



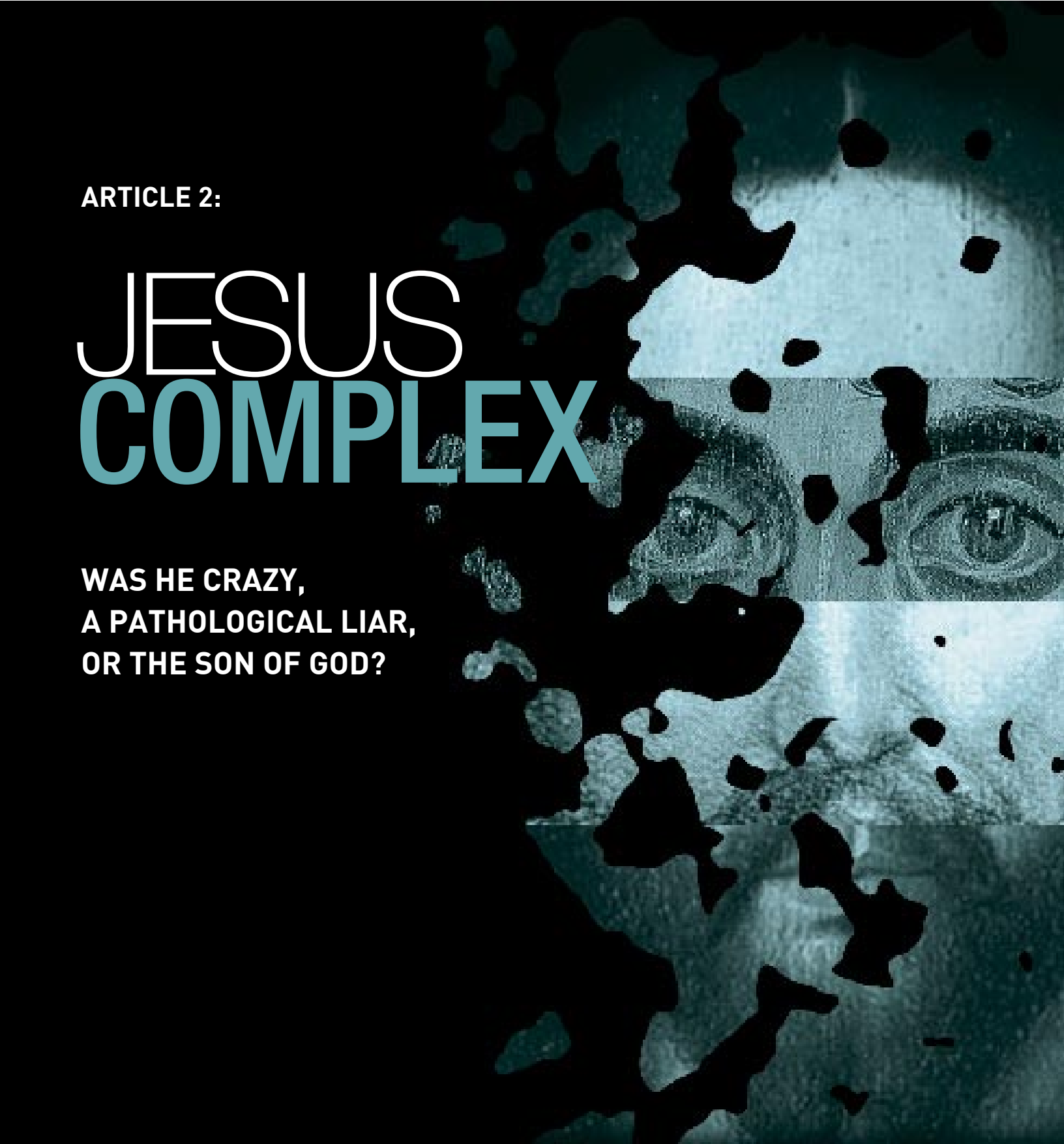
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ARTICLE 2:

JESUS COMPLEX

WAS HE CRAZY,
A PATHOLOGICAL LIAR,
OR THE SON OF GOD?



Jesus Complex

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to Dr. Bill Bright, who passed away before this project was finished. Dr. Bright enthusiastically endorsed and contributed to the development of the material presented in this endeavor.

Special thanks are also due to Rick James and Eric Stanford, who have both spent countless hours clarifying some of the concepts presented.

Several others have contributed greatly to the writing of these articles, including Dr. Henry Brandt, Dave Chapman, Dr. Bert Harned, and New Testament scholar, Dr. Ron Heine. The valuable input from Brian Ricci, Jamin Latvala, and the Campus Crusade staff at the University of Washington were especially helpful and constructive. Special thanks also are due Helmut Teichert of Bright Media, who has been the overall director of the project. Finally I would like to thank my wife, Marianne, for inspiring me to undertake this effort.

Larry Chapman

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Jesus Complex



WAS HE CRAZY, A
PATHOLOGICAL LIAR,
OR THE SON OF GOD?

Have you ever met somebody with such personal magnetism that they are always the center of attention? Possibly their personality or intelligence---but something about them is enigmatic. Well, that's the way it was two thousand years ago with Jesus Christ. But what makes Jesus relevant even today into the 21st century are the claims he made about himself.

As an unheralded carpenter from an obscure village in Palestine, Jesus made claims that, if true, have profound implications on our lives. According to Jesus, you and I are special, part of a grand cosmic scheme.

It was primarily Jesus' outrageous claims that caused him to be viewed as a crackpot by both the Roman authorities and the Jewish hierarchy. Although he was an outsider with no credentials or political powerbase, within three years, Jesus changed the world for the next 20 centuries. Other moral and religious leaders have left an

impact---but nothing like that unknown carpenter from Nazareth.

What was it about Jesus Christ that made the difference? Was he merely a great man, or something more?

These questions get to the heart of who Jesus really was. Some believe he was merely a great moral teacher; others believe he was simply the leader of the world's greatest religion. But many believe something far more. Christians believe that God has actually visited us in human form. And they believe the evidence backs that up. So who is the real Jesus? Let's take a closer look.

As we take a deeper look at the world's most controversial person, we begin by asking: could Jesus have been merely a great moral teacher?

GREAT MORAL TEACHER?

Almost all scholars acknowledge that Jesus was a great moral teacher. In fact, his brilliant insight into human morality is an accomplishment recognized even by those of other religions. In his book *Jesus of Nazareth*, Jewish scholar Joseph Klausner wrote, "It is universally admitted ... that Christ taught the purest and sublimest ethics ... which throws the moral precepts and maxims of the wisest men of antiquity far into the shade."¹

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount has been called the most superlative teaching of human ethics ever uttered by an individual. In fact, much of what we know today as "equal rights" actually is the result of Jesus' teaching. Historian Will Durant said of Jesus that "he lived and struggled unremittingly for 'equal rights'; in modern times he would have been sent to Siberia. 'He that is greatest among you, let him be your servant'—this is the inversion of all political wisdom, of all sanity."²

Some have tried to separate Jesus' teaching on ethics from his claims about himself, believing that he was simply a great man who taught lofty moral principles. This was the approach of one of America's Founding Fathers.

President Thomas Jefferson, ever the enlightened rationalist, sat down in the White House with two identical copies of the New Testament, a straight-edge razor, and a sheaf of octavo-size paper. Over



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the course of a few nights, he made quick work of cutting and pasting his own Bible, a slim volume he called “The Philosophy of Jesus of Nazareth.” After slicing away every passage that suggested Jesus’ divine nature, Jefferson had a Jesus who was no more and no less than a good, ethical guide.³

Thus Jefferson had reinvented Jesus to his own liking. In fact, he liked Jesus’ ethical teaching about human equality so much that he used it in the Declaration of Independence in which he wrote, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. . . .”

But it was not Jesus’ lofty moral and ethical teaching that polarized his enemies and altered 2000 years of history. In fact, as we will see, if Jesus’ claims about himself weren’t true, then he couldn’t have been a great moral teacher. For that reason some merely call Jesus a great religious leader. Perhaps flawed, they may argue, but nonetheless, great.

GREAT RELIGIOUS LEADER?

Does the title, “great religious leader” best describe Jesus Christ? Surprisingly, Jesus never claimed to be a religious leader. He never got into religious politics or pushed an ambitious agenda, and he ministered almost entirely outside the established religious framework.

“Then comes the real shock. Among these Jews there suddenly turns up a man who goes about talking as if he was God. He claims to forgive sins. He says He always existed. He says He is coming to judge the world at the end of time.”

C. S. Lewis, Oxford scholar

When one compares Jesus with the other great religious leaders, a remarkable distinction emerges. Ravi Zacharias, who grew up in a Hindu culture, has studied world religions and observed a fundamental distinction between other religious founders and Jesus Christ.

Whatever we may make of their claims, one reality is inescapable. They are teachers who point to their teaching or show some particular way. In all of these, there emerges an instruction, a way of living. It is not Zoroaster to whom you turn; it is Zoroaster to whom you listen. It is not Buddha who delivers you; it is his Noble Truths that instruct you. It is not Mohammad who transforms you; it is the beauty of the Koran that woos you. By contrast, Jesus did not only teach or expound His message. He was identical with His message.⁴

The truth of Zacharias’s point is underscored by the number of times in the Gospels that Jesus’ teaching message was simply “Come to me” or “Follow me” or “Obey me.” Also, Jesus made it clear that his primary mission was to forgive sins, something only God could do.

No other major religious leader ever claimed the power to forgive sins. And according to Huston Smith in *The World’s Great Religions*, Jesus distinguished himself even further. Smith writes,

Only two people ever astounded their contemporaries so much that the question they evoked was not ‘Who is he?’ but ‘*What is he?*’ They were Jesus and Buddha. The answers these two gave were exactly the opposite. Buddha said unequivocally that he was a mere man, not a god—almost as if he foresaw later attempts to worship him. Jesus, on the other hand, claimed . . . to be divine.⁵

DID JESUS CLAIM TO BE GOD?

Clearly, from the earliest years of the church, Jesus was called Lord and regarded by most Christians as God. Yet his divinity was a doctrine that was subjected to great debate. So the question—and it is *the* question—is this: Did Jesus really claim

to be God (the Creator), or was his divinity something invented or assumed by the New Testament authors?

Some scholars believe Jesus was such a powerful teacher and compelling personality that his disciples just assumed he was God. Or maybe they just wanted to think he was God. John Dominic Crossan and the Jesus Seminar (a fringe group of skeptical scholars with presuppositions against miracles) are among those who believe Jesus was deified in error.

Others who say he didn't claim to be God include Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Scientists, Unitarians, and a few other religious groups outside the borders of traditional Christianity.

Christians insist that Jesus did claim deity. As a deist, Thomas Jefferson had no problem accepting Jesus' teachings on morals and ethics while denying his deity.⁶ But as we've said, and will explore further, if Jesus was not who he claimed to be, then we must examine some other alternatives, none of which would make him a great moral teacher.

Even a superficial reading of the Gospels reveals that Jesus claimed to be someone more than a prophet like Moses or Daniel. But it is the nature of those claims that concern us. Two questions are worthy of attention.

- Did Jesus actually claim to be God?
- When he said "God," did Jesus really mean he was the Creator of the universe spoken of in the Hebrew Bible?

To address these questions, let's consider Jesus' words in Matthew 28:18, NLT: "I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth."

What did Jesus mean when he claimed to have complete authority in heaven and on earth?

"Authority" was a well-understood term in Roman-occupied Israel. At that time, Caesar was the supreme authority in the entire Roman world. His edict could instantly launch legions for war, condemn or exonerate criminals, and establish laws and rules of government. In fact, Caesar's authority was such that he himself claimed divinity.

So, at the very least Jesus was claiming authority on a par with Caesar himself. But He didn't just say he had *more* authority than the Jewish leaders or Roman rulers; Jesus was claiming to be *the supreme authority* in the universe. To those he spoke to, it meant that he was God. Not a god—but *the* God.

According to former skeptic and Oxford professor, C. S. Lewis, Jesus' claim to be God hit both his followers and enemies like a thunderbolt:

'Then comes the real shock,' wrote Lewis: 'Among these Jews there suddenly turns up a man who goes about talking as if He was God. He claims to forgive sins. He says He always existed. He says He is coming to judge the world at the end of time.'⁷

DID JESUS CLAIM TO BE THE CREATOR?

But is it possible that Jesus was just reflecting God's authority and was not stating that he was the actual Creator? At first glance that seems plausible. Yet Jesus' claim to have all authority seems to make sense only if he is the Creator of the universe. The word "all" encompasses everything---including creation itself.

As we look deeper into Jesus' own words, a pattern seems to emerge. Jesus made radical assertions about himself that, if true, unmistakably point to his deity. Here is a partial list of such statements as recorded by eyewitness accounts.



GOD

- I am the resurrection and the life. (John 11:25, NIV)
- I am the light of the world. (John 8:12, NIV)
- I and my Father are one. (John 10:30, NIV)
- I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. (Revelation 22:13, NIV)
- I am the way, the truth, and the life. (John 14:6, NIV)
- I am the only way to the Father [God]. (John 14:6)

Once again, we must go back to context. In the Hebrew Scriptures, when Moses asked God his name at the burning bush, God answered, “I AM.” He was telling Moses that He is the only Creator, eternal and transcendent of time.

Since the time of Moses, no practicing Jew would ever refer to himself or anyone else by “I AM.” As a result, Jesus’ “I AM” claims infuriated the Jewish leaders. One time, for example, some leaders explained to Jesus why they were trying to kill him: “Because you, a mere man, have made yourself God” (John 10:33, NLT).

But the point here is not simply that such a phrase fumed the religious leaders. The point is that they knew exactly what he was saying—he was claiming to be God, the Creator of the universe. It is only this claim that would have brought the accusation of blasphemy. To read into the text that Jesus claimed to be God is clearly warranted, not simply by his words, but also by their reaction to those words.

WHAT KIND OF GOD?

Some who teach that we are all gods might accept Jesus’ claims, as long as they weren’t exclusive. The idea that we are all part of God, and that within us is the seed of divinity, is simply not a possible meaning for Jesus’ words and actions. Such thoughts are revisionist, foreign to his teaching, foreign to his stated beliefs, and foreign to his disciples’ understanding of his teaching.



Jesus taught that he is God in the way the Jews understood God and the way the Hebrew Scriptures portrayed God, not in the way the New Age movement understands God. Neither Jesus nor his audience had been weaned on *Star Wars*, and so when they spoke of God, they were not speaking of cosmic forces. It’s simply bad history to redefine what Jesus meant by the concept of God.

There are many who just aren’t able to accept Jesus as God, and want to call him a great moral teacher. But if Jesus wasn’t God, are we still okay by calling him a great moral teacher? Lewis argued, “I am trying

here to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say.”⁸

In his quest for truth, Lewis knew that he could not have it both ways with the identity of Jesus. Either Jesus was who he claimed to be—God in the flesh—or his claims were false. And if they were false, Jesus could not be a great moral teacher. He would either be lying intentionally or he would be a lunatic with a God complex.

So the options we must choose from for Jesus’ true identity are:

- Jesus was a liar who knowingly deceived us.
- Jesus was a lunatic who was self-deceived.
- Jesus was who he claimed to be—God.

WAS JESUS A LIAR??

In the movie *Deceived*, Goldie Hawn plays the role of Adrienne Saunders, a recently widowed woman who sees fleeting glimpses of her late husband, Jack Saunders (John Heard). As the plot unfolds, Hawn realizes that her former husband had spun a web of deceit, faking his own death. She discovers that for years Saunders had been living under an assumed identity with another wife.

Few people have ever accused Jesus Christ of living a double life like Jack Saunders. Even most non-Christians believe Jesus was a good person. But if one examines his claims, then the issue that emerges is: either Jesus was the world's greatest deceiver, or he was exactly who he claimed to be. So which is the truth?

The question we must deal with is, what could possibly motivate Jesus to live his entire life as a lie? He taught that God was opposed to lying and hypocrisy, so he wouldn't have been doing it to please his Father. He certainly didn't lie for his followers' benefit. (All but one were martyred.) And so we are left with only two other reasonable explanations, each of which is problematic.

Many people have lied for personal gain. In fact, the motivation of most lies is some perceived benefit to oneself. What could Jesus have hoped to gain from lying about his identity? Power would be the most obvious answer. If people believed he was God, he would have tremendous power. (That is why many ancient leaders, such as the Caesars, claimed divine origin.)

The rub with this explanation is that Jesus shunned all attempts to move him in the direction of seated power, instead chastising those who abused such power and lived their lives pursuing it. He also chose to reach out to the outcasts (poor and hurting), those without power, creating a network of people whose influence was less than zero. In a way that could only be described as bizarre, all that Jesus did and said moved diametrically in the other direction from power.

It would seem that if power was Jesus' motivation, he would have avoided the cross at all costs. Yet, on several occasions, he told his disciples that the cross was his destiny and mission. How would dying on a Roman cross bring one power?

Death, of course, brings all things into proper focus. And while many martyrs have died for a cause they believed in, few have been willing to die for a known lie. Certainly all hopes for Jesus' own personal gain would have ended on the cross. Yet, to his last breath, he would not relinquish his claim of being the unique Son of God.

So if Jesus was above lying for personal benefit, perhaps his radical claims were falsified in order to leave a legacy. But the prospect of being beaten to a pulp and nailed to a cross would quickly dampen the enthusiasm of most would-be superstars.

Here is another haunting fact. If Jesus were to have simply dropped the claim of being God's Son, he never would have been condemned. It was his claim to be God and his unwillingness to recant of it that got him crucified.

Do historians believe Jesus lied? Scholars have scrutinized Jesus' words and life to see if there is any evidence of a defect in his moral character. In fact, even the most ardent skeptics are stunned by Jesus' moral and ethical purity. One of those was skeptic and antagonist John Stuart Mill (1806–73). Yet Mill called Jesus an "ideal representative and guide for humanity."⁹

According to historian Philip Schaff, there is no evidence, either in church history or in secular history, that Jesus lied about anything. Schaff argued, "How, in the name of logic, common sense, and experience, could a deceitful, selfish, depraved man have invented, and consistently maintained from the beginning to end, the purest and noblest character known in history with the most perfect air of truth and reality?"¹⁰

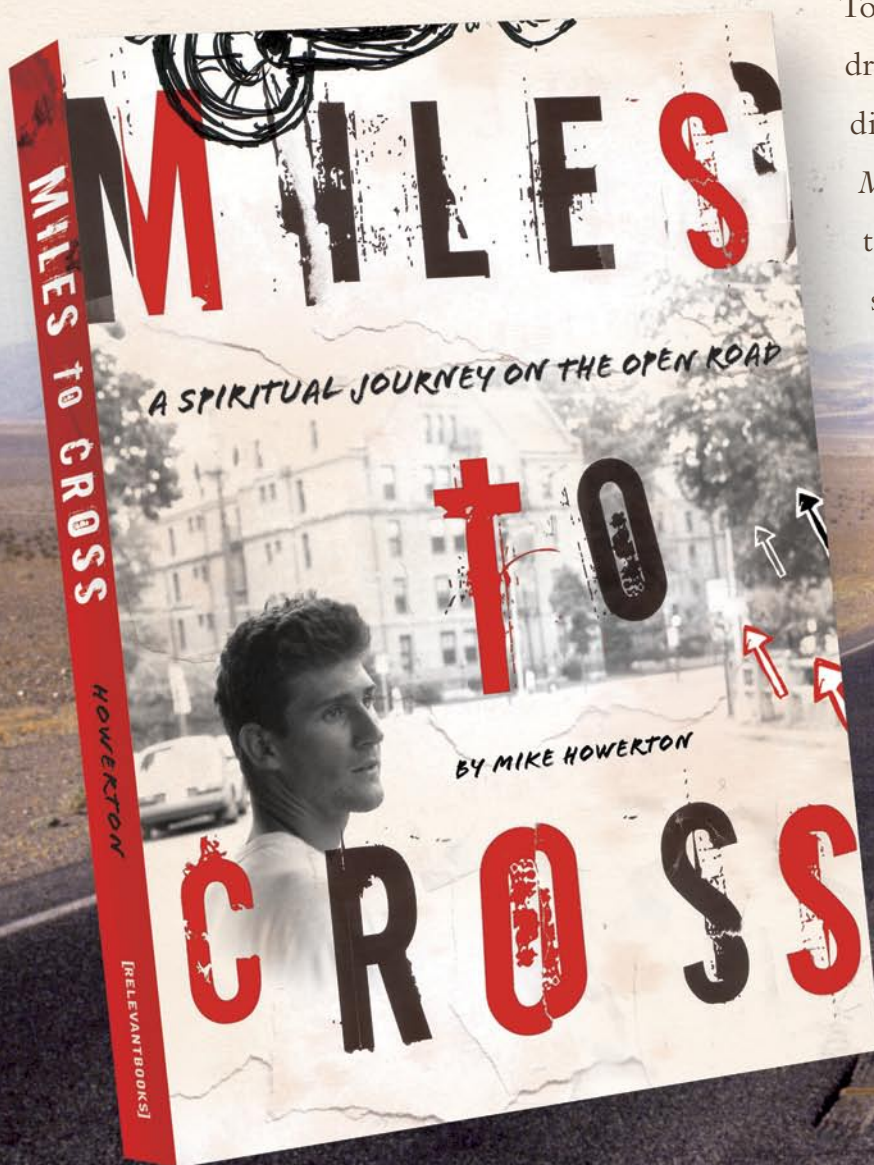
To go with the option of liar seems to swim upstream against everything Jesus taught, lived, and died for. To most scholars, it just doesn't make sense. Yet, to deny Jesus' claims, one must come up with some explanation. And if Jesus' claims are not true, and he wasn't lying, the only option remaining is that he must have been self-deceived.



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Clive Staples Lewis was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, in 1898. He graduated from University College, Oxford, in 1923. For 30 years he was a fellow and tutor in English at Magdalen College, Oxford. Then he went to Cambridge as professor of medieval and Renaissance English. Lewis was a brilliant lecturer who could speak spontaneously about Greek and Latin texts without notes.

Lewis regarded Christianity as just another myth. But another atheist, T. D. Weldon, had shocked him with a statement regarding the remarkable evidence for Jesus Christ. Lewis began a quest for truth that led him to believe in a God, but he still was unconvinced that Jesus was God. However, Lewis was greatly influenced by his friend J. R. R. Tolkien (author of *The Lord of the Rings*) and began to examine the rational basis for belief in Christianity. Together with Tolkien and Charles Williams, Lewis formed a literary group called the Inklings, in which the members had deep conversations about the difference between Christianity and myths. Although Christianity had a mythlike appearance, unlike myths and legends, it was backed by solid historical evidence, proving it to be true.

Lewis was a prolific author, writing *The Chronicles of Narnia* series, his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy, Mere Christianity*, and among his most substantial books, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*. In another work, *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis suggested that much of the suffering in the world can be traced to the evil choices people make.

In his own life, Lewis followed Christian principles. He gave away two-thirds of his income, sat at the bedside of the sick, and personally served the poor. *The Chronicles of Narnia* series has turned out to be the most lasting of Lewis's fictional works. Lewis died on November 22, 1963.

WAS JESUS A LUNATIC?

Albert Schweitzer, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1952 for his humanitarian efforts, had his own views about Jesus.

Schweitzer concluded that insanity was behind Jesus' claim to be God. In other words, Jesus was wrong about his claims but didn't intentionally lie. According to this theory, Jesus was deluded into actually believing he was the Messiah.

As a skeptic, C. S. Lewis realized that Jesus was either a liar, a lunatic, or the real thing. He writes, "He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell."¹¹

But even those most skeptical of Christianity rarely question Jesus' sanity. Social reformer William Channing (1780–1842), admittedly not a Christian, stated that the idea that Jesus was self-deluded is the most absurd title we could give him.¹² Nothing Jesus said or did point to any mental instability.

Even the great skeptic Rousseau, acknowledged Jesus' superior character and mental balance, writing, "What presence of mind.

... Yes, if the life and death of Socrates are those of a philosopher, the life and death of Jesus Christ are those of a God."¹³

Schaff posed the question we must ask ourselves: "Is such an intellect—thoroughly healthy and vigorous, always ready and always self-possessed—liable to a radical and most serious delusion concerning his own character and mission?"¹⁴

So, was Jesus a liar or a lunatic, or was he the Son of God? Could Jefferson have been right by labeling Jesus "only a good moral teacher" while denying him deity? Interestingly, the audience who heard Jesus—both believers and enemies—never regarded him as a mere moral teacher. Jesus produced three primary effects in the people who met him: hatred, terror, or adoration.

It is the claims of Jesus Christ that force us to make a choice about who he is.

We can't just cut and paste Jesus and his words, like Jefferson attempted to do. Lewis writes,

You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. 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. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.¹⁵

The apostle Paul originally thought Jesus was an imposter, and as a Jewish leader, severely persecuted Christians. But later he came to a much different conclusion, as he writes to the young church at Philippi:

Though he was God...he appeared in human form.¹⁶

The entire message of Jesus' life and words is only valid if his claims about himself are true. If they are true, then his words about life and purpose command our utmost attention. As Lewis says, each of us must make our own choice about the most significant life who ever existed. Who do you say Jesus is?

LUNATIC

“You must make your choice: Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.... But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.”

C. S. Lewis, Oxford professor

ENDNOTES

¹ Quoted in Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Nelson, 1979), 127.

² Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy* (New York: Washington Square, 1961), 428.

³ Linda Kulman and Jay Tolson, “The Jesus Code,” *U. S. News & World Report*, December 22, 2003, 1.

⁴ Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus among Other Gods* (Nashville: Word, 2000), 89.

⁵ Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 150.

⁶ A deist is someone who believes in a standoffish God—a deity who created the world and then lets it run according to pre-established laws. Deism was a fad among intellectuals around the time of America’s independence, and Jefferson bought into it.

⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1972), 51.

⁸ Lewis, 52.

⁹ Quoted in Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino, CA: Here’s Life, 1999), 159.

¹⁰ Quoted in McDowell, *New Evidence*, 160.

¹¹ Lewis, 52.

¹² Quoted in McDowell, *New Evidence*, 161, 162.

¹³ Quoted in McDowell, *New Evidence*, 122, 129.

¹⁴ Quoted in McDowell, *New Evidence*, 162.

¹⁵ Lewis, 52.

¹⁶ Philippians 2: 6, 7

