



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

## Sermon Notes

### Keep Standing for Jesus

1 John 1:1-3

#### Introduction

1. American philosopher George Santayana (1863-1952) famously said: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”
  - a. Succinctly explained: “Studying history is necessary to avoid repeating past mistakes.”<sup>1</sup>
  - b. I propose a variation: “Christians who are not familiar with the past may be unduly alarmed about challenges in the present.”
2. In 2016, I read Larry Hurtado’s 130-page book, *Why On Earth Did Anyone Become a Christian in the First Three Centuries?*<sup>2</sup> It is the text of a 2016 theology lecture at Marquette University.
  - a. Hurtado is a historian, believer, and conservative NT scholar. His title is ironic; he stresses how amazing it was for people to convert to Christianity in the presence of the unavoidable hostility Christians faced.
    - i. Believers were viewed with suspicion, ridiculed, and ostracized, from social and civic gatherings, trade guilds, and other groups that had patron deities.
    - ii. People scoffed at the notion that Jesus was God in the flesh.
    - iii. Christians were called “atheists” — because their monotheistic view of God was foreign to the common understanding and because they would not acknowledge the accepted gods, even just to pledge loyalty to the empire. Some died for their stand.<sup>3</sup>
  - b. Yet, in time, so many declared allegiance to Christianity that, by the 4th century, it was officially tolerated (313, Edict of Milan) and made legal (380, Edict of Thessalonica).
3. We face a similar challenge which seems to be gaining strength (note the growing number of “Nones”). Regarding Jesus, N. T. Wright’s 1999 conclusion is more apropos now.

the people whom ordinary Christians meet, to whom they must address the gospel, have been told over and over and over by the media, on the basis of some recent book or other, that the

<sup>1</sup> those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. Dictionary.com. *The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, Third Edition. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005. <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/those-who-cannot-remember-the-past-are-condemned-to-repeat-it> (accessed: February 21, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Larry W. Hurtado, *Why On Earth Did Anyone Become a Christian in the First Three Centuries? The Père Marquette Lecture in Theology 2016* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2016). He elaborated more in *Destroyer of the Gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> See *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* 3.2, 9.2 in Michael W. Holmes, ed. & trans., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* 3rd. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 310-311, 316-317.

Jesus of the Gospels is historically incredible and that Christianity is therefore based on a mistake.<sup>4</sup>

4. Recall one more thing from history: a major reason Christianity made headway in the second and third centuries was because of writings that aimed “to allay rumors about Christians and . . . deflect or dampen negative attitudes and harsh treatment of them.”<sup>5</sup>
5. In fact, the defense began during the first century. Hurtado notes 1 Thessalonians, Hebrews, and 1 Peter. We will focus on John’s epistles.

### Body

#### I. Some of the Concerns Among the Believers to Whom John Wrote.

- A. Deserters (1 John 2:18-19), influenced by false prophets (1 John 4:1).
  1. “Antichrists [had] come” (1 John 2:18; see vv. 22-23; 2 John 7) and were then “in the world” (1 John 4:3).
  2. Would not “confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. . . the spirit of the antichrist” (1 John 4:2-3).
- B. The believers’ view described: us against the world (1 John 4:4-6).

#### II. How Did John Respond (1 John 1:1-3)?

- A. He continued to teach and defend what they had “heard from the beginning” about “the life [that] was revealed” (NRSV) (vv. 1, 2).
  1. Experience: “. . . we have *seen* it, . . .”
    - a) This is a perfect indicative form of ὁράω (*horaō*), indicating a present state of affairs resulting from past action; the continuance of completed action.<sup>6</sup>
    - b) What John had seen in the past (v. 1) was the source of his present teaching.
  2. Evidence: “. . . and *testify* to it. . .” The word is μαρτυρέω (*martureō*).
  3. Evangelism: “. . . and *proclaim* to you.” The word is ἀπαγγέλλω (*apaggellō*).
  4. Summary: Knowledge learned led to continual defense (see Phil. 1:7, 16; 1 Pet. 3:15) and proclamation.
- B. John did not adjust his teaching to accommodate the dissenters; he kept proclaiming it.
  1. Specifically:
    - a) “. . . Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he is God” (1 John 4:15).
    - b) He is the propitiation whose sacrifice takes away sins (1 John 2:2; 3:5, 16; 4:10).
  2. Some historians found that the *content* of faith was primarily important in the first three centuries; benefits of it and methods of sharing it were secondarily important.<sup>7</sup>
- C. John saw it as the church’s role to know, teach, and live the faith.

4 N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 18.

5 Hurtado, 75-78, specifically refers to Justin Martyr’s writings in this respect.

6 Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 573. In introducing his discussion of the perfect tense, Wallace says, “As Moulton [*Prolegomena*, 140] points out, the perfect tense is “the most important, exegetically, of all the Greek Tenses.” The perfect is used less frequently than the present, aorist, future, or imperfect; when it is used, there is usually a deliberate choice on the part of the writer.”

7 Hurtado, 122; citing Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 79.

1. In John's time, no other entity propped up the faith as culturally acceptable.<sup>8</sup>
2. No doubt, he would have done things the same way even if Christianity was considered culturally normative.

### III. What Do We Learn from John?

- A. Christianity's claim to be based on real events in history invites critical examination of those events. Because we care for truth, we should welcome the opportunity to answer such questions.
- B. This does not mean that everyone must become an "expert" in any or all aspects of the defense; the reality that the church is a body belies that idea.
- C. It does mean that we should take seriously the need to "make a defense" (1 Pet. 3:15).
  1. Do not be surprised to hear the questions; remain aware of the challenges.
  2. If your thing is not to become an expert in some area related to giving an answer, at least be aware of the sources and people who can address things more completely.

### Conclusion

1. Years ago, a teacher introduced me to a quotation that I return to periodically as a reminder of what is possible. It's from the book, *The Jesus of History* by T. R. Glover, published in 1917. I eventually found and purchased a reprinted copy, and read the larger context of the quote.<sup>9</sup>
2. Having examined the evidence for Jesus, Glover considered the question of how the church, seen by the world as "a ludicrous collection of trivial people" conquered Rome's "enormous strength, universal acceptance, [and] great traditions . . . How was it done? . . . the Christian 'out-lived' the pagan, 'out-died' him, and 'out-thought' him."
3. Regarding the last, Glover wrote, "The Christian out-thought the pagan world. . . . They would go to the shrines and ask uncomfortable questions. . . . The Christian . . . lived the freest intellectual life that the world had. Jesus had set him free to be true to fact. . . . Who did the thinking in that ancient world? Again and again it was the Christian."
4. In other words, they kept doing what John did. Let us remain committed to doing the same.

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<sup>8</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon have argued that it is the loss of this "propping up," in place in the West since Constantine's edict in 313, that has unnerved many believers. See *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*, 1st ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 15, 18-19.

<sup>9</sup> T. R. Glover, *The Jesus of History* (New York: Association Press, 1917; New York Public Library reprint); the following quotations are taken from pp. 198-200, 203, 205.