

## Van Til vs. Bahnsen

Van Til writes:

We say that Christ rose from the grave. We say further that this resurrection proves his divinity. (*The Defense of the Faith*, p. 7-8)

Bahnsen writes:

Why should anyone believe that Jesus was in fact “very God of very God”? Could any mere man’s evaluation establish such a claim? Even the estimation of a large percentage of people would be insufficient to establish that Jesus was more than a man. Even his miracles and resurrection do not in themselves imply deity (think of the other miracle workers in Scripture); they constitute evidence of divine status only because He authoritatively interprets them as such. So the only authority by which the identification of Jesus as God could be warranted would have to be the authority of Jesus Himself, taken as the one whom He claims to be. Such self-identification or self-authorization is, in the very nature of the case, “circular.” (*Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings & Analysis*, p. 201)

How can this be? Van Til explicitly states that Jesus’ “resurrection proves his divinity,” while Bahnsen says that Jesus’ “miracles and resurrection do not in themselves imply deity.” If Jesus’ resurrection itself does not “imply deity,” how can Van Til say that it “proves his divinity”?

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Christian Psychopathy](#), [Van Til](#)

posted by [Bahnsen Burner](#) at [6:00 AM](#)

### 15 Comments:

[Vytautas](#) said...

Bahnsen Burner: How can this be? Van Til explicitly states that Jesus’ “resurrection proves his divinity,” while Bahnsen says that Jesus’ “miracles and resurrection do not in themselves imply deity.” If Jesus’ resurrection itself does not “imply deity,” how can Van Til say that it “proves his divinity”?

Vytautas: Van Til might say that resurrection proves Jesus’ divinity along with other evidences, since he does not say the resurrection and only resurrection proves Jesus’ divinity.

[January 03, 2008 4:44 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Van Til can say all kinds of things. They don’t even have to be consistent with other things he’s said. He can say one thing over here, and something completely different over there (and sometimes he in fact has done this). But that would not answer the question that I have posed. Here Van Til clearly goes on record stating explicitly that Jesus’ alleged “resurrection proves his divinity.” How can this be if what Bahnsen says is true? Consider the two statements more closely:

[a] Jesus’ miracles and resurrection do not even *imply* deity

[b] Jesus’ resurrection *proves* his divinity

How can one affirm [b] without denying [a]?

Regards,  
Dawson

[January 03, 2008 6:42 PM](#)

[Ágil Currículo](#) said...

How does Christ's resurrection proves anything?

[January 04, 2008 5:13 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Even more, how does one prove that Christ was resurrected? All we have to go on is a storybook, and even there, according to the stories contained therein, no one witnessed Jesus rising from the dead. According to the stories, Jesus' resurrection took place in a sealed tomb. So even on its own basis, the story of Jesus' resurrection could have been a mistaken inference on the part of those who wrote it. Or, it was just metaphor to begin with, as was much religious literature of the day. At best, we have an ancient Harry Potter story which over the centuries was popularized as religious "truth."

But why believe anything described in the storybook is historical in the first place? It all reads like a legend which grows with each retelling. That's precisely what we find when we compare the writings of Paul with Mark (the earliest gospel), Mark with Matthew-Luke (gospels modeled directly on Mark) and John (the latest gospel in the NT canon), and those with the later, non-canonical biographies of Jesus. We see the telltale marks of a legend growing right before our eyes.

Regards,  
Dawson

[January 04, 2008 5:44 AM](#)

[Samonedo](#) said...

Why wait 30 years (at the best) to compile a written account of something of that importance?

Why so many Christians didn't believe Jesus lived on earth in the early years of Christianity? Did they know mark, luke, mathew and Jhon? If so, what was their objection to the factual Jesus less than 50 years after his alleged death?

The fact that some elements of Jesus mith were already available to Christianiy through other contemporary religions cast even more doubt on the account.

Why not a single independent testimony for the story?

Finally, those stories are blatantly invented, like others in the Bible. They look like any children storytale and I d be as surprised to discover they really happened as to find little red cap and the wolf sunbathing on copacabana beach. Should I keep my mind open for them as well?

[January 04, 2008 12:58 PM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Bahnsen Burner: Even more, how does one prove that Christ was resurrected? All we have to go on is a storybook, and even there, according to the stories contained therein, no one witnessed Jesus rising from the dead. According to the stories, Jesus' resurrection took place in a sealed tomb. So even on its own basis, the story of Jesus' resurrection could have been a mistaken inference on the part of those who wrote it. Or, it was just metaphor to begin with, as was much religious literature of the day. At best, we have an ancient Harry Potter story which over the centuries was popularized as religious "truth."

Vytautas: Paul wrote that Jesus appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive when Paul wrote the epistle to the Corinthians, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to Paul. It cannot be a mistaken inference that they saw Jesus after he died on a cross because John wrote that they have heard, they have seen with their eyes, and they looked upon and have touched with their

hands, Jesus who is the word of life. You cannot see, hear, and touch a metaphor, but you can see, hear, and touch a real person who rose from the dead.

Bahnsen Burner: But why believe anything described in the storybook is historical in the first place? It all reads like a legend which grows with each retelling. That's precisely what we find when we compare the writings of Paul with Mark (the earliest gospel), Mark with Matthew-Luke (gospels modeled directly on Mark) and John (the latest gospel in the NT canon), and those with the later, non-canonical biographies of Jesus. We see the telltale marks of a legend growing right before our eyes.

Vytautas: What are the properties of a legend and what are the properties of the historical? A legend is a story that gets passed around in oral tradition for hundreds of years before it is finally written down, but the gospels are historical since they were written during the apostles' and followers' of apostles lifetime.

[January 04, 2008 4:16 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

I wrote: Even more, how does one prove that Christ was resurrected? All we have to go on is a storybook, and even there, according to the stories contained therein, no one witnessed Jesus rising from the dead. According to the stories, Jesus' resurrection took place in a sealed tomb. So even on its own basis, the story of Jesus' resurrection could have been a mistaken inference on the part of those who wrote it. Or, it was just metaphor to begin with, as was much religious literature of the day. At best, we have an ancient Harry Potter story which over the centuries was popularized as religious "truth."

Vytautas responded: Paul wrote that Jesus appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive when Paul wrote the epistle to the Corinthians, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to Paul."

I've written about this topic here: [Five Hundred Anonymous Witnesses](#). Appealing to I Cor. 15 is apologetically hopeless. But I realize that Christians don't have anything better than this.

Vytautas: "It cannot be a mistaken inference that they saw Jesus after he died on a cross because John wrote that they have heard, they have seen with their eyes, and they looked upon and have touched with their hands, Jesus who is the word of life."

This is a non sequitur. Just because John (or an anonymous writer who was later dubbed John by the faithful) wrote these things, does not mean that those about whom he was writing could not have been mistaken in inferring what the author attributes to them. "So-and-so wrote such-and-such" does not secure the assurance you're trying to invest in the gospel story.

Vytautas: "You cannot see, hear, and touch a metaphor, but you can see, hear, and touch a real person who rose from the dead."

Of course. But that is not what I was suggesting, either.

I wrote: But why believe anything described in the storybook is historical in the first place? It all reads like a legend which grows with each retelling. That's precisely what we find when we compare the writings of Paul with Mark (the earliest gospel), Mark with Matthew-Luke (gospels modeled directly on Mark) and John (the latest gospel in the NT canon), and those with the later, non-canonical biographies of Jesus. We see the telltale marks of a legend growing right before our eyes.

Vytautas: "What are the properties of a legend and what are the properties of the historical? A legend is a story that gets passed around in oral tradition for hundreds of years before it is finally written down, but the gospels are historical since they were written during the apostles' and followers' of apostles lifetime."

For one, being "passed around in oral tradition for hundreds of years before it is finally written down" is not a prerequisite for a story or personage to be legendary. For that matter, however, we have no idea how long the detail-deficient stories that Paul was preaching were circulating before they got to him. Paul nowhere sets a date to the stories as he understands them. Also, a comparison of what Paul teaches and what we find in the later

gospels is quite telling. Just look at the following details which form part of the elaboration of the Jesus story as found in the gospels which Paul nowhere breathes a word about in any of his letters:

- Bethlehem (Jesus' supposed birthplace)
- a place called 'Nazareth' (as in "Jesus of Nazareth")
- a Roman census
- parents named Mary and Joseph
- angelic visitations to both Mary and Joseph
- the Virgin Birth
- the Slaughter of the Innocents
- the Magi (they were magically summoned to meet the baby Jesus)
- John the Baptist
- Jesus' baptism
- Jesus' career as a carpenter
- Galilee
- Jesus' itinerant preaching ministry in Judea (didn't the apostle know about this?!)
- that Jesus was a teacher of morals
- that Jesus taught in parables
- Jesus' prayers
- Jesus' many miracles (Paul nowhere has his Jesus turn water into wine, stilling storms, feeding 5,000 or walking on lakes)
- Jesus' healings and cures (no mention of the blind receiving their sight, for example, after Jesus spits into dysfunctional eyes)
- Jesus' exorcisms
- Jesus' temptation in the wilderness
- Mary Magdalene
- Nicodemus (mentioned only in the gospel of John)
- Judas Iscariot (a key player in the lead-up to the passion story)
- Gethsemane (and Jesus' hesitation there)
- a trial before Pilate
- Peter's repeated denials
- Jesus' flogging
- Jesus' crucifixion outside the walls of Jerusalem
- a place called "Calvary" (mentioned only in Luke 23:33)
- the two malefactors condemned with Jesus
- Jesus' words from the cross
- the spear thrust in Jesus' side
- the darkness over the earth
- the earthquake
- the rising of the saints mentioned only in Matthew 27:52-53
- Joseph of Arimathaea
- Golgotha
- female witnesses
- an empty tomb (Paul never even mentions an empty tomb!)
- Doubting Thomas

If the gospels are legendary inventions on the basic and relatively threadbare Jesus story that Paul was peddling about, we would expect the situation to look like this: the later stories adding content which is completely absent in earlier versions.

Add to these glaring silences in Paul the fact that he affirms on his own authority or attributes to "God" teachings which the later gospels put into Jesus' mouth. Wells gives a very brief catalogue of such instances in the following passage:

Paul gives it as his own view (Rom. 13:8-10) that the law can be summed up in the one Old Testament injunction "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." According to Lk. 10:25-8, Jesus himself taught that love of neighbor (together with love of God) ensures salvation; but one could never gather from Paul that Jesus had expressed himself on the matter. In 1 Thess. 4:9 it is not Jesus but God who is said to have taught Christians to love one another. And in the injunction not to repay evil for evil but always to do good to all is given in the same epistle (5:15) without any suggestion that Jesus had taught it (as according to the gospels he did in the Sermon on the

Mount). In his letter to Christians at Rome Paul says "bless those that persecute you" (12:14 and 17) and "judge not" (14:13). Surely in such instances he might reasonably be expected to have invoked the authority of Jesus, *had he known* that Jesus had taught the very same doctrines. (The former doctrine is ascribed to him at Mt. 5:44 and Lk. 6:28, and the latter at Mt. 7:1 and Lk. 6:37.) In the same epistle he urges Christians to "pay taxes" (13:6), but does not suggest that Jesus had given such a ruling (Mk. 12:17). It is much more likely that certain precepts concerning forgiveness and civil obedience were originally urged independently of Jesus, and only later put into his mouth and thereby stamped with supreme authority, than that he gave such rulings and was not credited with having done so by Paul and... by other early Christian writers. (*The Historical Evidence for Jesus*, p. 33.)

Finally we have another non sequitur: Even if it were the case that "the gospels... were written during the apostles' and followers' of apostles lifetime," it would not follow from this that they are historical. It's silly to suppose that they are historical on such a flimsy basis. I could write a story telling about Ronald Reagan's encounter with aliens from outer space who visited him on his ranch near Santa Barbara in 1992. By giving this date I'm indicating that it took place in my lifetime (I was born in the 1960's). Would that make my story historical? Of course not.

I could go on and on about the legendary nature of the New Testament writings. But I'll rest right here for now since what I've given is more than sufficient in making my point.

Regards,  
Dawson

[January 04, 2008 8:22 PM](#)

[Samonedo](#) said...

The idea of a person resurrecting is quite silly.

[January 05, 2008 8:54 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Samonedo: "The idea of a person resurrecting is quite silly."

Indeed it is. But here's what's even sillier: the idea that a god-man "sacrificed" himself, only to be resurrected into eternal life afterwards. If Jesus came back to life, there was no sacrifice whatsoever. Sacrifice involves the loss of a higher value for the sake of a lesser value or non-value. Clearly for there to have been a sacrifice, Jesus would have had to have given up something. Christianity teaches that Jesus sacrificed his life. So if Jesus sacrificed his life, he'd have to be dead forever. But if he was resurrected, he didn't give up his life. He got it back, and in spades. So to call Jesus' death on the cross a "sacrifice" is just another religious sham. If "Jesus lives" is true, then there was no sacrifice. And if there was no sacrifice, then there can be no remission of sins, according to New Testament theology. Believers have been had big time.

Regards,  
Dawson

[January 05, 2008 9:41 AM](#)

[Samonedo](#) said...

What is the real meaning of the word "death" if in Christian Universe there is something called "resurrection" and "afterlife".

In such a world words often don't mean what they say and can be used and abused by the christian clone, manipulating them.

[January 05, 2008 11:09 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

That's another great point. In the Christian worldview, we find a heavy dose of what can rightly be called "concepticide" - the destruction of conceptual integrity. The Christian mishandling of the concept 'death' is a great

example. In one context, it denotes biological expiration; in a very close but most vaguely different context it means something else, such as destruction of the spirit, separation from the deity, annihilation of amenable conscience, etc. God tells Adam and Eve that if they eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they shall surely die. It's not clear that Adam and Eve could know what death is at this point, and the passage makes no indication that God explained this to them so that they could make informed decisions. Nonetheless, the meaning implied here at this point is that they will cease existing, i.e., biological expiration. The serpent in the garden then tells them that they surely will not die if they eat of the fruit, and Eve is persuaded, probably because she doesn't realize how these concepts are being mishandled already, in the first pages of the initial book of the canon. She eats the fruit, and guess what - she doesn't die. Or does she? She continues living, so she didn't experience biological expiration. Does this make God a liar? He said she'd surely die. But she didn't die, at least so far as we understand the concept 'death' and its cognates. No, she "died spiritually," we're told. What does that mean? Essentially, it means the invisible magic being which made her and earlier said its creation is "good" doesn't want anything to do with her any more. Fine for Eve - go on with your life. This "death" isn't so bad; in fact, now she has knowledge - knowledge of good and evil - that her creator chose to withhold from her, and threatened her not to seek and achieve.

This egregious play with meaning is one of the most destructive things about Christianity. It keeps the believer in a constant state of having to guess what certain passages might mean at different times, and allows the believer to evade stable meaning in concepts when attempting to defend his confessional investment in a deeply labyrinthine imagination. And it's most ironic as well, since Christians are always telling us that we need "God" in our lives in order for our lives to have meaning. It's just more evidence that our legs are being pulled here.

Anyway, the whole Adam and Eve story seems so cruel and unusual to begin with. Imagine a father who locks his daughter in a room full of toys saying to her, "All the things in this room are yours and you can play with them to your heart's content; but don't touch this thing here - for if you do, you shall surely blop." What does "blop" mean? This is not explained. But the little girl is left in the room and begins playing with the toys in it. Then the father sends in another toy, this one with a tape recording which says "You can touch that thing! Don't worry! You surely won't blop!" The little girl, naturally curious about the mysterious thing, goes and touches it. It turns out to be a live electrical wire, and she's electrocuted. What father would do this? Certainly not a genuinely loving father.

Or, try this scenario: the father locks the child in the room full of toys and says to her, "Of all the toys in this room you are free to play with, but don't touch the electrical outlet! If you do, you shall surely die!" Of course, I don't think a loving father would leave his child unattended where he knows such hazards exist, but this is the god of the bible we're talking about. So the little girl busies herself with her play, and here comes another toy with this recording: "Oh, don't worry about the electrical outlet! You can touch it. You won't die!" Naturally, she's curious, and eventually goes over to touch it. She's not zapped - it turns out that the electrical current was turned off. Then her father, who had been watching her on a webcam the entire time storms into the room and says "You touched the electrical outlet!" And she responds, "Yes, I did, but you know what, Father? I surely did not die!" And she's right - what the father initially said to her in his warning was not true: she did not surely die when she touched it.

Surely there are better, more loving ways to teach one's children. I certainly wouldn't mishandle the meanings of concepts in this way when teaching my children, because I genuinely love my children, and I know they're naturally curious (we're born ignorant, and with active consciousnesses continually seeking fresh content and finding pleasure in discovery), so I would take this into account and would never try to exploit their natural inclinations in an effort to ensnare them. But that's what the Adam and Eve story models - a plotting god who can't wait to spring a trap on Adam and Eve. If anything, the story tells us that they were wrong to trust God. But Christianity turns around and calls this god a god of justice. So again, we have more concepticide going on, with the next casualty being the concepts of love and justice.

I'm glad these aren't my problems!

Regards,  
Dawson

[January 05, 2008 11:45 AM](#)

[Samonedo](#) said...

Take Jesus comeback for example. He says he would be back "soon".

But Christians say "soon" might mean a million years for God.

It seems Christians can't avoid being dishonest. That's why some non-believers go crazy debating them. And they call us abnoxious.

[January 05, 2008 12:30 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

That's another good example of concepticide in action: concepts denoting temporal measurement are played fast and loose when believers are called to answer for the bible's empty promises.

Another example is "hate" is supposed to mean "love less," such as when the gospel Jesus is made to say that the price of discipleship is hating one's parents, siblings, spouse, friends and even oneself. (See Lk. 14:26) If someone says he hates me, I do not interpret this to mean he loves me in some way. Love is one's devotion to what he values. Hate has a [specific meaning of its own](#): "to dislike intensely or passionately; feel extreme aversion for or extreme hostility toward."

Let's face it, Christianity is a most dishonest worldview. It requires one to be dishonest with himself, claiming as knowledge something he is compelled to believe by psychological sanctions without evidence and against good reason. And after he's made the initial downpayment in his confessional investment in Christian god-belief, he seeks to defend it at all costs. And look at what they defend? A deity which is referred to as a "Father" who couldn't be any less loving as a father. If human fathers did to their children what the Christian deity is portrayed as doing to its own creatures in the bible, they'd rightly lock them in prison and throw away the keys. They'd be wrong not to do so.

Regards,  
Dawson

[January 05, 2008 12:59 PM](#)

[Citrus](#) said...

Oh! I've got one.

Justice. Thus usually means something along the lines of 'giving people what they deserve'. Even Christians agree, I've observed. But only sometimes. Sinners apparently deserve eternal punishment in Hell. BUT! Jesus can let you get away with it if you repent, and believe in and love him. 'God's justice' is satisfied by Jesus, the innocent man-god, being punished in your place. He didn't deserve it. But God's pleased enough.

This is often justified by using a financial metaphor. Jesus in his infinite kindness, voluntarily 'paid' a 'debt' that you couldn't possibly pay yourself. Because you have no monies. And Jesus is really rich. Money is money. As long as someone can pay enough, doesn't matter *who's* actually receiving the punishment. Justice?

This only makes sense with a ...different concept of justice. Paraphrasing one alternative Christian definition: 'dealing with sin the proper way'. So the *sin* itself God's concern. Jesus 'bared the sins of the world' at the crucifixion. So in some way, the sin can be separated from the sinner, and 'put on' an innocent man, so God can torture him instead.

Sin = disobedience to God's law. And this can be transferred from person to person? For me, this is where it stops making any sense. If someone did something, he did it. If you're guilty, you're guilty, and that's that! But then probably Christians go and substitute another meaning for 'sin', perhaps defined entirely in financial terms, perhaps with more fun properties like being supernaturally inherited through semen...

regards

Jason

[January 06, 2008 4:01 AM](#)

[Samonedo](#) said...

What are "good" and "evil" actions, when referring to God?

If God decides to cure a child, he is "good". If he inflicts pain to a child, he is not "evil", because he is omniscient and there might be a good explanation, not yet revealed, for the apparent "evil" perpetrated. In the end, God always means "good".

By this, we can conclude that everything God does is "good" by default. So what do Christians mean when they say things like "God is so good! He saved my mother from cancer!"; He would be called "good" whatever happened!!

Christians often manipulate meaning and play a game in which it is impossible for their God concept to lose. The game is rigged.

And you don't have to think that much to see what they're up to.

[January 06, 2008 8:29 AM](#)