

Thinking Christian Podcast

Episode 7 Transcript (Automatically generated. Mistakes may remain.)

Atheist Responses to *Too Good to be False*

00:00:08 Welcome to the thinking Christian podcast, your weekly guy to solid Christian thinking on culture science, faith, and Christian confidence hosted by Tom Gilson.

00:00:23 Hello, I'm Tom. Gilson. Welcome to the thinking. Christian podcast, episode 7, coming back after a delay due to everything that's involved in launching a new book.

Too Good to be False came out on August 1st and ever since then, I've been very interested to see how atheists would respond to the case I make for the gospels in that book so far in this month, only one has weighed in on it fully. And his response is totally fascinating besides him, a few others have, I'd say wasted their time, critiquing the case without knowing it they're working on vague shadowy impressions and a strong negativity bias based on interviews they've heard or things that they've seen in short versions on the internet. You know, this book is new and I say so, and, and, and other people do too. In these interviews, this book is, and its argument are new.

00:01:16 So for anyone to think that they can get it in its entirety, just by listening to an interview is to completely misunderstand what's going on in this book, you have to get the full weight of it. In part one, which talks about how incredibly unique, consistent, and good Jesus is across a multiple dimensions. Part two that says that this uniqueness makes it hard to believe the atheist story, the skeptic story about where the gospels originally came from. And part three that pulls it all together with conclusions, for Christians in particular about following Jesus, no matter what well, these people, you know, like I said, they're working on vague shadowy impressions, and they're they're really negative. This is not so unusual. I've seen it before. In fact, I did a study on it once comparing negative and positive reviews of Stephen C Meyers' book *Signature in the Cell*.

00:02:13 I'll link to that study in the podcast notes. What you'll see there, what I found was a surprising proportion of the one-star Amazon reviews coming from peoplethjesusey who admitted right there in their review, that they hadn't read the book. Well, whether they've read it or not, I'm talking about too good to be false. Again, there is an interesting pattern in skeptics responses. I'm making a prediction here. Now you see this book, this book more than any other I know of in recent times, draws the reader in for a real closeup view of Jesus Christ in ways you haven't seen him before. And it practically demands that the reader decide what he or she thinks of Jesus. A lot of believers have said it's them and energize their worship of Jesus. They're seeing a new vision of his greatness. They're falling more in love with him. Their faith in him is growing stronger. Well, wait until you hear what the atheists say.

00:03:13 But I have to pause and review for a moment first. Even though you can't get the whole picture in a short podcast, I need to give you at least an overview, so you know a little bit what's going on. When I come back to talking about what the atheists say, the book is titled. *Too Good to be False*. That's a good five word summary of the case I make in it. But it's only five words. It's hardly all of it. Although the skeptics tend to treat it as if it were, the fact is the book. Doesn't just look at Jesus' goodness, but also his surprising uniqueness across a long list of traits. I look at his leadership. I look at his mission. I look at his friendship with those followers. I look at the way he uses authority. I look at how he handles the trial and crucifixion.

00:04:00 Now I can't go into details on those other dimensions now, but suffice it to say that Jesus' character is surprisingly unique across all of these dimensions, and the gospels are consistent in presenting him that way. Of course, along with that, he's also astonishingly good, especially in one perfectly clear and definable way: He is the only supremely powerful character in history or literature who was also supremely good, good in the sense of focusing his life and all of his work and especially all of his power on the benefit of others, for others, self sacrificially, giving. Jesus is unique in that and to a degree that I'm serious, no other character could match. Read the book. You'll see why. Now that's a, that's a painfully condensed summary of the almost a hundred, 100 pages in part one. In part two, I go on from there and I ask, and I answer the question, okay, there's quite a story there, but what if it isn't true.

00:05:05 Yeah, he's great. What if it's just a story? Well, here's the Jesus tack I take in answering that question. This story with this main character came from somewhere and I don't think the skeptics explanation for where it came from. Makes sense. I think the Speaker 1 y're wrong. In fact, from the perspective of Jesus' character as presented in the gospels, they're obviously wrong. I think they're going to have real difficulty holding onto their legend theories in light of this new challenge. I'm actually looking forward to hearing their best representatives on it, such as Bart Ehrman, you see the skeptics in general, think the gospels arose through decades of oral tradition and the telephone game motivated by psychological and in some cases political need. Well, I say that those things that they used, theorize, that they hypothesize that they're corrupting processes and they couldn't possibly have produced a character as unique as consistent and as good as Jesus.

00:06:09 That's part two in way too short of a summary. But you have to understand that the point is that the skeptics have a theory of the gospels and where they came from, that doesn't actually fit the character that's portrayed in this story. Now, remember what I said about how believers have responded to this book, that they've fallen more in love with Jesus. It's because I take readers in for a closeup on his character like they've never seen before. And the reviewers will tell you, we haven't seen Jesus this way before. Well, that's believers. How do you suppose skeptics are responding? It isn't love so far. They're all locking in on what they think is wrong with Jesus hold. They've got all kinds of complaints. The big one, the one I hear most often is he didn't condemn slavery. Well, no, but he did teach very clearly that all humanity is equal before God he taught even more clearly that no one should ever mistreat another human being.

00:07:13 Does he have to say the word slavery in order for people to get the point? Yeah. Okay. He didn't lead a crusade against slavery. He didn't use that word. He led a mission instead to set us all free

from the inside out. How do, how far do you, I think he had gotten with that mission. If he tried adding up political and economic mission and insurrection on top of that, Oh, he'd have been cut off early way too early way, too abruptly and whatever message he was able to get across about his primary mission would have been hopelessly muddled in it. Jesus knew better than to try to do too many things at once. He was working on the heart. That's a lot. And remember Speaker 1, again, working on the heart, people are all equal before God, no one should be mistreated. He said, treat others as you would have them treat you.

00:08:07 I think that answers the slavery question. Even if he didn't use the word. But speaking of mixing up missions, I've heard atheists complain that if he was really God, and if he was really good, he should have introduced basic medical practices like boiling bandages. So people wouldn't get so many infections. I hear that. And I go, can you imagine the priesthood that would grow up around that? The superstition, he wouldn't have just introduced one new religion. He would have introduced two, which is one too, too many. Wouldn't have gotten him where he intended to go. He was too smart to do that. Another one people say that Jesus had an anger problem. He got himself into a hissy fit and he cursed the fig tree. He was in a rage when he cleaned the temple. I look at that and I said, there's no sign that he was angry. Either time. I'm serious. They'd say what he did. It don't say that he was, he was ticked off. He was acting out object lessons in both cases, take the fig tree. For example, it said it didn't have any fruit on it. And but it did say it was in leaf. Now, fig trees that are in leaf should have at least some fruit on them. And this one didn't have any,

00:09:29 He cursed it clearly. This one it was a physical object lesson for fruitless Israel, which was soon to be, as we know, and as he taught in, in plainer terms in Mark 13, Matthew 24, I forget the chapter in Luke might be Luke 22, that the Israel was facing judgment for their fruitless newness. As it says in Genesis 12, three, being a blessing to the whole world. And by the way, this, the part about the victory being an object lesson that that's not an ad hoc or post-hoc explanation. That's how a first century Jew quite naturally could have viewed it. It's a natural explanation. If you understand the context and the same goes for his cleansing of the temple, he was enacting in advance. What God would do for real less than four decades later. And the destruction of the temple for that. I'm going to go ahead and recommend you read into N. T. Wright's book, *The Challenge of Jesus* just to see again, how clearly the first century Jews would have seen that this is not obscure. This is not at hoc far from this being a sign of, He knew

00:10:45 He's walked by fig trees before. He probably walked by that fig tree before. He'd certainly been in the temple often enough. He wasn't surprised, he wasn't caught off guard. He wasn't moved to a sudden rage. In fact, I would say there's no reason to think he didn't have it planned days in advance. Because he was, uh, he was there to teach something with an object lesson. Atheist don't have to like that, but they can't just land on it being a fit of rage. By the way, only once in all of the gospels, does it say that Jesus was angry and there his anchor was accompanied with grief over the smug religionists, the Pharisees' lack of love, their hardness of heart. You'll find it in Mark 3:15. Look it up. That's what Jesus anger looks like when he's angry. He's sad over people's lack of love. And he goes ahead and he does his ministry in love.

00:11:47 Still, skeptics reading the book have narrowed in on the question of whether Jesus is and whether he's uniquely good. They miss all the other unique aspects of his character that I cover in part one of the book. That's the first pattern I've noticed so far. They think they can defeat the book's argument. If they show that Jesus wasn't good. Oh, some skeptics have complained that Jesus couldn't be perfectly good if he, if he wasn't married, if he didn't have a wife and kids, you know, marriage and family fatherhood, that's a human good. He didn't have it. That means he didn't display every human. Good. So he wasn't a perfectly good human. I say, look, you might is. You might as well complain that he wasn't perfect because he didn't swim the English channel, climb Mount Everest, and leave us with a dozen original proofs of the Pythagorean theorem. There's a lot of human goods that he did not practice, but the argument isn't that Jesus displayed every conceivable human perfection, rather it said he was perfect and everything he set out to do most importantly, that he was perfect in the relationships he actually had with people.

00:12:59 I could go on to skeptics' complaints about what's wrong with Jesus, but I have a larger point. I want to make that, that covers all of it. Believers and unbelievers alike. Everyone has the opportunity in this book to see Jesus in a new light. Believers are consistently saying that they fall more in love with Jesus skeptics. So far skeptics so far have been hardening themselves more against him. They're they're fine. They seem to be being pushed to find things that are supposedly wrong with him. Maybe these things have been in the back of their mind, but boy, this pushing them to the forefront. And I don't think that has to be a skeptics response. I don't unbelievers could read this book and they could see Jesus' greatness and magnificence like never before. And they could see that the gospels can't be a legend as, as skeptical theorists say they are. And they can draw the same conclusion that I have. This story cries out. Jesus is different. He's so different in such amazing degree, across so many dimensions, his story. can't be just any story. This story couldn't be a human invention. It has to be true. And fall in love with Jesus, too.

00:14:16 And I pray that many, many unbelievers will see it that way. I pray that people will turn to Christ. I pray they'll fall in love with the greatest of all men ever to walk the earth. Pray that. Yeah, realistically, I know that not all skeptics won't go that way. So I said, I had a prediction. I have a prediction in inheritance. We're seeing this, seeing it start to happen already. It's it's nothing incredibly new. It's, it's, it's really the expansion, the continuation, the enlarging of a pattern that's already well underway.

You see the one way that skeptics consistently are trying to head off this argument is by finding ways not to like Jesus. Well, we know there's already a wide divide between committed believers and strongly committed atheist. We know that these really strongly committed atheist actually hate Christianity. If you doubt that my friend George Yancey has written the book on it from a sociological perspective, honest to goodness research, it's titled *So Many Christians, So Few Lions*. They hate Christianity. Well, I predict if this book gets any kind of influence -- I predict that the more influence this book has, the more believers will love Jesus. And the more atheists will hate him.

00:15:45 We're already polarized. That gap will grow even wider. And as they grow to hate Jesus more, if my prediction is correct, they will grow to hate us more. They'll grow to hate believers more. And they're, I'm not making my own prediction. It's Jesus' own words. In John 15:18 following, he says

“a servant is not greater than his master. If they hated me, they will hate you also.” Now this is already familiar in too much of the world and it has been through, down through the ages, but I'm talking about the Western world; the new thing that's going to happen to us in the Western world, where we have not known persecution. I see it happening now. I see an increasing, I see the possibility that a look at Jesus, like what I provide in too good to be false. I see the possibility of contributing to increased polarization.

00:16:40 And that doesn't make me happy. The one constellation is that Jesus said it would have to be that way, that the more people see him up close, the more they're going to have to decide either for him or against him and in the Western world where this is unfamiliar to us. I think that's going to happen more and more, which takes me to part three of the book. I've covered parts one and two way too quickly. I'll cover part three way too quickly too. It's titled part three is titled Jesus, no matter what. And you know, believers in every place in every generation have always had to make the decision. Am I going to follow Jesus? Even though there's a financial loss or sickness or relational pain or separation or war or whatever, it's not every believer that's had to say, am I going to follow Jesus?

00:17:38 Even though following Jesus is the reason I'm experiencing the pain. In other words, am I going to follow Jesus? Even when there is costs specifically to following him, if there's persecution. And my point that I really want to emphasize is that he's worth following no matter what he's worth it. He is the greatest human being ever to live. He lived the one perfect human life. He died for us and he Rose again for us. He's rescued us from our sins. He's got a home prepared for us. It's good. Now it's getting better later. Look, if things get hotter than they've been before, for us who live in the West, I'm still going to follow Jesus no matter what skeptics and choose what they want. I'm going to choose Jesus choosing with me. This is Tom Gilson for the thinking Christian podcast. Thank you for listening.

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