

Concerning the accounts of eyewitnesses in the New Testament . . .

Is Their Testimony Credible?

“The credit due to the testimony of witnesses depends upon, firstly, their honesty; secondly, their ability; thirdly, their number and the consistency of their testimony; fourthly, the conformity of their testimony with experience; and fifthly, the coincidence of their testimony with collateral circumstances.”

Simon Greenleaf (1783-1853), founder, Harvard Law School

“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. . . .men ordinarily speak the truth, when they have no prevailing motive or inducement to the contrary . . . (these witnesses) went against all their worldly interests . . . They could expect nothing but contempt, opposition, revilings, bitter persecutions, stripes, imprisonments, torments and death. Yet this faith they zealously did propagate; and all these miseries they endured . . .”

Acts 4:18-20

"(The Jewish Council) called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

Acts 5:28-32

"Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? . . . (the) apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree . . . And we are his witnesses of these things . . ."

vs. 40-42 ". . . and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."

2 Corinthians 4:8,9,13

"We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed . . . we also believe, and therefore speak;"

Philippians 3:7-8

"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,"

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“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 It is always to be presumed that men are honest, and of sound mind, and of the average and ordinary degree of intelligence. This is not the judgment of mere charity; it is also the uniform presumption of the law of the land. . . .”

2 Peter 1:16-18

"For we have not followed cunningly devised fables,
when we made known unto you the power and
coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were
eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received
from God the Father honour and glory, when there
came such a voice to him from the excellent glory,
This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well
pleased. And this voice which came from heaven
we heard, when we were with him in the holy
mount."

1 John 1:1-3

"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, of the Word of life . . . that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you . . ."

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“In a number of concurrent testimonies . . . there is a probability distinct from that which may be termed the sum of the probabilities resulting from the testimonies of the witnesses . . . This probability arises from the concurrence itself . . . That such a concurrence should spring from chance . . . is impossible . . . There remains no cause but the reality of the fact.”

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; **of whom the greater part remain unto this present,** but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time."

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“The title of the witnesses to full credit for veracity would be readily conceded by the objector, if the facts they relate were such as ordinarily occur in human experience, and on this circumstance an argument is founded against their credibility. Miracles, say the objectors, are impossible . . .”

Mark 2:5-12

“Jesus said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only? . . . Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.”

John 11:45-48

"Then many of the Jews which . . . had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him. But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done. Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation."

Acts 4:13-16

"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it."

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“A false witness will not willingly detail any circumstances, in which his testimony will be open to contradiction, nor multiply them where there is danger of his being detected by a comparison of them with other accounts In the testimony of true witnesses there is a visible copiousness in the detail. . . . The more largely the narrative partakes of these (details), the further it will be found removed from all suspicion of contrivance or design”

John 21:25

"And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written."

John 20:30-31

"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

Acts 1:1-2

"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus,
of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,
until the day in which he was taken up . . ."

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“The question is . . . the veracity of the witnesses and the credibility of their narratives . . . A lawyer examining the testimony of the witnesses by the rules of his profession, in order to ascertain whether, if they had thus testified on oath, in a court of justice . . . (would find them) entitled to credit . . . receiving their testimony . . . as being all that members of the legal profession would desire.”

