

# The Gospels of Christ

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

---

*The picture of Jesus Christ in the Gospels is a supernatural and perfect portrayal of a human being, which cannot be explained by human imagination or invention.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 16:15, Luke 1:1, John 1:14, John 5:39, John 10:10, John 14:6, John 20:30, 1 Corinthians 15:3, 2 Peter 1:16, 1 John 1:1

**Topics:** "Jesus Christ", "Gospel Authenticity"

---

## Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas delves into the profound question of the character of Jesus Christ as depicted in the Gospels, challenging listeners to consider whether this portrayal is real or a creation of the writers. The argument presented emphasizes the consistency and realism of Jesus' character, pointing towards its authenticity and historical accuracy. Various scholars and critics acknowledge the unparalleled nature of Jesus' depiction in the Gospels, highlighting the impossibility of such a character being invented by ordinary men. The sermon explores the unique and natural portrayal of the sinless Jesus, underscoring the impact and significance of His life on human history and spirituality.

---

## Transcript

We have now endeavored to consider the picture of Jesus Christ as it is presented to us in the Gospels - His character, claim, teaching, death and resurrection. It is necessary, however, at this stage to consider one feature which is apt to be overlooked. Indeed its very familiarity tends to make us forget its force and importance. It is this: taking the Gospels as they stand how are we to account for the delineation of Jesus Christ as there given? What is the relation between the character of Christ and the record in which it is found?

The alternatives are only two: either the character is real, or else it was created by the writers. The value of this argument is such that it can be thoroughly examined and tested by even the most untrained mind, and it requires no technical scholarship and no presupposition of the Divine authority or inspiration of the Gospels. This is therefore a point of real importance because of its simplicity and directness, and the universality of its application. It is the character of Jesus Christ which furnishes the most powerful argument for the historical character of the records in which it is portrayed.

The examination of historical records is the work of trained experts, and at the end of the examination nothing more than a high degree of probability can be attained. The examination of the consistency of a certain character, however, is a much simpler matter, and yields an absolute certainty. The character of

Jesus Christ stands or falls according as the drawing of it in the Gospel narratives is consistent or inconsistent. Its absolute consistency guarantees its reality. [B.

Lucas, *The Faith of a Christian*, p. 46.] Let us then state the argument again: either the character of Jesus Christ is real or else it was created by the writers. The character, as we observe it in the Gospels, bears every mark of reality, every indication of living personality. It is almost a law of literature that any portraits of the ideal in the least degree satisfactory are closely transcribed from life, as was, for example, Dinah Morris in *Adam Bede*. This confirms what has been said.

The wonderfulness, the originality of the character described in the Gospels, the minuteness, the freshness, the realization, the detail of the whole portrait, prove that it is drawn from life. [Robertson Nicoll, *The Church's One Foundation*, p. 43.] Now we know who and what were the writers; they were ordinary men without any pretense to literary ability, still less to literary genius. And yet they have managed to depict for us a unique Figure which has been the greatest attraction of the ages.

How are we to account for this even on purely literary grounds? Can we imagine such men inventing such a character? Is not the conception beyond anything merely human? As Dr. Fairbairn has well said - Were the Gospels inventions, whether mythical or conscious, spontaneous or purposed, they would be the most marvelous creations of literary art which we possess. [Fairbairn, *The Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, p. 303.] Have we anything in literature at all like it? If we take the finest characters of history or the noblest ideal in fiction, we at once see the contrast.

In all the world's great masterpieces we cannot find a single instance of a perfect human character. We think of Hamlet as perhaps the most perfect delineation of human character in Shakespeare's works, but no one would dream of saying that he was anything like a perfect human being. To paint the ideal is much, even for genius, but to picture the sinless is very much more. And yet in these Gospels, written by men possessing no literary genius, we have a perfect Human Being depicted.

They succeeded in giving us the Figure of the Sinless. The pencil does not swerve; and yet how inevitable it was that it should swerve had another Hand not held it! One false note would have destroyed all, but that false note never comes. [Robertson Nicoll, *The Church's One Foundation*, p. 47.] And, what is in its way more remarkable than anything else, the sum total of the impression made by this sinless and perfect Being is one of absolute naturalness, with the entire absence of anything incongruous, unbalanced, or unfitting.

The remarkable thing is not simply that these attributes and acts are represented as His, but that they are conceived as quite natural to Him, as not making Him anomalous or abnormal, but as leaving Him simple and rational and real - a person who never ceases to be Himself, who has no double consciousness and plays no double part, but expresses Himself in history according to the nature He has and the truth within Him. There is nothing quite like this in literature, no miraculous person who is so truly natural, so continuously one and the same; and no writers of the miraculous who so feel that they are dealing with what is normal and regular through and through.

These are things which have more than a psychological interest; they speak of men who have stood face to face with the reality, and are conscious of only describing what they saw. [Fairbairn, *The Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, p. 330.] How is all this to be explained? Did the Person create the record, or did the record create the Person? If the writers of the Gospels can be conceived of as inventing the character of Jesus Christ, it is hardly too much to say that we should be face to face with at least as great a miracle as

anything we now possess in connection with Christianity.

This has been admitted by several leading opponents of Christianity. Thus, Theodore Parker - It takes a Newton to forge a Newton. What man could have fabricated a Jesus? No one but a Jesus. [Theodore Parker, *Life of Jesus*, p. 363.] And John Stuart Mill in like manner - It is of no use to say that Christ, as exhibited in the Gospels, is not historical, and that we know not how much of what is admirable has been superadded by the tradition of His followers. Who among His disciples or among their proselytes was capable of inventing the sayings of Jesus, or of imagining the life and character revealed in the Gospels?

Certainly not the fishermen of Galilee; as certainly not St. Paul, whose character and idiosyncrasies were of a totally different sort; still less the early Christian writers, in whom nothing is more evident than that all the good in them was derived, as they always professed it was derived, from the higher source. [Mill, *Essays on Nature*. pp. 253-255.] Rousseau's words, too, are often quoted - It is more inconceivable that several men should have united to forge the Gospel than that a single person should have furnished the subject of it.

The Gospel has marks of truth so great, so striking, so perfectly inimitable, that the inventor of it would be more astonishing than the hero. [See Robertson Nicoll; *The Church's One Foundation*, p. 41.] To believe that unlettered Galilean fisherman, or even their immediate successors, invented a character which is so transcendent as to cast into the shade the finest efforts of all the greatest writers of every age, requires greater credulity than to believe that such a life was actually lived.

And besides this, the individuality of each of the writers, so marked that an ordinary reader sometimes thinks one contradicts another, joined with the marvelous unity of the picture, which is clear to the mind of every student, together with the absence of all sophistry or special pleading, will not allow us to believe that the facts given are anything else than an accurate record by honest men of what they saw and heard. If Jesus was acclaimed, they put it down; if He was scorned, they recorded it.

When He was called liar, blasphemer, deceiver, devil, when His own town-men rejected His claims, they drew no veil over the unpalatable circumstances, but let the truth be put down just as it was. It is inconceivable that the Evangelic Jesus should be a creation, whether of some master mind or of the myth-forming genius of the primitive Church. Humanity cannot transcend itself. Surely skepticism has its credulity no less than faith when it is gravely maintained that so radiant an ideal arose "among nearly the most degraded generation of the most narrowminded race that the world has ever known, and made it the birthplace of a new earth."

The mere fact that there dawned on the world, and that in a land barren of wisdom and an age morally bankrupt, an ideal which has been the wonder and inspiration of mankind for more than sixty generations, is an irrefragable evidence that is no mere ideal, but a historic fact. The Divine Life which the Evangelists portray must have been actually lived out on the earth, else they could never have conceived it. And thus Evangelic Jesus is Himself the supreme evidence at once of the historicity of the evangelic narratives and of His own Divinity. [Religion and the Modern Mind.

David Smith, "The Divinity of Jesus," p. 176.] It will readily be seen from what has been said that this argument is quite independent of any theory we may hold as to the origin, dates, and primitive character of the Gospels. It is the picture itself that has to be accounted for. There is no reasonable doubt that our four Gospels have occupied their present place in the Church at least since 200 A.D., whatever may have been their history previous to that date. How, then, are we to explain the picture of Christ?

And even when we go further and accept the irreducible minimum of the Gospels allowed us by modern criticism, the general result is exactly the same. [Nolloth, The Person of our Lord and Recent Thought, chapters iii and iv.] Analyze the Gospels as we will, the Portrait is there. Not only so, but the more complex the origin and the more numerous the strata of the Gospels, the greater the problem of the Portrait. Even if we admit the presence of inaccuracies, inconsistencies, later additions, and interpolations, the Character remains and has to be accounted for.

The larger the number of authorities, the more difficult to account for the unity. How is it that the net result of so many different hands at so many different times should be the perfect Picture, the consistent, balanced delineation of Jesus Christ as it stands in the Gospels today? And how and why, too, did this happen just then in Judea, under such adverse conditions? Why was the Perfect Man depicted then, and not before or since? How is it that the Gospels remain unique in literature today?

Among the striking proofs of this uniqueness is the contrast afforded by the apocryphal Gospels. All who read them with any attention will see that they are fictions, and not histories; not traditions even, so much as legends. ... Before I undertook this work I never realized so completely as I do now the impassable character of the gulf which separates the genuine Gospels from these. [B. Harris Cowper. Preface to Translation of the Apocryphal Gospels.] Again: we may look at the question from the standpoint of modern criticism of the Gospels which, as we have already seen, regards Mark, or a document equivalent to our Mark, as the earliest Gospel.

Does the acceptance of this position make any difference to the conception of Christ formed by readers? None whatever. The earliest Gospel is as full of the picture of a perfect and supernatural Christ as the later ones. This is admitted by critics who do not accept the orthodox Christian view of Christ and Christianity. Let us quote some representative testimonies of well-known scholars: - Even the oldest Gospel is written from the standpoint of faith; already for Mark Jesus is not only the Messiah of the Jewish people, but the miraculous, eternal Son of God, whose glory shone in the world. [Quoted, Warfield, The Lord of Glory, p. 144, from Bousset, Was Wissen Wir von Jesus?]

For the belief of the community, which is shared already by the oldest Evangelist, Jesus is the miraculous Son of God, on whom men believe, whom men put wholly by God's side. [Quoted, Warfield, *ibid.*] Nor must we lose sight of the fact that the Gospels, whenever and by whomsoever written, represent not merely four men, the writers, but the entire Christian community among whom they arose and by whom they were universally accepted. The picture of Christ of the earliest Gospel is the Christ of the Christian Church, not only of the Evangelists.

To quote Bousset again - We have not merely pupils transmitting the teaching of their Master, but a believing community speaking of one they honour as the exalted Lord. [Quoted, Warfield, *ibid.*] So also Otto Schmiedel - The early Church, in whose circles the narratives of the life of Jesus originated ... was at one in its acknowledgment of Christ, its exalted Lord. [Quoted, Warfield, The Lord of Glory, p. 133, from O. Schmiedel, Die Haupt-probleme der Leben-Jesu Forschung.] As, therefore, we study closely the most recent and acutest criticism of the Gospels in the light of the generally accepted view that Mark is the earliest, it is impossible to doubt or question the conclusion drawn by Professor Warfield: It is clear, then, that the documents which, even in the view of the most unreasonable criticism, are supposed to underlie the structure of our present Synoptics, are freighted with the same teaching which these Gospels themselves embody as to the Person of our Lord.

Literary criticism cannot penetrate to any stratum of belief more primitive than this. We may sink our trial shafts down through the soil of the Gospel tradition at any point we please; it is only conformable strata that we pierce. So far as the tradition goes, it gives consentient testimony to an aboriginal faith in the Deity of the Founder of the religion of Christianity. [Warfield, *The Lord of Glory*, p. 141. See also pp. 157-158.] It will be seen that our argument in this chapter has proceeded on two distinct though connected lines.

The one is that of taking the Gospels as they stand, and as they have stood since 200 A.D., and seeking to account for their picture of Jesus Christ. The other is that of accepting the consensus of modern criticism as to our earliest Gospel and endeavoring to account for the picture and view of Christ there given. In both cases the result is the same; a supernatural Person is depicted and has to be accounted for. And this is surely sufficient, whatever criticism may say as to the origin and date of our Gospels.

When Christians are asked to furnish a reply to every fresh assault on the Gospel history, they are entitled to say that if they can establish the great faiths of the historic creed, the critic who denies these, and justifies the denial on the grounds of criticism, must be in error. To establish the sinlessness of Christ and His Resurrection is virtually to refute many critical arguments. [Robertson Nicoll, *The Church's One Foundation*, p. 11.] But, as a matter of fact, the best of modern scholarship tends more and more to put back our Gospels to the position of contemporary documents, and to see in them the testimony of eyewitnesses to the Person and circumstances there recorded.

The more these works are studied the more conviction will grow that they were written by men who had companied with eyewitnesses of the Saviour's life and who have faithfully reported their words. [Salmon, *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 581.] That the third Gospel and the Acts are by Luke, a companion of Paul, is now fully admitted by Harnack. The momentous consequence of this as a testimony to early date and contemporary knowledge is perfectly obvious to all who have given attention to the subject. [Harnack, *Luke the Physician*, passim.]

See also Ramsay, *Luke the Physician*, ch. i.] And even with the inclusion of the fourth Gospel this position is scarcely weakened. Dr. Sanday, speaking of St. John 21:24, says - This is the most explicit of all the passages which imply that the author of the Gospel was an eyewitness, and wrote as an eyewitness. ... There is no ambiguity in the verse. ... A statement like this if not true is deliberately false; and if it is false, then I should say that the writer stamped himself as dishonest and insincere. [Sanday, *Expository Times*, vol. xx, p. 154.]

In the same way the Dean of Westminster says - It is to my mind impossible to doubt that the Evangelist of the fourth Gospel intended the scenes which he described to be accepted as real occurrences; it is impossible to believe that he knew them all the while to be the outcome of his imagination. [Armitage Robinson, *The Historical Character of St. John's Gospel*, p. 9.] The more thoroughly the Gospels are studied the stronger will be the conviction that they have come from men who were eye-witnesses of Christ and who have faithfully reported the events of their Master's life.

Dr. Kenyon, of the British Museum, closes an essay by referring to evidence which has become available during recent years for the study of the Gospels. So far as they have borne upon the question at all, the tendency has been the same - to confirm the traditional view of the date and authority of our Gospels. The traditional view had been hotly assailed by the searching historical criticism which, for good or for evil (and certainly very largely for good) has beaten upon the Christian records during the last sixty years, as it has upon all other departments of human knowledge; and although the great defenders of that tradition made

good their case with the materials which already lay to their hands, it is a striking fact that witness after witness has risen, as it were, from the grave to testify that they were right.

The historical critic will accept the new evidence and record it, after the searching examination which it requires, with that loyal obedience to the established fact which is characteristic of the best criticism of the day; but the Christian student is entitled to go one step further, and to say: "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes." [Kenyon, *The Gospels in the Early Church*, p. 48, "Essays of the Times," No. 3.] And so from the Gospels themselves, their conception of Christ, their reality and candor, [See a suggestive article in the *Spectator* for Jan. 30, 1909, on "The Candour of the New Testament."] we argue for our position that Christ is Christianity.

We invite the closest scrutiny, and ask men to submit the Gospels to the severest tests, feeling confident of the conclusion when all the facts and factors are properly taken into account. We are confronted by the story of the Gospels. However critically we may analyze them, the marvelous picture which they have created remains. And it is that picture, and not any critical explanation of it, which has dominated human history for nigh upon two thousand years. And what is that picture?

It professes, in the form in which it has come down to us, to be a revelation of God to man. It has the very characteristics which we might imagine such a revelation to possess; for it startles, it surprises us, it takes away our breath; it is utterly unlike what we should have expected; we could never have invented it. And yet the longer we look at it, the more truly God-like it appears. It is not what we thought God would be like, if we could see Him, but it surpasses our utmost thought.

It is too superhuman not to be true. And not only so, but it has subserved the purpose, the only purpose, for which a revelation could be made. It has drawn all its serious believers into the experiences of a closer communion with God. It has introduced in consequence a new type of spiritual life into the world. It has ennobled the whole subsequent history of our race. Can it be other than the revelation which, as Theists, we must antecedently expect? [Illingworth, *Reason and Revelation*, p. 151.]

This, then, is the problem of the Gospels in relation to Christ, and we are not surprised that men of very different schools of thought have realized its force and admitted its power. Thus Professor Gwatkin says - There is a tremendous dilemma there which will have to be faced. Assuming that the stupendous claim ascribed to him is false, one would think it must have disordered his life with insanity if he made it himself, and the accounts of his life if others invented it. [Gwatkin, *The Knowledge of God*, vol. i. p. 120.]

And a very different thinker, Matthew Arnold, whose attitude to orthodox Christianity is well known, writes: - Jesus himself as He appears in the Gospels, and for the very reason that He is so manifestly above the heads of His reporters there, is, in the jargon of modern philosophy, an absolute; we cannot explain Him, and cannot get behind Him and above Him, cannot command Him. [Matthew Arnold, *Preface to Literature and Dogma*.] Is there any solution of this problem except that which the New Testament and the Christian Church provide?

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/wh-griffith-thomas/the-gospels-of-christ/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**