

Introduction:

Greenleaf, one of the principal founders of the Harvard Law School, originally set out to disprove the biblical testimony concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He was certain that a careful examination of the internal witness of the Gospels would dispel all the myths at the heart of Christianity. But this legal scholar came to the conclusion that the witnesses were reliable, and that the resurrection did in fact happen. Mr. Greenleaf studies the four Gospels and focused on their eyewitness testimony. Our faith depends on the eyewitnesses of Christ's resurrection.

The Testimony of The Four Evangelists

"In examining the evidence of the Christian religion, it is essential to the discovery of truth that we bring to the investigation a mind freed, as far as possible, from existing prejudice, and open to conviction. There should be a readiness, on our part, to investigate with candor to follow the truth wherever it may lead us, and to submit, without reserve or objection, to all the teachings of this religion, if it be found to be of divine origin. "There is no other entrance," says Lord Bacon, "to the kingdom of man, which is founded in the sciences, than to the kingdom of heaven, into which no one can enter but in the character of a little child."

"Christianity does not profess to convince the perverse and headstrong, to bring irresistible evidence to the daring and profane, to vanquish the proud scorner, and afford evidences from which the careless and perverse cannot possibly escape. This might go to destroy man's responsibility. All that Christianity professes, is to propose such evidences as may satisfy the meek, the tractable, the candid, the serious inquirer."

"The foundation of our religion is a basis of fact--the fact of the birth, ministry, miracles, death, resurrection by the Evangelists as having actually occurred, within their own personal knowledge. Our religion,

then, rests on the credit due to these witnesses. Are they worthy of implicit belief, in the matters which they relate? This is the question, in all human tribunals, in regard to persons testifying before them; and we propose to test the veracity of these witnesses, by the same rules and means which are there employed.”

“In the absence of circumstances which generate suspicion, every witness is to be presumed credible, until the contrary is shown; the burden of impeaching his credibility lying on the objector.”

The key question: Is their testimony credible?

1. Honesty - Here they are entitled to the benefit of the general course of human experience, that men ordinarily speak the truth, when they have no prevailing motive or inducement to the contrary.
2. Ability - of a witness to speak the truth, depends on the opportunities which he has had for observing the fact, the accuracy of his powers of discerning, and the faithfulness of his memory in retaining the facts, once observed and known.
3. Numbers and consistency -
4. Conformity with experience
5. Coincidence of their testimony with collateral and contemporaneous facts and circumstances.

I) Honest

A) People will tell the truth when it benefits them.

1. Dishonest people will lie when it benefits them.
2. But honest people will tell the truth no matter the benefit or cost to them.

B) Did the eyewitnesses lie for personal gain? Did they pay a high cost for their testimony?

1. *So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. **Acts 4:18***
2. *“Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!” **29** But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men. **Acts 5:28-29***
3. *But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. **8** Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ **Philippians 3:7-8***
4. Looking at their testimony we see they paid a price for their testimony and must conclude they were honest men.

“It would also have been irreconcilable with the fact that they were good men. But it is impossible to read their writings, and not feel that we are conversing with men eminently holy, and of tender consciences, with men acting under an abiding sense of the presence and omniscience of God, and of their accountability to him, living in his fear, and walking in his ways.”.

II) Ability

A) The ability of a witness to speak the truth, depends on the opportunities which he has had for observing the fact, the accuracy of his powers of discerning, and the faithfulness of his memory in retaining the facts, once observed and known.

1. Were they in the position to have seen these events?
2. Did they recall the events concerning the resurrection.

B) Did these men have the ability to be eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Christ

1. Peter - **16** *For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. 17* *For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." 18* *And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. 2*
Peter 1:16-18
2. John's testimony - *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life 1 John 1:1*
3. Matthew was trained, by his calling, to habits of severe investigation and suspicious scrutiny; and Luke's profession demanded an exactness of observation equally close and searching. The other two evangelists, it has been well remarked, were as much too unlearned to forge the story of their Master's Life, as these were too learned and acute to be deceived by any imposture.

III) Number and Consistency

A) Two facts about number and consistency

1. The more people who see and event the more likely the event occurred.
2. The more people who see and event the more likely different facts will emerge.

B) The four evangelist all assert.

1. They saw Jesus, he spoke to them, after His death, and resurrection.

*And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!" So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me." **Matthew 28:9-10***

*Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. ¹⁵ And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. ¹⁶ He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned **Mark 16:14-16***

³⁶ Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, "Peace to you." ³⁷ But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit. ³⁸ And He said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." ⁴⁰ When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. ⁴¹ But while they still did

not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, "Have you any food here?"⁴² So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb.⁴³ And He took it and ate in their presence.

Luke 24:36-43

Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you."²⁰ When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. **John 20:19-20**

2. **1 Corinthians 15** says Jesus appeared to over 500 people at one time.

IV) Conformity with Experience

A) These witnesses testify of observing miraculous events.

1. Events which are hard to believe but neither the less happened – Jesus walking on water, turning water into wine, various healings, feeding of thousands with a few loaves of bread and a few fish, etc.

When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you."⁶ And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts,⁷ "Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Mark 2:5-7...¹² *Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"*

Mark 2:12

2. These men had the ability to perform miracles.

But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, ¹⁶ saying, "What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. Acts 4:15-16

B) The miracles came from a source (God) for a purpose (confirm the word of God).

V) Coincidence

A) The strength of the testimony itself

1. False witnesses will not give a lot of details.
2. A true witness will tell all they know to be true.

B) What is the strength of these four witnesses.

²⁵ *And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen. John 21:25*

³⁰ *And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; John 20:30*

The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, ² until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen Acts 1:1-2

Conclusion:

Can these men be trusted? When approached in a logical, methodical manner one must say yes. Our faith rest upon their testimony and that of the scriptures, we have no reason to doubt or be timid about what we believe.