Christianity's Killswitch **[1]**

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Christianity is unique amongst world religions in that it explicitly provides a way through which it can be destroyed. Here is how.

A killswitch is a mechanism whereby a dangerous system can immediately be stopped. Typically one would find it where there is heavy machinery. If something—or someone—falls into the machinery, then the killswitch can be hit and it would immediately stop the machine, thereby preventing the something or someone from being destroyed. The main electrical switch in your house can also be thought of as a kind of killswitch. Unlike the name may suggest, a killswitch is intended to *save* and preserve. A good system will always provide a killswitch, even if the intention is that it will never be used. Its presence is meant to assure people that it is there should there be a threat, just as much as it reminds people that there is a threat and that operating the machine can be at an unintended cost.

As systems of *belief* and *salvation*, operating inside a religion can have a dire cost: if you hedge your bets on the wrong one, it is unlikely to go well for you when you pass away. The apostle Paul was aware of this. Earlier in his life, he was a devout Pharisee, which was a Jew who took his religion very seriously. Even amongst the Pharisees he was strict in keeping the laws and statutes that is necessary for a Jew to be admitted into heaven. Paul eventually had an encounter with Jesus which led him to abandon his life as a Pharisee and to proclaim the same good message that Jesus did. He therefore understood the sacrifice and importance of giving up something that he had devoutly believed his whole life to follow a new way. He understood that even the devout Pharisees would be in danger of God's wrath if they did not come to insight. But it was not just the Jews: Paul spent most of his life speaking to non-Jews (gentiles) to convince them of the truth of Jesus's message. He therefore encountered many different peoples and beliefs and saw the impact it had on these people to be confronted with a radical new message which called for a total sacrifice and submission.

Paul was thinking about this cost when he was nearing the end of his first letter to the church in the Greek city of Corinth. He had just reiterated to them the gospel (good news): that God has always had a plan to redeem this broken world, that Jesus was the Agent through which this plan would be worked out, and that the plan was carried out *successfully* through His life, death and resurrection. This was, and remains, a difficult message for many to accept and many have a mental block to some or all of the pieces in this puzzle. As Paul moves to address the intellectual objections that many Greeks had to the resurrection of the dead, he admits that much *is* at stake, and he presents us with Christianity's killswitch:

> Now if Christ is preached, that he has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, neither has Christ been raised. *If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith also is in vain. Yes, we are found false witnesses of God, because we testified about God that he raised up Christ, whom he didn't raise up, if it is so that the dead are not raised*. For if the dead aren't raised, neither has Christ been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins. Then they also who are fallen asleep in Christ have perished. *If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most pitiable*. — 1 Corinthians 15:12–19

Our preaching is in vain.

Your faith is also in vain.

You are still in your sins.

They also who have fallen asleep[1] *in Christ have perished.*

You do not get more honest than this. Paul declares that if Jesus never rose from the dead, *there is no Christianity and that all Christians will be under God's wrath for believing such foolishness*. Indeed, people should feel sorry for Christians, as they have spent their lives believing in a fairytale.

This is Christianity's killswitch. This is how you can destroy Christianity: by proving that Jesus did not rise from the dead.

Paul also writes:

> Now I declare to you, brothers, the Good News which I preached to you, which also you received, in which you also stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold firmly the word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to over five hundred brothers at once, most of whom remain until now, but some have also fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all, as to the child born at the wrong time, he appeared to me also. For I am the least of the apostles, who is not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the assembly of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am. His grace which was bestowed on me was not futile, but I worked more than all of them; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Whether then it is I or they, so we preach, and so you believed. — 1 Corinthians 15:1–11

Paul was certain of Jesus's resurrection. Not only had he experienced the resurrected Jesus face-to-face (Acts 9:1–19), but he had also spoken to eyewitnesses of Jesus's life, death and resurrection. Here he implicitly challenges his readers to go speak to eyewitnesses while they were still alive so that they could verify what Paul had told them *independently*.

Paul needed his audience to understand that everything was at stake when he called them to faith in Jesus. If they made a mistake, it would be disastrous and it would have been *much* better for them to not break with their former beliefs and traditions, which may well have led to fractured families and personal hardship. Paul did not invite them to meet Christ on his word only: he wanted, perhaps even required, them to be sure of the facts, so that he as Paul could not be blamed for being deceitful and intellectually dishonest. Therefore, out of concern for the well-being of his audience, he provided a killswitch for the message that he was proclaiming. A good system that can be dangerous always has a killswitch, even if it is intended exactly to ensure the safety of the people operating in

it. And with a system that was designed by the creator God before time itself, one won't find a better, more perfect system within which to operate.

Two thousand years later, the killswitch remains untouched. It is true that individuals have flipped it and given up on their faith, but no universally compelling proof of Jesus's permanent death have been provided. On the contrary, much work has been done to bolster the credibility of the historicity of Jesus's resurrection in the absence of living eyewitnesses. Paul's concern echoes down through the millennia and I want to give voice to it again: be intellectually honest and investigate the matter with seriousness and openness. The work of J. Warner Wallace [2] is accessible to most readers. For the more academically inclined, see Michael Licona's The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach [3].

> But now Christ has been raised from the dead. He became the first fruits of those who are asleep. — 1 Corinthians 15:20

PS Paul's requirement of people to know and assent to facts is not unique in the Bible. When God instituted the Passover in Exodus 12, the purpose was to remind future generations of (the historicity of) God's acts in the world to save the Israelite people. And when the Israelites did stop believing, then God spoke through the prophet Ezekiel (and others), and repeatedly proclaimed judgement and future hope, underscoring it with the words, "Then you will know that I am the Lord", so that people will see and remember God acting in the world. God requires remembrance of the past, and faith for the future.

- 1. Here "falling asleep" is a euphemism for having died, like "passed away" is.
- . Photo credit: Kevin [4].

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