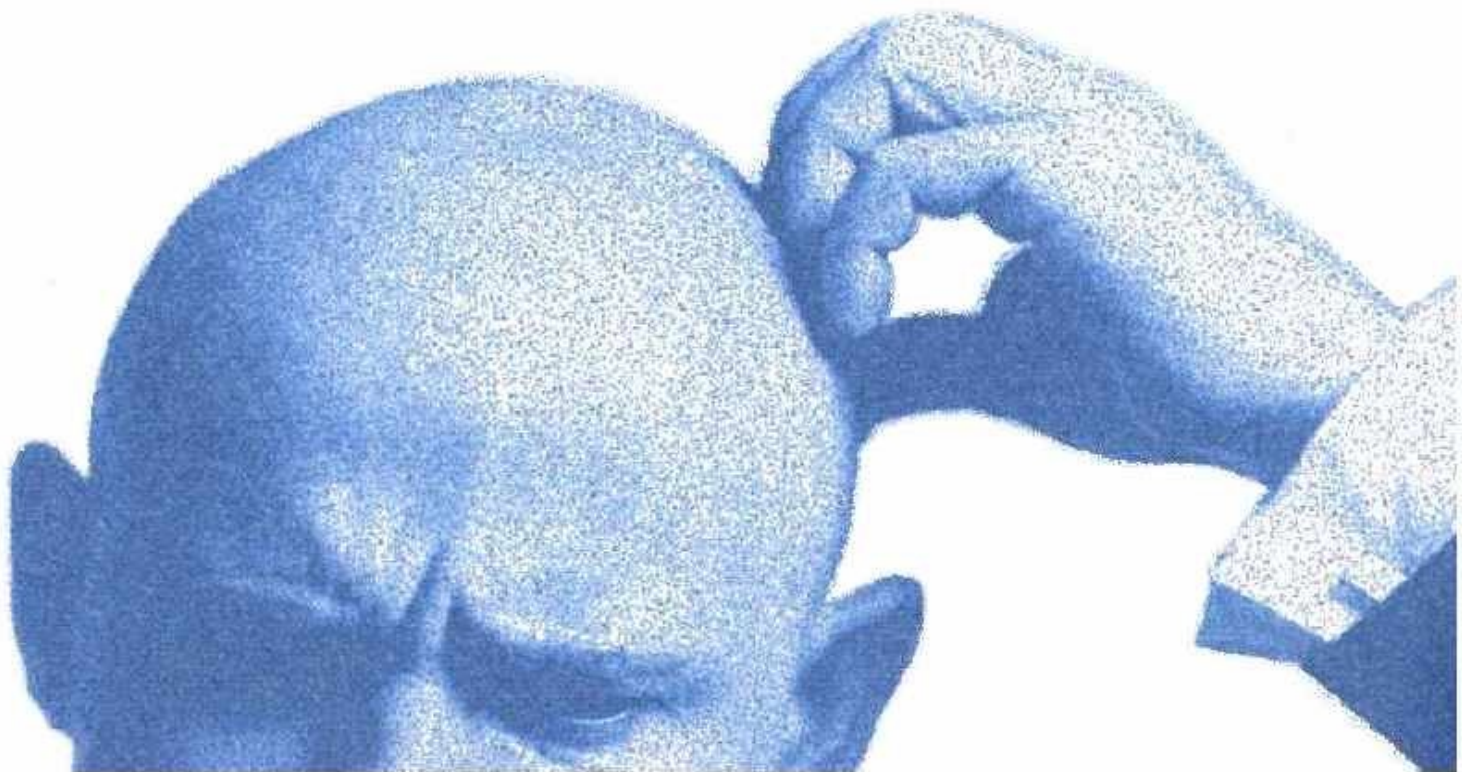


Thomasville

Leader's Guide



Thomasville

A Learning Track for all who honestly question
the basics of the Christian faith

Designed for
one-on-one sessions
or small group study

By
Larry Suttle

Table of Contents

Leaders Instructions.....	i
Session 1.....	4
Session 2	12
Session 3	18
Session 4	24
Session 5	30
Session 6	38

Scripture quotations noted **NIV** are taken from the *HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION*. Copyright 1973, 1978, and 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

About the Author

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Thomasville
Session 1



Thomasville Session 1

CAUTION - READ BEFORE PROCEEDING:

“Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and, if true, of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important.”

C.S. Lewis

1 Where is Thomasville?

It's in the land of questions and doubts. Though it can't be located on any map, it's very real for many who honestly wonder: "Could all this about Jesus and the Bible be true? I'd like to believe, **but...**"

Thomasville is named, oddly enough, for one of the apostles of Jesus. He has been called "Doubting Thomas," a name that unfortunately still lives even now. It's unfortunate because he was not one-dimensional. He had his times of great faith.

John 11:16

16 Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." NIV

In spite of this fact, his name is forever linked with an incident after Christ's death and resurrection. His story is recorded in the Gospel of John:

John 20:19-27

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. ...24 Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." 26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger

here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." NIV

It's also an unfortunate description of Thomas because doubts are part of the human experience. We all have had our doubts. The most convinced Christian still has questions. In spite of questions or even doubts, Christian faith remains for millions the only solid foundation for life and beyond.

Meet C.S. Lewis – As one of the great defenders of Christianity while a lecturer at Oxford University in England, he wrote the popular *Narnia* series, as well as many other classics of Christian literature. As a younger man, he was an avowed atheist. His mother's death when he was young affected him profoundly. Also, experiencing the horrors of war as a soldier in WWI made him question the existence of God. His great intellect and powers of reason, however, led him to deeper study and eventually to profound faith in God and Scripture.

Meet Dr. Anthony Flew – A world-famous scholar and long-time atheist, he has renounced his atheistic beliefs. In his newest book, *There is a God*, written in 2007, he tells how he came to believe. C.S. Lewis was a big influence in his life. He is quoted as saying to a former debate opponent that he simply "had to go where the evidence leads."

It's not a matter of having faith or not having faith, because everyone has faith in something or someone beyond themselves. The question is where or in what a person will have faith.

Someone said: "I don't have the faith to **not** believe in the God of the Bible." Indeed, it does take great faith to **not** see a creator behind the universe of which we are a part. Design screams out for a designer.

But even with faith, one still wonders. On some days or lonely nights, the questions loom large. So let's shine some light toward the land of doubt...toward Thomasville.

2 Is it just me, or is there more doubt and uncertainty now?

Yes and No!

There have always been forces against faith in the God of Scripture.

This, however, is a new time, and in one generation this nation and much of the world has seemingly gone from a default belief in the God of the Bible to one of no belief or to a pluralistic belief in other gods.

3 The general direction of our culture tends toward doubt rather than certainty.

The predominate thought of recent or modern generations has been characterized by belief in the objectivity of truth, the universality of reason and the inevitability of human progress. This “modern thinking” is now, however, being replaced by “**post-modernism.**”

Post [“after”]-modernism:

- Truth is no longer necessarily fact but rather whatever works for the individual.
- Every foundational principle formerly accepted is now open to re-examination and possibly rejection.
- One set of eternal values or standards no longer exists.

Post-modernism rejects a notion of Biblical “truth” that directs all people.

Post-modern thought now permeates virtually all of life and culture.

A “new” Atheism has emerged at the same time that is an “in your face” opposition to Christianity, and religion in general. According to *Time Magazine*, this new atheism, after laying low for a generation, is more vocal than has been heard in many years.

Examples:

- Richard Dawkins, Oxford University, England, *The God Delusion*
- Christopher Hitchens’ *God Is Not Good*
- Bill Mahre, comedian and social commentator, in film *Riligulous*
- Sam Harris, in *The End of Faith*, wrote:

“God himself is an ogre...especially the God of the Bible, who is not a god that any sane or morally sensitive person would believe in, much less love. Belief in God...corrupts human beings.”

Basic ideas: Belief in God is simply organized ignorance, and religion (especially Judeo-Christian religion) has actually been detrimental to society.

- Atheism is liberation from former generations’ “hang-ups, traditions and worn-out social mores.”

--It places scientific and psychological theories above belief in a supernatural God or ancient scriptures.

Though not new, these ideas can be and are being spread throughout the culture as never before. Our technological world makes the communication and distribution of thought much more widespread than at any time in the past.

The results are self-evident.

Let's think about this...

What are some results of post-modern thinking? How is the world different than the world you remember or have heard about? How do you feel about these changes?

Big questions of life can also prompt doubt:

(1) The problem of evil and suffering

--Moral evil [murder, rape, theft, etc.]

--Natural evil [tornados, earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, famine, etc.]

--Combination [environmental abuse brought on by greed, or shoddy construction that leads to many deaths, etc.]

Argument: If God is all good, he would destroy evil. If God is all powerful, he could destroy evil. But evil is not destroyed. Therefore, there is no God.

For some this closes the case. They are finished with faith in God!

Consider, however, an alternative argument: God is all good and desires to defeat evil. God is all powerful and is able to defeat evil. Evil is not yet defeated. Therefore, it will one day be defeated.

Revelation 21:4-5

4 ..."He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." 5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." NIV

A choice of conclusions:

--The atheist chooses the conclusion that evil is not defeated and never will be, a conclusion based on faith.

--The believer chooses the conclusion that evil will be defeated by a loving and powerful God in His time, a conclusion based on faith.

Consider possible reasons for suffering:

- Human freedom
- A stable, cause-effect universe, whose laws make life possible
- Reasons beyond the grasp of human beings

--To be expected in a God who is worthy of belief and worship

The presence of evil and suffering can actually encourage belief in God.

Consider this...

--If one says that evil does not exist [extension of post-modern thinking that everything is relative], then one is assuming there is no absolute standard of good.

--If there is no absolute standard of good, we could not know anything was "evil." In other words, there must be a straight line drawn by someone to serve as a standard for declaring another line crooked.

--In order for an absolute good to exist, God is necessary. Only an absolutely righteous being can draw a line of absolute good.

--There cannot be an ultimate standard of good without an ultimate lawgiver, and that lawgiver is God.

Put another way...

--Evil exists in the world.

--Evil is a departure from the way things should be.

--If there is a way things should be, there must be a standard or design for the universe.

--There cannot be a design without a designer.

--Evil is humanity's departure from the standard and design provided by the intelligent designer, God.

-If God, Why Evil & Suffering?
Charlie Campbell
AlwaysBeReady.com

Belief in God and the acknowledgment of evil is the Christian choice.

(2) **The existence of Hell**—How a loving God could send people to an everlasting hell is another big question that skeptics ask.

What is hell?

--Eternal separation from God

2 Thessalonians 1:8-9

⁸ He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power NIV

--A place cut off from the ideal, which is complete union with God

Revelation 21:3

³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God." NIV

Revelation 22:4

⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. NIV

--Prepared not for humans but for Satan and his angels

Matthew 25:41

⁴¹ "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" NIV

Does God send people to hell?

--Hell can be considered a human choice.

--People who go there resisted God and His purpose while on earth.

--They wanted no God; they get no God. God merely gives them what they chose in life, despite many invitations and opportunities to do otherwise.

“There are two kinds of people: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done’ and those to whom God says, ‘Thy will be done.’”

--C.S. Lewis

The Bible teaches that God does not want anyone to live forever away from His presence.

1 Timothy 2:3-4

³ ...God our Savior, ⁴ who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. NIV

In many ways He extends his grace to all.

Titus 2:11-14

¹¹ For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. ¹² It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. NIV

In spite of questions and maybe some doubts...

*...If your faith is not placed in the God of the Bible,
...upon what or whom will you place your faith?*

*Do you think continuing this study will be valuable to you?
Would you like to set a time to continue?*

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Session 2



Thomasville Session 2

How can we know that God exists? What evidence is there?

“Evidence” means “the presentation of facts relevant to a case that must be honestly considered by one(s) appointed to decide.” In this case, it is you. Consider carefully, for your decision will impact many people dramatically and deeply. The decision must not be made thoughtlessly or flippantly.

1 The Evidence of Creation—Since there is a universe, it must have been created.

Basis: **The Law of Causality**—Everything physical is caused by something other than itself.

The only alternative is to believe the universe has always existed. This view is almost universally rejected by scientists who see evidence for what they call “The Big Bang” beginning of everything material.

Many scientists now say that a “transcendent causal agent outside space and time brought the universe into existence.”

2 The Evidence of Design

Scripture teaches:

Romans 1:19-23

¹⁹...since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. NIV

To look at the universe causes a thoughtful person to conclude there was a master plan and planner.

There are many unanswered questions about the universe that cannot be humanly explained or reasoned.

Ecclesiastes 11:5

⁵ As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things. NIV

In the oldest book of the Bible, the book of Job, Job is asked a series of questions that were unknowable in his time with many remaining so in our time. The questions were asked originally to encourage an attitude of humility, and they continue to make the thoughtful person realize the limitations of human understanding of God's universe. Examine these questions. Do you know the answer?

Job 38

⁴ "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?

Tell me, if you understand.

⁵ Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!

Who stretched a measuring line across it?

⁶ On what were its footings set,

or who laid its cornerstone—

⁷ while the morning stars sang together

and all the angels shouted for joy?

⁸ Who shut up the sea behind doors

when it burst forth from the womb,

⁹ when I made the clouds its garment

and wrapped it in thick darkness,

¹⁰ when I fixed limits for it

and set its doors and bars in place,

¹¹ when I said, 'This far you may come and no farther;

here is where your proud waves halt'?

¹² "Have you ever given orders to the morning,

or shown the dawn its place,

¹³ that it might take the earth by the edges

and shake the wicked out of it? ..."

¹⁶ "Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea

or walked in the recesses of the deep?

¹⁷ Have the gates of death been shown to you?

Have you seen the gates of the shadow of death?

¹⁸ Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth?

Tell me, if you know all this.

¹⁹ What is the way to the abode of light?

And where does darkness reside?

²⁰ Can you take them to their places?

Do you know the paths to their dwellings?

²¹ Surely you know, for you were already born!

You have lived so many years!

²² Have you entered the storehouses of the snow

or seen the storehouses of the hail,

²³ which I reserve for times of trouble,

for days of war and battle?

²⁴ What is the way to the place where the lightning is dispersed,

or the place where the east winds are scattered over the earth?

²⁵ Who cuts a channel for the torrents of rain,

and a path for the thunderstorm,

²⁶ to water a land where no man lives,

a desert with no one in it,

²⁷ to satisfy a desolate wasteland

and make it sprout with grass?

²⁸ Does the rain have a father?

Who fathers the drops of dew?

²⁹ From whose womb comes the ice?

Who gives birth to the frost from the heavens

³⁰ when the waters become hard as stone,

when the surface of the deep is frozen?

³¹ Can you bind the beautiful Pleiades?

Can you loose the cords of Orion?

³² Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons

or lead out the Bear with its cubs?

³³ Do you know the laws of the heavens?

Can you set up [God's] dominion over the earth?

³⁴ Can you raise your voice to the clouds
and cover yourself with a flood of water?

³⁵ Do you send the lightning bolts on their way?
Do they report to you, 'Here we are'?

³⁶ Who endowed the heart with wisdom
or gave understanding to the mind?

³⁷ Who has the wisdom to count the clouds?

Who can tip over the water jars of the heavens

³⁸ when the dust becomes hard
and the clods of earth stick together?" NIV

Optional Video: *Unlocking the Mystery of Life* [65 minutes]

3 The Evidence of Moral Standards

Human beings have an innate sense of right and wrong.

--Various cultural behaviors may differ, but there is almost universal agreement on what is basically moral and immoral.

--Love, generosity, and loyalty are universally accepted as honorable behaviors.

--Murder, rape, theft are universally condemned.

When one says, "That's not fair!", it is admission that there is a moral code that came from somewhere. Who decided what is fair?

Conclusion: There must exist a supreme creator of a moral standard of right and wrong.

4 The Evidence of Universal Belief in a God

Human beings are seemingly "hardwired" to believe in a god.

--All peoples and civilizations worship and have concepts of a higher power.

--Where does this come from?

Ecclesiastes 3:11

11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. NIV

Consider this: The fact that human beings conceive of a transcendent god suggests that such a being exists.

--One cannot think of that which does not exist.

--Example: A person can think of a blue banana which does not exist. However, the color blue and bananas do exist. But if there was no such thing as the color blue or bananas, it could not be conceived. By definition, a person cannot think of what does not exist.

5 The Evidence of Changed Lives

Saul of Tarsus, a one-time persecutor of Christians who became the apostle Paul, wrote:

1 Timothy 1:15-17

15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. 16 But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. 17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. NIV

People you have known have had their lives changed.

--Fundamental to life change is belief in a “higher power” [e.g., the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and other recovery programs].

--Complete life change for the better and belief in God go together.

The late D. James Kennedy told the following story:

In the 19th century, Charles Bradlaugh, a prominent atheist, challenged a Christian man to debate the validity of the claims of Christianity. The Christian was Hugh Price Hughes, an active soul-winner who worked among the poor in the slums of London. Hughes told Bradlaugh he would agree to the debate on one condition.

Hughes said, "I propose to you that we each bring some concrete evidences of the validity of our beliefs in the form of men and women who have been redeemed from the lives of sin and shame by the influence of our teaching. I will bring 100 such men and women, and I challenge you to do the same."

Hughes then said that if Bradlaugh couldn't bring 100, then he could bring 20. He finally whittled the number down to one. All Bradlaugh had to do was to find one person whose life was improved by atheism, and Hughes, who would bring 100 people improved by Christ, would agree to debate him. Bradlaugh withdrew!

*It takes greater faith to **not** believe in God than to believe!*

What do you think?

Do you want to go on with this study?

Thomasville
Session 3



Thomasville Session 3

1 The Bible

What the Bible **claims**:

Luke 1:3-4

³ Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,

⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. NIV

John 20:30-31

³⁰ Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. NIV

Galatians 1:11-12

¹¹ I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. ¹² I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. NIV

1 Thessalonians 2:13

¹³ And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. NIV

2 Timothy 3:14-17

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All

Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. NIV

2 Peter 1:16

¹⁶ We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. NIV

2 Peter 1:20-21

²⁰ Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. ²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. NIV

2 Peter 3:15-16

¹⁵ Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. ¹⁶ He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. NIV

1 John 1:1

¹ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. NIV

The bold claims are:

Prophetic accuracy

Historical accuracy

Eyewitness accuracy

Inspired of God

THE BIG QUESTION: Is it true?

2 Part of the answer lies in the nature of Scripture itself.

- Written by over 40 people
- Over a period of 1400 years
- In three languages
- In many different literature styles
- By people of many different backgrounds

Yet a constant and consistent theme runs throughout.

Compare the Bible with other books that claim supernatural origin (e.g., Book of Mormon, Quran).

3 The Bible as History

The Bible is not merely a collection of noble thoughts, philosophy, or meditations for better living, of which there are countless examples.

It's addressed to and is about real people who lived in real places in real time. Those people, places and times can be checked and verified.

Historical references match the historical facts as we know them.

- Historical questions do exist, but are rare and minor.
- Upon later research, the Bible is often proven correct, though for a time it was possibly thought to be in error.
- Josephus and other ancient secular historians confirm Biblical accounts.

Archeology—"Though not intended to prove Scripture, it does provide background information, places and events within a historical context and builds confidence in Scripture's accuracy, especially where it touches upon historical fact."

"Over the last century or so, archeology has strengthened the case for biblical reliability. Missing [i.e., that which is mentioned in the Bible only but

not mentioned in other contemporary material] individuals, peoples, places, obscure customs, historical and political settings have been helpfully identified.”

--Walter Kaiser, Jr.
Apologists Study Bible

4 The Bible as Science

The Bible is **not** a science textbook. It was not written to provide scientific details. However, if the Bible conflicted with what we know to be true through science, it would destroy its credibility.

When Bible statements are properly understood, there are no conflicts.

In fact, many Bible teachings reflect a scientific awareness that far pre-dates ideas held by scientists and thinkers of the time.

--Bible statements have even led to scientific discovery.

Example: Shipping lanes in the ocean were discovered by a man who read of the “paths of the sea” in Psalms.

Psalms 8:6-8

*⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:
⁷ all flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,
⁸ the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas. NIV*

Example: Understanding of health and sanitary practices has come from the Jewish laws of the Old Testament.

5 Human Nature

The Bible was written by people who were willing to die for their faith.

Human nature is such that people do not die for what they know to be false.
Death-bed confessions are believable!

All of the apostles except one died violent deaths because of their identification with Christ and their refusal to deny their testimony. The other apostle, John, died an old man enduring difficult persecution to the very end. He described the many visions of Christian victory in the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation.

The apostle Paul wrote at the end of his life...

2 Timothy 4:6-8

⁶ For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

⁸ Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. NIV

--Shortly after those words were written, Paul was executed because he was a Christian [at Rome during the reign of the Roman emperor, Nero].

--Conspiracies do not hold together as someone faces death or severe consequences.

The Bible has survived many attempts to disprove its claims and continues to this day to be the major influence in the world.

The evidence is compelling.

Have you considered this evidence before?

Do we continue?

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Session 4



Thomasville Session 4

1 How do we know the Bible is complete? Are there books that should be in it that aren't? Do we have the whole story?

History of the "canon":

"Canon" is a Greek word that means "measuring rod" [like a yard stick].

The word came to mean not the rod itself, but what was measured.

The books that are included in the Bible are the ones that "measured-up." They passed the tests of inspiration by their acceptance and widespread usage by the early Christians.

--Many other books that claimed to be special [by claiming to be from God or written by a prominent Christian] did not measure up (e.g., Gospel of Thomas, Gospel According to Judas, The Gnostic Gospels, etc.).

--Even many books that are considered authoritative by the Roman Catholic Church [*The Apocrypha*] are in doubt and are not considered inspired by others. They lack the ring of authenticity. Therefore, when doubted, they were rejected.

Criteria for being chosen:

Authorship—written by someone of recognized authority

Authenticity—considered the genuine article and not a fake

Authority—reflected divine authority; its message in harmony with other accepted books or letters

Who decided?

No one! Over time the books and letters believed to be genuine came to be accepted by the church, and the others were simply disregarded.

--When Paul or other apostles wrote to a particular church, that letter would be circulated among other churches. Copies would be carefully made and protected for reference.

Colossians 4:16

¹⁶ After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea. NIV

Thought: No one “decides” a movie will be a classic or that a television show will have high ratings and become “must-see” TV. It just happens by acceptance over time. A formal list may be made up later of those that measured up.

That’s what happened with the Bible as we know it.

- Old Testament Scripture had been accepted for centuries by the time of the New Testament. Jesus validated the Old Testament by making frequent reference to the Old Testament, as did the apostles.
- The first formal listing of the 27 books of the New Testament accepted today was compiled in 367 A.D.
- But all the books had been accepted by the church long before, ever since they were first written and handed down as authentic by the people who would know best: the people who lived at the time of the writing.
- A good example is the astounding recounting of the resurrection of Jesus. The apostle Paul, when he wrote of the resurrection, referred to many people who were **still living** who could verify his account.

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also... NIV

Important to Know: No council decreed what books the church had to accept. Various councils simply listed the books that the church **had already accepted**.

2 We can have confidence in the process of giving and receiving the New Testament. Consider the time-line:

- (1) Jesus taught until 30 A.D.
- (2) Just **50 days** after Jesus died, the apostles were spreading His message on the Day of Pentecost.
- (3) People from throughout the Roman Empire heard the basics of the Christian faith while in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. They carried the gospel when they returned to their homelands.
- (4) The apostles continued to preach, teach, travel and counsel until the last one died around 95 A.D.
- (5) Their letters were circulated among all the churches with a consistent Christian message.
- (6) Before the printing press, dedicated and professional copyists made accurate copies of these letters for use all over the world. These copies were treasured.

--Many more copies of biblical manuscripts exist than any other accepted piece of literature.

Examples: There are 643 known copies existing of Homer's *Iliad*. The age of the oldest copy in existence is 500 years after Homer wrote the original. The original does not exist.

Also, only 49 copies of Aristotle's writings exist. No originals exist. The oldest copy known to exist was written some 1400 years after Aristotle lived.

--Contrast those examples with the Bible. There are almost 25,000 copies of Bible manuscripts known to exist all over the world. In some cases, only 50 to 100 years separate the original from the copy.

--When compared with each other, all these copies are virtually identical with a few having only minor variations caused by scribal errors [i.e., transposing letters, punctuation errors].

--Bible writers and those who copied those letters were very serious about their craft and their responsibility to faithfully record what they knew to be true. Notice Luke's preface to his account of Jesus Christ:

Luke 1:1-4

¹ Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. ³ Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. NIV

Christians have the conviction that the Holy Spirit who inspired Scripture was faithful in transmitting it to all generations.

1 Peter 1:24-25

²⁴ For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field;
the grass withers and the flowers fall, ²⁵ but the word of the Lord stands forever."
And this is the word that was preached to you. NIV

Jude 3

...contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.
NIV

3 Why are there different versions or translations of the Bible? How can I know which one to trust?

There are four methods of translating anything (spoken or written), including the Bible.

- Word for word
- The meaning of thoughts
- Combination of word for word and meaning of thoughts
- Paraphrase by the translator

Different versions or translations of the Bible follow one of the above methods.

Examples:

- Word for word:

King James Version (KJV)
American Standard Version (ASV)
Revised Standard Version (RSV)
New King James Version (NKJV)
New English Standard Version (NESV)

- Meaning of thoughts:
 - Good News Translation (GNT)
 - New Living Translation (NLT)
- Combination:
 - New International Version (NIV)
- Paraphrase:
 - The Message
 - The Living Bible

What is the purpose of new translations?

- To make the meaning of words more understandable for each generation as words can change meanings over time
- To include the latest scholarship and research as new discoveries bring new understandings of how words were used in ancient times

All recognized translations will use the ancient texts as the standard for their particular version.

Which version is best and most faithful to the original?

- A Bible professor and Greek scholar at a Christian college stated: "In spite of preferences, the truth is you can go to heaven using any one of them!"
- But remember: For an acceptable translation, look for the names of the language scholars in the front of the translation. These committees of scholars research and debate the best English word to substitute for the original Hebrew word (in the case of the Old Testament) or Greek word (in the case of the New Testament).
- Avoid a "translation" that is the work of one person or unnamed people who are attempting to fortify their unique doctrine with their own translation [e.g., Jehovah's Witnesses Bible].
- Remember also that a paraphrase is one person's opinion. It can be a helpful tool to understanding but should not be relied upon.

4 As you confront the Bible, you have several options:

You can ignore the Bible.

You can trivialize the Bible.

You can deny the truth of the Bible.

You can believe the Bible and spend the remainder of your life in serious study of it and conforming to its teaching.

What do you think at this point in our study?

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Session 5



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Session 5

“How is Christianity different from any other religion? They all do good...and they’ve all done bad! Who’s to say which one is best?”

1 The bold claim of Jesus

Christ claimed all authority on heaven and earth and that His way is the only way to reach God.

John 14:1-7

¹ "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. ² In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going." ⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." NIV

Is He Lord or lunatic?

--Many want to call him a good teacher but not the Lord; not the Son of God any more than any of us are his sons or daughters.

--C.S. Lewis wrote:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

--Mere Christianity

2 The effect of Christ's teachings—good or bad?

Despite the strong feelings that Christ generates today, wherever His teachings have been followed, only good has resulted.

Alvin Schmidt, writing in the *Apologetics Study Bible*, asks the question ***Has Christianity Had a Bad Influence on History?*** He lists these positive effects on the world:

- >Christianity elevated the sanctity of human life. The early Christians, motivated by the gospel, opposed abortion, infanticide, child abandonment, suicide, and gladiatorial contests.
- >In the fourth century, Christianity introduced hospitals to the world. Greeks and Romans had no such institutions of compassion. Christians, moved by Christ's words, "I was sick and you looked after me," built hospices as early as 325 and hospitals by 369 A.D.
- >Before Christianity appeared, women were practically slaves, having little or no freedom or dignity. Not so in the Christian church. Women were baptized and instructed along with men and took communion along with men. Adultery was no longer defined in terms of a woman's marital status; a married man having sex with a single woman now was also guilty of adultery.
- >Countries where Christianity has had the greatest presence were the first to abolish slavery. By contrast, slavery is still present in many Islamic countries.
- >The Magna Carta expanded the Christian concepts of liberty and justice and that no one, not even the ruler, was above the law.
- >Christian teachings resulted in economic, political, and religious freedom.
- >Christian theology, not pagan pantheism, motivated early scientists to explore the natural world. ["Pantheism" in this usage means all of the many different gods worshipped by mankind.]
- >Christianity inspired the invention of the musical scale and great musical compositions.

>Christianity's influence is present in many of the West's social institutions and in its nomenclature, literature, and education, shaping much in the daily lives of people – both Christians and non-Christians.

3 Facing Facts

Evil actions in the name of Christianity have indeed been committed. [e.g., the Crusades; Spanish Inquisition; medieval and early American witch persecutions; Roman Catholicism's silencing of Galileo and the persecution of those who attempted to translate the Scripture].

Common Mistakes:

- **To think that Roman Catholic history is Christianity's history (Roman Catholicism is not the church as described in the New Testament.)**
- **To connect Christianity with a friend, relative or associate who seems to live his/her religion hypocritically or in an abusive way**

Religion in general or living "religiously" is of no intrinsic value.

One can live hypocritically.

Matthew 23:27-28

²⁷ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. ²⁸ In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness." NIV

New Testament writers warned Christians of "false teachers" in the church.

2 Peter 2:1

¹ But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. NIV

Such distortions do not diminish the possibilities of living as Christ directed and modeled.

There **is** religion that is pure and accepted by God.

James 1:22-27

²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does. ²⁶ If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. NIV

Christianity is a relationship with a person, Jesus Christ.

--The quest of a human being is to be His student [disciple=learner].

--The mission is to do His work.

4 Jesus' teachings about His church

He lived and died to establish His church.

Matthew 16:13-19

¹³ When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

¹⁴ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

¹⁵ "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

¹⁷ Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the

kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." NIV

He is not the savior to everyone (universalism), but to His body, the church.

Acts 20:28

²⁸ Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. NIV

The New Testament teaches that only those who personally, consciously, and openly confess Jesus Christ as Lord and obey His gospel will be saved.

Romans 10:8-13

⁸ But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: ⁹ That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. ¹¹ As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." ¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him,

¹³ for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." NIV

This confession of Jesus Christ as Lord preceded baptism into His death.

Acts 22:16

¹⁶ "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name." NIV

Acts 8:34-39

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" ³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" ³⁷ Philip said,

“If you believe with all your heart, you may. The eunuch answered, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” ³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. NIV

The New Testament refers to becoming a Christian as “obeying the gospel.”

2 Thessalonians 1:6-9

⁶ God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you ⁷ and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. ⁸ He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power. NIV

During His earthly ministry, Jesus spoke more of final judgment than about heaven.

Matthew 13:37-43

³⁷ He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. ⁴⁰ As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴² They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. ” NIV

The apostles throughout the New Testament consistently repeated those teachings of Jesus.

In a “post-modern” world that emphasizes tolerance, pluralism, and no objective truth, this all sounds oddly or even cruelly objectionable.

5 The authoritative words of Jesus

The Lamb of God humbly invites.

Matthew 11:25-30

²⁵ At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.

²⁶ Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. ²⁷ All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. ²⁸ Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." NIV

Jesus will one day judge all men and women by His words.

John 12:44-50

⁴⁴ Then Jesus cried out, "When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. ⁴⁵ When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me. ⁴⁶ I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. ⁴⁷ As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. ⁴⁸ There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. ⁴⁹ For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. ⁵⁰ I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say." NIV

6 Jesus' warning of false teaching

Jesus and the apostles warned of predominate “winds” of ideas and teachings that will sweep across humanity.

Widespread acceptance of human ideas does not make them correct.

Ephesians 4:14-15

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. NIV

Colossians 2:1-8

¹ I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. ² My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴ I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. ⁵ For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

⁶ So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. ⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. NIV

Christ is everything, or He is nothing!

To whom will you listen?

Thomasville
Session 6



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Session 6**

1 Are you still interested?

Maybe not. The call of Jesus is both full of grace and yet is demanding.

Jesus both invited and discouraged followers.

Luke 9:57-62

⁵⁷ As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."

⁵⁸ Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." ⁵⁹ He said to another man, "Follow me."

But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

⁶⁰ Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

⁶¹ Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family."

⁶² Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." NIV

Luke 14:25-33

²⁵ Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said:

²⁶ "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? ²⁹ For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, ³⁰ saying,

'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' ³¹ Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask

for terms of peace. ³³ In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple." NIV

John 6:60-66

⁶⁰ On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" ⁶¹ Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? ⁶² What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! ⁶³ The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. ⁶⁴ Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. ⁶⁵ He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." ⁶⁶ From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. NIV

2 You have been studying reasons why Jesus ought to be seriously considered as the new Lord of your life.

You have been given evidence for belief and obedience.

It's evidence that demands a decision.

--Josh McDowell has written a classic, 2-volume work on reasons for Christian faith. It bears the title: *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*.

--It contains over 700 pages of readable but compelling reasons to accept Christ and be rid of crippling doubts.

But it's the title that is captivating: "*Evidence That **Demands** a Verdict.*"

--Today, in a way, you sit on a jury. It's your decision after examining the evidence.

--One response you **cannot** give is: "I just won't make a decision." You will make a decision. The evidence demands it!

--You will decide to become a follower, or you will refuse. A decision to delay is likely to decide no!

--If you decide "no," what will be the alternative life direction?

John 6:66-69

⁶⁶ From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

⁶⁷ "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." NIV

3 Face the Facts: All of your questions will never be fully answered in this life.

--There are many mysteries in life.

--The most devout Christian still has questions.

Another quote from C.S. Lewis:

It is no good asking for a simple religion. After all, real things aren't simple. They look simple, but they're not. The table I'm sitting at looks simple: but ask a scientist to tell you what it's really made of--all about the atoms and how the light waves rebound from them and hit my eye and what they do to the optic nerve and what it does to my brain--and, of course, you will find what we call "seeing a table" lands you in mysteries and complications which you can hardly get to the end of. ...

Reality, in fact, is always something you couldn't have guessed. That's one of the reasons I believe Christianity. It's a religion you couldn't have guessed. If it offered us just the kind of universe we'd always expected, I'd feel we were making it up. But, in fact, it's not the sort of thing anyone would have made up. It has just that queer twist about it that real things have. So let's leave behind all these boys' philosophies--these over-simple answers.

C.S. Lewis

Don't allow lingering questions about some things to keep you from the wonderful invitation of Jesus Christ: "Come, follow me!" It will be the most fulfilling and exciting experience of your life!

4 Let's finish the story about Thomas.

John 20:25-31

²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

³⁰ Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. NIV

When Thomas said to Jesus, "My Lord and my God," he was making a statement that, as a Jew, was considered blasphemy and punishable by death. But Thomas was willing to take that risk. His doubts had been replaced by conviction. Tradition indicates that Thomas became a great spokesman for Christ in Asia, possibly what is today India. It is believed by many that Thomas, when asked by non-believers to deny his faith in Christ, made the statement, "I will never renounce Christ." Because of his refusal to deny Christ, this one-time doubter died a martyr's death by having a stake driven through his body.

The German theologian, Wolfhart Pannenberg, said:

"The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things: First, it is a very unusual event. And second, if you believe it happened, you have to change the way you live."

Could that be the real issue?

What will be your verdict?