

The Christian Life Report

You Can't Follow Jesus if You Don't Trust His Word

TIMOTHY PAUL JONES, PHD

1

“Well, I actually do think Jesus was probably raised from the dead,” the young woman measures each syllable carefully as she turns her gaze toward the ceiling. “I just don’t believe the Bible, and I don’t want to be a Christian if I have to believe everything in the Bible.”



This week’s student ministry gathering was winding down. A few minutes earlier, I had wrapped up a series on the Bible and sexuality with an exposition of Paul’s words to the Thessalonians: “For God has not called us to impurity but to live in holiness. Consequently, anyone who rejects this does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit” (1 Thess 4:7–8 CSB). I closed my message with an appeal for anyone who had not yet trusted Jesus to believe the gospel. That’s part of what brought this ninth-grader to the edge of the stage after the service ended.

“So what is it that keeps you from wanting to become a follower of Jesus?” I ask. A year ago, this young woman had never set foot inside a church building. Now, she’s been participating in student ministry for several months, and she’s even attended Sunday morning services a couple of times.

“It’s not that I don’t want to follow Jesus,” she replies quickly. “I’m great with following Jesus. I just don’t know that I can believe all the things the Bible says.”

“And what is it about the Bible you don’t want to believe?” I have already had a couple of interactions with this student, and I am fairly sure I know where the conversation is headed.

She draws a deep breath. “Like I told you before, I think I might actually be a guy even though I was born a girl. According to what you said tonight, the Bible isn’t in favor of being transgender. I think Jesus is alive. I just can’t believe what the Bible says if the Bible won’t let me be who I feel like I am.”

The Christian Life Report

This young woman was willing to accept the miracle of the resurrection. Yet she also recognized that Christian faith requires more than mere assent. And so, despite her acceptance of the evidence for the resurrection, she was not ready to embrace Christian faith. She wanted to accept the parts of Scripture that described Jesus and his resurrection while rejecting the sections that challenged her own confused self-conception. She was open to the possibility of a risen Jesus, but she did not want to submit to the moral teachings of Scripture. She's not alone.

2

LESS SKEPTICAL ABOUT MIRACLES, MORE SKEPTICAL ABOUT SCRIPTURE

An increasing number of people today seem to be willing to accept the miracles described in Scripture while rejecting the moral witness of Scripture. Of course, the tendency to accept the parts of God's Word that please us while ignoring the portions we dislike is not new. That inclination is as old as sin. What has shifted over the past few decades has to do with which aspects of God's revelation seem most scandalous to those whose hearts are not submitted to God. At one time, the miracles described in Scripture seemed like the most difficult texts for people to trust. In response, defenders of the Christian faith focused on providing evidence that Jesus was the risen Lord, not merely a human teacher. "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," C. S. Lewis declared in the middle of the twentieth century. "But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

I am not suggesting that any of us should stop contending that Jesus was more than a great human teacher. Christians should persist in providing evidence for the living Lord and the miracles in Scripture. And yet, the miracles of Scripture may no longer be the aspect of Christian faith that seems the most scandalous. One result is that it is increasingly not enough to stop in our apologetics at anything less than the comprehensive authority of the entirety of Scripture.

According to a recent analysis of more than three decades of data, belief in miracles has increased in the United States, despite the rise of secularity. And yet, throughout the same era, people have grown more skeptical about the reliability of Scripture. A widespread rejection of biblical sexual ethics has been multiplying at the same time. People seem to have grown less skeptical about miracles but more skeptical about the Bible and its moral witness. Thus, in many Western contexts, it has become less offensive to confess that Jesus is the risen Lord than it is to declare that the cosmos created by Jesus is one in which gender does not change and same-sex marriages are not marriages at all.

If our defenses of the Christian faith never go beyond providing historical evidence for a miraculous event, we may be overlooking people's most pressing doubts about the faith,

The Christian Life Report

which have less to do with the miracles and more to do with the Scriptures and Christian morals. Every Christian should be able to give evidence for the historicity of Jesus's miracles and the resurrection, but we should never stop there. The lordship of the risen Jesus is inseparable from the truth and authority of God's written Word.

THE MIRACLE OF THE RESURRECTION AND THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

3

Modern defenders of the Christian faith have rightly emphasized the strength of the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. The apostolic eyewitnesses would have known if the resurrection of Jesus had been uncertain or untrue. These witnesses endured intense persecution for their claims about Jesus, and none of them changed their story. Since people will not typically suffer and die for a claim they know is a lie, their persistence in their profession all the way to the point of persecution and death provides strong evidence for the truth of the resurrection.

But these witnesses provided evidence for far more than the miracle of the resurrection.

The apostolic witnesses also linked the reality of the resurrection to the reliability of the written Word of God. Jesus did not merely die and rise again as a historical curiosity. According to one of the earliest Christian confessions of faith, Jesus died and returned to life "according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3–4). Simon Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost likewise linked the resurrection of Jesus with the Scriptures, declaring that this miracle fulfilled the words of a psalm: "You will not allow your faithful one to see decay" (Ps 16:10; Acts 2:31).

The reality of the resurrection was inseparable from the testimony of the Old Testament. What's more, the same early witnesses who wrote about the resurrection also described how Jesus himself insisted on the truth of these texts (Matt 12:38–39; 24:37–38; Luke 11:29–32; 17:2–627; John 6:32; 10:35). For Jesus, the truth-telling nature of God his Father guaranteed the truth-conveying nature of the Old Testament.

The truth of the New Testament is linked to the resurrection of Jesus, no less than the Old Testament. That is because every text in your New Testament originated with a Christ-commissioned eyewitness of the resurrection or with a close associate of one of these witnesses. Matthew's and John's Gospels derived from two witnesses within the initial band of disciples. John also penned three epistles that carry his name, as well as the book of Revelation. Mark wrote his Gospel based on Simon Peter's firsthand testimony about Jesus, and Peter himself wrote two epistles. Paul was commissioned by the risen Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus and produced thirteen letters addressed to churches and individuals. Although no one knows for certain who wrote the book of Hebrews, the writer was closely connected to Paul through Timothy (Heb 13:23). Luke, the author of

The Christian Life Report

the third Gospel and Acts, was one of Paul's close associates (Col 4:14; Phil 1:24). The authors of the epistles of James and Jude were among the half-brothers of Jesus who saw him alive and trusted him as their Lord (Acts 1:14; 1 Cor 15:7; Gal 1:19). All of these texts could be traced to Christ-commissioned witnesses of the resurrection, and they carried the authority of Jesus himself. Thus, Paul placed a teaching of Jesus from Luke's Gospel alongside a quotation from the Old Testament and treated both texts as Scripture (Luke 10:7; 1 Tim 5:18). Peter likewise grouped Paul's epistles with the Old Testament Scriptures (2 Pet 3:15–16). This pattern of recognizing divine authority in the apostolic writings persisted throughout the earliest generations of Christians. In the second century, a pastor named Serapion declared that his church received the writings of apostolic eyewitnesses "just as we receive Christ."

The resurrection produced Christ-commissioned witnesses, and these witnesses produced Spirit-inspired texts that were received as the words of Christ himself. Thus, the miracle of the resurrection can never be unhitched from the authority of the written Word of God. To follow the risen Lord Jesus is to submit to the absolute authority of the triune God as revealed in Holy Scripture. If anyone claims to follow Jesus but does not trust the texts Jesus trusted and commissioned, that person is not actually following Jesus at all. And that's the point I wanted to help the young woman in our church's student ministry to see.

DECLARING THE WHOLE TRUTH OF GOD'S WORD

I pause and pray silently before continuing my conversation. This young woman is deeply confused, but she is also a precious image of God whose life will last past the rise and fall of all the kingdoms of this earth. I want her to hear God's truth spoken not only with clarity but also with "gentleness and reverence" (1 Pet 3:16).

"You said you're open to following Jesus, but you're not ready to believe the Bible," I say. "Would you be willing to look with me at what Jesus believed about the Bible he knew?" And so we begin looking together at how Jesus loved and trusted the Scriptures.

Defenses of the Christian faith may start with the order of the cosmos or the historical truth of the resurrection or any number of other evidences, but our defenses should never end there. Until we declare the full truth and authority of God's written Word, our apologetic will always remain incomplete. What Christians confess regarding the Scriptures is simply—in the words of Sinclair Ferguson—that "the Father does not lie to his Son. The Son does not lie to the Spirit. The Spirit did not lie to the apostles ... and the apostles did not lie to us." Thus, the foundation of our defense is nothing more or less than the truth-telling character of God himself.

The Christian Life Report

Dr. Timothy Paul Jones is Vice President for Doctoral Studies and Chair of the Department of Apologetics, Ethics, and Philosophy. He has been the Professor of Christian Family Ministry since 2007. Before coming to Southern, he led churches in Missouri and Oklahoma as pastor and associate pastor. In 2016, the Evangelical Christian Publishing Association awarded Dr. Jones a Gold Medallion book of the year award for his book *How We Got the Bible*. He is married to Rayann and they have four daughters. Dr. Jones serves as one of the teaching pastors at the Midtown congregation of Sojourn Collective in Louisville, Kentucky.

© The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (2026). *Southern Seminary Magazine*, Spring 2026. Retrieved June 17, 2026.

<https://equip.sbts.edu/publications/magazine/magazine-type/magazine-toc-lead-story/you-cant-follow-jesus-if-you-dont-trust-his-word/>

NOTE: This post is in compliance with the Fair Use clause of the US Copyright Act of 1976 (17 U.S. Code § 107). The US Supreme Court has issued several major decisions clarifying and reaffirming the fair use doctrine since the 1980s, most recently in the 2021 decision *Google LLC v. Oracle America, Inc.*