Introduction

This article was written from notes for an apologetics discussion I had with a couple youth who had various questions and struggles with the faith. I’ve included various supplemental resources in the footnotes and at the end of this article. I hope they would be helpful!

Firstly, I’d like to express how glad I am to see young people who are actually asking questions that matter. While many today seemed caught up with the latest trivialities and getting hit crossing the road trying to capture some virtual imaginary animal in a phone app, asking tough questions about the most important things in life is a welcomed sight! All of the questions which were relayed to me are great ones, and rest assured they all have answers to them. However, given the range of questions and the time I have here, it would not be practical to try to get to all of them—nor would I be able to do each of them justice. So I will have to focus in on what I think are the primary questions of most importance.

It is for this reason that I’ve chosen to focus most of my content on presuppositions and building an apologetic for the Bible as the trustworthy Word of God, and thus a base for a Christian worldview. I will mainly focus on atheistic scientific naturalism (belief that the material world is all that there is) and postmodern relativism (that there is no absolute truth or metanarrative to life) as the two major competing worldviews I’ll tackle here—as I think they represent two of the major forces in our culture today. I believe that all the subsequent questions will eventually find their answers if that foundation is laid first.
Presuppositions & Worldview

We all have presuppositions. These presuppositions are based on what our underlying worldview is, and informs how we interpret and filter information which we are presented with. It lays the foundation for how we make sense of the world and also how we build our defence for what we believe. As a Christian, I base my worldview on the Bible and what it says about ultimate reality: God, His creation, and myself. It provides a basis for me to know truth and expect to have an intelligible Universe that I can make sense of. Worldviews then, act as lenses through which we see the world around us. If the lenses are distorted, and they are all we have known, then there is no way of us knowing that they are wrong. Just as if a person is born blind, the world they know is one void of colour and light. Interestingly, this is exactly how the Bible describes people without a knowledge of God—spiritually blind, and blind to their own blindness. This is why we need God to give us eyes to see and ears to hear.

A Paradigm Shift

A helpful modern analogy I have found is in physics. Before the development of Quantum physics—which deals with the mechanics of sub-atomic particles which may sometimes have totally different rules to normal mechanical physics—Newtonian physics was all that there was. No one could ever imagine or conceive of these different laws and functions because all that was known was the Newtonian model. Such suggestions would have seemed foolish and absurd. Also, the move to Quantum physics models can seem like a jump—as there can seem like there is no direct, gradual way to move from Newtonian to Quantum. However, once the jump was made, there was no going back. I find in this a good metaphor to what happens at conversion for the Christian. Before we were converted, all we knew was 'Newtonian' and we couldn’t even imagine the other side of the gap—indeed, the Cross was foolishness to us and we could not accept it (1 Cor. 1:18; 2:14). The only thing that made sense was what we understood within our worldview. However, after conversion—on the other side of the Quantum gap—we not only could make sense of the Newtonian world, but also the Quantum. A sort of paradigm shift had happened and now we see the world from the other side as it really is. The things which we saw before still make sense, but now we can see a bigger picture and understand a whole lot more. Perhaps a simpler (and better) analogy is of someone who was colour blind having an operation that allows them to see
Thaddeus M. Maharaj: Ground Level Apologetics—presuppositions, worldviews and the Bible.

colour—the world they knew before still makes sense, but now they see a fuller picture that people who are still colour blind could not comprehend fully.¹

Evidence is not enough—we must love the truth

Many of the struggles that freshman university students face with regards to their faith and encountering challenges from professors and philosophies they have never heard starts here. If we do not have a sure foundation upon which our faith is built—our worldview—the structure is bound to come crashing down. However, merely giving statistics, numbers and facts is not enough. If I were to just only give ‘evidences’ for belief, without first addressing the lenses we have, it will do no good—for our presuppositions will always tend to interpret those evidences in a way to match our worldview. In this regard, one may say that our reasoning is always circular since our worldview and presuppositions are what allow for reasoning to happen.

However, what I am arguing is that the naturalistic atheist is actually borrowing from a Christian theistic worldview in order to substantiate his faculties of reason and then using that to disprove the worldview he is borrowing from.

The Bible doesn’t tell us that we have to throw away our reason in order to have faith—in fact in Isaiah 1:18 it says, “Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow.” Peter encourages us to be ready to present logical and compelling reasons for the hope we have (1 Peter 3:15). But I could throw at an unbeliever a multiplicity of evidences and it would be to no avail—and this is why we have many, even in the scientific community, who can see all the same ‘evidences’ and yet come to different conclusions. As George Mac-Donald said, “To give truth to him who loves it not is to only give him more multiplied reasons for misinterpretation.” There must be an inner disposition which loves the truth, and is open to it challenging their own preconceptions. This, I argue, must be a work of the Spirit—since it requires a change of heart for the one who may have previously been opposed to the Gospel message. For the natural man does not receive the things of God—he is hostile against it (1 Cor. 2:14; Rom. 8:7).

¹ More on spiritual blindness here: http://www.gotquestions.org/spiritual-blindness.html
Faith: The Foundation of Knowledge

All knowledge requires faith—even ‘scientific’ knowledge—since the scientist has to have faith that his own senses are accurately relaying to him truthful information about the world he perceives. He must have faith that his instruments function properly. He must have faith that the laws of physics are constant and stable to give repeatable results to his experiments. He must have faith that his colleagues and the textbooks he reads and uses for information have faithfully reported their findings. Every worldview begins with a basic assumption about the nature of reality which cannot be proven by the scientific method because that very method relies on those very assumptions. This is where we begin to see the insufficiency of a purely ‘scientific’ method to know all truth and we move out of the realm of evidential science into that of metaphysics and philosophy. Edward T. Ramsdell (professor of systematic theology at Vanderbilt University) writes,

“"The natural man is no less certainly a man of faith than the spiritual, but his faith is in the ultimacy of something other than the Word of God. The spiritual man is no less certainly a man of reason than the natural, but his reason, like that of every man, functions within the perspective of his faith."”

I’ve heard some try to avoid this truth by saying they don’t have faith but rather base their knowledge on probability: that a fact is never able to be ascertained with absolute certainty, but one can have a sufficient amount of probability that it is so. However, that just moves the question one step back—for it still assumes that premise to be true—that a fact can never be ascertained with absolute certainty. They have faith that this statement is true and starting principle. It is self-defeating.

Similarly, we have postmodern pluralists who insist that truth is relative and based more on personal preference than empirical or objective facts. We’ve all heard the catchphrases like, “Oh that may be true for you, but it’s not true for me” or “truth is what you make it, or feel it to be, etc.” This has led to a sort of radical scepticism in our age, a redefinition of ‘tolerance’ into acceptance of all beliefs even if they are contradicting (with the exception of course of Christian belief which is seen as exclusivist), and the rejection of all overarching metanarratives (a big story) that define reality. This too however does not dodge the fact that there is still a faith system in place—even the postmodernist has a set of beliefs and assumptions which they trust to be basically true in order to construct their worldview.

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“As Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, God has put eternity—a sense of beginning and end, a sense of being part of a larger story—in our hearts, in the very core of our being, so that we require some larger story within which to situate, to make sense of, the smaller stories of our lives and cultures. God intended us to find meaning in our lives through being part of a larger story that gives purpose and direction to our lives and explains our world. It is important to note, therefore, that one who rejects the Christian story will not simply live without a grand story but rather will find an alternative grand story and live by it. Even the postmodern view, which says that there is no grand story, is itself a whopper of a grand story!”

Both of these systems, though they deny the Christian God, borrow from starting principles of Christian theism in order to assert their denial of the same. It is to this now I will briefly try to address and show that Christianity actually provides the basis for ‘knowledge.’ Indeed, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,” (Prov. 1:7; 9:10) and in Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3).

Weighed and found wanting

Atheistic humanists put their faith in the findings of science and experience which cannot be rationally demonstrated as the source of all truth without appealing to certain worldview assumptions. The irony of this is that many of those assumptions are not possible without a Christian worldview. Science itself depends on assumptions that the world in which we live is intelligible and that the laws of nature which are used for calculations are stable. Neither of those two foundational truths are possible or to be expected if the Universe is simply the product of random, unguided, chaotic chance. Why should we expect to see order or stability then? Such order and stability are only expected if there is a mind behind the design of Creation, and an unchanging Author who has set these laws in place. The intelligent design movement is a sector of the scientific community which has caught on to these truths. Both of these truths we find established in the Bible. Nobel Prize winning quantum theorist, Mark Planck, one of the most important physicists of all time said:

4 For more on intelligent design: [http://www.gotquestions.org/evidence-intelligent-design.html](http://www.gotquestions.org/evidence-intelligent-design.html) there are also numerous books and resources online about this movement.
“Anybody who has seriously been engaged in scientific work of any kind realizes that over the entrance to the gates of the temple of science are written the words: Ye must have faith. It is a quality which the scientist cannot dispense with... Science cannot solve the ultimate mystery of nature. That is because, in the last analysis, we ourselves are a part of nature and therefore a part of the very mystery that we are trying to solve.”

The End of Reason, Justice and Morality

In a Darwinian naturalistic view, we are the products of random chance—simply molecules in motion. How then can I trust that the molecules which are dancing between your ears are any more ‘truthful’ than mine? Molecules have no commitment to honestly after all. How can that which is created from random, unguided chaos be expected to produce orderly and logical thought? In asking that very question even it betrays the expectation that what we are saying even makes sense. Order, logic, creativity, reason—all these things are not the product of chaotic randomness—no process of unguided chaos will ever produce design and order. The puzzle of why we have a ‘mind’ and where it comes from can only be satisfactorily answered if we have a Creator who is personal and has a mind also. Consciousness does not arise out of inanimate matter. Rather, it is part of the Imago Dei—that we are created in the image of God.

In fact, the naturalistic worldview taken to its logical conclusion turns out to be very deterministic. Because, if we are simply dancing to the music of our DNA, that all we are is material and our genes determine everything about us and there is no transcendent mind or soul—then how can we trust our reasoning about ontological and objective truths? From a purely naturalistic standpoint, you think the way you do because your genes program you to do so. You cannot think outside of the way your genes have coded you to do so. There is no true ‘freedom of the will’ because we all simply blindly follow what our DNA dictates with no ability to do otherwise. However, how incredibly odd is it then, if that is the case, for us to even ask questions of it and challenge the functioning of our own minds if we are bound to its DNA hardcoding? Does that mean I have some sort of genetic coding to question my own mind? Does that mean there’s some sort of gene for faith that those who believe in God have and those who do not lack?

Therefore, the cereal killer or rapist also cannot be held accountable in a purely naturalistic framework—they were just doing what their genes told them to do. How can we

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5 Mark Planck, Where is Science Going? Epilogue (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. NY, 1932), 214.
expect them to rise above what they were destined to do through their genetic programming? There is no ultimate basis for objective morality—only a subjective preference or at best a societal agreement on moral judgments. But in the end, it is survival of the fittest and the strong survive. The only basis for ‘oughts’ then should be whatever guarantees the most propagation of my genes to the next generation. So then, why not kill and rape and pillage if that brings about the most continuation of my DNA? Why the moral outrage—as many atheists like to levy the moral arguments of the existence of evil to disprove God—not realizing that they need a theistic framework to even ask this question meaningfully! This is what English journalist, Steve Turner, was referring to in his satirical poem on the modern mind, “Creed” when he said:

“If chance be the Father of all flesh, disaster is his rainbow in the sky and when you hear, ‘State of Emergency! Sniper kills ten! Troops on Rampage! Whites go looting! Bomb blasts school! It is but the sound of man worshipping his maker.”

An Unliveable Premise

Postmodernism sounds like a fine theory, but upon closer inspection it turns out to be nothing more than living in a fantasy world. “To say that we cannot have knowledge of reality is itself a claim to know something about reality. Postmodernists also refute their own position when they give reasons for their views and cite facts and observations.” Ultimately, relativism is unlivable. Stating that there is no such thing as absolute truth is itself self-defeating. Just ask anyone who says that whether if that statement itself is true and watch it breakdown since what they have in fact stated is a claim to an absolute truth that there is no absolute truth. Postmodern writers themselves divulge this when they “write literary texts and protest when people misinterpret the authorial intent in their own writings.” Postmodernists presuppose what they deny, which is that we can know anything objectively, because they suppose that they can know objectively what they deny.

If you really want to see the true colors of a postmodernist or moral relativist show, just simply grossly misrepresent or misinterpret what they just said to you or steal something from them. They will either correct your misrepresentation—showing that they

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6 As quoted in Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God?*, 42-44.
9 See R. Scott Smith, “Christian Postmodernism and the Internal Relation of Language and the World,” in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, ed. Myron Penner (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005).
do in fact believe in truth and that words have meaning—or they will become outraged that you stole something—showing that they do in fact believe in morals which are objectively binding since they’re holding you accountable to a moral standard outside what is just their personal preference. God has written his law on our hearts and consciences (Rom. 2:15; Jer. 31:33). At some point, there are beliefs which are necessary truths which cannot be empirically demonstrated but must serve as first principles upon which everything else must be built upon. Such basic assumptions are: one’s personal existence, the reality of the external world, basic reliability of the senses, the rationality of human reason, and the principle of causality.

G.K. Chesterton says, “The man who begins to think without the proper first principles goes mad; he begins to think at the wrong end.”

Geisler and Zukeran state, “First principles of knowledge are self-evident (obvious) truths, and they form the foundation of all knowledge. Since a principle is that from which everything else in its order flows, first principles of knowledge are those basic premises from which all else follows in the realm of knowing.”

Cornelius Van Til gives the example of why addressing this issue of presuppositions is important—for if we do not address the fact that a person’s presuppositions and worldview are actually foundational to whether we can accurately find or even expect to find truth, it is like a man made of water, in an ocean of water, trying to get out of water by making a ladder of water then climbing up it, only to fall into water. This is the hopelessness and senselessness of using a methodology of a worldview that’s presuppositions do not allow for any other conclusion than that which was presupposed. Christian theism “is the only position which gives human reason a field for successful operation and a method of true progress in knowledge.” Van Til said, “In spite of this claim to neutrality on the part of the non-Christian the Reformed apologist must point out that every method, the supposedly neutral one no less than any other, presupposes either the truth or the falsity of Christian theism.” The illusion of neutrality must be shown

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14 Cornelius Van Til and William Edgar, *Christian Apologetics*. 
false, for we all have presuppositions/worldview which we work within. This is not to say that non-Christians don't discover truth by the methods they employ, but rather that those methods borrow from Christian presuppositions about the ultimate reality of the Universe. This is the great irony, that in order to prove Christianity wrong, one must presuppose it true—and this is exactly the point to which God brings us in Romans 1, that men suppress the truth in unrighteousness—but we will come back to that later.

On Christ the Solid Rock I Stand

I have really briefly run through two contemporary worldviews and shown how they lack a proper foundation upon which to build a worldview. Now, I'd like now to spend the majority of the rest of my time building an argument for the reliability of the Bible—specifically focusing on the New Testament due to time—as the foundation upon which we can build. Goheen and Bartholomew state that,

“The Bible claims to be the real world. This story, among all stories, claims to tell the whole truth about the way our own world really is. Here, inside this story, we are meant to find the meaning of our lives. Here we must find a place in which our own experience was meant to fit. Here we are offered insight into the ultimate significance of human life itself.”

This section will focus briefly on several evidences which give us confidence to trust in the Bible (NT). One of the major question we have to answer in a religiously pluralistic world with many other ‘holy books’ claiming divine authority is, how can we know the Bible is God’s Word and what sets it apart as unique from others?

One of my pet peeves is how decidedly biased a lot of the information—or rather misinformation—presented to the public on popular ‘learning’ networks and especially online can be. A lot of the time, things which have been rebutted thoroughly for many years in Biblical scholarship is brought up again and again, presented as if it is ‘amazing new evidence’ against the Bible. So in my presentation that follows I’ll also try to address some of these which are popularly thrown out there. We shall focus primarily on the manuscript evidence for the NT, internal and external evidences, early testimony of the church and the resurrection. While this is by no means exhaustive of all the evidence we have in

favor for the Bible as a sure source, I do believe they do help to build a compelling collaborative case for Christian belief. And while I am presenting ‘evidences’ here—what we had previously discussed about our presuppositions and starting assumptions still holds true—we must still assume a Christian theistic framework to even make sense of and process these evidences according to logic, reason, etc. What is being built here is why the Bible is a sure foundation upon which to rest those starting presuppositions.

Internal Witness

One of the most incredible things about the Bible we must understand is the amazing fact of its internal coherence given the nature of the Bible. Many make the mistaken assumption that the Bible is just a book—however, it is not just one book, it’s actually more like a library of books—66 in all. These books were written spanning three continents, in three different original languages, over a period of approximately 1500 years and by more than 40 authors from different walks of life. This is important for two major reasons:

1. Internal Consistency

Firstly, it means that no one human person could have ever controlled the authorship of the Bible—it simply spans too wide a time, area and authorship for any one person or group to control its message. Yet, what we find in it is a consistency of its essential message unlike any other books. In fact, there is no other collection of books which we are even able to compare to it! This sort of consistency of theme and message can only exist if there was One Divine Author behind it—which is exactly what Christians believe. 2 Timothy 3:16 says that all Scripture is ‘God-breathed.’ The word used there by Paul is θεόπνευστος [theopneustos], and is in reference not to human author, but rather the product which he was writing—namely the Scriptures themselves. They are what are God-breathed and this is why the Scriptures we have received in their current form are trustworthy and consistent—because they all find their ultimate origin in the same God who breathed them out through the human instruments He used to pen them and transmit them. This point is relevant in addressing the common claim that the Bible is just a man-invented document or book. The sheer scope of how the Bible was authored (from a human perspective) excludes this claim from being anything more than an empty assertion.
2. Fulfilled Prophecy

Secondly, we see the internal witness of fulfilled prophecy. The Bible contains literally hundreds of detailed prophecies which relate to the future of individual nations and Israel, and many more concerning the coming of the Messiah (one of the uniting themes of the Bible). Unlike other so-called prophetic books such as the Book of Mormon, Nostradamus, and the Qur’an—the Bible’s prophecies are detailed and accurate in their fulfillment. Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, tried to prophesy many times in error—including that the temple would be built in Missouri and that Jesus would come again in 56 years.¹⁶ Both of those obviously never came true. Nostradamus made some extraordinary claims, but it has been shown how much he seemed to borrow from the Bible and also how generalized a lot of his ‘prophecies’ were so that they could be seen to be read and fulfilled many different ways.¹⁷ Mohammed similarly tried to prophecy but gets many things wrong, and the Qur’an is filled with errors about the Bible—which it also recognizes as Scripture. However, here I do not have time to examine these in depth, but there are numerous great resources online and in print.¹⁸

To illustrate this point for the Bible, one example will have to suffice among the myriads I could draw from. There are over three hundred prophecies in the OT about Jesus Christ which point to his coming in the NT. Details foretold range from where he would be born, His lineage, how he would die and rise again—are all things which he could not control if he were simply another mere human.¹⁹ It was long contested that because of the specificity of some of these prophecies that there was no way they could have been written so early before Christ’s birth, so they must have been added in later by Christians wanting to show the truth of their Scriptures. One of the most disputed texts was Isaiah 53. As the text is read, many see pretty easily the clear reference to Christ as he is described as:

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\text{having no form or majesty, despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, one who bore our griefs, smitten by God, pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, the chastisement that brought us peace was upon him, we are healed by his wounds, a lamb led to the slaughter, his grave was with a rich man, his soul makes an offering for}
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¹⁶ More on Mormonism here: https://carm.org/mormonism
¹⁷ For more info: http://www.gotquestions.org/Nostradamus-prophet.html
¹⁸ See RZIM’s Andy Bannister and Nabeel Qureshi for tons of great resources on Islam. Also Dr. James R. White has done quite significant work in the area of apologetics to Islam as well as numerous other Christian apologists.
¹⁹ For a few examples of these prophecies see here: http://www.gotquestions.org/Old-Testament-Christ.html
guilt, by knowledge of this Righteous One many will be accounted righteous because he bears their iniquity and makes intercession for the transgressors.

If we didn’t know better, many would think this comes straight out of the NT and is why many critical scholars did not believe this could have been written before the NT times. Then, in 1947, a young Bedouin shepherd stumbled upon an amazing find of Qumran scrolls in the rocky caves of the Judean hills. These are what have come to be popularly known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. Among them was found one of the oldest, largest and best preserved biblical scrolls which was The Great Isaiah Scroll. It was confirmed to be dated around ca. 125 BCE and its text was in general agreement with the Masoretic text. Sure enough, it had chapter 53 in there. Proof positive that Isaiah 53 was penned well before the birth of Christ even if this scroll was somehow the first copy of it—which it was not. With that discovery, mountains of critical scholarly work were made irrelevant. In fact, if we believe the traditional dating for Isaiah, it would have been written between 701 and 681 BCE—some 700 years before Christ! The Bible always seems to outlive its pallbearers. The mathematical odds of just 48 prophecies regarding Christ coming true as they were foretold is one in ten to the 157th power! To give you an idea of how big a number that is, it’s more than the estimated number of atoms in the entire Universe! There is much more about the internal evidence that could be presented such as archaeological evidences which have proven Biblical details, but for now we will turn to other evidences.

Is the New Testament Reliable or Corrupted?

One of the often heard claims by skeptics is that we cannot actually know what was written in the Bible because we have no way to know what was in the originals, and that because it has been copied so many thousands of times it has been corrupted through various omissions, additions and mistakes. In fact, such scholarly skeptics such as Bart Ehrman make their living trying to cut down the reliability of the Bible. One of his most famous claims is that the New Testament has more errors than it has words. Sounds like quite a devastating

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21 http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/isaiah
22 For more you can check out Ed Strauss and John Beck’s book, Why Should I Believe the Bible?: An Easy-to-Understand Guide to Scripture’s Trustworthiness or Strauss’ other book, Answers to Your Bible Questions: 75 Reasons to Believe Scripture’s Truth and Trustworthiness.
Bart Ehrman’s claim is not without some truth. It is actually true that the manuscripts we have of the New Testaments do have errors. And it is true that if we were to sum them up, there are more errors than there are words in the New Testament. By recent estimations, there are about 400,000 textual variants in the New Testament and only 140,000 words. However, what are the nature of these errors and what are the reasons for them? If we just hear those numbers quoted without knowing what’s going on behind them, it can indeed seem very troubling. We must first understand what counts as a ‘textual variant.’

*Any place among the manuscripts in which there is variation in wording, including word order, omission or addition of words or spelling differences count for a variation.*

So, that means that even something as simple as a scribe misspelling a word would be counted as a variation—and every time this happened in a different manuscript, it would count as another variation. The reason we have a lot of textual variants is that we have a lot of manuscripts. In fact, the real problem we have with the New Testament is that we have an embarrassment of number of manuscripts! Recent estimates count more than 5,800 Greek manuscripts (the NT was originally written in Greek), 10,000 Latin manuscripts with an additional 10,000 copies in other languages! If we factor into those numbers of errors being spread over such a huge number of copies—we can see why we would expect to have so many variants. Plus, the early church Fathers wrote a lot and quoted from the NT at length. There are over 1 million direct quotations by early church Fathers which means that even if we were to lose all the original NT manuscripts, we’d be able to reconstruct it from just the quotations from church Fathers.

Additionally, a majority of the variants are things such as misspelled words and most are so insignificant they aren’t even translatable. The scribes which copied the New Testament before the printing press was invented did such a good job that it is calculated that the text is 99.5% pure. This means that among the massive wealth of copies we have, there is only half a percentage of variation. This is amazing. And considering that if we had 99.5% of ANY text, we’d surely be able to be very confident that we know what it says—it
can be surely said of the NT as well. Any claim to the opposite is simply ridiculous skepticism. Of ALL the variations, NONE affect any doctrinal truth or major belief of the Christian faith.

Lastly, one of the errors propagated is the analogy of the childhood game of telephone. It is said that, just like that game where the message gets garbled by the end of the line of people conveying the message, we cannot trust that the scribes who copied the NT got it write because what we have are copies of copies of copies of copies, etc. However, this is a false analogy for two major reasons. Firstly, in the game telephone, you are not allowed to go back and check with the person you got the message whether if you heard it right or not. That is not how scribal copyists worked. They had the manuscript they were copying from right in front of them! Secondly, this assumes that the scribes always copied from a copy or a translation so that errors would be propagated. However, again that is not the case. A scribe copying a manuscript would go back to the oldest manuscript they possessed and copy it. Also, new translations into other languages were not translated from another translation—they went back to the originals as much as they could and would translate from Greek and Hebrew to the new receptor language. This is still how Bible translation works today—we strive to go back to the originals to translate from them.²³

The Bible Compared with Other Works of Antiquity

But how does the Bible compare to other ancient texts of a similar time period? There is NO comparison. Nothing even comes close. The average classical Greek writer has less than 20 copies of his work still in existence. Not only that, for the average ancient Greek writing from a similar time—the closest copy available is normally hundreds of years removed from the original. Pliny the Elder is 700 years after it was originally written. Plutarch and Josephus are 800 years, Polybius is 1200 years—and this could go on and on with other examples, yet none of these receives the kind of skepticism that the NT does. For the NT manuscripts, we have manuscript copies from within less than a hundred years of when the originals would have been written (by critical scholars' estimation). P66—a fragment manuscript of the Gospel of John is dated no later by 175AD and P52, which is another fragment of John in the John Rylands Library in Manchester

²³ For a very informative presentation on this topic by top NT manuscript Scholar, Daniel B. Wallace, check out this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wiWKifMu6f8
England, dates to about 29 years after the original! If we were to be consistent in our scepticism of ancient manuscripts we’d have to do away with the large majority of accepted ancient history today. No other work of antiquity is able to be held up to the critical standards of the NT.

Furthermore, if these were just the copies—it is logical that the original autographs would have to predate them—which places the NT right at the time of the events and within a generation or two of the actual people and witnesses. This means that there would not be the amount of time necessary for myths and legends to develop nor for the text to be corrupted and changed since many of the eyewitnesses would still be alive. Among other very early copies is Codex Sinaiticus—an early codex or book of the NT and almost complete OT—which dates to around 330-360AD and Codex Vaticanus which dates to about 300-325AD. This is important since some try to assert that the Council of Nicea (325AD) was when the Bible was constructed and the canon established—however, earlier manuscripts and these codices prove that a canon was in place well before that council. Plus, the Council of Nicea was not about establishing the canon—that is another manufactured urban legend. The DaVinci code and other modern fictions continue to perpetuate this as well as other urban legends although they have been thoroughly refuted by actual scholarship.

Lastly, the early church had quite unique requirements for the canonicity of a book—that is, whether or not it would be accepted as authentic and part of scripture. These criteria include: Apostolic authority (if it was connected with an apostle), Antiquity (if it originated at the right time, later works obviously would be fake), Orthodoxy (if it concurred with the general teaching of accepted scripture), Catholicity (if it was generally recognized by the greater majority of the Church and believers), Traditional use (if it was found useful by church bodies for instruction in faith), and Inspiration (was it a work of the person’s own initiative or of the Spirit?). This is why pseudopigraphal books or the apocryphal books are not traditionally accepted by Protestant Christianity—and again, a lot of popular media and movies make use of these discredited books such as the Gospel of Thomas, James or Mary
and the Book of Enoch in order to cast doubt on the Bible as reliable and complete. I cannot go more into these criteria here, but there are great resources on this elsewhere.  

Other Sources

Jesus had such a public reputation in his day that there are other sources outside of the NT which make similar testimonies either directly or by inference. This is a fact beyond dispute. Even the sources from opponents to Christianity confirm the NT's testimony. A few examples will have to suffice here.

Jewish sources, such as the Jewish historian Josephus (37-100AD), report the Jewish reaction to Jesus and that they believed his miracles were sourced by malevolent power. Interestingly, we see this same reaction in the Gospels (Matt. 12:24; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15). Josephus also confirms details about John the Baptist, Herod, James (Jesus' brother) and Ananias the High Priest. Other sources that mention Jesus are Tacitus (55-117AD) and Thallus (52AD) who records the strange solar eclipse and earthquake which were connected with the Crucifixion. Pliny (112AD), the governor of Bithynia, and Lucian (120-180AD) both write about Christians and their worship of Christ. In the debate between Justin Martyr and Trypho, Trypho argues that Jesus was a magician (Ag. Trypho 69.7) and similar charges appear in the Jewish Talmud (b. Sanh. 43a). Note that although they opposed Christianity, they didn't argue that Jesus didn't exist nor did they dispute that he did miracles—the argument was instead the source of his miracles. It seems that the early witness was so strong that it was impossible to deny the fact that Jesus did miracles. This is also significant today since it shows that no one around that time was arguing that the accounts of Jesus were mythical—an argument you hear tossed around a lot today.

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25 For more: http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/sources-for-caesar-and-jesus-compared

26 For more on these extra-biblical sources which confirm the NT, see here: http://coldcasechristianity.com/2014/is-there-any-evidence-for-jesus-outside-the-bible/ and https://carm.org/non-biblical-accounts-new-testament-events-andor-people
Early Church Witness

Furthermore, the witness of the Early Church is filled with martyrs who died for the sake of what they believed. Each one of the disciples of Jesus was martyred for their belief that Jesus was the Son of God and the only Saviour of the world. James was probably beheaded, Peter was crucified upside down according to tradition, Matthew was killed with the sword in Ethiopia, James (Jesus’ brother) was thrown from the temple then clubbed to death, Nathanael was flayed to death with a whip in Turkey, Andrew was whipped and crucified in Greece—preaching from the cross for two days until he died, Thomas was stabbed with a spear in India, Matthias (who replaced Judas Iscariot) was stoned and beheaded, Paul was tortured and beheaded. The only one who escaped was John, but it was not for lack of trying—they boiled him in oil, but when he wouldn’t die it probably freaked them out and they exiled him to Patmos where he wrote his book of Revelation. This is not to mention the literally hundreds of stories of early martyrs during the rules of Roman emperors like Nero (54-68AD), Domitian (81-96AD), Trajan (98-117AD), Marcus Aurelius (161-180AD), Severus (193-211AD), Decius (249-251AD) who was the first to lead Empire-wide persecution, Valerian (253-260AD), and Diocletian (284-305AD) who led the Great Persecution to try to extinguish Christians. These Emperors tortured and killed many Christians who refused to deny their belief in Jesus, his work and his claims.

Now, just because someone dies for a cause does not automatically mean it is true. However, the fact that both the disciples and many of the early eye-witnesses to Jesus and his Resurrection were willing to give their lives for the truthfulness of this claim at least shows that they thought it was true. We can see from their writings, that these men wrote as sane, thoughtful, some very intelligent and learned authors—so they clearly weren’t just insane. They came from varied walks of life—from fishermen and working class, to learned scholars and academics. If they had made up the story of Jesus’ resurrection—why would they all willingly suffer torture and horrendous deaths for the sake of a lie they knew was false? Especially when they had nothing to gain? And it was not just the disciples of Jesus, but many of the early converts who were also eye-witnesses who suffered the same fates.

Many try to brush off the testimony of the early church to mass delusion or hallucination. However, to explain a miracle they are possibly positing a bigger miracle—because there have NEVER been any recorded mass hallucinations of that scale, and also groups of people who have hallucinations never hallucinate exactly the same thing! Pair this together with the early manuscript evidence which would have never survived during a time where actual eye-witnesses could have discredited them as false if they were simply made up, and the weight of the witness of the early church plus the other evidences we don’t even have time to touch on such as early creeds and confessions and the evidence is indeed very heavy!

Evidence for the Resurrection can be found here.28

Comparison with Myths and Other Religions

I have one last short note on the internal witness of the Bible which is important to mention. The Bible does not read like myth like a lot of other religious texts. It includes many specific details of dates, names, places and events which could be checked and verified by the early readers and us today. The nature of myths is that they are set in a fictional or unverifiable time or location. We see this in the Hindu scriptures which are told as mythical tales, or ancient Greek legends, etc. The fact that Biblical writers take the effort to specifically mention such verifiable details means that they believed what they were writing was actual history—and indeed they encouraged their readers to verify it (see for example 1 Cor. 15:1-11 where Paul mentions other witnesses and that some of them are still live to verify the story).

Also, the Bible is unique in its message—every other religion is a system of works man does to reach God or salvation. The Bible emphatically goes counter to this in declaring that there is nothing man can do to reconcile himself to God. It flips it upside down, and instead it is God who reaches down to man to save him. If the Bible were merely a human product, we would not expect such a harsh evaluation of the wretchedness of mankind. Nor would we expect the authors to include shameful details about themselves and the early followers of Jesus—every other religion tries to clean up their heroes and present them as

almost sinless or perfect examples. However, every Biblical character apart from Jesus is shown to be fallen and sinful. People who are making up stories and writing themselves into it usually make themselves look good. The disciples look like buffoons for a lot of times in the Gospels—which is quite odd if they were embellishing the story.

Other Similar Stories/Myths

Another popular claim by skeptics is that the story of Jesus is not unique and is copied from other myths such as pagan folklore stories of Osiris, Dionysus, Adonis, Attis or Mithras. Popular books/movies like The Da Vinci Code by Dan Brown offer pseudo-scholarly claims (which are nowhere near scholarly or truthful) that end up becoming widely accepted urban legends to many. These claims originated in the writings of liberal critical German theologians in the nineteenth century who claimed that Jesus was a copy of popular dying-and-rising gods of Mesopotamia, Syria, Egypt, etc. However, these claims were taken seriously by scholarship and have been thoroughly refuted as bogus—but of course that detail is conveniently left out! Thanks to the internet and people not checking sources or doing serious investigation, these claims have resurfaced.

The movie Zietgeist claims that Jesus is a copy of the Egyptian god Horus. They claim that like Jesus, Horus was born on December 25 of a virgin, a star proclaimed his birth, three kings came to adore him, he was a child prodigy teacher at 12, he was baptized and began a ‘ministry’ at 30, had 12 disciples, was betrayed, crucified, buried 3 days and resurrected. WOW! Seems pretty similar huh? Well, not quite. Because that’s mainly baloney. If we read the actual sources, we find that Horus was born to Isis who was not a virgin—she conceived Horus with Osiris. Horus was born in Oct/Nov not Dec, plus December 25 is not Christ’s actual birth date—just the date we celebrate it. There is no record of three kings, he is not a saviour, no accounts of being a child teacher, was not baptized, did not have a ministry or 12 disciples (he had 4 demigods), was not betrayed, was not crucified (no accounts of his death include crucifixion), was not buried and was nor resurrected. Also—Horus’ story is VERY different to the Gospels and is written like myth.

What about Mithras? Many claim the same things for Mithras as Jesus. However, he was born out of a solid rock—not a woman. He battled with the sun and a bull, which became the ground of life for humans. His birth was celebrated on December 25th—which is maybe the only connection we could stretch to make, but as it was mentioned, this was not Christ’s
actual birth date. There is no mention of him being a teacher, having disciples (though the idea may come from him being surrounded by the 12 zodiac signs in some depictions). He had no bodily resurrection but rather was taken to heaven in a chariot. In fact, Tertullian, an early Christian writer records that Mithraic cultists re-enacted resurrection scenes after the NT times, and thus, if there was any copying—it was by Mithraism. All the other supposed similarities to pagan myths fail the same tests. Also, history has shown that myths take at least two generations to pass before they can enter a historical account. This is because as long as eye-witnesses are alive, errors can be refuted and the myth cannot take root. All the Gospels of the NT were written during the lifetime of the eyewitnesses, and some of Paul’s letter’s as early as 50AD, and some scholars even put NT writings earlier than that!²⁹

The Hard Truth of Unbelief

So, in light of all of this, why do unbelievers not believe if the evidence is so clear? Because in their natural state—they do not want to. This is a hard truth to hear, and one that will upset many as we often like to think of ourselves as better than we actually are. Speaking about unbelievers Paul says:

“In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” (2 Corinthians 4:4)

This is consistent with what we see in Ephesians 2 also:

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” (Ephesians 2:1-3)

It is our own sinful desires which prevents us from seeing the truth because ultimately, at the deepest level, the person apart from the grace of God hates it and is in rebellion against God. This is the effect of the Fall to all humanity. If we go to Romans 1:18-20, it tells us that all people have a knowledge of God through what is main plain to them through creation but suppress that truth by their unrighteousness and are therefore without excuse. That word there is ἀναπολογήτους [anapologētous], which literally means ‘without an apologetic’ or without a reasonable defence. This is why in the first section I covered our

²⁹ A good resource on more for this is Lee Stroble, The Case for the Real Jesus.
presuppositions and the fact that even unbelievers borrow from a Christian theistic framework. They have this instinctive knowledge of the truth, but suppress it. This however, is not to say that they are necessarily conscious of doing so, but is something which may happen at a more subconscious level as the working out of the mind and heart which is in rebellion against God.

Jesus himself, after our favorite verse memorized in isolation—John 3:16—tells us that, “this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.” (John 3:19-20) This is why we need a new heart—to be born again. Augustine said therefore, that faith precedes understanding. That metaphorical paradigm shift from Newtonian to Quantum, or blind to seeing needs to happen. We need to be converted by the Spirit of God himself. Without that, I can throw many more evidences at an unbeliever, and he can even intellectually understand them but still remain unconverted because the Spirit of God needs to work a miracle of regeneration in his heart (John 1:13; 3:3-7; 6:44; 1 Pet. 1:23; Eph. 2:1-5; 1 Cor. 1:18; Rom. 8:7).

**Necessary Conclusions**

So where does this leave us? We have seen how without a Christian worldview, the basic presuppositions which allow us to have a firm foundation for truth, science, intelligibility, reason and morality break down. A postmodern/relativist worldview and a purely naturalistic worldview both break down. We’ve seen the trustworthiness of the Bible both from its internal and external witness. Also we’ve seen its uniqueness both of the weight of manuscript evidence and in its claims. There’s much more we could cover—however, I think it would be inappropriate to do so without bringing to bear what this means for us now. What do we do with this truth? Is man’s problem actually a lack of information, or sinfulness which prevents us from even seeing rightly and believing? What does God through His Word tell us about Himself, ourselves, and our responsibility in light of that? What is the actual cure for man’s condition?

**The Gospel**

The central, unifying theme of the Bible is the Gospel—that is, God’s redemptive plan for mankind. The essential message can be broken down as follows:
God is holy—the sovereign creator of all that is—righteous and just. Man is sinful and fallen, unable to live up to the perfect law of God, we cannot earn right standing with an absolutely Holy God and are in rebellion to Him. This therefore causes a problem for man, the worst news is that God is good and we are not, and thus there is a separation between God and man caused by sin. We cannot keep God’s moral Law—we all have broken it and are thus guilty and liable to the punishment of that transgression. God in His mercy and grace sends Jesus—the incarnate Son of God—to live a perfect life and die a substitutionary death in payment for sin, suffering the just wrath of God against sin in our place. God shows his acceptance of Jesus’ sacrifice by raising him back to life and now he sits at the right hand of the Father as a perfect intercessor for all those who put their faith in his accomplished work of redemption as their only hope.

However, man being spiritually dead and blind, not wanting the things of God—they love their deeds, and instead of accepting God’s free offer of grace, continually look to find ways to justify themselves. This is futile though since the separation and debt is an infinite one, but Christ being the God-man is able to fulfill the infinite requirement. A great exchange happens in the Gospel where our sin is put on Christ, and his righteousness is put on our account—this is called imputation. If we want to see the cost of our sin and redemption—we need look no further than the Cross, for it required the death of the very Son of God to pay for it. In addition to this, God not just saves us from the consequence of our sin but also the power of sin—He gives true believers His Holy Spirit which works in the life of a believer to bring them gradually closer and closer to his standard of holiness and wanting the things of God—this is called sanctification.

The call of the Gospel then is simple—repent and believe. Repentance is a turning away from sin towards God, to forsake all that we once lived for in our sinful desires and follow after God. It is a constant action, not just a one-time event. The evidence that we’ve truly repented is that we continue to walk in repentance. Secondly, belief—true belief is to put all of our trust and hope in Jesus’ completed work of redemption on the Cross. We no
longer trust our own good works to justify us, but realize our poverty and need for God to do for us that which we cannot do for ourselves. True belief also works itself out in every aspect of our lives—because like our discussion about worldview, belief is the foundation of our worldview and thus it will radically affect how we live our lives.

While the Gospel call is simple, it is also costly. This is why we see the Bible instruct us to count the cost before—Jesus says that if any man desires to be his disciple, let him take up his Cross daily, deny himself and follow Christ (Luke 9). It is a call to lose you life that you would find it in Christ. The Gospel is no half-hearted call, nor is Jesus simply something you add on to your life—but rather we receive him in exchange for our life. This is why the most common term of the apostles to refer of themselves was as “slaves of Christ.” They understood that they were bought with a high price (the Cross) and thus they no longer belonged to themselves or lived for themselves but rather for their Master. The believer is dead to sin and alive to Christ, their whole life is hidden in Christ and thus defined by him.

Lastly, the Gospel is received joyfully. Jesus tells parables of the Kingdom of God as a treasure found in a field or a pearl of great price, that the person upon finding, in their joy sells all that they have just to have it. That is the value of Christ we need to come to understand—that far from Christianity being a solemn, fun-sapping, set of rules and restriction—it is actually true life! Jesus says that he desires that we would have life to the full (John 10:10)—and this is life, that we would know God and Jesus Christ (John 17:3). Together with a serious contemplation of the cost of Christianity, must also be the overwhelming joy of Salvation—in knowing how greatly we’ve been forgiven of our infinite debt before a holy God, our hearts rejoice in the salvation which is graciously given to us freely without deserving it. Without Christianity we are left to a cold, indifferent, incoherent, purposeless existence with no expectation that things should make sense or for any sort of final justice or meaning. With Christ we get all things—for in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. We get a coherent worldview and system, we find forgiveness and reconciliation to God, we find hope for tomorrow in spite of the sufferings of today, we find ourselves in a grand metanarrative of redemption that gives purpose and meaning to all of Creation and we find joy of having our deepest need satisfied—we have eternity set in our hearts, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Him.
Additional Resources

There are lots of free video resources on YouTube for Christian Apologetics and debates which will help you along your journey of understanding. Here are a few names you can look up:

- Ravi Zacharias
- James R. White
- Jeff Durbin
- Greg Bahnsen
- Gary Habermas
- Scott K. Oliphint
- Michael Ramsden
- Nabeel Qureshi (apologetics to Islam)
- Alister McGrath
- Francis Collins (genetic scientist)
- Lee Strobel
- William Lane Craig
- Daniel B. Wallace (Biblical scholar)

Online Sources

In addition, here are some apologetics websites you can search:

www.carm.org
www.rzim.org
www.aomin.org
www.apologiaradio.com
www.reasonablefaith.org
www.reasons.org

Here are a few Bible learning resources and sites:

http://www.ligonier.org/learn/
https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/
http://desiringgod.org/
www.gotquestions.org

“Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” (Acts 17:11)