Paul is often placed on a pedestal for his many contributions to the growth of the church and especially ministering to the Gentiles (basically most of the world today). But when he first began his ministry after the road to Damascus, it is highly unlikely that the Gospels had been published and even he had only heard pieces of them. But one surefire thing that Paul knew was how critical the Resurrection of Jesus was, and he explained this in one of the oldest known samples of his writing: “Now brothers, I want to clarify for you the gospel I proclaimed to you; you received it and have taken your stand on it. You are also saved by it, if you hold the message I proclaimed to you – unless you believed for no purpose. **For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.**” (1 Corinthians 15:1-4, HCSB). This means that Paul considered the message of salvation of utmost importance and he is only reiterating what Jesus said on the mountain in Galilee.

But before we run out the door, the church's mission has one final ingredient that, if ignored, will have very dangerous consequences. The message of Christ must be *only about Christ*. Anything beyond the salvation message of Christ (sometimes considered Jesus+) such as Jesus + Jewish Sacraments, Jesus + Jewish Law, Jesus + Self-Righteous Regulations, etc. is *not the Gospel*. Yet, this puts Christians in an interesting position. People who are seeking a renewed life in Christ must see the value of this in the lives of those around them. After all, if someone claims they believe a certain thing, but their life does not illustrate that, how is it any different than anything else? Paul explains this eloquently in Galatians: "For you were called to be free, brothers; only don't use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through Love. For the entire law is fulfilled in one statement: Love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another, watch out, or you will be consumed by one another." (Galatians 5:13-15, HCSB). Accepting Christ means that the Church should look different. How can we truly tell if we are in the right spiritual place? The only acceptable answer is that Christ's message compels us to change and our lives should illustrate those changes in everything we say or do.

Conclusion

All the material that has been provided here is not intended to be a single, standalone course for spiritual perfection. In fact, the opposite is true. My hope for gathering this material, organizing it, and presenting it, is that it will open future doors for believers to learn more about what we believe and how it can be understood and supported. A small, five-part course is nowhere near sufficient to summarize the entirety of the field of Christian Apologetics. However, if one believer hears this material and it inspires them to dig deeper into any of these topics, that is one more believer who will learn to equip themselves with the message that a

desperate and dying world needs to hear. I suggest then, that one follow the instructions Jesus provided to those who asked him how to grow: “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33, NKJV).

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