

**WE BECOME WHAT WE BEHOLD:
THE SEARCH FOR SIGNIFICANCE & VALUE IN AN IMAGE-DRIVEN AGE:**

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In this digital age our young people are surrounded by imagery. But sadly, much of the imagery does not correspond to how things actually are. Thus, in an effort to embrace an identity that is provocative and popular, but consumer-centered and imaginary, many people strive to become what is impossible in order to find fulfillment, meaning, and purpose. But because these efforts are in vain, the emptiness within them remains. So, we will explore what this means and how Jesus Christ can meet our deepest needs for significance and value.

I. Introduction:

Problem 1: The Saturation of “Distorted Perfect” Imagery in our Western Culture:

- A. In our society we see visual images of physical beauty everywhere. We open the internet, unfold a paper, turn on the TV, pick up a magazine, look up at a billboard, or enter into a clothing store, and we see images of beautiful people who seem to have it all together physically. Cut, defined, and augmented in the right places; unblemished, tanned, and smooth; bright eyes, lustrous hair, and perfect lips; tall, skinny, and proportionally curved. These images surround us as we go about living our lives tackling the difficult, facing the mundane, and hoping for relief from the daily grind of responsibilities. There is hardly a place we can go where these images do not bombard us.
- B. Our culture idolizes beauty. To be sure, this is not a recent trend. Our human civilization has always prized physical beauty. From Joseph in Egypt to Queen Cleopatra; from Aphrodite to Helen of Troy; From European Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine to Marilyn Monroe; From fictional characters like Wonder Woman and Emma Frost to certain *Anime* characters Light Yagami from *Death Note*, Pegasus from *Yu-Gi-Oh*, Howl the Wizard from *Howl's Moving Castle*, and video game characters like Ezio Auditore, Master Chief, Zelda, and Laura Croft-people love to be associated with physical beauty. This is so evident with our culture's fascination with “Brangelina.”
- C. When you are with a beautiful or handsome person, you will often find others watching her or him, carefully soaking in all the details. Even though naturally beautiful or strikingly handsome people may tell you that their natural appearance has brought on a certain *mass* of troubles, trials, and temptations that other people do not have to experience, some of us long to trade places with them-regardless. We say to ourselves, “It can't be that bad!”
- D. But what do you do with images that are “distortedly perfected” and do not correspond to how things actually are? Do you honestly think people look like that perfect? So many young girls look at these magazine pictures and are so captured by what they see that they strive to become what is not real. Or let me put it this way: Have you ever found yourself trying to identify with a particular image or identity and are eventually crushed when those false expectations do not materialize? Have you ever wondered why those expectations were not

fulfilled? Could it be that those images are distortions of the way things actually are? Have you ever been misled by an image? Did you feel betrayed? Was it dishonest?

- E. But often associated, combined, and connected to these images of beautiful people are objects of success. From shampoo to sports-cars we are bombarded with the notion that accomplishments, happiness, popularity, and success are found in these two relationships: physical beauty and materialism. What I mean by materialism is "*things, things, and things.*" Thus, we buy, hoping we will "look" successful even if we have come to the conclusion that we will "never" be successful.
- F. So, what does this bombardment by all of these beautiful images of success do to us? These images foster within ourselves a discontentment about *who* we are-no matter if we are financially poor, living on paycheck to paycheck, or are even financially successful.
- G. See, these images suggest that we are not right; there is something wrong with us! We look in the mirror after a day barraged with visual images and the discontentment we have with ourselves re-emerges to the forefront of our minds. Our cheekbones aren't high enough, our nose is too large, our eyes too small, our body frame not symmetrically balanced and proportioned, our teeth aren't right, our hair is thinning out, and this thing called fat seems to collect in unwanted places.
- H. But as we continue to watch the late night infomercials with all of its secret tips to conquer our bags, sags, and drags, follow the activities of celebrities, and see and hear about "*who is who*" and "*who has what,*" some of us feel motivated *within* to alter, change, or even forsake our purposes, values, and become someone else altogether. Like cinema, these images tinker inside our brain; they steal upon us at the oddest times and change not only how we look at the world, but also "*how we move, live, and have our becoming.*" In essence, they foster in us to change who we are, what we do, and what we love. See, marketing-type images that are brushed, cleansed from impurities, and augmented, are designed to foster certain affections, to govern certain pursuits, and cultivate certain passions. As you indulge the invitations, you do change, but perhaps in ways you never anticipated.
- I. For some of us we find ourselves buying particular products believing that it holds the potential promise that we can become someone better or perhaps someone else altogether-even though there is no real connection between the person of beauty and the product he or she represents. Just because a beautiful actress like Jennifer Aniston or an actor superstar like Hugh Jackman endorses a product does not mean that you will look like that person. There is more too humanity than mere physical appearance.
- J. Moreover, because of such vices as peer pressure, pride, jealousy, ambitions, and certain insecurities, we will even cast an image of ourselves to others in ways that do not actually correspond to reality. Using social utilities like Facebook we project ourselves to others in some of the most dishonest ways in order to gain "street cred," legitimacy, and popularity points. We edit or modify our "pics" and use certain hip words to describe our "coolness"

and protect our “interests.” Yet the irony is that we demand authenticity from others while we suppress what is actually true about ourselves.

- K. Certain images *influence* our behavior, *infect* the way we look at the world, and *inflame* certain tendencies within for economic gain. In fact, images can improve social standing among others, help protect certain establishments, and even be used to solidify or redirect the moral structures, direction, and vision of our society. But the imagery we create and the imagery that we “spin” can be dishonest, duplicitous, and oppressive when we framing them in such a way that they manipulate our insecurities, misrepresent who we are, and indulge our appetites. Moreover, when we encounter this kind of imagery, three particular problems can arise.¹
- a. First, certain imagery can actually harmful to our well-being (e.g., pornography). How? Images express falsehoods about important matters such as reality, moral behavior, and what it means to be human, confusion, misunderstandings, neglect, and manipulation can emerge. For example, removing every flaw and augmenting or enhancing certain features of the human body can generate certain unwarranted insecurities in and among young people. They compare themselves to such images and come to the conclusion that they will never measure up while never seriously realizing that these images are distortions of reality.
 - b. Second, images can be harmful in the attitudes and dispositions that they cultivate (e.g., how we look at and treat others). This is evidenced for example in many of the Nazi posters before and during World War II fostering such horrific evils as anti-Semitism.
 - c. Imagery can inflame the “darker side” of our personhood, hindering the development of a character of excellence, both intellectually and emotionally. This is evidences, for example, in pornographic images.

But if the problem of being showered by distorted perfect imagery in our Western culture is not enough, we have another serious problem at work. This problem directly feeds into the power the images have over us.

II. Problem 2: The Emptiness Within: The Search for Significance and Value:

- A. Many of us long to be loved, to be accepted, to be valued, to have purpose, meaning, and a destiny worthwhile. We realize that there is a void within, an incompleteness that runs deep. We move from relationship to relationship, home to home, friend to friend, hobby to hobby, job to job, school to school, looking but never finding the heart’s desire of true and lasting fulfillment. Some of us have actually given up on our marriages and promising careers because this discontentment seems to plague our very footsteps. Others of us turn to alcohol, drugs, and licentiousness only to discover that these addictions have robbed the best parts of us and hurt the people we love the most.

¹ *Aesthetics: The Key Thinkers*, edited by Alessandro Giovannelli (New York: Continuum, 2012), 11.

- B. Let me put it this way: There is something deeper going on here than being bombarded by images! Yet the images feed into something greater that is going on within the deepest parts of our personhood. Things are not right within and we know it! We can see it, hear it, feel it, and taste it. We earnestly desire contentment, peace, and satisfaction. We long to be loved and accepted. We want our lives to have meaning, purpose, significance, and value. We hunger for meaning. We yearn for hope.
- C. We realize that we are empty and have come to the popular conclusion from the constant images that we see, that if we can become what we see in these images, achieve a perfect body, or become an object of physical desire, then we will know what it means to be complete, to be fulfilled, and live worry-free. I'm only a six-pack away from fulfillment! So, the crunches and sit-ups continue and continue and continue.
- D. Moreover, some of us have it in our mind that if we can look like this celebrity, then all of our material desires will also be met. As depicted in many popular movies like *Pretty Woman*, we day dream of a good-looking person swooping down and giving us the desires of our heart. But even with the dream of rescue from our lack of permanent fulfillment, a dream is a dream. Even if the dream does come true, many of us sadly come to the realization that the grass is not greener-even on this side of the community. As a result, the emptiness within reemerges and we ask ourselves, "Is this all there is? Is this the best life can get?"
- E. You've heard the stories. You perhaps have even talked to those who seem to have it all. They are strikingly beautiful. They have the power, they have the material goods, and they have all that our society deems successful. Yet, they cry within, hoping if not begging for deliverance from the angst.
- F. This theme of discontentment is powerfully expressed in a hit song that received universal acclaim by U2, "*I still haven't found what I'm looking for*":

Consider a portion of the lyrics from this song:

I have climbed the highest mountains
I have run through the fields
Only to be with you
Only to be with you

I have run I have crawled
I have scaled these city walls
These city walls
Only to be with you
But I still haven't found
What I'm looking for
But I still haven't found
What I'm looking for

I have kissed honey lips
Felt the healing in the fingertips
It burned like fire
This burning desire
I have spoke with the tongue of angels
I have held the hand of a devil
It was one empty night
I was cold as a stone
But I still haven't found
What I'm looking for
But I still haven't found
What I'm looking for

III. Probing the Two-Fold Problem: Distorted Perfected Imagery and Existential Emptiness:

- A. U2 poignantly expresses what many of us are experiencing and have experienced for many, many years. Combining both the images that affect us and the already emptiness within, consider the following:
1. Are you content? Are you satisfied with the way you are designed to be? Or do you seek to reflect or even absorb the identity of others? Why do you dress the way you do? While I think dressing fashionably is fine, what I am asking is *why* do you dress fashionably? Is there a lack of contentment within? Are you trying to be someone that you are not? ***If your circumstances were to never change, would you intimately know contentment?***
 2. Are you looking for hope? You look at yourself in the mirror, you ponder the costly mistakes you have made, and regret wells up within and you ask yourself, "Is there really any real hope for me?" To be honest, you really are looking for change you can believe in! You are looking for peace, wholeness, and redemption. You ask yourself, ***"Does hope even exist for someone like me?"***
 3. Are you unhappy about who you are and what you have become? Perhaps you were raised in a dysfunctional home where the people who were responsible over you repeatedly said, *"I love you but I don't like you."* Or perhaps you are unhappy about how you have turned out given the all the negative repercussions from the poor choices you have made. You have been changed in the most unexpected ways and you do not like what you see. You ask yourself, ***"Will I ever be happy?"***
 4. You, like the rest of us, long to be loved by others. But have you come to the conclusion that if you look like the images that our prized by society, then people will finally cherish, love, and respect you? Will this type of love really satisfy your deepest longings to love? Is not our society fickle? Consider how fast our culture turns on celebrities when they make a mistake or are no longer receiving the

spotlight? *Do you hunger for a love that always has your best interest at heart? **"Will somebody ever love me for who I am?"***

5. Do you seek to become like the images you see in order to show others that you can look like that or even better! Are you exhausted or disillusioned from such pursuits? Sadly, are you truly aware that you are often competing with images that do not correspond to reality but have actually been altered by computer graphic imagery (CGI)? ***"Do you realize you are competing with that which is not actually real?"***
6. Do you feel like you have never been truly valued for who you are. Ignored and perhaps mocked by others, do you find yourself chronically alone? So, accepting that notion that there is something significantly wrong with you, do you try to become someone or something else instead of flourishing the way God made you? Do you ever pretend you are someone else? Do you wish you were someone else? ***"Do you feel alone?"***
7. For some of you who have been cut off from the fast pace of our society, were you raised to think we you were okay? But ever since you stepped out into the large world, barraged by all this imagery, has your understanding of who you are began to erode? Do you find yourself questioning who you are? Do you feel like all that you once understood about yourself and your relation to this world is lost in obscurity; it was all a dream, a naivety? ***"Do you no longer know who you are?"***
8. Many people despise who they are once they see what others possess. Instead of having feelings of sympathy, they resent what others are and what they possess. If you are not careful, resentment generates bitterness. ***Do you struggle with jealousy? Do you dislike yourself? Has bitterness found expression in your life?***
9. Some of us possess a disposition of a follower. We naturally follow what others... even marketing schemes... thinking that is this way we are to live; we know no better. Thus, mindless about who we are, we just go along, and do whatever the herd is doing. Have you ever thought about the relationship between yourself and the images that that might be shaping your life? What do your surroundings say about you? ***"Do you find yourself following but never asking?"***
10. Does it bother you to see anyone else receiving more attention than you? Do you find yourself projecting an image to others that always puts the attention back on you? ***Why do you have need to call attention to yourself? What does this say about your life and the emptiness you have within yourself?***
11. Some of us long for power in order to fill the void within. We desire to lead the herd in our sphere of influence. You don't just merely want to be cool, you also seek power. Thus, if you look like some of the images you see, people will not only listen to you; they will follow you. You will be the alpha-male you have always dreamed!

Why do you have self-deify yourself? Are you trying to fill the void within with the power to control and manipulate others?

12. Realizing how far you are from what is beautiful, hip, and cool, have you come to the realization that the gap between who we are and the images you see is too big to cross. So, you sink into a “woe- is-me” syndrome. **Are you depressed about who you are? Do you even think real change is possible?**
 13. Lastly, do you strive to achieve beauty and with every victory you achieve, you want others to know it. So, you wear the tight-fitting shirts, curl up the jeans, you do pushups and crunches before you go out at night. Always primping and looking into every mirror, do you feed off of the words of affirmation you receive? Do you find yourself comparing yourself with those who are less than what you are! Are you prideful? Do you realize that pride is often rooted in terrible insecurity? **Are you afraid to let others know who you really are?**
- B. I take it that these images *bombard, aggravate, and inflames* the void, the emptiness, and the longing that we have for lasting completeness, fulfillment, and satisfaction. Even if we were to not live in an image-driven society, I am confident that the emptiness we have within would continue, though our pursuit of it might not be so sensual. In times past people thought contentment would be found in such activities as a bloody conquest, a life of seafaring adventure, or worshipping pagan gods with lacerations, self-denials, or blood sacrifices.
- C. In sum:
1. We have people who believe they are ugly and have come to the conclusion that they will never become beautiful as the images that surround them. The gap is too wide for them to achieve beauty, and thus, significance and value. They look at these images, which many of them do not actually correspond to reality since they have been digitally enhanced, and conclude that they will never arrive. Discontentment reigns supreme; emptiness remains.
 2. We also have people who attempt to bridge the gap of who they are with what they do in order to achieve value and significance. Still contentment evades them even with every step of success they achieve.
 3. We have beautiful people who seem to have it all together in the world’s eyes. Yet, if brutally honest, many of them cry out for lasting fulfillment. So many beautiful people are unfulfilled. So many beautiful people are used by others-people are feeding off of them like vampires for selfish gain.

IV. Why do we become what we behold?

- A. Image-driven society, with all of its unspoken visuals, has been and is shaping our understanding of what success really means. How is this possible? I submit to you that there

is a bilateral relationship between us and our environment. We feed on our environment while our environment feeds on us like an unborn baby is affected by the health of the mother while at the same time the baby affects the health of the mother. Thus, because many of us, especially young people, are surrounded by these types of images, bombarded with them on a daily basis, our purposes, pursuits, and values are being shaped. Why? Typically it is for economic exploitation. For some it is not merely economic exploitation; it is also because there are people who create these images, seeing themselves as agents of cultural change. So, they seek to shape your life in order for you to pursue what they want you to pursue or become something they want you to become.

- B. So, we absorb, perhaps unaware, and for some, especially young girls and boys, unintentionally, these images to the extent that they shape our very identities. Let me put it this way, no one is immune to one's surroundings. Whatever surrounds you will affect you. You live in a filthy home. You will be affected by filth. If you are bombarded with images of beautiful people distorted by computer graphic imagery, your purposes, pursuits, and values are not merely stimulated to change, but new ones are meant to be embraced. I suspect many of the movers and shakers of society think of us as "useful idiots."

V. What is the Answer to this two-fold Problem?

- A. But even within this bilateral relationship between us and our environment a choice can be made, an alternative can be given, and hope can be rekindled to find that which will bring completion, fulfillment, and satisfaction within the deepest reaches of our person.
- B. Said differently, I would like to invite you to explore your own moments of joy and seriously question the source of your deepest longings.
1. During the past two hundred years or so we have been told to interpret these longings as nothing more than primitive, tribal emotions or psychological wishes.
 2. But I submit to you that this view lacks explanatory power. Dr. Lou Markos puts this problem this way: "But why and how could unconscious nature produce in us a conscious desire for something that transcends the natural world?"²
 3. Rather, as St. Augustine discovered many years ago as recorded in his biography, *Confessions*, I contend that God created us to be in intimate fellowship with Him. The void within is a spiritual problem that demands a spiritual answer. This view possesses existential relevance because when we turn to knowing God as the solution, we discover by experience and by His Word a fullness that surpasses but does not contradict our understanding.
 4. C. S. Lewis originally described these longings for God as an argument by desire:³

² Dr. Louis Markos handout, "C. S. LEWIS: APOLOGIST FOR THE 21ST CENTURY." See www.loumarkos.com for this handout and other incredible resources.

- a. Just as the fact that we experience thirst, food, and physical intimacy is proof that we are creatures for whom the drinking of water, eating food, and having physical intimacy is natural, so the fact that we desire an object that our natural realm cannot offer implies the existence of a supernatural realm.
 - b. This desire does not guarantee that we will achieve this other realm, but it does claim that we are creatures who are capable of achieving it. In fact, I agree with C. S. Lewis and Dr. Markos that we are designed to spend eternity with God.
- C. The offer to fill this reality of spiritual incompleteness is not rooted in an activity. It is not filled with conditions. No demands need to be made to qualify in order for the void to be permanently filled within. The void is not filled by doing but by knowing the right Person. I submit to you that Person is no other than Jesus Christ, who is God, who died on the cross for your sins and rose bodily from the dead. Scripture presents Him as that Redeemer. It is in His person and His works where significance and value is found. Since He is the Son of God, the image of the invisible God, we do not have to become something in order to be accepted. Jesus accepts us as we are. We do not have to achieve something in order to be fulfilled. Instead, Jesus achieved something for us on the cross and offers it to us freely. Jesus not only accepts us for who we are, but offers us a joy, a peace, and fulfillment that is God-centered, not man centered, not-marketing centered, and not-peer pressure centered. Jesus will not exploit you. Instead Jesus offers you a peace that surpasses understanding and the only condition for such peace is trust and trust alone in Him for salvation by believing that He is God who died on the cross for your sins and rose bodily from the dead. God who knows every mistake you have ever made and will make, fully and accurately aware of every sin you have ever committed, stands to offer you the gift of eternal life. He will free you from yourself. He will liberate you from bondage to this world. He will emancipate you with a love that is so intense that it will surpass anything you have ever experienced in this life. Jesus stands to offer significance and value apart from every frailty, every appetite, and every propensity you have.
1. One zealot in the New Testament, Saul, who once opposed Christ and all that He stood for as evidenced in his murder of Christian, experienced the joy, the fullness, that peace that flooded His soul. Saul became the Apostle Paul. Out of gratitude for the undeserved favor he received, he concludes in Philippians that to live is Christ; to die is gain. With Him, He will preserve you. With Him you will experience the goodness you have longed to intimately know. God the Father will delight in you!
 2. But this is not something just found in the New Testament in his prayer to the God of the Bible. Listen to the words of David found in Psalm 16:11, a psalm that mirrors the promise of the Messiah who will take the sins of the world upon Himself in Isaiah 52:13-53:12:

³ Ibid.

You will show me the path of life; in your presence is fullness of joy; At your right hand are pleasures forevermore. ~ Psalm 16:11

3. Thus, when you place your trust in Christ, you do not have to strive to become something to calm the storms of emptiness within. He fills the void with His presence. It is a joy that conquers all.
- d. In the same song, "I still haven't found what I'm looking for," Bono sings:

I believe when the Kingdom comes
Then all the colors will bleed into one
Bleed into one
But yes I'm still running.
You broke the bonds
You loosened the chains
You carried the cross
Of my shame
Of my shame
You know I believed it
- e. Bono sings about how know earthly desire will ever completely fill the void within. But God has demonstrated his love with grace through the sacrifice of Christ who carried the cross. The bonds are broken. The chains are loosened. So, God broke what has tied us to this world and liberated us to eternal life. The only condition for this type of satisfaction is faith alone in Christ alone.
- f. But how do we know that Jesus is God? In an effort to address this question, please consider the following two questions:
 1. First, for the sake of argument, what expectations would you have if God became a man?⁴
 - a. Have an utterly unique entrance into human history.
 - b. Be without evil and sin.
 - c. Use supernatural powers to do great and noble deeds.
 - d. Live perfectly than any human who has ever lived.
 - e. Speak the greatest words ever spoken.
 - f. Have an enduring and universal influence.
 - g. Satisfy the spiritual hunger in humanity
 - h. Overcome humanity's most pervasive and feared enemy-physical death.
 - i. Remove Sin and Evil itself.
 2. And second, what determines when an event may be termed "historical"? When are we justified in concluding that something actually occurred in history? Are there

⁴ This portion is adapted from Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 287.

ways to confirm or validate that we have arrived at a sufficient amount of evidence to declare something to have actually happened. How can these conclusions be known with any degree of assurance or certainty? I contend that history is the knowledge of the past based upon testimony.⁵

- a. What are the tools used by historians? To be sure there is not unanimous agreement (e.g., revisionists...people for example who rewrite history for various reasons, e.g., The European Holocaust never happened). Nevertheless, here are some standard tools that have been used by those who take seriously the science and art of historical methodology (historiography). In fact, we are going to build a case from the historical nature of Christian events based upon what we call a “minimal facts” approach. The “minimal facts” are facts that either are accepted or recognized by critics or facts that would be ridiculous for critics to deny.
- b. Essentially there are four distinguishable aspects of historical evidence historians typically use to learn about past events: (1) apparent memories, (2) the testimony of others (either oral or written (e.g., eyewitnesses, primary and secondary documents), (3) physical traces left behind that may point to the event in question (e.g., archeology), and (4) the application of scientific principles or the application of critical interaction.
- c. The historian gathers data from these above sources and then applies an array of criteria to help him or her to ascertain what actually occurred in the past (to be sure, certain criteria is considered more valuable than others):
 1. Early evidence principle: Early evidence is needed for a case to be well-established.
 2. Eyewitness principle: Eyewitnesses of that event is preferred (“best relevant evidence” or “the rule of immediacy.”).
 3. Multiple independent sources significantly strengthen the case.
 4. Details are enhanced by the principle of embarrassment, surprise, or negative reports whereby the writer (who has a friendly vested interested) makes painful remarks concerning an event, person, and/or himself/herself.
 5. Antagonistic principle: Person or party recognizes the event or person investigated.

⁵ This portion is indebted to Gary R. Habermas: *The Resurrection of Jesus: An Apologetic* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980; Lanham: University Press of America, 1984); *Ancient Evidence for the Life of Jesus: Historical Records of His Death and Resurrection* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Publishers, 1984); with Antony Flew, *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead? The Resurrection Debate*, edited by Terry L. Miethe (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1988); *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Joplin: College Press, 1996); “The Resurrection Appearances of Jesus,” in *In Defense of Miracles*, edited by R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), pp. 262-275; “Resurrection Claims in Non-Christian Religions,” *Religious Studies*, Volume 25 (1989), pp. 167-177; “Knowing that Jesus’ Resurrection Occurred,” *Faith and Philosophy*, Volume 2 (July, 1985), pp. 295-302; “Jesus’ Resurrection and Contemporary Criticism,” *Criswell Theological Review*, two parts, Volume 4.1 (Fall, 1989), pp. 159-174 and Volume 4.2 (Fall, 1989), pp. 373-385], “Historical Epistemology, Jesus’ Resurrection, the Shroud of Turin” (Gary Habermas: 1999).

6. Historical coherence principle: The event coheres with other attested historical events, events, persons, and situational setting.
 7. Scrutinization principle: Finally, the explanation proposed is scrutinized in order to see if the explanation sheds light on other known phenomena or investigated claims.
3. Coupled with this criteria to examine historical data, the minimal approach places importance upon, first and most of all, remarkably or extraordinarily well-attested documents on several distinct grounds and, second, whether the material is classified as historical by the majority of critical scholars.
 4. Additionally, let's keep in mind a complimentary and helpful tool offered by the atheist David Hume. In order to test the credibility of witnesses, Hume writes, "We entertain suspicion concerning any matter of fact when the witnesses contradict each other, when they are but few or of a doubtful character, when they have an interest in what they affirm, when they deliver their testimony with hesitation, or with too violent asseverations [declarations]." ⁶ We can outline Hume's concerns into four questions: ⁷
 - a. Do the witnesses contradict each other?
 - b. Are there a sufficient number of witnesses?
 - c. Were the witnesses truthful?
 - d. Were they non-prejudicial?

Thus, let's be mindful of this skeptic's criteria as we use the minimal approach to demonstrate the historical person and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

5. Having examined the nature or "how to do" historical inquiry, let's study the evidence for the person and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ using the same criteria historians use.
6. Romans 10:9-10: *"...that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."*
7. 1 Corinthians 15:1-7: *"Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you-unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the*

⁶ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by Chas W. Hendel (New York: Liberal Arts, 1955), 120.

⁷ Norman Geisler, *Baker's Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 779.

greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. 7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. 8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time."

8. Exceptionally Early Evidence & Contemporary Eyewitnesses:

a. 1 Corinthians 15:1-7: Scholars generally date Paul's reception of this report from A.D. 33-38. Since it is widely accepted by critical and conservative scholars that 1 Corinthians was written by A.D. 55 or 56. This is less than a quarter century after the crucifixion in 33. Interestingly, Paul speaks of more than 250 eyewitnesses who were still alive when he wrote 1 Cor. 15:6. Specifically mentioned are the twelve apostles and James the brother of Jesus.

1. The book repeatedly claims to be written by Paul (1:1, 12-17, 3:4, 6, 22; 16:21).
2. There are parallels with the Book of Acts.
3. Paul states that 500 people had seen Christ with most still alive.
4. The contents harmonize with what has been learned about Corinth during that era.
5. There is also outstanding external evidence attesting to an early dating of 1 Corinthians:

- a. Clement of Rome's Epistle to the Corinthians (A.D. 95)
- b. The Epistle of Barnabas (A.D. 130-138).
- c. Shepherd of Hermas (A.D. 115-140).
- d. Nearly 600 quotations of 1 Corinthians from early church father such as Irenaeus (A.D. 130-202), Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-215), and Tertullian (A.D.160-220).

b. The early attestation of the Book of Acts presents a very early testimony regarding the death & resurrection of Jesus Christ. If Acts was written approx. A.D. 60-64, and Luke was written before Acts, then Luke-Acts were written less than forty years of the death of Jesus. This is also contemporary to the generation who witnessed the events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. In fact, this is precisely what Doctor Luke claims in the prologue to his Gospel in Luke 1:1-4:

1 Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, 3 it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.

c. Additionally, if Acts was written by Luke, a dear companion of the apostle Paul, we have a historian who was closely associated with the apostles who participated in the events reported.

9. Multiple, independent sources for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ:

- a. Gospel of Matthew (Approx. A.D. 50-60).
 - b. Gospel of Mark (Approx. A.D. 64, yet prior to A.D. 70).
 - c. Gospel of John (Approx. AD. 85-95).
 - d. Early Patristic Sources (A.D. 70-150).
 - e. Anti-Nicene Patristic Fathers (A.D. 150-300).
 - f. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers A.D. 300-430).
10. The patristic citations of Scripture give overwhelming support to the existence of the twenty-seven authoritative books of the New Testament canon. Second, the quotations are so numerous and widespread that if no manuscripts of the New Testament were extant, the New Testament could be reproduced from the writings of the early Fathers alone. These evidences account for an incredible amount of early manuscript evidence: AD 70-430.
11. Ancient Roman Sources:
- a. Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus (A.D. 55-120) who lived through the reigns of over a half dozen Roman emperors.
 - b. Seutonius, who was chief secretary to Emperor Hadrian (reign from 117-138).
 - c. Historian Flavius Josephus (A.D. 37/38-97), a Jewish revolutionary who changed allegiance to the Romans in the Jewish revolt in order to have his life, worked under Emperor Vespasian.
 - d. Thallus (A.D. 52).
 - e. Pliny the Younger, a Roman author and administrator under the Emperor Trajan approx. A.D. 112.
 - f. Hadrian (ca. 265-339).
12. Jewish sources:
- a. Talmud (compiled between A.D. 70-200).
 - b. Toledoth Jesus, an anti-Christian document, compiled in the 5th century.
13. Gentile sources:
- a. Lucian of Samosata, 2nd Century Greek writer.
14. Mara Bar-Serapion. A Syrian, Mara Bara-Serapion wrote a letter to his son Serapion sometime between the late 1st and early 3rd centuries.
15. Gnostic sources:
- a. The Gospel of Truth, second century book written by Valentinus in AD. 135-160.
 - b. The Apocryphon of John, a 2nd Century work.
 - c. The Gospel of Thomas (A.D. 140-200).

- d. The Treatise on Resurrection, a late 2nd Century work.
16. Other sources:
- a. Acts of Pontius Pilate (before A.D. 150).
 - b. Phlegon, a freed slave of Emperor Hadrian (ca. 80).
17. Therefore, Jesus' appearances are recorded in more than one source.
18. Embarrassing confessions:
- a. Gospels repeatedly assert that Jesus' friends such as Thomas did not believe He had been resurrected despite the testimonies of those who had seen Him. Their unbelief persisted until after He had appeared to them.
19. Antagonistic Testimony:
- a. Antagonistic testimony is given by Jewish sources that confess the empty tomb, even though they try to explain the data naturalistically.
 - b. Conversion of Saul to Paul.
 - c. The brother James.
20. Critical Interaction:
21. Realizing that historical data must be subjected to critical interaction:
- a. Resurrection is not best explained on purely natural grounds.
 - b. Initially, the effort to dismiss the resurrection because of its incredibility is before the evidence is assessed is presumptuous.
 - c. If it is even possible that God exists, such an event is also possible, no matter how unlikely it may seem.
22. No one hypothesis is capable of explaining all of the data.
23. Therefore: A strong defense for the person and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is very well substantiated by the minimal historical facts method alone. We are able to defend the historicity of Jesus Christ by appealing to remarkable and well-attested documents from multiple, independent sources that are both friendly and antagonistic. By using criteria for historical accuracy that is recognized by leading historians for any historical account, we have been able to perform two major apologetic tasks:
- a. Refute major naturalistic hypotheses;

- b. Provide powerful evidences for the person and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

VI. Conclusion:

- A. Here's the bottom line. Only God Himself fully satisfies our deepest longings. That statement should make us yearn for God even more. The reason why is simple. God originally designed us to be in fellowship with Him (Genesis 1-2). So, like the U2 song suggests, no earthly pleasure will ever satisfy you. Rather, earthly pleasures hold you in bondage. Sure, false pleasures may offer you solutions and offer temporary relief and release, but they were never designed to fulfill what you were originally designed to be, that is, to be in intimate fellowship with the God of the universe. You cannot fill an immaterial, spiritual void with a material object or physical activity.
- B. Even as a believer in Jesus Christ, when you are not in intimate fellowship with God, you will experience conviction, unrest, and dissatisfaction until you return to Him with confession (1 John 1:9) and repentance (Revelation 2-3). Once you intimacy with God is restored, your joy will be full.
- C. If nothing expect God fully satisfies, then what about all other things such as relationships, family, church, vocation, studies, jobs, dreams, etc. are they worthless? No, they are not necessarily worthless if they are good, honorable, and noble to God and before others (Ecclesiastes 3:12-13; Philippians 4:8). But what they do is point us, if not sharpen our focus on one specific truth: ultimate satisfaction is only found in the God of the Bible.
- D. The satisfaction we experience now knowing Christ will only become more rapturous when we are fully in His presence without the capacity to sin. After coming to Christ and experiencing His fullness we develop a new longing. This fresh desire expresses itself with exclamations like "I want more of you, God!" Like being separated from those you love the most, you earnestly desire to be in the presence of our precious God. So, as the years go by both intimately walking with our beloved Savior and experiencing the frailties and troubles of this depraved and dying world, our yearnings for heaven become more and more intense. While we tread on this earth in our unredeemed bodies, the satisfaction we experience now as believers who intimately know Jesus Christ is only a foretaste of what we will experience before Him in His heavenly presence (Revelation 21-22). Only then will our yearnings be complete when we reach our heavenly home and kneel before the One who sits on His glorious throne (Revelation 4-5).
- E. Therefore, while you cannot eliminate the bombardment of unwarranted and harmful imagery you face, you can come to grips with the biblical truth that your completion, fulfillment, and satisfaction is exclusively found in Christ alone by faith alone. God can empower you to give up the desire, which is an exercise in futility, to strive to embrace an identity that is provocative and popular, but altogether consumer-centered and imaginary. In fact, God invites you to experience His best if you will center your attention upon Him who is utterly beautiful and realistically perfect; the God of the Bible has committed Himself

to your true good. The only condition to experience His very best in the “now” and for all eternity is to place your trust in Him for salvation.