Christ 101: How to Defend the Christian Faith with Reason and Evidence.

Lesson Twelve – The Gospels and the Eyewitnesses

* The original New Testament was not just one book. It is a collection of many different works that were written at different times.
* All of the books of the New Testament were written within sixty years of Jesus’ lifetime.
* When we look at the question of how the New Testament was composed, we can discern a distinct three stage process.

Stage 1: 28 – 30 AD; Life of Jesus – Eyewitnesses began immediately recounting what they see.

Stage 2: 30 – 65 AD; Oral Period and the New Testament Epistles – When the New Testament Epistles were written. When the Apostles were preaching in an oral fashion.

* The oral period was controlled and reinforced by communal correction, rabbinical memory skills, likelihood of written notes, and authoritative eyewitness accounts.

Stage 3: 65 – 90 AD; Writing of the New Testament Gospels and New Testament Epistles. Eyewitnesses still remain accessible at the time that the Gospels are written.

* At each stage of the New Testament composition, eyewitnesses remain accessible for the New Testament writers.

AID

The Gospel writers were able to write accurate history.

The Gospel writers intended to write accurate history.

The Gospels writers did write accurate history.

* The Gospels were written relatively early.
* If the traditional authorship is correct, then we have a strong case for eyewitness testimony being heavily involved in the writing of the New Testament.
* Matthew and John were written by eyewitnesses. Mark and Luke were written in close contact with eyewitnesses.

The Case for Traditional Authorship

1. Internal Evidence – evidence that comes from withing the Gospel text itself.

* Criterion of embarrassment suggests traditional authorship for three of the four Gospels.
* Matthew was written by a tax collector.
* Mark was written by a disciple of Peter.
* Luke was written by a disciple of Paul.
* The internal evidence for the Gospel of John suggests that the author was a Jew, the author was Palestinian, the author was an eyewitness, and the author was an apostle.

1. External Evidence – evidence outside of the Gospel texts.

* All of the early Christian writers without exception, affirm traditional authorship. No competing tradition exists.

What does traditional authorship reveal?

1. The Gospels were written either by eyewitnesses or in close association with eyewitnesses.
2. Traditional authorship sets a “time cap” on when these Gospels could be written.

* There is a strong case for other living eyewitnesses being available.
* Multiple Attestation – many different sources saying the same thing.
* The Gospel of Luke explicitly claims to have access to eyewitness accounts.
* In addition, other New Testament writers claimed either to be eyewitnesses or have access to eyewitnesses.
* It is very probable that the Gospel writers were in close contact with the eyewitnesses.