

INTRODUCTION TO APOLOGETICS



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Course Overview

Course Objectives

- (1) To understand the relationship between apologetics and the gospel (Lesson 1)
- (2) To respond to common misconceptions about apologetics (Lesson 2)
- (3) To understand the evidence for the existence of God (Lesson 3)
- (4) To appreciate the evidence for creation (Lesson 4)
- (5) To memorize the General Argument for the truth of Christianity (Lesson 5)
- (6) To recognize the evidence for the reliability of the New Testament (Lesson 6)
- (7) To appreciate the importance of fulfilled prophecy as a testimony to Jesus' deity (Lesson 7)
- (8) To evaluate evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ (Lesson 7)
- (9) To understand Jesus' claims to deity, and the appropriate response to those claims (Lesson 8)
- (10) To answer questions about the uniqueness of the Christian faith, the doctrine of the Trinity, animism, and the fate of those who have never heard the gospel (Lesson 9)

Explanations and Directions for Class Leaders

This course introduces the basic principles of apologetics. You should allot 90-120 minutes for the class, in addition to time for doing assignments outside of class.

Discussion questions and in-class activities are indicated by this symbol ►. For discussion questions, the class leader should ask the question and give students time to discuss the answer. Try to make sure that all students in the class are involved in the discussion. If necessary, you can call on students by name.

Many footnotes refer to a **Scripture reference**. Please have students look up the verses and read them during the class. Unless indicated otherwise, Scripture quotations in the lessons are from the *English Standard Version* (ESV) of the Bible.

Section reviews are included throughout each lesson. These questions will be included on the tests. Take time to review each question during each class and at the end of each class. If you are studying as a group, have one member of the group answer each question. If you are studying individually, answer each question. If you do not know the answer, look back in the previous section for the answer.

Each lesson will include **three assignments**. Assignments should be completed and reported before the next lesson time.

1. The first assignment will be directed to the **head**. This will be a test to be taken at the beginning of the next class after the lesson is complete. Tests should be taken without referring to the course book, written notes, or to classmates. A test answer key is available for download at ShepherdsGlobal.org.
2. The second assignment will be directed to the **heart**. These brief assignments are intended to remind students that a true apologetic speaks to more than the mind. These assignments will sometimes be a personal testimony. Take time in the class to share these testimonies.
3. The third assignment will be directed to the **hands**. This is the student's opportunity to put their class learning into practice. In many ways, this is the most important part of the course. If students do not practice the principles taught in the lessons, they will rarely remember or apply the principles later. Take time to discuss these assignments each week.

At the beginning of each class session the class leader should give the **test** over the previous lesson. Every test includes a Scripture memory question. Please look at the test before teaching the lesson, so that you can remind the students of which Scripture verses they should memorize. The assessment for Lesson 7 is an in-class *debate*, conducted before Lesson 8. As class leader, your part in the debate is to present each of the arguments *against* the Resurrection given in Lesson 7. Make sure that every student has a chance to respond to at least one of the arguments.

Also at the beginning of each class session, each student should give a brief summary of their conversation for the "Apologetics and the Hands" assignment for the previous lesson.

If the student wants to **earn a certificate from Shepherds Global Classroom**, he should attend the class sessions and complete the assignments. A form is provided at the end of the course for recording the assignments completed.

Lesson 1

Introduction to Apologetics

Introduction

Jia is a young Christian in Taipei. She has been a Christian for one year. For the past few months, she has been trying to share the gospel with Lee, her neighbor. Lee is an unbeliever and likes to ask Jia difficult questions. Sometimes Jia thinks that Lee has sincere doubts and is seeking the truth; at other times, she thinks he may just like to argue. However, regardless of his motivation, Jia tries to be respectful and to show Christian love. Even as a young believer, she knows that not only her mind, but her spirit, must reflect Jesus to her neighbor.

This week, Lee excitedly came to Jia. From the internet, he had found a list of ten questions to “confuse Christians.” The website said, “No Christian can answer these questions. These questions will prove that the Bible cannot be trusted.”

Lee said, “Jia, I have a question for you. You say that the Bible is the Word of God and cannot have error. Mark 15:25 states that Jesus was crucified the third hour; that is 9:00 a.m. John 19:14 states that Pilate did not announce his judgment until the sixth hour; that is 12:00 p.m. If the Bible is the Word of God, why do these verses disagree?”

► If Jia came to you for help, how would you respond? Would you be afraid that Lee had found an error in the Bible? Do you think it is important to be able to defend your faith?

What is Apologetics?

Before we begin to study apologetics, we should define the term. Apologetics is based on the word “apology.” In common use today, to “apologize” means to say that you are sorry for something. But the *secondary* meaning of “apology” (*to give a defense*) was once the primary meaning of the word, and it is still one of the meanings. Apology in the sense of “defending my beliefs or actions” is the meaning this class will use. Apologetics is the defense of the faith; it is giving reasons for one’s beliefs.

Memorize this definition of Christian apologetics: **Christian apologetics is presenting the evidence for the truth of the Christian faith.**

D. James Kennedy was motivated to write a book on apologetics after hearing a radio talk show. The host had been interviewing an atheist. Kennedy testifies:

While frantically trying to get a call through to the station, I listened to a dozen or more Christian callers talk to this man. It seemed that every Christian who called was incapable of giving an intelligent reason for the faith that he or she held. Each caller would begin with, “The Bible says” The atheist would respond, “Why do you believe

the Bible?" Every one of them was reduced to stammering out something like, "Well, I've got it down in my heart." The atheist would answer, "Well, it's not down in my heart, friend, and I don't believe it."¹

► How would you answer this atheist?

In this course, you will study the answers to questions such as:

- Can we know that God exists?
- What about the problem of pain and evil in the world?
- What does creation teach us about God?
- Is the New Testament reliable?
- Are the Old Testament Messianic prophecies fulfilled in Jesus?
- Did Jesus Christ truly rise from the dead?
- Is Christianity the only way to heaven?
- What is the Trinity?
- How should Christians respond to animism?
- What will happen to those who have never heard the gospel?

Why Study Apologetics?

Apologetics is important for both *pre-evangelism* and *post-evangelism*. Pre-evangelism is what we do to help a person get closer to committing his life to Christ. A Christian can use apologetics to remove intellectual obstacles in the path of someone on his way to faith. Post-evangelism is what we do to help Christians become strengthened in their faith after they are converted.

Why is apologetics important in pre-evangelism? **Because many people come to Christ after studying the evidence for the truth of Christianity.**

C.S. Lewis was a former atheist who became a Christian after discovering that Christianity was true. Speaking of his life as an atheist, C.S. Lewis said, "I thought I had the Christians... disposed of forever." But "a young man who wishes to remain a sound atheist cannot be too careful of his reading. There are traps everywhere...."

The evidence for Christianity was so compelling that Lewis could not escape it. He said that he was brought to admit the existence of God, "kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting [his] eyes in every direction for a chance of escape." As God worked in Lewis' life, he became a committed Christian who called the story of his conversion *Surprised by Joy*.

Josh McDowell was another skeptic who tried to disprove Christianity. He found that the evidence pointed toward the truth of Christianity. McDowell became a Christian and wrote a book, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, to demonstrate the truth of the Christian faith.

Lee Strobel, author of *The Case for Christ*, was an atheist who became a Christian after

¹ D. James Kennedy. *Why I Believe*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 13

studying the evidence for Christianity. One of the books he read was *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*.

Apologetics is an effective pre-evangelism tool. When we present apologetics to someone who does not believe that Christianity is true, we may remove an intellectual stumbling block that is keeping him from believing the gospel. In this way, apologetics may help you share your faith.

Apologetics also helps in post-evangelism. Apologetics will not only help you share your faith, but it will also strengthen your faith and the faith of others. This is post-evangelism. Why is apologetics important in post-evangelism? **Knowing why you believe will make you strong in the Christian faith.**

Even many people who identify themselves as born-again Christians think that it doesn't matter what religion you belong to because all faiths teach similar lessons about life. Many Christians do not know why they believe what they believe. They are vulnerable to the faith-destroying attacks of skeptics. The study of apologetics will prepare you to answer skeptics who try to tear down your faith.

Is a knowledge of apologetics necessary for someone to believe in Christ? No, there are many Christians who became believers in Christ before they knew all the historical and scientific evidence that supports the truth of the Bible. Yet it is also possible for these same people to become confused by the lies that the devil tells them later about Jesus. Satan wants to steal the faith of those who put their trust in Christ. That is one reason it is important to learn intellectual reasons for faith.

Section A Review

1. What is a definition of Christian apologetics?
2. Why do we say that apologetics is important in pre-evangelism?
3. Why do we say that apologetics is important in post-evangelism?

Where in Scripture Are We Commanded to Use Apologetics?

The biggest reason we should study apologetics is that the Bible tells us that we should always be ready to defend our faith. The apostle Peter wrote,

But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.²

The Greek word translated "defense" is *apologia*. In ancient Greece, the word *apologia* referred to the defense of a person accused in court. The person with the complaint would

² 1 Peter 3:15

present his accusation (a *categoria*). Then the accused would give his defense (an *apologia*).

1 Peter 3:15 answers three questions about apologetics.

1. Should Christians use apologetics? **Yes, Christians should always be ready to give a defense, a reasoned explanation for our belief.**
2. Whom should we reach with apologetics? **Everyone who asks a reason for our hope.**
3. How should we present apologetics? **With gentleness and respect.**

Aside from this command, does the Bible itself promote the use of apologetics? Yes. For example, Luke refers to the "many infallible proofs" that Jesus used to prove that he was alive after his resurrection (Acts 1:3). Also, Acts 17 tells us that Paul, while in Athens, spoke of the Greek altar to the "unknown God" to make a case for Christianity. The biblical writers made sure their readers understood that the claims they were making corresponded with reality.

When Should We Present Apologetics?

► When should we present apologetics? Should we present it before or after we present the gospel?

The general rule is this: when you are sharing your faith, **present the gospel first**. Then, if it is needed, **use apologetics to support** the presentation of the gospel.

There are exceptions to the rule of "gospel first." For instance, sometimes you may want to use an apologetic topic to introduce the basic message of the Bible. Remember that the gospel is most important. Use apologetics if people bring up an objection or if using apologetics will create opportunities to share the gospel.

Section B Review

1. What New Testament verse demonstrates the need for apologetics? Write this verse from memory.
2. What three questions about apologetics are answered in the verse referenced above?
3. When sharing your faith, which should be first, the gospel or apologetics? Why?

What Is the Gospel?

Because the gospel is our primary message, it is important to have a good understanding of the gospel. 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 gives a summary of the "good news."

- Christ died for our sins.
- He was buried.
- He rose again and showed himself alive to many people.

Other scriptures show the results of the death and bodily resurrection of Christ:

- We can have forgiveness and cleansing of sin.³
- We can be adopted into the family of God and be inhabited by the Spirit of God.⁴
- We are able to live a holy life and please God.⁵
- We will have a new body resurrected to live eternally with Christ in a new heaven and a new earth.⁶

Here is a summary of the gospel message: the gospel is the good news that we can be saved by faith in the crucified and risen divine-human Christ. To explain this message of the gospel with someone, here is a time-tested approach:

The Basic Message of the Bible⁷

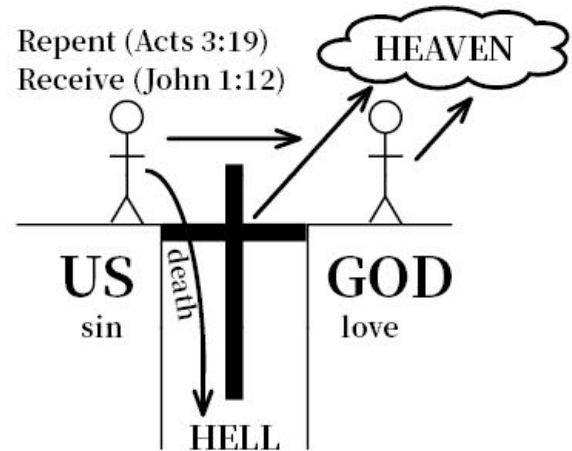
Start by asking people what they think the basic message of the Bible is. Affirm their response, then say, "May I show you a diagram that shows what I see to be the basic message of the Bible?"

If they give you permission, say the following as you draw the diagram (add figures, shapes, or words as you first mention the concepts associated with them).

The basic message of the Bible is this: **God** made **us**, the human family, to have a holy **love** relationship with Him. But we **sinned**, and our sin brought a great gulf between us and God. The Bible calls that separation **death**. In fact, if we die physically while being spiritually dead, we will forever be separated from God in a place called **hell**. That is the bad news of the Bible.

The good news is that God loves us and doesn't want us to go to hell (John 3:16). So, God the Father sent God the Son, Jesus, into the world to die on the cross and rise from the dead, so that we could have our relationship to God restored.

Now if we **repent**—if we turn away from all our sins (Acts 3:19)—and if we **receive** Christ into our hearts and lives—trusting him to forgive us (John 1:12)—then we will in a moment of time pass from death to life (we will cross the bridge). We will enter into a relationship with God, becoming a new creation. And in the end, all those who are trusting in Christ



³ Hebrews 9:22

⁴ Galatians 4:4-6

⁵ Hebrews 13:12, 20-21

⁶ Philippians 3:20-21.

⁷ You can download a free PowerPoint of a gospel presentation at www.answersingenesis.org/go/defending-your-faith. Click on the link to "Basic Message of the Bible" to download this presentation.

alone for salvation will go to **heaven** to spend eternity in happy fellowship with God and with others who know God.

That is the basic message of the Bible. Could I ask you...

- Where do you see yourself on this diagram?
- Where do you want to be?
- Is there anything stopping you from stepping over right now?

Who Needs Apologetics?

Every Christian needs to know why they believe. Every Christian needs to understand the foundation of his or her faith.

What about unbelievers? What is the role of apologetics for unbelievers? According to Josh McDowell, there are three reasons that people reject Christ:

- Ignorance (many times this is willful ignorance)
- Pride
- Moral problems

"In combat, the aim is to defeat your opponent. In evangelism, the aim is to persuade them."
-Ravi Zacharias

There are many people who have sincere intellectual doubts concerning the truth of Christianity. The problem for these people is ignorance of the Christian faith. These people need apologetics.

There are other people who bring up intellectual objections as an excuse to avoid admitting the real reason they don't want to believe. These people may be proud or have sins that they do not want to give up. We need to recognize the real reason these people are rejecting Christ and confront them with the reality of their sin and pride. However, we should also deal with their intellectual objections. Many times these people need answers to their intellectual excuses before they will recognize the real reason they reject Christ. Because of this, anyone who brings up intellectual objections may need apologetics, regardless of the person's deepest reason for bringing up the objection.

Section C Review

1. What are three reasons people reject Christ?
2. Why should we respond to intellectual objections, even for people who have a deeper reason for unbelief?

Apologetics in Action - The Conversion of C.S. Lewis

C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) was born into a Christian family in Ireland. His great-grandfather was a Methodist minister, and his grandfather was an evangelical Anglican. However, after his mother died of cancer, Lewis decided that God was a cruel God. By the age of thirteen, Lewis had declared himself an atheist.

Lewis became a brilliant student of literature at Oxford University. After graduation, he became one of the most popular lecturers at Magdalen College, Oxford. Two of Lewis's best friends on the English faculty, Hugo Dyson and J.R.R. Tolkien, were Christians. Through discussions with these men and his own readings, Lewis recognized the intellectual emptiness of atheism.

In 1929, Lewis admitted the reality of God's existence and became "the most reluctant convert in all England." At this point, Lewis confessed the truth of theism ("God is God"), but he had not yet become a Christian. Apologetics had convinced Lewis's mind of God's existence; the gospel had not yet won his heart.

Two years later, C.S. Lewis surrendered to Christ. This time, Lewis had a true change of heart, not just a mental assent to God's existence. Lewis was no longer a "reluctant convert." Now he was "surprised by joy," and he willingly followed Jesus Christ.

Lewis became one of the most influential Christian writers of the twentieth century. He wrote twenty-five books addressing many aspects of Christian belief. In an age of growing secularism, Lewis was a gifted defender of the Christian faith.

The conversion of C.S. Lewis shows the relationship between apologetics and evangelism. After the death of his mother, Lewis had intellectual questions about the existence of God. Lewis could not reconcile a loving God with the presence of pain and suffering in this world. Before his ears were opened to the gospel, Lewis needed to hear an answer to these questions.

Apologetics brought Lewis to the point of admitting the existence of God; evangelism brought him to a joyful relationship with God. Although the gospel should *usually* be presented first, the conversion of C.S. Lewis shows that apologetics is sometimes necessary to prepare the way for the gospel.

What Are the Limits of Apologetics?

Apologetics itself does not bring anyone to Christ. God opens the eyes of those who are spiritually blind. However, the Holy Spirit uses apologetics as a means to help some people find Jesus. We must pray that God uses the information that we share with others to help their spiritual eyes become opened.

It is the Word of God (which is sharper than a sword) that will penetrate to the heart of a lost person to awaken them to their need of Christ.⁸ Yes, we do need to make a case for the Scriptures to help people have a greater confidence that they can trust what they read in the Bible, but we should also keep in mind that the Bible is self-authenticating.

What does it mean to say that “the Bible is self-authenticating”? Because the Bible is God’s Word, it is living and powerful. The Bible speaks to our hearts of its own truthfulness. Our hearts recognize the truth of God’s Word.

Because the Word of God testifies to itself, many people come to faith in Christ even without knowing the arguments in favor of Christianity. They recognize the truth of the Bible long before they have formed intellectual reasons for their faith.

Throughout history, Christians from all levels of society have been willing to die for the sake of the gospel. Some of these were highly educated people; others did not read at all. But their faith was unshakable! Where did their assurance and confidence come from? It did not come by natural ability or intellectual argument, but by a revelation by the Holy Spirit to the “eyes of the heart.”⁹

There are two ways to see. We see with physical eyes and with spiritual eyes - the eyes of the heart. Most people first know that the Bible is the Word of God because when they read it or hear it read, God reveals its glory to their hearts.

The Testimony of a Filipino Pastor

A pastor in the highlands of the Philippines was born into a pagan tribe. His father was a “priest” who performed demonic rituals for the tribe. One day, this young man was given a New Testament in his native language. He began to read – and could not stop reading!

He knew this book was true even though he could not explain why. When he came to the story of the crucifixion, he began to weep. He was reading the story of Jesus’ death for the first time. “As I read”, he said, “I felt as if my soul became transparent, and I cried out to God to save me! After that I felt clean!”

How Does God Reveal His Glory?

John Piper lists some of the ways in which God gives spiritual sight to people.¹⁰

God Reveals His Glory Through Creation

The Apostle Paul wrote that God’s “eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.” All mankind is given spiritual sight of God’s glory through the world he created. We are without

⁸ Hebrews 4:12

⁹ 1 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 1:19

¹⁰ This material is adapted from John Piper’s sermon, “God’s Peculiar Glory: How We Know the Bible Is True” (Houston, Texas, April 28, 2016). Retrieved from <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/gods-peculiar-glory-April-11>, 2020.

excuse.¹¹ Pointing out to people how creation shows God's handiwork is a form of apologetics.

God Reveals His Glory in the Person and Sacrifice of Jesus Christ

To those who are willing to receive Christ, God supernaturally opens the eyes of their heart to see his glory and to become convinced that he is who he claims to be.¹²

God has revealed himself to all people. "The grace of God which brings salvation has appeared to all men."¹³ Sadly, most men reject his grace and remain blind. Men and women who refuse to see become more and more blind. But to those who are willing to see, God reveals more and more of his glory and saving grace.

► Read Matthew 13:13 and John 9:39. How is it possible to see and not see, and to hear and not hear? Discuss your answers as a group.

God Reveals His Glory in the Gospel

In 2 Corinthians 4:6, Paul makes an amazing statement!

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Just as God said, "Let there be light" during creation, he commands spiritual light to shine so brightly in every receptive heart that we *know* that Jesus and the gospel are real. God speaks through the gospel to reveal himself to everyone who is willing to see.

God Reveals His Glory Through the Life and Testimony of Believers

We read above that "the grace of God which brings salvation has appeared to all men." Just before that, Paul makes another startling statement. Paul is writing to Titus, a young pastor on the island of Crete. Paul says that Titus must teach the Christians how to live godly lives "so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior."¹⁴ The life and testimony of believers makes the gospel attractive. God speaks to the hearts of unbelievers through the lives of Christians who are faithful. *The holy lives of Christian believers are an important apologetic.*

The Testimony of a Chinese Believer

David determined early in life to be an atheist. But as a young man searching for peace, he began experimenting with various religions. He converted to Buddhism, but Buddhism left him empty. Later he studied the writings of Confucius, but he could not find inner peace.

¹¹ Psalm 19; Romans 1:19-21

¹² Ephesians 1:19

¹³ Titus 2:11

¹⁴ Titus 2:10

At one point, David attempted to study the Bible. But, when he got to the story of the Flood, he closed the Bible in anger. The idea of God destroying the earth by a world-wide flood disgusted him. David said, "I was determined to never become a Christian! I could never believe in a vengeful god who would bring such death and destruction to men!"

A few years later David attended an English class at a Chinese university. The teacher was a young Christian professor from the United States.

"This young professor was very cautious about sharing his gospel," David said. "He knew he was being watched by the authorities so he rarely witnessed in the classroom, though we knew he was a Christian. But it was joy that captivated me! I had never met a person with so much joy! We would find him around the campus playing his guitar and singing, and he seemed so at peace. I just had to know where his peace came from.

"One day I followed the professor to his apartment, and in very broken Chinese he shared with me the plan of salvation. Somehow as he read, I simply believed the message and instantly knew that something miraculous and wonderful had happened to me! I felt that the whole world had changed! I looked outside the apartment window and saw the flowers as if for the first time. They appeared so brilliant. Then I realized that it wasn't the world that had changed. The change had happened inside my heart!"

God used the life of a Christian to reveal his glory to David's hungry heart. A young Christian professor "adorned the doctrine of God" through his joyful Christian life.

Section D Review

1. Who is the Person who opens the eyes of those who are spiritually blind?
2. How does the Holy Spirit use apologetics to help bring some people to faith in Christ?
3. What does it mean for the Scriptures to be self-authenticating?
4. List four ways in which God reveals his glory to the spiritual eyes of the heart.

Conclusion

Jia stopped Lee and said, "Can I talk with you a few minutes? I may have an answer to your question about the difference between Mark and John's time for the crucifixion."

Lee was surprised. "You really care enough about that religious book to look for an answer to my question? I didn't think Christians liked questions! I thought that Christians closed their mind and eyes to truth. But go ahead and tell me; what did you find?"

Jia showed Lee what she found in a Bible commentary. Lee's question, like many questions about the Bible, can be answered by considering the historical context. Jia said, "Mark's gospel was written between A.D. 45 and 65. During those years, the Jewish people used their own system of counting time. They began the new day at 6:00 a.m. Mark probably used the Jewish system in his Gospel. When Mark 15:25 says that Jesus was crucified at

the third hour of the day, it means that he was crucified at 9:00 a.m.”

“That’s what I said,” Lee interrupted. “Mark says 9:00 a.m. but John says 12:00 p.m. One of them is wrong!”

Jia smiled and quietly said, “John didn't actually say that Jesus stood before Pilate at 12:00 p.m. He said it was the sixth hour. John wrote his gospel later than Mark’s. He was probably writing from Ephesus, a Roman colony. The Roman influence was great in those days, especially in the Gentile world. The Romans started a new day at 12:00 a.m. So if John was using the Roman system, in John 19:14, the ‘sixth hour’ is 6:00 a.m.”

“Together, these two gospels show us the story of Jesus’ trial and crucifixion. John shows us that Jesus was condemned by Pilate at 6:00 in the morning (the sixth hour) after a nighttime trial. A nighttime trial was not even legal! Jesus was condemned unjustly. Then, Mark shows that three hours later, Pilate’s sentence was carried out. Jesus was crucified at 9:00 a.m. And, Lee, he was crucified not for anything that he did wrong. Even Pilate said, ‘I find no guilt in him.’ Jesus was crucified for your sins and my sins. He died so that you and I can live forever.”

Lesson 1 Assignments

- (1) Apologetics and the Head: You will begin the next class with a test over the review questions from Lesson 1. Study these questions carefully in preparation for the test.
- (2) Apologetics and the Heart: Thank God for revealing himself to you. Thank him for removing stumbling blocks that closed your mind to truth. Think of a person whose life demonstrated genuine Christianity to you. Write or call this person to express thanks.
- (3) Apologetics and the Hands: Ask unbelievers (at least one) if you can interview them regarding their worldview or belief system. If they are willing, you can say, “How would you answer the three great philosophical questions of life? These questions are: Where did I come from? Why am I here? and Where am I going?” These are questions regarding the origin of life, the purpose of our existence and what happens after we die. Ask them why they believe what they believe. Then ask if they are willing to talk with you again as you continue this course. Take notes about your conversation(s) to share with the class at your next meeting.

Lesson 1 Test

- (1) What is a definition of Christian apologetics?
- (2) Why do we say that apologetics is important in pre-evangelism?
- (3) Why do we say that apologetics is important in post-evangelism?
- (4) What New Testament verse demonstrates the need for apologetics? Write this verse from memory.
- (5) What three questions about apologetics are answered in the verse referenced above?
- (6) When sharing your faith, which should be first: the gospel or apologetics? Why?
- (7) What are three reasons people reject Christ?
- (8) Why should we respond to intellectual objections, even for people who have a deeper reason for unbelief?
- (9) Who is the Person who opens the eyes of those who are spiritually blind?
- (10) How does the Holy Spirit use apologetics to help bring some people to faith in Christ?
- (11) What does it mean for the Scriptures to be self-authenticating?
- (12) List four ways in which God reveals his glory to the spiritual eyes of the heart.

Lesson 2

Misconceptions about Apologetics

Introduction

"Jia, I have a question for you!" Jia turned to find Lee waving excitedly from his apartment. She began to wonder, "Can I really answer his questions? I've only been a Christian a short time myself. What if he causes me to begin doubting my new faith?"

But Jia believed that Christians are to be "prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you."¹⁵ So, she smiled and said, "What is your question, Lee?"

"Last week, you explained to me about the difference between Mark and John. I admit that your answer was pretty good! I never knew about the difference in counting time. But, how can you prove that the story of Jesus is true at all? Maybe the whole thing is made up! I am a modern man. I look for scientific proof before I believe anything. Prove scientifically that Jesus was crucified, buried, and rose from the grave and I might become a believer!"

In this lesson, we will study four common misconceptions concerning Christianity that are shared by many people. Many non-Christians, and even some Christians, agree with the four statements we will discuss. But these statements are false and may hinder a non-Christian who is trying to understand the gospel. We need to answer these questions if they hinder someone from becoming a Christian.

Misconception 1: Christianity Must Be Proven with the Scientific Method

Some unbelievers say, "I can accept Christianity only if you can prove it with the scientific method."

To understand the problem with this statement, you must understand the definition of the "scientific method." The scientific method proves something by *repeating an experiment again and again in a controlled environment while recording the results*. The scientific method requires *repeatable* experiments.

Can we prove by the scientific method that gravity exists? Yes! We can drop a rock twenty times and record, "Twenty times out of twenty, the rock fell to the ground." Gravity exists.

Can we prove by the scientific method that Jesus was crucified, buried, and rose from the grave? No! This is an historical event which cannot be repeated. We cannot kill Jesus twenty times, bury him, and wait for another resurrection!

¹⁵ 1 Peter 3:15

Agnostics who insist that historical events must be proven with the scientific method are confusing two very different types of proof. To prove historical events, we cannot use the scientific method, because we cannot repeat the events. To prove historical events, we must use the *legal-historical* method of proof.

The legal-historical method of proof looks for precise evidence for an event. It looks at:

- Written testimony
- Oral testimony
- Physical evidence

Imagine that we try to determine, "Was Chairman Mao Tse-tung alive in 1972?" This is not a scientific question; this is an historical question. To prove the existence of Chairman Mao, we will use the legal-historical method. We will look for:

Written testimony:

- Can we find written documents from 1972 that refer to Chairman Mao?
- Do biographies written by people who knew Mao tell stories from 1972?

Oral testimony:

- Can we find anyone who says, "I met Mao Tse-tung in 1972"?
- Can we find speeches that were made in 1972 by Chairman Mao?

Physical evidence:

- Are there pictures from 1972 of Chairman Mao?

► Before reading the next paragraph, discuss the kinds of legal-historical proof you would seek for the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

Let's put Jesus of Nazareth to the test we used for Chairman Mao.

Written testimony:

- Can we find written documents that refer to Jesus?

Josephus, a Jewish historian, referred to Jesus in his *Antiquities*, a history written in the first century

- Are there biographies written by people who knew him?

Each of the four gospels is a historical biography. Matthew and John were written by his close followers. Mark records the memories of Simon Peter. Luke was a careful scholar who investigated each of the stories in his gospel.¹⁶

¹⁶ Luke 1:1-4

Oral testimony:

A Roman centurion testified, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"¹⁷

The gospels contain detailed records of Jesus' own words. Some of these, such as the Sermon on the Mount, are long. This oral testimony became written testimony in the Gospels.

Physical evidence:

Thomas, a man who would not accept the testimony of the other disciples, touched Jesus' hands and exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!"¹⁸

Jesus' brother James, who did not believe Jesus' words during his earthly ministry, became a believer when he saw the risen Lord.¹⁹

Christianity is unique among world religions. There is little evidence from the life of Mohammad or Buddha. These religions cannot be proven true or false using the legal-historical method. Christianity can be proven true with the same type of evidence we use to prove the life of any other historical figure.

Is science useful for Christian apologetics? Yes. Scientific facts support the truth of the Bible. Scientific facts are helpful in supporting the truth of the Bible; but the life, death and resurrection of Jesus must be examined using the legal-historical method.

If a non-Christian says, "You have to prove Christianity with the scientific method," show him that non-repeatable events such as a person's birth and death are proven not by the scientific but by the legal-historical method. Show the legal-historical evidence for the life of Jesus Christ. This can remove one of the stumbling blocks on the path to the cross.

Section A Review

1. What are the key elements to the scientific method?
2. Instead of the scientific method, historical events should be proven by what method?
3. What are three types of evidence used for legal-historical proof?

Misconception 2: Christianity Must Be Proven with 100% Certainty

A second misconception about apologetics says, "I can't accept Christianity unless there is enough evidence to prove with *absolute certainty* that it is true."

► Before reading the next paragraph, how would you respond to this misconception? Does this statement sound reasonable?

¹⁷ Mark 15:39

¹⁸ John 20:28

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:7

In your discussion of this question, did anyone say, “You cannot prove any historical event with 100% certainty”? This is a good response. *Because it happened in the past* and we were not there, we cannot prove anything with 100% certainty.

Think of some examples from history:

- In 49 B.C., Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon on his way to Rome. Is there any way to prove this with 100% certainty? No; we cannot visit that day in history to observe Caesar. But no historian denies this historical event. Historians believe that Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon because there is enough legal-historical evidence to support that event.
- In 1789, George Washington became president of the United States. Is there any way to prove this with 100% certainty? No; we cannot visit that day in history to witness Washington’s inauguration. But no historian denies this historical event.
- In 1917, Nicholas II left the throne as Czar of Russia. Is there any way to prove this with 100% certainty? No; we cannot visit that day in history to witness the abdication of Czar Nicholas II. But no historian denies this historical event.

We cannot prove historical events with 100% certainty. Instead, we collect data until we have enough evidence to make a decision about what has happened. Even in court, the prosecutor does not need to provide absolute proof. A jury simply needs to be convinced *beyond a reasonable doubt* that a crime has been committed.

This is how we live every day. We make decisions based on sufficient evidence, not on absolute proof.

As Christian apologists, we do not need to “prove Christianity with 100% certainty.” Instead, we need to show that there is sufficient evidence for believing the truth of the Christian faith. The historical evidence for Christianity is not absolute, but it is sufficient.

“There is enough evidence for the Christian faith to convince anyone who is not set against it. But there is not enough evidence to bring anyone into God’s kingdom who will not come.”
- Blaise Pascal,
French philosopher and scientist

► Discuss: If we cannot prove with 100% certainty that Christianity is true, does that mean that we can never know for certain that it is true?

Do not think that this means we can never know that Christianity is true! There is a difference between *knowing* something absolutely and *proving* something absolutely.

Let me give you a simple illustration of this. Today is September 15, 2016. I *know* absolutely what I had for breakfast today. I ate some strawberries and a bowl of cereal, and I drank a cup of coffee. I know this, but I cannot prove it to you. You were not there; I did not take a photograph for evidence. I know it; I cannot prove it.

You can know with absolute certainty that Christianity is true. When you study the evidence for the truth of Christianity and take the step of faith necessary to accept Christ, the Holy Spirit will confirm in your heart that what you are believing is absolutely true. You will live and act as if you had absolute proof because you have sufficient reasons to commit to it 100%. This is called *moral certainty*. You can know with certainty that the Christian faith is true even though you cannot *prove* it with 100% proof.

Misconception 3: All Truth Is Relative

Today, it is popular to say, "All truth is relative." In other words, if you believe something, it is true for you – even if it is not true for anyone else.

Imagine that a glass of poison was sitting on the desk in this room. Imagine that you came into the room thirsty and took a drink, believing that the glass contained water. Even if you believed completely that the glass was full of water, you would become sick.

Believing something does not make it true. Truth is truth regardless of our belief. Believing that poison is water does not change the truth. Truth is not relative.

The statement "all truth is relative" is *self-contradictory*. This statement is absolute, but it claims that there are no absolute statements. If all truth is relative, the statement "all truth is relative" is not true!

Imagine this conversation between a Christian (Thomas) and an agnostic (Aldous).

Aldous: "The gospel may be true for you; it is not true for me."

Thomas: "So all truth is relative?"

Aldous: "Yes! That is right."

Thomas: "You are saying that *nothing* is absolute. There is nothing that is true in every situation?"

Aldous: "That's right! Christianity may be true for you, but it is not true for me."

Thomas: "That's very interesting! You are telling me *absolutely* that nothing is absolute. If you are right, you must be wrong!"

Do you understand? This is self-contradiction. It cannot be true in all cases that nothing is true in all cases. The statement, "There are no absolutes" is presented as an absolute statement. This cannot be true.

Let's have Aldous and Thomas continue their conversation. Thomas will guide Aldous to better conclusions about the nature of truth. You could save similar conversations by asking the same kind of questions Thomas does. Role play this dialogue ahead of time:

Thomas: "So, Aldous, how do you define truth?"

Aldous: "Truth is what you believe."

Thomas: "Ok. Well, could you believe something that is false?"

Aldous: "Yes."

Thomas: "Then truth isn't what you believe then, is it?"

Aldous: "Guess not."

Thomas: "If I were to tell you that it is raining outside this room right now, would that be a true claim or a false claim?" [It's not actually raining outside where Thomas and Aldous are having this conversation.]

Aldous: "That would be a false claim."

Thomas: "Why is it false?"

Aldous: "Because it's not actually raining."

Thomas: "That's right. My claim does not match reality. For a claim or a statement to be true, it has to correspond to reality. A claim is false if it doesn't correspond to reality. The best definition of truth is this: Truth is an idea or statement that corresponds to reality. If that is the case, is truth something we discover or is truth something we create?"

Aldous: "Something we discover."

Thomas: "That's right. It's something we discover, or is revealed to us. This means that truth exists outside ourselves; it is objective. It is not something we make up, but something we find. That being the case, we should become seekers of truth. There are real and objective answers to life's great philosophical questions (like where did we come from, why are we here, and where are we going), and it is in our best interest to discover those answers."

Section B Review

1. Why do we say, "You cannot prove any historical event with 100% certainty"?
2. If you cannot *prove* something with absolute certainty, but you have enough proof to have an inner conviction that it is true (and you are willing to live according to that conviction), you have _____.
3. The idea that all truth is relative is _____. It cannot be true.
4. What is truth?

Misconception 4: Sincerity Is More Important than Truth

This misconception is related to Misconception 3. It says, "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere in your belief. It really doesn't matter who or what you put your faith in. The important thing is that you believe something."

► How can you respond to this misconception?

People who believe Misconception 3 ("All truth is relative") often believe misconception 4. However, we have already seen that believing poison is water does not make it true. Believing something does not make it true. This is especially important in regards to salvation. Just believing that I am saved is not enough. It does not matter how sincere I am. It is important *what* we believe in. What we believe in is called the *object of our faith*.

The object of our faith is important. Again, let us illustrate this with a real-life example. Imagine two people standing at the edge of a cliff. Thomas says, "I must find a strong bridge that I trust to carry me across the canyon." Aldous says, "It doesn't matter if the bridge is strong, as long as I believe sincerely." Which one will get across the canyon safely?

There is only one person who can save us—Jesus Christ. We must put our faith in him. It will do us no good to put our faith in someone or something that cannot save us, no matter how sincere we are.

We are not saved by our faith; we are saved by *Christ* when we place our faith in him. We are saved *by* the grace of Christ *through* faith.²⁰ Only Christ can bring salvation.

It is not even the *strength* of our faith that saves us; it is the *object* of our faith. Imagine two people. Abdul is a Muslim with a strong faith in the teachings of Mohammad; Nabeel is a Christian who is still weak in his faith. Nabeel's faith is real, but it is weak.

► Who is saved: Abdul with his strong faith in Mohammad or Nabeel with his weak (but real) faith in Christ?

The Christian is the only one saved, even though he has a weaker faith. Why? Because he has his faith in the right person.

Many people say that a person in any religion will be saved as long as they are sincere. As long as they believe the road they are on is right, they will be O.K. Let's see how that works.

► Look at this map of Iowa.²¹ Which road goes from Des Moines (1) to Davenport (2)?

²⁰ Read Ephesians 2:8-9

²¹ "Iowa" was created by SGC with open data from NED and Wiki Commons, available from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/sgc-library/52344115203>, public domain (CC0).



The answer is Interstate 80. If I drove on Interstate 35 from Des Moines and believed sincerely that it goes to Davenport, would it take me to Davenport? No!

Believing that a particular road will get me somewhere does not mean it will get me there. I must be on the right road. Likewise, believing that I am on my way to heaven does not mean that that way will get me there. I need to actually be on the right path. The writer of Proverbs warned, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death."²² Jesus said, "I am the way...No one comes to the Father but through me" (John 14:6). Any other way than through Jesus will not get us to Heaven.

Section C Review

1. It is not enough to believe. We must put our faith in the right _____.
2. List the four misconceptions about apologetics studied in this lesson. Give a brief response to each one.

²² Proverbs 14:12

Apologetics in Action - The Conversion of Josh McDowell

As a teenager growing up in Michigan, Josh McDowell (1939-)²³ sought answers to three big questions: *Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going?*

Josh looked for answers to these questions in church, but he did not find answers in the church he attended. Josh looked for answers in education, but he found that his teachers and fellow students did not have answers to these big questions. Josh thought the answers to his questions might be found in parties, but he found that the thrill of the parties soon ended – and he remained confused about his purpose in life and his destiny.

The people around McDowell thought he was happy, but inside he was empty. During this time, he saw a group of students and teachers who were happy and seemed to have an inner peace.

One day, Josh sat down to talk with these students. When they mentioned their faith in God, McDowell mocked them, “Christianity is for weak people, not for intellectuals.” However, he was so impressed by these people that he asked one of the students, “Why are you so different from all the other students and faculty on this campus? What changed your life?” Her answer shocked McDowell; she said, “Jesus Christ.”

When Josh McDowell argued that he could not believe in Jesus, his friend challenged him to make a careful study of the claims of Jesus Christ: that he is God’s Son; that he lived as a real human on earth; that he died on the cross for the sins of humanity; that he was buried and was resurrected three days later; and that he is still alive and can change a person’s life today.

McDowell accepted this challenge in order to prove that the Christian story was untrue. As a prelaw student, Josh knew how to examine evidence. He started by studying the Bible. He wanted to find evidence that the Bible is unreliable.

For months, Josh studied the evidence for the Bible. What he found changed his life. He discovered that the Old and New Testaments were some of the most reliable documents in the ancient world. This forced him to a difficult question, “Was Jesus more than a carpenter? Was he truly the Son of God?” McDowell came to the conclusion that Jesus was indeed the Son of God.

Once our mind finds the truth of the gospel, we are then ready to face the question of our heart. After recognizing the truth of the Bible, McDowell was still unwilling to accept Christ as his Lord. There were two reasons for his reluctance: pleasure and pride.

McDowell knew that becoming a Christian would stop his sinful pleasures and require him to give up control of his life. McDowell says, “I was a walking battlefield. My mind was

²³ This material is adapted from Josh McDowell’s testimony, retrieved from <https://www.cru.org/us/en/how-to-know-god/my-story-a-life-changed/my-story-josh-mcdowell.html> April 18, 2020.

telling me that Christianity was true, but my will was resisting it with all the energy it could muster.”

He also struggled with his pride. If the gospel was true, all his previous beliefs were wrong. McDowell faced the same struggles that C.S. Lewis had faced. However, after months of struggle, Josh McDowell became a Christian.

From that moment, McDowell’s life was changed. Apologetics broke down the intellectual barriers to belief. Then, the Holy Spirit brought him to a place of belief. As Christians we can use apologetics to bring unbelievers to a place where they are open to hearing God’s voice.

Conclusion

Jia listened politely to Lee’s question, “Can you prove Jesus’ death and resurrection using the scientific method?” She remembered that, “the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.”²⁴ She quickly prayed that God would give her the ability to communicate with divine power.

Jia responded, “Lee, let me ask you a question. You know Chinese history very well. If you answer my question, I will be ready to answer your question. Is that fair?” Lee was sure he could answer Jia’s question; so he responded confidently, “Of course!”

Jia said, “I have been having some doubts about Sun Yat-sen. Our history books tell us that he founded the Republic of China. He is even called the ‘Father of the Nation.’ But can you prove *scientifically* and with *100% certainty* that Sun Yat-sen lived?”

Lee laughed. “What a silly question! Of course, Sun Yat-sen lived! That is easy to prove. Let me find a newspaper from 1925. It will show when President Sun died.”

Jia interrupted with a smile, “No, no, no! Remember you asked for *scientific* proof. That means you must ‘repeat an event many times while recording the results.’ I’ll wait here while you manage to have Sun Yat-sen reborn!”

“That’s not fair,” Lee sputtered. “It is impossible to reproduce Sun Yat-sen’s life, but we know that he lived! We have written testimony from authors during his lifetime; we have speeches that were written down by people who heard him speak; we even have photographs of President Sun. You can’t ignore this legal-historical proof, can you?”

“You’re right,” Jia said. “I believe Sun Yat-sen lived. I cannot be proven scientifically with 100% certainty, but there is good evidence for his life. That is the same reason I believe that Jesus lived, died, and was raised from the dead. The gospels were written by people who knew him well; Matthew wrote down Jesus’ sermons; some of the greatest doubters became believers when they saw the physical evidence of the resurrection.

²⁴ 2 Corinthians 10:4

"The gospel came to China through India. It was brought to India by an apostle named Thomas. Lee, you remind me of Thomas. They called him 'Doubting Thomas' because he said, 'Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails..., I will never believe.'²⁵ Lee, 2,000 years ago, Thomas had the same doubts you have. But he opened his mind to the evidence – and his life was changed forever. The same thing can happen for you. The evidence is recorded in the gospels. Read them, let God speak, and you will find good reason to believe."

Lesson 2 Assignments

(1) Apologetics and the Head: You will begin the next class with a test over the review questions from Lesson 2. Study these questions carefully in preparation for the test.

(2) Apologetics and the Heart: Pray for the unbeliever that you talked with last week. Pray that God will open his eyes to the truth. Pray that God will give you answers as you talk to them in the future. Thank God for the opportunity to be a witness to this person.

(3) Apologetics and the Hands: Talk to someone who believes at least one of the four misconceptions in this lesson. To determine whether someone has these misconceptions, ask questions such as:

- "How would Christianity have to be proven if it could be proven?"
- "How much proof would you need to believe in Christianity?"
- "What is truth?"
- "Is truth relative?"
- "How important is it that you believe in the right thing or person?"

Ask the unbeliever for his reasons for believing like he does. Ask if he will allow you to share your notes from this lesson. If he gives permission, share the illustrations and examples from this lesson. Do not be argumentative, but give simple and clear answers to the misconceptions the unbeliever may have. Take notes about your conversation to share at your next class meeting.

²⁵ John 20:25

Lesson 2 Test

- (1) What are the key elements to the scientific method?
- (2) Instead of the scientific method, historical events should be proven by what method?
- (3) What are three types of evidence used for legal-historical proof?
- (4) Why do we say, "You cannot prove any historical event with 100% certainty"?
- (5) If you cannot *prove* something with absolute certainty, but you have enough proof to have an inner conviction that it is true (and you are willing to live according to that conviction), you have _____.
- (6) The idea that all truth is relative is _____. It cannot be true.
- (7) What is truth?
- (8) It is not enough to believe. We must put our faith in the right _____.
- (9) List the four misconceptions about apologetics studied in this lesson. Give a brief response to each one.
- (10) Write 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 from memory.

Lesson 3

Is There a God?

Introduction

Jia did not see her friend Lee for two weeks. When she asked a neighbor, she heard the sad news that Lee's mother had died after a long illness. Lee had gone back to Taoyuan to be with his family.

When Jia saw Lee a few weeks later, she expressed her sorrow at the death of his mother. Lee thanked her for her kindness but then spoke with anger, "This is why I can't believe in the Christian God. If there is a God, why did he allow my mother to suffer so much? You say your God is all-powerful and all-loving. If he truly loved my mother and truly had the power to stop her suffering, why did he let her suffer so much? Maybe there is a God, but he doesn't have the power to help us. Or maybe there is a God, but he doesn't really care about our suffering. Or maybe there is no God. I believe we are alone in the universe."

► How would you answer Lee?

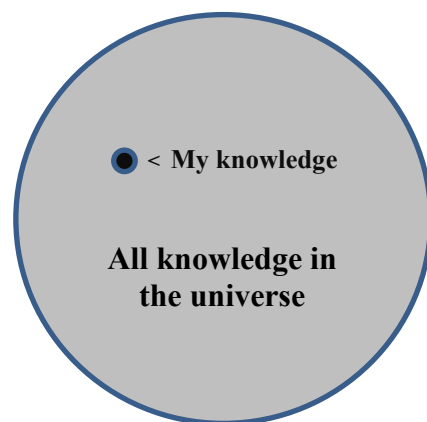
Can Anyone Know There Is No God?

Can anyone know absolutely that there is no God? Imagine all the knowledge in the universe as a large circle. Now imagine your knowledge as a circle inside the total knowledge in the universe.

Unless the circle of your knowledge matches the circle of all the knowledge in the universe, you do not know everything! If your current knowledge does not include the knowledge of God's existence, it could be that God exists in the broader circle of knowledge and not in your own. You would have to have all the knowledge in the universe to prove that God does not exist. Many unbelievers admit this, and agree that it is possible that God exists, but that they haven't discovered him yet.

If it is possible that God exists, an honest person should be willing to examine the evidence for the existence of God. People such as C.S. Lewis and Josh McDowell examined this evidence and came to believe that God exists and has revealed himself to us through the Bible.

This lesson will examine the evidence for the existence of God. We will see that there are many reasons to believe that God exists.



Evidence for the Existence of God: The Cosmological Argument

The word *cosmological* comes from *cosmos*, which means “world.” The **Cosmological Argument** demands an adequate explanation for the existence of the world. This argument asks, “Why does the world exist?” It concludes, “The world exists because it was created by God – a personal, eternal, self-existent Being.”

The Cosmological Argument begins with the idea that everything must have an adequate explanation. For example, imagine that you asked me, “Where did the chair you are sitting on come from?” Imagine that I answered, “The chair just happened; no one made the chair; no one brought the chair into this room; the chair just appeared.” You would know this is wrong. Everything must have an adequate explanation, including the universe as a whole.

The Cosmological Argument has three premises and a conclusion:²⁶

Premise A: The universe could not have come from nothing.

Premise B: The universe could not have always existed as it is.

Premise C: The universe could not have come from impersonal matter or energy.

Conclusion: Therefore, the universe must have been created by a personal, eternal, self-existent Being.

Let’s discuss possible explanations for the universe.

Some People Say the Universe Came from Nothing

How could nothing produce something? Nothing would have to be something in order to produce something else. If we say that the universe created itself, we have to say that the universe existed before it existed. The universe would have *to be* and *not be* at the same time. This is self-contradictory. Something cannot exist and not exist at the same time.

Some People Say the Universe Has Always Existed as It Is

The two **laws of thermodynamics** show that it is impossible that the universe has always existed as it is.

The **first law of thermodynamics** states that matter/energy can neither be created nor destroyed. The **second law of thermodynamics** states that the usable energy in the universe is being converted slowly into unusable energy. When you put the two laws together, they show that the universe began with a fixed amount of usable energy that is slowly depleting.

²⁶ Argument from premises to a conclusion is a long-established form of logic. A premise is a simple statement. In a valid logical argument, if all the premises are true, the conclusion must be true.

What is the significance of this? The universe is slowly dying. If it has always existed as it does now (including the natural laws of the universe), the energy in the world would already be used up, everything would be at the same temperature, and we would all be dead.

Some People Say That the Universe Came from Matter or Energy

If the universe came from an impersonal force, the only factors that produced the universe are impersonal. It is impossible for something without personality to create personality. But humans have personality. If the impersonal cannot produce personality, humans must have been created by a personal, eternal Being.

If No Other Explanation Is Sufficient, the Universe Must Have Been Created by a Personal, Eternal, Self-Existent Being

Since the other options are not valid, the only reasonable explanation for the universe is a self-existent Creator.

Another form of the cosmological argument has two premises that lead to a conclusion:

Premise A: Whatever begins to exist has a cause.

Premise B: The universe began to exist.

Conclusion: The universe has a cause.

"No one has ever demonstrated how time plus chance can produce the complexity of the universe, let alone the personality of man."

- Adapted from Francis Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*

Premise A is supported by the fact that something cannot come from nothing. Scientifically, this has been constantly verified. Our common experience confirms this.

Premise B is supported by the expansion of the universe and the second law of thermodynamics. Most scientists agree that the universe had a beginning.

If Premise A and Premise B are true, then the conclusion is true: The universe has a cause. What is this cause like? It must be uncaused (an infinite regress of causes is impossible), non-physical, and unimaginably powerful. The Cause must be highly intelligent to bring about such intricate design and order in the universe. We can even argue that the Cause is a person.²⁷ One reason the Cause must be personal is because personal creatures like us—with power, intelligence, and will—could not have come from something that does not have these features. This personal, all-powerful being is God!

²⁷ One could argue that a personal cause is the only way to explain how a timeless cause can produce a temporal effect (beginning of the universe). Without a will, there would be no permanent cause without a permanent effect. A personal being with freedom of the will could bring about something spontaneous and new, such as the creation of the universe. For a more detailed explanation of this argument, read William Lane Craig on the cosmological argument for the existence of God. His book *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2010) gives a good presentation of it.

This is the Cosmological Argument for God's existence. Here are some questions to ask when talking to someone about the first cause:

"Do you agree with the vast majority of scientists that the universe had a beginning?"

If they say "Yes," ask:

"Do you believe that something [like the universe] can come from nothing?"

If they say "No," ask:

"So if something now exists, then something must have always existed, right?"

"Would the something that always existed have to have the power, intelligence, and will to bring about everything in the universe?"

"Don't you think that if this eternal, all-powerful being went to all the trouble of putting us here, that he would tell us why he did?"

"According to the Bible, the reason God put us here is to have a personal relationship with him."

Section A Review

1. What question does the Cosmological Argument ask?
2. How does the Cosmological Argument answer this question?
3. What are three unreasonable explanations for the universe?
4. Present the Cosmological Argument in a deductive form with two premises and a conclusion.

Evidence for the Existence of God: The Teleological Argument

An argument related to the Cosmological Argument is the **Teleological Argument**. The word *teleological* comes from the Greek word *telos*, which means "goal." It has to do with purpose, or design.

The Teleological Argument asks, "How did the universe get its careful design?" It concludes that "the intricate design in the universe requires a Designer."

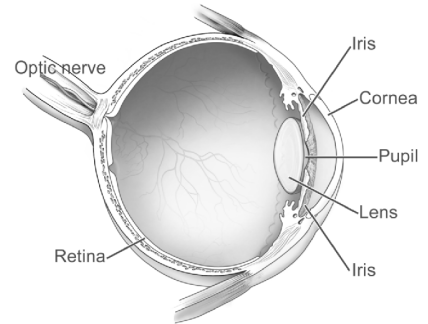
There must be a goal or purpose guiding our universe. Let's see some examples from science.

"Suppose there was no intelligence behind the universe, no creative mind. In that case, nobody designed my brain for the purpose of thinking. But, if so, how can I trust my own thinking? It's like upsetting a milk jug and hoping that the way it splashes will give you a map of London. But if I can't trust my own thinking, I can't trust the arguments leading to Atheism. I have no reason to be an Atheist, or anything else. Unless I believe in God, I cannot believe in thought: so I can never use thought to disbelieve in God."

- C.S. Lewis, *The Case for Christianity*

The Eye

The human eye²⁸ is a very intricate design. Each part of the eye plays a purpose in the overall design. No part of the eye would “evolve” until the eye was complete. The iris of the eye is useless without the rest of the eye.



All the parts of the eye must have appeared at the same time. This describes creation, not evolution. It is impossible for a structure with this much design and purpose to have come into being by chance.²⁹ The only designer who could create such an intricate design is God.

DNA

A single strand of DNA³⁰ is more complex than the most advanced modern computer. All the information for each human body is contained in a strand of human DNA that takes up less space than the period at the end of a written sentence.



The amount of information that could be stored in a pinhead's volume of DNA is equivalent to a pile of books 500 times as high as the distance from the earth to the moon. The Teleological Argument says that the complexity of human DNA requires a designer of great intelligence. The only designer capable of such design is God.

The Earth's Environment

Have you ever considered the wonder of the earth's location in the universe? If we were any closer to the sun, we would burn up. If we were any farther away, we would freeze to death. The earth's atmosphere is just right to support life. Everything necessary for life is provided on the planet earth. This implies that the earth and its atmosphere were made for us by an intelligent Being who created the world with a design. The earth is not the result of chance. The earth was created for a purpose by God.

Evidence for the Existence of God: The Moral Argument

The Moral Argument for the existence of God asks, “Why does humanity have an inborn sense of right and wrong?” It answers, “Humanity's sense of right and wrong comes from God, the Supreme Lawgiver who gives us morality.”

²⁸ Image: "Human eye diagram-sagittal view-NEI", National Eye Institute, National Institutes of Health, retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Human_eye_diagram-sagittal_view-NEI.jpg, public domain.

²⁹ To learn more about God's design for the eye, visit www.answersingenesis.org/go/eye.

³⁰ Image: "Acido desoxirribonucleico (DNA)" by Kadumago retrieved from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%C3%81cido_desoxirribonucleico_\(DNA\).png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%C3%81cido_desoxirribonucleico_(DNA).png), licensed under CC BY 4.0, desaturated from the original.

This argument was made by C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*. He wrote about a sense of “oughtness” that people from every culture have. Even though different cultures sometimes disagree about what is right and wrong, all persons from all cultures know that they “ought” to do some things, or “ought not” do other things. Where did this sense of “oughtness” come from? The Moral Argument says that this moral sense of right and wrong must come from a Supreme Lawgiver.

Here's the formal logical argument:

Premise A: If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist.

Premise B: Objective moral values and duties do exist.

Conclusion: Therefore, God exists.

Premise A says that apart from God, there could be no objective morality. Morality could not be the same for everyone if there was not a transcendent personal Lawgiver to whom we are all accountable. Moral commands only make sense if there is a person to give the command and another person to receive it. If there are some commands that apply equally to everyone in the world, there must be a transcendent Person from which that command came and to whom all people are responsible. Furthermore, moral guilt is only appropriate when laws from a person are violated. Guilt does not come simply from breaking a law. A person (higher authority) must be involved.

Premise B says that moral values exist objectively. They are valid whether or not anyone believes in them; and they are discovered, not invented. Even some atheists admit this. For example, atheist Peter Cave said, *"Whatever skeptical arguments may be brought against our belief that killing the innocent is morally wrong, we are more certain that the killing is morally wrong than that the argument is sound... Torturing an innocent child for the sheer fun of it is morally wrong."* Some things are recognized as wrong in all cultures and all times.

If Premise A and B are both true, then the conclusion that God exists must also be true.

► Read Romans 2:12-16. What does Paul teach about the moral law written on the hearts of those who do not have the Bible?

Section B Review

1. What question does the Teleological Argument ask?
2. How does the Teleological Argument answer this question?
3. What question does the Moral Argument ask?
4. How does the Moral Argument answer this question?
5. Present the Moral Argument in a deductive form with two premises and a conclusion.

The #1 Objection to the Existence of God: Evil and Suffering

The most common objection to the existence of God is this: "If there is a good and omnipotent God, why is there evil and suffering in the world? The existence of evil proves there is not a good, omnipotent God." Very often this objection is presented like this:

Premise A: A good God would not allow suffering in the world.

Premise B: An all-powerful God could remove all suffering.

Conclusion: Therefore, there is no good, all-powerful God.

People expect a good, all-powerful God to immediately deal with sin and suffering. They say that if God were both good and all-powerful, he would keep the world free of pain and evil. How do we respond to the question, "Why is there evil in the world?"

► How would you respond to this question, "If God is both good and all-powerful, why does he allow evil in the world?"

Here are some answers to this objection:

Evil Is the Result of Man's Free Choice to Disobey God

There is evil in the world because the first humans abused their freedom and chose to disobey God. Suffering is the consequence of human disobedience.

Adam and Eve disobeyed God and, as a result, the whole world was cursed.³¹ Even innocent people suffer because of this curse.

Some people will ask, "But why did God make free creatures? If God had made humans without the power to choose sin, there would be no suffering in the world."

One answer to this question is that God created humankind for love and relationship. Love is impossible without freedom of choice. God gave humanity the freedom to choose love – or to choose rebellion.

The Problem of Evil Implies That There Is a God

Remember the Moral Argument for the existence of God. The very problem of evil implies that there is a God. We would not know that evil exists without an absolute standard of right and wrong. This absolute standard of right and wrong must come from an Absolute Lawgiver, who is God.

If there is no Lawgiver, you cannot say there is evil in the world. Without a Lawgiver, what you call evil, I might call good. If I choose to steal money from you, it is neither right nor wrong; it is just a choice. It is only a Lawgiver that establishes absolute right and wrong.

³¹ Read Genesis 3:14-19 and Romans 8:20-23.

It is only when we accept a moral law of right and wrong that we are faced with the existence of evil. The problem of evil suggests that there is a good God. But, if God is good and all-powerful, why does he allow evil in the world?

God Has Provided an Answer to the Problem of Evil and Suffering

Some people will ask, "Why doesn't God do something about the evil and suffering in the world? Why does he allow suffering to continue?"

The answer is that God has *already* done something about it. In Jesus, the God of infinite love stepped into human history and became part of the broken world in which we live. He took into himself suffering and even death, and then destroyed death in his resurrection. Because of Christ's atonement, we can be freed from sin and someday escape our suffering forever.

Why is it taking so long for our pain to be removed? We still live in a fallen world; and God is first dealing with sin, as the ultimate cause of our suffering. Dealing with sin takes time because people are willful.

The fact that suffering is the result of moral evil does not mean that all suffering is the direct result of individual sin. Everyone experiences pain because of Adam's sin, not necessarily because of his or her own sin. In our fallen world, even innocent people suffer unjustly because of the sin of others. But all suffering will eventually be over for those who let God deal with sin in their own hearts and lives.

Even when we experience pain now, we have God's comfort. As Christians, we have the assurance that "all things work together for good to them that love God."³² Though we may not understand it, God has a purpose for what he allows in our lives. God takes our pain and uses it for our good. He uses even the pain in our life to draw people into a relationship with himself. C.S. Lewis said, "God whispers to us in our pleasure, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain. It is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world."³³

Section C Review

1. What is the most common objection to the existence of God?
2. Give three answers to the question, "How could a good and all-powerful God exist if there is evil in the world?"

³² Romans 8:28

³³ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, (NY: Macmillan Publishing, 1962), 93

Apologetics in Action - The Testimony of Lee Strobel

Adapted from Lee Strobel (1952-):³⁴

For most of my life I was an atheist. I thought the idea of an all-loving, all-powerful creator was stupid. My background is in journalism and law. I tend to be a skeptical person. I was the legal editor of the Chicago Tribune. So, I needed evidence before I would believe anything.

One day my wife said that she had become a follower of Jesus Christ. I thought this was the end of our marriage. But I soon saw positive changes in her values, in her character, in the way she related to me and the children. It was attractive and made me want to investigate her new faith.

I went to church one day and heard the message of Jesus in a way that I could understand. I heard that forgiveness is a free gift, that Jesus Christ died for our sins, and that we can spend eternity with him. I was still an atheist, but I walked out saying, "If this is true, it has huge implications for my life."

For nearly two years, I used my journalistic and legal training to investigate the truth of Christianity. On November 8th 1991, I realized that to be an atheist I would have to ignore all the evidence pointing to the truth of the gospel. I couldn't do that. I was trained in journalism and law to respond to truth. And so on that day, I received Jesus Christ as my forgiver and as my leader. Just like with my wife, my life began to change. My values, my character, the purpose of my life began to be transformed. As I look back, I cannot compare my former life with the adventure and joy of following Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

As Jia prepared to answer Lee, she sensed the Holy Spirit telling her that the answer to Lee's question was more than an intellectual response. She must speak to his heart, not just to his head.

Jia said to Lee, "First, I want you to know that I feel your hurt. You are my friend and when you hurt, I hurt. More than that, I want you to know that God feels your hurt. God the Father watched as his beloved Son died on a cross. He knows the pain of losing someone close to him.

"I can't explain all the suffering in our world, but I know that God created a world without suffering. He created a perfect world without death. Sadly, our first father, Adam, rebelled against God and brought sin into this world. Sin brought suffering and death. Adam knew before he ever broke God's law that his sin would bring death into the world. Man broke the perfect world that God created. Each of us continues the chain of sin that started with Adam.

³⁴ This transcript is adapted from Lee Strobel's testimony, "Atheist to Evangelical." Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/E8IE9Y4wudk> March 5, 2021.

Every one of us breaks God's law.

"Because of Adam's sin, we are born into a hurting world. We live in a broken world. But, Lee, can I tell you two things to remember through your tears?

"First, God himself became part of our suffering world. He sent his Son to become part of our world. He sent his Son to die so that our world can someday be free from the curse of sin.

"Second, because God sent his Son, you can have eternal life. The same Bible that warns against the penalty of sin promises that those who accept Jesus Christ will have eternal life. This book promises that someday God 'will wipe every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore.'³⁵

"Lee, imagine a God who loved us so much that he sent his Son to die and to provide the cure for death. That is a God who is all-powerful, but who gave himself in love to us. That God loves you with an awesome love."

Lesson 3 Assignments

(1) Apologetics and the Head: You will begin the next class with a test over the review questions from Lesson 3. Study these questions carefully in preparation for the test.

(2) Apologetics and the Heart: It is sometimes easy to "explain" evil and suffering; it is much harder to empathize with the suffering. Pray that God will give you a tender heart for those who are suffering. Pray that he will speak through you to bring comfort to the hurting.

(3) Apologetics and the Hands: Talk to an unbeliever about the arguments for the existence of God. Share the three arguments from this lesson. If possible, share these arguments with an unbeliever you've talked to for a previous lesson.

³⁵ Revelation 21:4

Lesson 3 Test

- (1) What question does the Cosmological Argument ask?
- (2) How does the Cosmological Argument answer this question?
- (3) What are three unreasonable explanations for the universe?
- (4) Present the Cosmological Argument in a deductive form with two premises and a conclusion.
- (5) What question does the Teleological Argument ask?
- (6) How does the Teleological Argument answer this question?
- (7) What question does the Moral Argument ask?
- (8) How does the Moral Argument answer this question?
- (9) Present the Moral Argument in a deductive form with two premises and a conclusion.
- (10) What is the most common objection to the existence of God?
- (11) Give three answers to the question, "How could a good and all-powerful God exist, if there is evil in the world?"
- (12) Write Romans 1:19-20 from memory.

Lesson 4

Creation Apologetics

Introduction

Jia was walking in the park on a Sunday afternoon. As she looked at the beautiful flowers, she began to praise the Creator and to think about the Genesis creation story. Soon she met Lee walking towards her.

Jia called out, "Lee, isn't this a beautiful park! How do you think it got here?"

Lee laughed. "You probably believe that your invisible God made all of this. But I know science; every real scientist knows that the world evolved over billions of years. Simple creatures evolved into more complex creatures. All this beauty came as the result of chance plus billions of years.

"The difference between us, Jia, is this: your belief in creation is based on blind faith; my confidence in evolution is based on facts. You can't name *one* great scientist who believed in creation!"

Jia said, "That's very interesting. I tell you what – let's trade challenges. Next Sunday afternoon, we'll meet back in this park. I will answer your challenge: 'Name one great scientist who believed in creation.' But you must meet a challenge for me: 'Give me one example of a non-living article evolving into a living creature.' I think that your belief in evolution is based on 'faith' just as much as my belief in creation! Let's talk next Sunday."

► What do you think about Jia's statement? Is belief in evolution based on faith, or can it be proven scientifically? What about creation?

Faith in Creation or Faith in Evolution

In this lesson, we will study evidence that we were created by God. It is amazing how hard some humans try to deny our Creator. Many books have been written by people who want to deny that we were made by God.

Evolutionists claim that creation is not true science. They argue that real science cannot claim a supernatural explanation for anything. To them, everything must be explained by natural causes. However, the claims for both evolution and creation must be taken by faith. They are both "faith propositions." What do we mean by this?

Neither evolution nor creation can be “proven scientifically.” Both creation and evolution attempt to explain something that happened in the past. This is an *historical* issue, not a scientific issue.³⁶

No human living today saw how the world was formed. None of us observed either the creation or the evolution of man. We must either:

1. Trust someone else’s report for the beginning of the world or
2. Look for clues in the world around us.

Can We Trust the Bible’s Account of Creation?

It makes sense that if God made us with the capacity to reflect on our origin and purpose, he would tell us about creation. In the Bible, God claims to have made the world and everything in it in six days. In a future lesson, we will study evidence that the Bible was written by God. If we can persuade people that the Bible is from God, we can encourage them to trust what God said in his Word about origins.

Christians who believe in creation say that we can trust God’s report about the beginning of the world. We believe that his words in Genesis 1-2 are a true account of creation. We have faith in the creation story because we have faith in the God who inspired Genesis.

Are There Clues in the World around Us?

While we are trying to convince non-Christians of the truth of the Bible, we also need to point them to the world around us and help them see that the biblical account of origins makes the most sense of our world. We can’t use the scientific method itself to determine the historical event of creation because we cannot see the beginning of the universe. However, we can show people how scientific evidence supports the biblical view of creation.

A detective looks at fingerprint evidence at a crime scene to determine which person committed the murder. The evidence that is left behind points to the truth. We can look at scientific evidence like DNA to show that *God*, not time and chance, committed the act of creation. God’s fingerprints are found everywhere in our universe.

One way to approach the evidence from the world around us is to look at what evolutionists or creationists would expect to see if their belief were true.

“If you study science deep enough and long enough, it will force you to believe in God.”
- Lord William Kelvin

“In the absence of any other proof, the [design of the] thumb alone would convince me of God’s existence.”
- Sir Isaac Newton

“A little science takes you away from God, but more of it takes you to him.”
- Louis Pasteur

³⁶ To review this topic, see Lesson 2 on “Misconceptions about Apologetics.”

► If evolution were true, what would we expect to see in the world around us?³⁷ If creation were true, what would we expect to see in the world around us?³⁸

After we know what each theory predicts, we can ask, “Does what we see around us best fit the expectations of *evolution* or *creation*? Which approach is most consistent with the evidence? Do the observations of scientists fit better with evolution or creation?”

When we study the evidence of the world around us, we see that the world fits the expectations of creation, not evolution. In fact, the theory of evolution is anti-scientific. It does not fit the evidence of our world.

Clue #1: The Law of Biogenesis

One hundred years ago, most people believed that life could suddenly appear from something that was not living. They thought that if you left a box of rags in the corner long enough, it might spontaneously generate mice — from the non-living rags.³⁹

Louis Pasteur, a famous scientist who was also a devoted Christian, did many experiments that proved the law of biogenesis. The law of biogenesis says: **life comes only from life.**

Evolutionists deny this basic law of science when they say that life had to come from non-life at least once. Most evolutionists think that life spontaneously arose out of early (non-living) chemical compounds. Even though they know the law of biogenesis, they are not willing to accept that God created life. Instead, they insist that life arose from non-living matter. However, no scientist has ever been able to form life from non-living matter.

THE APPEARANCE OF LIFE	
EVOLUTION PREDICTS	CREATION PREDICTS
Life comes from non-living things.	Life comes only from life.
THE EVIDENCE OF OUR WORLD SHOWS	
Life comes only from life.	

Section A Review

1. What does it mean to say that both evolution and creation are “faith propositions”?
2. What does the law of biogenesis teach?

³⁷ Some correct answers include: transitional forms in the fossil record, evidence of mutations producing new information, simplicity rather than complexity, randomness in how the world operates, etc.

³⁸ Some correct answers include: evidence of design, limits to variations within kinds of plants and animals, evidence of distinct kinds in the fossil record, established laws of science that show that the universe was put in place by an unchanging Master Designer, etc.

³⁹ “Spontaneous generation” means the appearance of life out of non-living matter.

Clue #2: The Laws of Thermodynamics

We studied the laws of thermodynamics in Lesson 3, but let's review them.

► What is the first law of thermodynamics?⁴⁰

The first law of thermodynamics states that matter/energy can neither be created nor destroyed. Existing matter had to come from somewhere; it could not create itself. This means that matter and energy was created by an outside source, God. New matter and energy cannot appear from nothing.

► What is the second law of thermodynamics?⁴¹

The second law of thermodynamics states that the amount of usable energy in the universe is depleting. It is changing from usable energy to unusable energy. For example, sunlight is produced by the tremendous energy of the sun; but most of that energy goes off into space, and even what comes to the earth is mostly not conserved for use. The unusable energy in the universe is called "entropy."

Together, these two laws state that there is a fixed amount of matter/energy in the universe that is becoming more and more unusable. The universe is deteriorating. So how does this contradict evolution?

Atheistic evolutionists must say that (1) matter/energy came from nothing or (2) that matter/energy has always existed. The first option contradicts the first law of thermodynamics. (Matter cannot come from nothing).

The second option contradicts the second law of thermodynamics. If the universe has always existed with a fixed amount of energy, and more and more of this energy has become unusable, then by now the universe would be completely deteriorated and we wouldn't be here! Evolutionists are unscientific when they contradict the laws of thermodynamics.

⁴⁰ The correct answer is: The first law of thermodynamics states that matter/energy can neither be created nor destroyed.

⁴¹ The correct answer is: The second law of thermodynamics states that the usable energy in the universe is being converted slowly into unusable energy.

ENERGY	
EVOLUTION PREDICTS	CREATION PREDICTS
Matter/energy comes from nothing or has always existed.	Matter/energy is gradually becoming unusable and the universe is running down.
THE EVIDENCE OF OUR WORLD SHOWS	
There is a fixed amount of usable energy in the universe. This energy is becoming more and more unusable.	

Clue #3: The Fossil Record

According to the theory of evolution, modern forms of animals gradually evolved from simpler forms, beginning with a single cell. If this is true, we should see many transitional forms (from simpler to more complicated) in the fossil record. But after more than 150 years of digging, scientists have still not found evidence of transitional forms.

The lack of transitional fossils contradicts the predictions of evolution. By contrast, creationists predict that there should be distinct organisms based on each day of creation, with no need for transitional forms.

► Read Genesis 1 and list what God created on each day of the creation week.

CREATION WEEK	
Day 1	Light
Day 2	The sky
Day 3	Oceans, land, and vegetation
Day 4	Sun, moon, and stars
Day 5	Creatures for sea and sky
Day 6	Creatures for land, including humankind
Day 7	God rested

So what do we find in the fossil record? We find distinct kinds of plants and animals. The fossil record suggests that the biblical creation is much more reasonable than evolution.

FOSSILS	
EVOLUTION PREDICTS	CREATION PREDICTS
Many transitional forms	Distinct kinds of plants and animals
THE EVIDENCE OF OUR WORLD SHOWS	
Distinct kinds of plants and animals without transitional forms	

Clue #4: The Laws of Genetics

► If there were only two dogs on Noah's Ark, why do we have so many different types of dogs today?

Many evolutionists argue that variations among animals, such as different kinds of dogs, are proof that evolution occurred through natural selection. They say that genetic mutations produce new kinds of plants and animals.

However, most changes we see in animals are due to genetic information that has always been in their DNA. Look at the varieties of dogs, for example. Are the differences between beagles and bulldogs largely the result of genetic mutation? No. **Mendel's Laws of Genetics** explain that various combinations of genes produce different features in offspring. A cocker spaniel is not so different from a collie because of mutations, but because a certain portion of the dog population was separated from the rest and interbred. The genes for a cocker spaniel were already part of the dog gene pool. Though mutations can have some effect on populations, the majority of characteristics we see in different varieties of dogs are the result of breeding.

Breeding can change a dog only a limited amount. No matter how much breeding a dog owner does, his dogs will still be dogs. A dog will not become a cat through breeding!

Mutations cannot do what evolutionists say they can do. A mutation can change existing genes and thereby change the information of the DNA, but a mutation cannot add new information to DNA. For example, a mutation can cause a cow to be born with an extra leg, but it cannot cause a cow to grow a turtle shell. The cow simply does not have the genetic material to produce a turtle shell. There are limits to how far an organism can change.

Creationists would expect limits to change within the various kinds of organisms. The observations of life around us indicate that there are limits to change.

Evolutionists would expect to see evidence of change from one major kind of organism to another. The evidence the evolutionists predict is not there.

GENETICS	
EVOLUTION PREDICTS	CREATION PREDICTS
Change from one kind of organism to another	Limited change within a kind of organism
THE EVIDENCE OF OUR WORLD SHOWS	
There is limited change within kinds of organisms	

Clue #5: A Young Earth

To allow time for animals to evolve by chance, evolutionists claim that the earth is billions of years old. We have already seen that evolution would be impossible even if the earth were billions of years old. But there are many reasons to believe that the earth is young. Ninety percent of the methods used to determine the age of the earth argue for a young earth. Here are examples that demonstrate that the earth cannot be billions of years old.

DNA in "Ancient" Bacteria

Evolutionary scientists found bacteria in a salt crystal that they considered to be 250 million years old, but they were surprised by their observation that the bacteria were very similar to [modern] bacteria. Scientists were also surprised that the DNA of the bacteria was still intact. If the salt beds in which the bacteria were found were actually deposited by a worldwide flood that occurred 4500 years ago, then it would be more likely to be intact and similar to modern bacteria.

Soft Tissue in Dinosaur Bones

In 2005, Dr. Mary Schweitzer found red blood cells and hemoglobin in dinosaur bones located in Montana. This creates a problem for evolutionary theory. Scientifically, soft tissue cannot last more than a few thousand years. It certainly cannot last the 65 million years from when evolutionists think the last dinosaur lived.

The Amount of Salt in the Sea

Salt is pouring into the sea faster than it is escaping. The sea is not nearly salty enough for this to have been happening for billions of years. The earth cannot be billions of years old based on the amount of salt in the sea.

The Global Catastrophic Flood

Noah's Flood argues for a young earth because if a global Flood [destroyed] the earth, and caused most of the layers in the geological column, then the layers were not laid down over millions of years.

If rock layers were rapidly deposited and folded without being fractured, also showing evidence that distinct kinds of plants and animals were buried by these massive flows of sediment, then the geological column should not be explained by millions of years of slow development of species, but instead should be explained mostly by reference to a global catastrophic flood that preserved many intact fossils on a relatively young earth.

Section B Review

1. According to the laws of _____, there is a fixed amount of usable matter and energy in the universe. This energy is becoming more and more unusable.
2. According to the theory of evolution, what kind of fossils should we find?
3. What does the biblical account of creation predict about genetic change?
4. Give three examples of scientific evidence for a relatively young earth.

Some Questions for Evolutionists

There are some questions evolutionists have a hard time answering, because evolution is not an adequate explanation of reality. If you talk to a person who accepts evolution, these questions might help them think about what they believe and to question their beliefs.

1. How did emotions such as love evolve?
2. How did higher thinking evolve?
3. How did the process of photosynthesis evolve?
4. Which evolved first, the plants or the insects that live on and pollinate the plants?
5. Can you give me an example of a mutation that has added new genetic information to an organism?
6. How do you explain the origin of the first living cell from non-living matter?
7. Why do some evolutionists who realize that life could not have come from non-life on this planet suggest that life was transported from another planet—when they know they are just moving the problem to another part of the universe?
8. If you believe that matter/energy has always existed, how do you deal with the laws of thermodynamics, which say that there is a set amount of energy in the universe, but that this energy is becoming more and more unusable? Would the universe not have run down by now?
9. Are you sure your answers are reasonable, right, and scientifically provable, or do you have blind faith in the theory of evolution?

Faith in the Creator

In this lesson, we have seen that evolution is not consistent with the facts of science. The predictions of evolutionists are not supported by the evidence of our world. They expect to see evidence that life could come from non-life; they expect time and chance to be capable of producing complexity; they expect mutations to explain evolution from single-celled organisms to man; and they expect to find transitional forms between major kinds of plants and animals. Yet their expectations are not fulfilled.

Evolutionists contradict the laws of thermodynamics; they contradict genetic laws; they contradict the fossil record; and they contradict the evidence for a young earth. They are unable to answer the tough questions about their theory because their theory is untrue.

Those who believe that God used evolution have compromised with man's theories about the age of the earth and evolution, while ignoring the clear teachings of the Bible.

The evidence from the world around us clearly supports a belief in God and creation rather than in evolution. The expectations of creationists are supported by scientific research. Christians realize that life must come from life; and that ultimately our physical life and spiritual life comes from the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We realize that we could not have come into existence by chance.

We believe in the Master Designer. We accept the laws of thermodynamics and the principles of genetics. These are not contradictory to our beliefs. The fossil record is consistent with our belief that God created everything according to its kind. We believe that the Bible teaches that the earth is relatively young, so the evidence for a young earth does not trouble us. Creationists have both God and science on their side! We have faith in the creation story because we have faith in the Creator.

Apologetics in Action - The Testimony of Richard Lumsden

Listen to the testimony of a trained scientist who faced the evidence and became a committed creationist and Christian.

Dr. Richard Lumsden⁴² (1938-1997) was professor of parasitology and cell biology at Tulane University. He served as dean of the graduate school and published hundreds of scientific papers. He was trained in Darwinian evolution. Science was his religion. Dr. Lumsden believed Darwinian evolution was an established principle of science, and he often ridiculed Christian beliefs.

One day, a student came to his office to ask questions about the day's lecture on evolution. The student did not argue with anything he taught. Instead, she asked a series of questions:

⁴² Adapted from "From Evolution to Creation: The Testimony of Dr. Richard Lumsden" (November 19, 2009). Retrieved from http://www.wayoflife.org/database/from_evolution_to_creation_lumsden.html April 25, 2020.

- How did life arise?
- Isn't DNA too complex to form by chance?
- Why are there gaps in the fossil record between major kinds?
- What are the missing links between apes and man?

This student didn't argue; she just asked questions. Dr. Lumsden gave the standard evolutionary answers to the questions. But he was uneasy about the conversation. He was not prepared for honest questions. While he was answering, he began to think, "This is wrong. What I know about biology is contrary to what I'm saying."

After a while, the student thanked him for his answers and left. On the outside, Dr. Lumsden appeared confident; but on the inside, he was devastated. He knew that what he had told this student was wrong. Dr. Lumsden had the honesty to face his doubts. He began to study the arguments for evolution. Eventually, he realized that based on the scientific evidence, he must reject Darwinism. Dr. Lumsden became a creationist.

But then Dr. Lumsden faced a new question. "If the world was created, who is the Creator?" A short time later, Lumsden's daughter invited him to go to church. In the past, he had no interest in religion; but now he wanted to know if the Bible was true. Did the God of the Bible create our world?

Dr. Lumsden heard the Good News that God sent his Son to pay the penalty for our sin and to offer men forgiveness and eternal life. At the end of the service, the pastor invited unbelievers to publicly receive Christ. That morning, an atheistic evolutionist who had seen the evidence for creation bowed before his Creator and became a believer.

Conclusion

The next Sunday, Jia came to the park early. She was excited to meet with Lee! But when she saw Lee, Jia knew that he was not very excited. "What's wrong? Did you bring an answer to my question?" Jia asked.

Lee said, "I have studied all week, but I cannot find one example of a non-living article becoming a living creature. I am starting to question my science! Maybe my belief in evolution is based on faith in Darwin instead of scientific proof. I don't like that!"

Jia laughed, "I think you are right. You believe in Darwin; I believe in the Creator. I think the world gives plenty reason to believe in the Genesis account of creation."

Suddenly Lee brightened. "Well, I might not have an answer for your question, but I bet you didn't find an answer for mine either! Did you find even one great scientist who believed in the creation story?"

Jia laughed. "You are right, Lee. I did not find *one* scientist who believed in creation. I found *dozens* of great scientists who believed in creation! The more scientists study this world, the more they realize that the evidence points to a Creator. I won't bore with the whole list; but see if you recognize any of these names, Lee."

Jia began to list some of the greatest scientists in history:

- Copernicus, who first recognized that the sun is at the center of the universe.
- Galileo, who is considered the "Father of Modern Science."
- Johannes Kepler, who first explained the movement of the planets.
- Sir Isaac Newton, who formulated the law of gravity.
- Robert Boyle, who is considered the first modern chemist.
- Louis Pasteur, who created the first vaccines for rabies and anthrax.
- Max Planck, who founded modern quantum mechanics.

"Lee," Jia concluded, "If you examine the evidence, you will find that the greatest scientific minds in history have understood that the only explanation for the beauty and complexity of our world is a God of infinite power and creativity. There is good reason to believe in the Creator."

Lesson 4 Assignments

(1) Apologetics and the Head: You will begin the next class with a test over the review questions from Lesson 4. Study these questions carefully in preparation for the test.

(2) Apologetics and the Heart: You may have friends or family members who have been convinced that evolution is true. Before sharing this lesson's information with them, pray for the Holy Spirit's help. Ask God to convict them of the truth about God's great creation.

(3) Apologetics and the Hands: Think of someone who has questions about creation. Ask this person if you can share the information you learned in this lesson. If the person believes in evolution, ask the questions from the last section of this lesson. Bring back to class a report of your interaction with this person.

Lesson 4 Test

(1) What does it mean to say that both evolution and creation are "faith propositions"?

(2) What does the law of biogenesis teach?

(3) According to the laws of _____, there is a fixed amount of usable matter and energy in the universe. This energy is becoming more and more unusable.

(4) According to the theory of evolution, what kind of fossils should we find?

(5) What does the biblical account of creation predict about genetic change?

(6) Give three examples of scientific evidence for a relatively young earth.

(7) Write Genesis 2:1-3 from memory.

Lesson 5

The General Argument for the Christian Faith

Note to the Student

This short lesson introduces arguments to be developed in Lessons 6-8. You may not fully understand this lesson until you study the later lessons. To best understand the argument for the Christian faith, read this lesson, memorize the assigned material, study Lessons 6-8, and then review this lesson again. After you have learned the arguments in the following lessons, you can return to this lesson for a fuller understanding.

Introduction

As Lee met Jia outside their apartment building, she looked serious. After visiting a few minutes, she said, "Can I ask you a question? Please give me an honest answer."

"Sure!" Lee answered worriedly. Although he often argued with Jia, he respected her deep Christian faith. It was clear that she sincerely cared about Lee as a person. He hoped she was not angry with him. He continued, "Is something wrong?"

"Nothing is wrong, but I have been thinking. We talk about the Christian faith, but are you really seeking the truth? If your questions are nothing more than mental exercises, you will never come to truly know the Giver of Truth. Is your heart seeking the truth?"

Lee thought for a few minutes. At times he envied Jia's faith in God; but he wasn't sure he was ready to accept Jia's religion, even if she answered all his questions. Lee said, "I don't know. I *think* I will accept the truth even if I don't like it. But I'm not sure."

Jia responded, "I think you need to ask yourself, 'Am I really a seeker after truth?' Without intellectual honesty, our conversations will never move beyond mental curiosity. Think about this question and let's talk tomorrow."

Building a Case for the Christian Faith

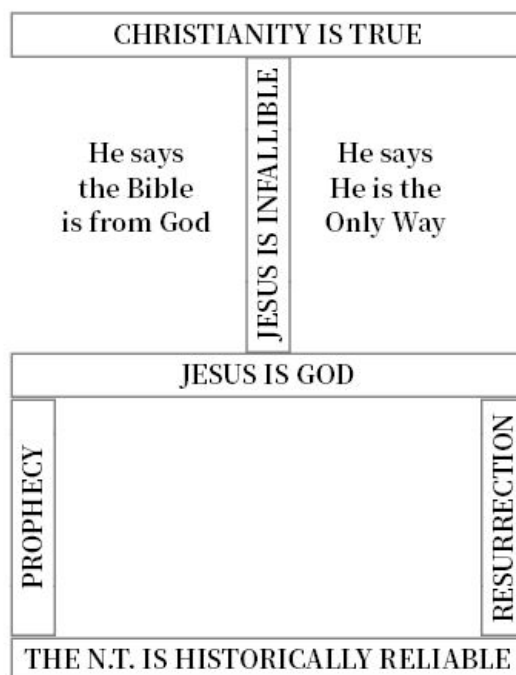
If you want to present the case for the Christian faith, it is important to have a good argument for the inspiration of the Bible and the truth of Christianity. Many people today say, "It doesn't matter if a religion is true. What matters is that your religion is useful to you." They insist, "There are no absolutes, so we cannot know that any religion is true."

However, we learned in Lesson 2 that this argument is not valid. The truth of our religion is very important. If Christianity is not true, Christians are foolish to follow a false religion.

In this lesson, we will begin to build a case for the Christian faith. We will see that Christianity is a reasonable faith. We can trust that Christianity is true. Our case argues that:

1. The Bible is the Word of God.
2. Jesus is the only way to Heaven.
3. The Christian faith is true.

The following lessons will give evidence for each block in our case for Christianity. For now, you will learn each of the blocks used in our case.



The first block in our case is **Historical Reliability**. The New Testament is historically reliable. If the Bible is not reliable in its history, we have nothing to stand on. But if the New Testament is historically accurate, we have sufficient evidence to believe that Jesus rose from the dead and fulfilled many Messianic prophecies.

The blocks of **Prophecy** and **Resurrection** show that Jesus is who he said he was — the Messiah, the Son of God, God come in the flesh. The Prophecy and Resurrection blocks support the truth that **Jesus is God**.

The next part of our case says that **Jesus is infallible**. Since Jesus is God, we know that he is infallible. To be infallible means that Jesus *cannot* be wrong. Jesus said that *the Bible was the Word of God* and that *he was the only way to God*.

The fact that Jesus is infallible supports the top block of our case: **Christianity is true!** Jesus, God's Son, took on human flesh, died on the cross, and rose from the tomb so that we could be forgiven and reconciled to God. This is the message of the Christian faith.

Section A Review

What are the six blocks that support the case for the Christian faith?

Is the Christian Faith True?

The six blocks represent a series of premises that lead to a logical conclusion. In Lessons 6-8, we will find evidence for each of these premises. For this lesson, memorize each premise and the conclusion.

Premise A: The New Testament is historically reliable.

This is the foundation of our case for the Christian faith. If the New Testament is not historically accurate, we do not have a case. If the New Testament is historically accurate, we can argue strongly for the truth of the Christian faith.

Premise B: Jesus fulfilled messianic prophecies.

Jesus' life, ministry, and death fulfilled dozens of prophecies made hundreds of years before his birth.

Premise C: Jesus rose from the dead.

Based on the reliability of the New Testament, we can trust the evidence that Jesus rose from the dead.

Premise D: Jesus' resurrection and fulfillment of prophecy show that he was Messiah, the Son of God, God come in the flesh.

If Jesus rose from the dead and fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, he must be the Son of God.

Premise E: Because Jesus is God, he is infallible.

To be infallible is to be without error. If Jesus is God, his words are absolutely trustworthy.

Premise F: Jesus Christ taught that the Bible is the Word of God and that he is the only way to God.

Repeatedly, Jesus testified that Scripture is the Word of God.⁴³ Repeatedly, Jesus told his listeners that he is the only way to God.⁴⁴

"I didn't become a Christian because God promised I would have an even happier life than I had as an atheist. He never promised any such thing.... I became a Christian because the evidence was so compelling that Jesus really is the one-and-only Son of God who proved his divinity by rising from the dead. That meant following him was the most rational and logical step I could possibly take."
- Lee Strobel

Conclusion: If Jesus was God, we must believe what he said: The Bible is the Word of God, and Jesus is the only way to God. Therefore, Christianity is true.

If each of the premises above are true, the conclusion must be true. Each premise builds on the previous premise, starting with the historical reliability of the Bible.

⁴³ Matthew 5:18, 15:4; Mark 12:36; Luke 24:44-46

⁴⁴ John 14:6

First, we will study the evidence that the New Testament is reliable. Skeptics say, “The Bible has been copied so many times that we don’t know what was originally written”, or “The stories in the New Testament are myths because they slowly developed over time. The original events were nothing like the accounts in the New Testament.”

Can you respond to these statements? These are common objections to the historical reliability of the New Testament. In the next lesson, we will learn how to show that the Bible is historically reliable.

► Discuss each of the six premises and the conclusion. Make sure you understand *why* the conclusion must be true if the premises are true. Memorize the six premises and the conclusion. This will be the foundation for the next three lessons. You will need to write these premises and conclusion on the quiz for this lesson.

Section B Review

List the six premises and conclusion that provide the case for the Christian faith.

Apologetics in Action - The Testimony of a Truth-Seeker

Jordan Monge⁴⁵ was an atheist throughout high school. When Christians talked to her about the Bible, she was able to defeat all their arguments.

In 2008, Jordan went to Harvard University to study government. The motto of Harvard is *Veritas*, “Truth.” As an atheistic student at Harvard, Jordan Monge came face to face with eternal truth.

At Harvard, Jordan became friends with another student, Joseph Porter, who was a committed Christian. Not only was Porter a Christian, but he had a brilliant mind and could respond to Monge’s arguments against the existence of God. As she brought argument after argument to him, he listened respectfully and answered carefully. She had never met a Christian like this.

Ms. Monge was an atheist, but she believed that there are absolute moral laws that govern our universe. Joseph showed her the inconsistency of claiming absolutes of right and wrong without believing in a God who created these absolutes. He also showed her the inconsistency of believing that the universe was created by a “Big Bang” without showing that someone or something caused this Big Bang to occur.

Because of these arguments, Jordan became a deist. She believed that God exists but still rejected Jesus as the incarnate God.⁴⁶ As she continued to read, however, she learned that Christians define love as “a commitment to the true good of the other person.” Ms. Monge

⁴⁵ This material is adapted from Jordan Monge’s testimony, retrieved from <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/march/atheists-dilemma.html> April 25, 2020.

⁴⁶ A deist accepts a “divine power” but does not believe God reveals himself in personal ways to mankind. A deist rejects the incarnation and other forms of special revelation, but accepts general revelation through nature.

realized that this was the reason for God's sacrifice of his Son to die for sinners. God "so loved the world that he gave his only Son." That is true love.

One day, Jordan read for the first time the story of the crucifixion. She began to weep as she realized the beauty of God's sacrificial love.

Through the next several months, Jordan studied the writings of great Christians such as Augustine, Blaise Pascal, and C.S. Lewis. She began to realize that the Christian faith is not only beautiful; it is true. On Easter 2009, Jordan Monge was baptized as a new believer. For the first time, she knew *Veritas*, "Truth."

Conclusion

The next morning, Lee was waiting on the sidewalk for Jia. "I've thought about your question. I don't think you can prove the truth of the Christian faith because I think it is a fairy tale. However, I want to be an honest person. If you show me that the Christian faith is true, I will admit my error and try to believe."

Jia replied joyfully, "That is all I ask, Lee. I believe that the God of Truth will reveal himself to everyone who truly seeks after truth. I have been studying reasons to believe the Christian faith. If God helps me, I think I can show you that there is good reason to believe that God exists and that Jesus Christ lived, died, and was raised from the grave in order to bring us to relationship with God. Let's talk next week about the Bible and what it shows about the truth of Jesus Christ the Messiah."

Lesson 5 Assignments

(1) Apologetics and the Head: You will begin the next class with a test over the review questions from Lesson 5. Study these questions carefully in preparation for the test.

(2) Apologetics and the Heart: When witnessing to an unbeliever, there is a danger of creating an intellectual competition. This causes a skeptic to feel that if he is convinced of the truth of the Christian faith, he has 'lost' the argument. Ask God to make you sensitive to the spirit of the people to whom you witness. Apologetics must communicate heart to heart, not just head to head.

(3) Apologetics and the Hands: After studying the argument for the Christian faith, share these premises with an unbeliever. If possible, speak with an unbeliever with whom you talked in previous lessons. Ask, "If I could show that each of these blocks is true, would you be willing to listen to my presentation?" Remember that your goal is not to win an argument, but to win the opportunity to share the truth. Take notes about your conversation to share in class at your next meeting.

Lesson 5 Test

- (1) What are the three parts of the case for Christianity in this lesson?
- (2) What are the six blocks that support the case for the Christian faith?
- (3) List the six premises and conclusion that provide the case for the Christian faith.
- (4) Write 1 Thessalonians 2:13 from memory.

Lesson 6

The Reliability of the New Testament

Note to Class Leader

This lesson is quite long and contains much important information. You may wish to divide the lesson into two parts.

Introduction

Jia was sitting in the park reading the story of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Ever since she had become a Christian, this was her favorite part of the New Testament. She had read the gospel of John so many times that she could quote the resurrection story by memory.

As Lee walked past, he saw what she was reading. "Jia, why do you read that book so much? It is no better than our ancient Chinese legends!"

Jia protested, "This is more than a legend; this is God's Word! The stories in this book were written by people who spent years with Jesus. This book tells me what it was like to hear Jesus teach and to see his miracles. I love this book!"

Lee smiled, "I'm sure it is interesting, but the gospels were written long after Jesus died. By the time the New Testament was written, many of the stories of Jesus' life had been changed. We can't rely on that book for history. It is a religious book, not a book of history! You can have 'faith' in your book if you choose, but you can't know that it is true."

"I disagree!" Jia replied. "I am resting my eternal future on this book because I know it is true. Can I show you some things that I have learned to support the reliability of this book? Yes, I have faith, but my faith is grounded on a foundation of historical truth."

► How would you respond to Lee? Can we trust the stories in the Bible? How can we know these stories are true?

The Date of the New Testament

Some people say, "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere in your faith." In Lesson 2, we saw the problem with this statement. Even if you sincerely believe that a glass of poison is water, you will still die from the poison. It is not enough to believe; your faith must be based on truth.

In Lesson 5, we studied the General Argument for Christianity. You learned to build a case for Christianity, block by block, or premise by premise. Now we have to demonstrate that all of the premises are true. If they are true, the conclusion will be true. But we have to show that they are true, beginning with the first premise or building block.

► What would happen to our case for Christianity if someone proved that the New Testament was NOT historically reliable?

If the New Testament is not historically reliable, we are followers of a false religion. Is the New Testament historically reliable? In this lesson, we will study three common objections to the reliability of the New Testament and then answer these objections.

Objection 1: The New Testament was written 100–200 years after the life of Christ. Many of the stories in the New Testament are myths.

Skeptics say that the New Testament was written 100-200 years after Jesus' death. During these decades, the stories of Jesus' life were communicated orally rather than in written form. This means that the stories could have been changed. Skeptics who make this objection say that many of the stories included in the gospels are myths that developed during this 100-200-year period.

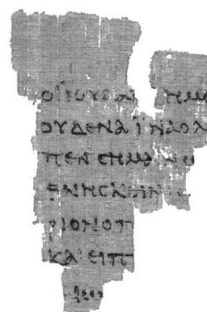
Response to Objection 1: The New Testament was complete within sixty years of Jesus' life. That was not enough time for the story of Christ to be distorted into myth.

There is strong evidence that the New Testament was written by eyewitnesses to Jesus' life. At the time the gospels were written, there were many people living who witnessed the events described. These people would know if the stories were not true!

We have good evidence that the New Testament was complete within sixty years of the death of Jesus. Actually, most New Testament books were written within about thirty years of the death of Christ. Here are four pieces of evidence to support our response to Objection 1.

Evidence:

1. Manuscripts have been found from the early second century. The John Rylands Papyrus⁴⁷ is a fragment of the gospel of John that was found in Egypt. This copy of John was dated to A.D. 125. In order for the John Rylands Papyrus to reach Egypt and be copied by A.D. 125, the original manuscript must have been written earlier.
2. Early church fathers⁴⁸ such as Clement and Ignatius were quoting New Testament books by A.D. 100. This shows that these books were circulated by this time.
3. Most of the New Testament must have been written before Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman army in A.D. 70 because there is no reference to this historical event



⁴⁷ Image: "P52 recto", John Rylands Library, retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:P52_recto.jpg, public domain.

⁴⁸ The term "church father" refers to the bishops who led the Christian church during the first centuries after Christ.

in the New Testament, as having already happened. The destruction of Jerusalem had a major impact on the Christian church. To write the New Testament **after** A.D. 70 without mentioning the destruction of Jerusalem would be like writing a history of twentieth century England without mentioning World War II.

4. The book of Acts and all of Paul's letters were written prior to Paul's death in the mid-60's.⁴⁹ Acts 1:1-2 shows that the Gospel of Luke was written before the book of Acts. So the Gospel of Luke is even earlier than the mid-60's.

Conclusion: The New Testament accounts were written by eyewitnesses within a few decades of the life of Jesus.

Date	Event
c. A.D. 33	Jesus' Ascension
c. A.D. 65	Death of Paul
A.D. 70	Destruction of Jerusalem
A.D. 100	Clement and Ignatius
A.D. 125	John Rylands Papyrus

Section A Review

Respond to the following objection: "The New Testament was written 100–200 years after the life of Christ. Many of the stories in the New Testament are myths." Give at least three pieces of evidence to support your response.

The Reliability of the New Testament: The Bibliographical Test

We have determined the approximate time that the New Testament was written, but do we know what was originally written? Some skeptics argue that the books in our New Testament are different than the original gospels. If we do not have what was originally written, then we cannot trust the New Testament.

Three major tests are used to determine the reliability of ancient documents. These three tests are used on any piece of ancient literature. These tests help us verify the historical reliability of the text we are reading. The first test is the *Bibliographical Test*.

The Bibliographical Test examines how well a document has been preserved. From the Bibliographical Test, we know whether or not we have the text of the original document.

There are three aspects of the Bibliographical Test:

⁴⁹ The Roman Emperor Nero died in A.D. 68. According to the early church historian Eusebius, Paul was executed during the reign of Nero.

1. *Timespan*. This measures the number of years between the original document and our earliest surviving copies. The shorter the time span, the more we can trust our copies.
2. *Number*. This measures the number of existing handwritten copies of a document. The greater the number of surviving copies, the more certain we are of the original text.
3. *Quality*. This measures how similar the existing manuscripts are. This examines the differences between the handwritten copies we possess today. The fewer differences between copies, the more certain we are of the original text.

These measurements answer the objections of skeptics who argue that we cannot trust our copies of the New Testament. Let's look at a second objection by the skeptics.

Objection 2: We cannot trust our copies of the New Testament because there is too much time between the original manuscripts and the earliest surviving copies.

This objection points out the truth that the more time between the original and a copy, the more likelihood of mistakes. But the objection erroneously asserts that there was a long time between the New Testament and the earliest copies; and that, therefore, we cannot trust our New Testament.

Bibliographical Test: Timespan

Our response to this objection looks at the short *timespan* between the original writing of the New Testament and our earliest surviving copies.

Response to Objection 2: The timespan for the New Testament is shorter than for any other piece of literature from the ancient world.

The timespan between the originals and the earliest existing copies for most classical Greek works is about 1,000 years. For example, there is 950 years between the original writing of Tacitus' *Annals* and our *earliest* copy (of the second half of it). By contrast, the time span for most of the New Testament books is around 150 years.

Date	Event
c. A.D. 33	Jesus' Ascension
c. A.D. 60	Most of NT written
A.D. 125	John Rylands Papyrus
A.D. 200	Copies of most of the NT

This timeline shows that most of the New Testament was written within thirty years of Jesus' ascension. We have manuscript copies of most New Testament books from about 150 years after they were first written. Compare this to some other famous Greek classics.

Author	Work	Time between original writing and earliest copy
Plato	<i>Tetralogies</i>	1,300 years
Caesar	<i>Gallic Wars</i>	950 years
Tacitus	<i>Annals</i> (first half)	750 years
Homer	<i>Iliad</i>	400 years
	<i>The New Testament</i>	150 years

Notice the small timespan between the original New Testament documents and our earliest copies. No one argues that we cannot trust Plato or Caesar. If that literature survived 1,000 years without corruption, why should we think that the New Testament was corrupted during the 150-year span?

Historians accept other ancient documents as reliable after 1,000 years. But skeptics unreasonably reject the New Testament as unreliable, even though the New Testament passes tests for reliability much better than other ancient documents.

Objection 3: Even if there is a short time between the originals and the first copies, there are too many differences among the surviving New Testament manuscripts for us to know what was in the original. We have too many conflicting manuscripts.

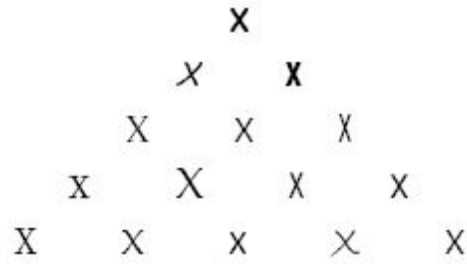
This is a common objection to the reliability of the New Testament. Based on this objection, Mormons say that we need the Book of Mormon; and Muslims say that we need the Quran.

► How would you answer a Mormon who says that we need the Book of Mormon because the New Testament is unreliable?

Response to Objection 3: The vast number of surviving New Testament manuscripts and the small number of conflicts show that we can trust the New Testament. The *number* and *quality* aspects of the Bibliographical Test will demonstrate this.

Bibliographical Test: Number

The aspect of *number* addresses the number of early manuscripts available for comparison. The more manuscripts we have, the closer we can get to the original manuscript reading. This illustration shows the value of having many manuscripts.



Imagine that the **X** at the top is the original text. The other x's are later copies. Even though there are slight differences in the later x's, it is obvious that each copy is an "x." You will not look at the fourth line (the latest copies) and read a group of "o's."

This shows the importance of the number of copies. Since we no longer have the original manuscripts, we depend on copies to discover what was originally written. The best way to reconstruct the original is to compare as many manuscripts as possible. If many manuscripts are analyzed, we can determine the original form of each passage.

How many early copies of the New Testament do we possess? Scholars have found about 25,000 fragments and manuscripts. This includes more than 5,800 Greek manuscripts, more than 10,000 Latin manuscripts, and thousands of other manuscripts in other languages.

In addition, there are thousands of New Testament quotations in the writings of the church fathers. With these alone, one could reconstruct practically the entire New Testament.

Compare this to the number of manuscripts of classical Greek and Roman literature. After the New Testament, the piece of ancient literature with the greatest number of existing copies (by far) is Homer's *Iliad*. Compared to 25,000 copies of the New Testament, we have about 1,800 copies of the *Iliad*. The manuscript evidence for the New Testament is far superior to the manuscript evidence for classical Greek and Roman literature. Again, the evidence shows that we can trust the reliability of the New Testament.

"The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true Word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation throughout the centuries."
- Sir Frederick Kenyon,
Director of the British Museum

Bibliographical Test: Quality

The aspect of *quality* measures differences between existing manuscripts of an ancient text. To understand this, look at the illustration below.



Illustration 1

As above, imagine that the **X** at the top is the original text. The other letters are copies. In this example, the differences are huge! Now “x” becomes “e” or “p.” The quality of these copies is low.

Now compare Illustration 1 to Illustration 2 below:

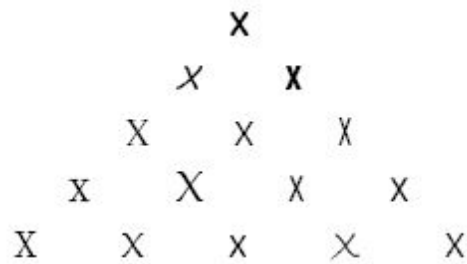


Illustration 2

Here, later copies show only slight differences. It is obvious that each of these is an “x.” The quality of these copies is high.

Illustration 2 is a good depiction of the differences in our copies of the New Testament. From the examination of thousands of ancient copies, it turns out there is less than 1% of the New Testament that is substantially affected by variant readings (about 400 words out of the 138,000 words in the NT).⁵⁰ This 1% does refer to significant differences, but none of these differences affect *any* major doctrinal teaching or any moral commandment of the New Testament. Any significant doctrine taught in a passage where the wording is unclear is taught in other parts of the Bible.

⁵⁰ There are a large number of other variants among the copies, but the vast majority of these are spelling errors or changes in word order, which do not affect the meaning of the text.

If we compare this to other ancient Roman and Greek literature, we see that the New Testament is very reliable. Only Homer's *Iliad* is even close to the quality of the New Testament copies. This evidence confirms that we have the original text written by the biblical writers.

Section B Review

1. What does the Bibliographical Test attempt to show when applied to any ancient document?
2. List three aspects of the Bibliographical Test for the reliability of the New Testament.
3. Some people say, "We cannot trust our copies of the New Testament because there is too much time between the original manuscripts and the earliest surviving copies." How does the *timespan* aspect of the Bibliographical Test answer this objection?
4. Respond to the following objection: "Even if there is a short time between the originals and the first copies, there are too many differences among the surviving New Testament manuscripts for us to know what was in the original. We have too many conflicting manuscripts."

The Reliability of the New Testament: Internal Evidence Test

Some skeptics will consider the Bibliographical Test and respond, "That's fine. We have what the New Testament authors wrote. But how do we know that they wrote accurately? Maybe they invented a myth."

Objection 4: We cannot trust the authors of the New Testament to record accurately the events that happened. They are not reliable witnesses.

To answer this objection, we will look at *internal evidence* and *external evidence* for the reliability of the Bible. The internal evidence test looks at the writing itself. It analyzes what is written to determine whether we can trust the author. The Internal Evidence Test asks, "Can we trust what the authors wrote? Were they honest and competent?" The External Evidence Test looks for outside information that supports the truth of the New Testament.

Response to Objection 4: The internal evidence and external evidence test show that the New Testament is a reliable historical record.

Internal Evidence: Eyewitness Testimony

► Read 2 Peter 1:16; 1 John 1:1, and Luke 1:1-4. What do these verses tell us about the testimony of the authors?

The Gospels were based on the memories of people who had close contact with Jesus. They reported what they had seen and heard personally.

Their memories can be trusted for two reasons:

1. Their time with Jesus was the most important thing that ever happened to them. Since the disciples' time with Jesus was so significant to them, they would likely have remembered the details well.
 - Can you remember where you were on Tuesday morning six months before studying this lesson? Probably not. But can you remember where you were when you surrendered your life to Christ and became God's child? Probably! We remember the details of important events much more than daily life.
2. Jesus told his disciples that the Holy Spirit would bring to their remembrance all that he had said to them (John 14:25-26).

Internal Evidence: The Presence of Living Witnesses

At the time the Gospels were written, there were many witnesses still living. These people had seen Jesus and would know if the Gospels included stories that were false.

Some of these witnesses were unbelievers. These critics would have loved to discredit the apostles. If the authors had made a mistake, the critics would have pointed it out. For instance, if the body of Jesus had been still in the tomb, it would have been easy for the Jewish leaders to say, "Here is the body!"

The Gospels tell the story of Jesus feeding 5,000 men, plus women and children. If this story had been false, someone would have said, "I was there that day. It didn't happen like that. We all brought our own lunches!"

Internal Evidence: The Authors Died for Their Faith

The apostles died because they would not give up their Christian faith. Some of them were tortured; all of them suffered opposition; most of them died as martyrs. People will sometimes die for what they believe to be true, but not for something they know to be false.

If the Resurrection had not taken place, the disciples would have known it. The disciples who had hidden in fear after Jesus' arrest would not have died for something they knew to be untrue. Their willingness to give their lives for their faith confirms their belief.

The writers of the Gospels were trustworthy and competent. This is internal evidence that we have a reliable New Testament.

"What About Contradictions in the Bible?"

When Randall McElwain was teaching at a seminary in Africa, he taught a student who had studied from liberal critics who rejected the truth of the Bible. These critics convinced this young student that the Bible was full of contradiction. Nearly every day, Toni would say to Randall, "I found a contradiction in the Bible. Can you explain...?"

At first, Randall was nervous that Toni would find a problem to which there was no good answer. However, the longer they studied, the more Randall realized that his

"contradictions" were the result of not properly understanding the Bible. By the end of the class, Toni admitted, "The Bible is much more reliable than I thought."

To address supposed contradictions, you should understand the *Law of Non-contradiction*. This law says, "**A statement cannot be both true and not true at the same time and in the same sense.**" So if one statement absolutely contradicts another statement, at least one of those statements cannot be true.

In order for one statement to absolutely contradict another, there must be no sense in which the statements can both be true. If there is a possible logical explanation, it is not a real contradiction. The examples Toni brought were *apparent* contradictions, not real contradictions.

Let's see examples of apparent and real contradictions:

An Apparent Contradiction:

Jeni says, "I saw a blue car in an accident on the way to school this morning."

Robert says, "I saw a red car in an accident on the way to school this morning."

Someone might say, "Those stories contradict each other!" But this is only an apparent contradiction. It is possible that Jeni and Robert saw different accidents. It is possible that the two cars were in an accident together; Jeni noticed the blue car, and Robert noticed the red car. Both stories may be true. This is not a real contradiction.

A Real Contradiction:

Jeni says, "On the way to school this morning, I saw a blue car hit a cow."

Robert says, "I saw the same accident. There was only one car and one animal; but the car was red, not blue; and it hit a horse, not a cow."

This is a real contradiction. Both stories cannot be true. At least one of the stories is false.

A Supposed Contradiction in the Gospels

Let's look at an example from the Gospels. Matthew mentions one angel at Jesus' tomb; Luke says there were two.

► Is this an apparent contradiction or a real contradiction? Explain your answer.

Is this an absolute contradiction? No. Matthew does not say there was "only one angel" at the tomb; he simply mentions one. It is entirely possible that Matthew mentioned only one angel, while Luke (a historian who loved details) mentioned both of the angels that were there.⁵¹

⁵¹ For another example, go back to Lesson 1 and read the story of Jia and Lee's conversation about the time of Jesus' crucifixion. This is another example of an apparent, not real, contradiction.

After 2,000 years of study, no skeptic has proven an absolute contradiction in the Bible. In fact, the more we learn about science, history, and the Bible, the more supposed problems in the Bible are solved. The list of apparent contradictions gets shorter and shorter.

Section C Review

1. Respond to the following objection: "We cannot trust the authors of the New Testament to record accurately the events that happened. They are not reliable witnesses."
2. List three reasons the New Testament passes the Internal Evidence Test.
3. What is the Law of Non-contradiction?
4. Can anyone demonstrate a genuine violation of the Law of Non-contradiction in Scripture?

The Reliability of the New Testament: External Evidence Test

The Internal Evidence Test looks at the writing itself to determine if the author was honest and competent. The External Evidence Test looks for outside information that supports the document. In the case of the New Testament, this test asks, "What evidence exists *outside of Scripture* for the truth of the New Testament?"

Supporting Evidence from Other Early Christian Writers

Early Christian leaders based their faith on the truth of the Gospels. Like the apostles themselves, these early Christians risked their lives for their faith.

Papias was an acquaintance of John the apostle. He wrote that John testified that the Gospel of Mark was based on Simon Peter's memories of Jesus' life and ministry. This is external evidence that the Gospel of Mark records an eyewitness account of Jesus' ministry.

Irenaeus was born around A.D. 125, less than forty years after John wrote his gospel. Irenaeus wrote:

So firm is the ground upon which these Gospels rest, that the very heretics themselves bear witness to them, and starting from these documents, each one of them endeavors to establish his own particular doctrine.

According to Irenaeus, even heretics in the early church respected the Gospel records. The Gospels must have been considered extremely reliable documents.

Supporting Evidence from Non-Christian Sources

What would we know about Jesus and early Christianity if we did not have the Bible? External evidence looks at non-Christian sources that confirm the New Testament record.

Historical references from non-Christians verify much of the New Testament. These include:

- A letter from Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia to Emperor Trajan in A.D. 112
- The writings of Josephus, a Jewish historian
- Tacitus, a Roman senator and historian
- Lucian, a Greek writer from the second century
- Suetonius, a Roman historian
- The Talmud, the Jewish commentary on the Law of Moses

These non-Christian sources confirm many aspects of the New Testament accounts:

- Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate at Passover (Tacitus, Josephus, Talmud).
- His disciples believed that he rose from the dead three days later (Josephus).
- Jewish leaders accused Jesus of doing magic (Talmud).⁵²
- Christianity spread to Rome (Tacitus, Suetonius).
- Nero and other Roman rulers persecuted and martyred early Christians (Tacitus).
- Christians denied polytheism, lived according to Christ's teaching, and worshiped Christ (Pliny, Lucian).

We know all of the above from secular and Jewish history. This provides outside confirmation that the New Testament is accurate historically.

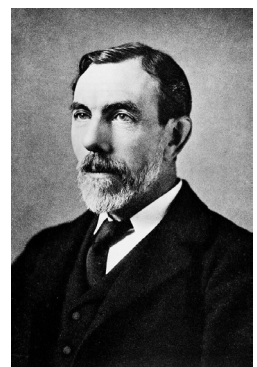
Supporting Evidence from Archaeology

Archaeology is a valuable source of external evidence. Since the nineteenth century, archaeologists have been able to find many locations mentioned in the New Testament. Repeatedly, their study has matched *exactly* the New Testament record.

Apologetics in Action - The Testimony of Sir William Ramsay

Sir William Ramsay (1851-1939) was one of the most highly respected archaeologists of the early twentieth century.⁵³ He studied under the greatest scholars of his day at Aberdeen and Oxford. Because his teachers did not accept the truth of the Bible, Ramsay assumed that the Bible was useless as a historical document.

Later, Ramsay traveled to Greece and Asia Minor to study the ancient world. At first, he did not even read what the Bible said about this land because he assumed it was unreliable. However, when he eventually began to study the writings of Luke, he was amazed at the accuracy of Luke's writing.



For the rest of Ramsay's life, he studied Acts and Paul's letters. When he began his studies, many of the cities mentioned in Acts were unknown. However, Ramsay became convinced that Acts is a reliable record of the ancient world. Sir William Ramsay eventually wrote

⁵² Even Jesus' enemies knew that he was doing miracles (they called it magic).

⁵³ Image: "Portrait of Sir William Ramsay", retrieved from the Wellcome Collection, <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/fwfdpnry>, licensed under CC BY 4.0, desaturated from the original.

books on the history and geography of Asia Minor, the travels of St. Paul, and many other subjects. This brilliant archaeologist learned that the New Testament is reliable.

Exhibit 1: The Reliability of Luke's Writings

Sir William Ramsay used the writings of Luke to study the geography of Asia Minor. He found that Luke was unsurpassed in his knowledge of history and geography. For example, Luke mentions about thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities, and nine islands. In every case Ramsay studied, he found Luke's account to be accurate.

Exhibit 2: Pilate's Judgment Seat

John 19:13 refers to a judgment seat where Pilate sat while trying Jesus.

So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement.

For many years, liberal critics called this story a myth. However, archaeologists have found this pavement; and it can be seen by visitors to Jerusalem. When the Roman general Titus destroyed Jerusalem, he built barracks above the pavement. When these barracks crumbled, other buildings were built on top. The pavement disappeared. Early archaeologists dug down to the barracks, but no further. During the 1970's archaeologists dug beneath the barracks and discovered the pavement. This place in the NT was proven to exist.

Exhibit 3: The Pool of Bethesda

John 5 refers to a Pool of Bethesda, with five porches. Again, because there is no record in Jewish or secular sources, skeptics called this a myth. In 1888, archaeologists found the pool while digging forty feet below ground near the Church of Saint Anne. The pool had five porches, just as John said.

The New Testament is historically reliable. We do not need to fear that archaeologists will disprove the Bible. As archaeologists dig, they find increasing evidence to support the truth of the Bible.

Section D Review

1. List three lines of evidence that help the New Testament pass the External Evidence Test.
2. Name two archaeological discoveries that support the historical accuracy of the New Testament.

Conclusion

Jia showed Lee each of these tests for the validity of the New Testament. She showed him that the *Bibliographical Test* confirms that the New Testament we have today teaches the same doctrine taught by the original manuscripts. She showed him that the *Internal* and *External Evidence Tests* confirm the reliability of the New Testament.

"Lee," Jia concluded, "You may choose to believe the claims of the New Testament or you may choose to reject them. However, you can't deny that the New Testament is a reliable historical document. There is far greater evidence for the truth of the New Testament than for any other document from the ancient world, either western or Chinese. The New Testament is a trustworthy historical document."

Lesson 6 Assignments

(1) Apologetics and the Head: You will begin the next class with a test over the review questions from Lesson 6. Study these questions carefully in preparation for the test.

(2) Apologetics and the Heart: The reliability of the Bible is more than an academic study. We rejoice that we can trust God's Word to reveal God's will to us. In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul tells us that God's Word is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." Now that you have studied the reliability of God's Word, ask God to speak to you through his Word. In the next week, allow God to show you:

- Teaching, to better understand truth
- Reproof, to guide your Christian walk
- Correction, to become more Christlike
- Training in right living

(3) Apologetics and the Hands: At the end of Lesson 5, you asked an unbeliever to allow you to share the blocks that support the Christian faith. Talk with this person again and share the information you have learned in this lesson. If they have heard of contradictions in the Bible, ask them to show you the contradictions. Show them an example of an apparent contradiction that has been resolved. Report on your conversation at the next class.

Lesson 6 Test

- (1) Respond to the following objection: "The New Testament was written 100–200 years after the life of Christ. Many of the stories in the New Testament are myths." Give at least three pieces of evidence to support your response.
- (2) What does the Bibliographical Test attempt to show about an ancient document?
- (3) List three aspects of the Bibliographical Test for the reliability of the New Testament.
- (4) Some people say, "We cannot trust our copies of the New Testament because there is too much time between the original manuscripts and the earliest surviving copies." How does the *timespan* aspect of the Bibliographical Test answer this objection?
- (5) Respond to the following objection: "Even if there is a short time between the originals and the first copies, there are too many differences among the surviving New Testament manuscripts for us to know what was in the original. We have too many conflicting manuscripts."
- (6) Respond to the following objection: "We cannot trust the authors of the New Testament to record accurately the events that happened. They are not reliable witnesses."
- (7) List three reasons the New Testament passes the Internal Evidence Test.
- (8) What is the Law of Non-contradiction?
- (9) Can anyone demonstrate a genuine violation of the Law of Non-contradiction in Scripture?
- (10) List three lines of evidence that help the New Testament pass the External Evidence Test.
- (11) Name two archaeological discoveries that support the historical accuracy of the New Testament.
- (12) Write 2 Timothy 3:16-17 from memory.

Lesson 7

Messianic Prophecy and the Resurrection

Note

VERY IMPORTANT: The test for this lesson will be a debate staged in your next class meeting. Before beginning the lesson, read the instructions for the "Apologetics and the Head" assignment at the end of this lesson. The review questions in this lesson will help students prepare for the debate.

Introduction

Jia was excited. God had helped her demonstrate to Lee that the New Testament was reliable. Surely, he would soon accept the gospel. This was more than an intellectual puzzle; Jia was praying for an opportunity to share the gospel with her friend. As Lee approached Jia at a tea shop, she smiled and said, "Have you thought about last week's conversation?"

Lee smiled, "I can see that you are very serious about your book! You have convinced me that the early Christians really believed that Jesus was the Messiah and that he did the miracles recorded in the gospels. I am convinced that the New Testament is an accurate record of what the early church believed. However, there is still a problem. Even if the early Christians truly believed that Jesus rose from the dead, today we know that the Resurrection is impossible!

"Yes, the early Christians *believed* in the Resurrection, but that doesn't make it true. Remember, people in the ancient world believed in many myths. They believed that the earth is flat; they believed in ghosts; they believed in the resurrection. But we live in a scientific age! Jia, you know that the earth is round! You know that ghosts do not exist! How can you seriously believe that a dead man rose from the grave?"

► How would you respond to Lee? Is there sufficient historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

In this lesson, we will look at two pieces of evidence that show Jesus was who he claimed to be. First, we will look at messianic prophecy. We will show that Jesus fulfilled precise predictions made hundreds of years before his birth. Secondly, we will examine the evidence for the Resurrection. We will see that the Resurrection is more than a beautiful story; it is an historical event.

Did Jesus Fulfill Messianic Prophecies?

► Please answer two sets of questions.

Set One:

- What will the weather be like tomorrow in your town?
- Who will be the next president of your country?
- In the next twenty years, will the economy of your country get better or worse?
- How difficult are these questions?
- Do you think your predictions are fairly accurate?

Set Two:

- Who will be president of your country in 2130?
- Where will he be born?
- How will he die?
- How difficult are these questions?
- What is different about these questions and the first set?

It is fairly easy to predict some things in the immediate future. Based on today's weather, I can make a good guess about tomorrow's weather. Based on the news, I may even be able to predict the next president.

It is much more difficult to predict something one hundred years in advance! I don't know who will be living in 2130; so I can't predict the president's name, place of birth, or manner of death.

The Bible prophecies concerning the Messiah belong to this second category. Prophets predicted specific events hundreds of years in advance, and these predictions came to pass exactly as predicted.

There are about sixty specific messianic prophecies fulfilled in the life of Jesus. In this lesson, we will look at twelve of these prophecies. The Jewish rabbis who lived *before the birth of Jesus* considered these to be messianic prophecies.

► Divide the class into two groups. For each prophecy, have someone in Group 1 read the prophecy. Then, have someone in Group 2 read the fulfillment.

FULFILLED PROPHECY IN THE LIFE OF JESUS	
PROPHECY	FULFILLMENT
Tribe of Judah – Genesis 49:10	Luke 3:23, 33
House of David – Jeremiah 23:5	Luke 3:23, 31
Born at Bethlehem - Micah 5:2	Matthew 2:1
Introduced by a messenger – Isaiah 40:3	Matthew 3:1-3
Teaching and healing ministry – Isaiah 61:1, 2; 32:3-4; 35:5	Matthew 9:24; Luke 4:17-21
Lives before temple and Jerusalem is destroyed – Daniel 9:26	The temple and Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70
Called Lord and God – Jeremiah 23:6; Isaiah 9:6	Luke 2:11; John 20:28
Enter Jerusalem on a donkey – Zechariah 9:9	Matthew 21:1-8
Silent before his accusers – Isaiah 53:7	Matthew 27:12
Suffers wounds – Isaiah 53:5	Matthew 27:26
Body pierced in crucifixion – Zechariah 12:10	John 19:34
Buried with the rich – Isaiah 53:9	Matthew 27:57-60

Is it possible that these predictions were fulfilled by chance?

Impossible. We have listed twelve of several dozen prophecies fulfilled by Jesus. A very conservative estimate of the probability of these twelve prophecies being fulfilled by chance is 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000 (1 in 10^{17}).

Imagine covering all of France with coins two feet deep. Mark one of the coins with a red "X." Blindfold a man and have him pick one coin. His chance of picking up the coin with the red "X" is 1 in 10^{17} . Impossible!

Is it possible that Jesus deliberately fulfilled these predictions?

Impossible. Jesus could choose to be a teacher or choose to be silent before his accusers; but he could not choose his family, his place of birth, or how the Romans would pierce his body after crucifixion.

Is it possible that God gave these predictions?

Absolutely. If these prophecies were not fulfilled by chance or by Jesus' deliberate choice, the predictions must have come from Someone who could look into the future.⁵⁴ Since only God knows the future, these predictions must have come from God. Whoever fulfills these predictions was chosen by God.

Section A Review

1. List three specific messianic prophecies fulfilled in the life of Jesus.
2. What does the fulfillment of many specific messianic prophecies demonstrate about the origin of the prophecies?

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

The Resurrection of Jesus is either the greatest hoax or the most glorious miracle of all time. Christianity stands or falls on the answer to the question, "Did Jesus physically rise from the dead?" Paul said that if Jesus did not rise from the dead, our faith is vain and we are a miserable people. Why? Because if Christ did not rise, we have no hope of eternal life.⁵⁵

To answer the question, "Did Jesus physically rise from the dead?" we will look at three issues:

1. Did Jesus die? Some people deny that Jesus actually died on the cross.
2. Why was the tomb empty? Some people argue that Jesus did not rise from the dead. They say there is another explanation for the empty tomb.
3. What happened after the Resurrection? Is there evidence for the Resurrection in the events that occurred after the first Easter Sunday morning?

From the answer to these questions, we will see that there is sufficient evidence to believe that Jesus physically rose from the dead. This is more than a legend; it is historical fact.

Did Jesus Die?

When we discuss the Resurrection, we need to demonstrate first that Jesus died. Some opponents of Christianity, such as Muslims, deny that Jesus actually died. What is some evidence for his death?

⁵⁴ Some skeptics argue that these prophecies were written after the events they describe. However, it is easy to demonstrate that these prophecies were made at least 200 years before the time of Christ. The *Septuagint* (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) was written about 200 years before Christ. Because the Old Testament prophecies were translated from Hebrew to Greek by 200 B.C., they must have been written earlier than this date.

⁵⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:14-22

Loss of blood before the crucifixion

Before Jesus was crucified, he was flogged by a Roman soldier. Roman floggings were brutal and often killed victims. A medical doctor wrote:

Roman floggings usually consisted of thirty-nine lashes.... The soldier would use a whip of braided leather thongs with metal balls woven into them. When the whip would strike the flesh, these balls would cause deep bruises or contusions, which would break open with further blows. The whip had pieces of sharp bone as well, which would cut the flesh severely.

The back would be so shredded that part of the spine was sometimes exposed by the deep cuts. The whipping would have gone all the way from the shoulders down to the back, the buttocks, and the back of the legs.⁵⁶

Even before the crucifixion, Jesus experienced so much pain and lost so much blood that he collapsed. They had to find someone else to carry his cross. Jesus was in critical condition even before he was hung on the cross.

Evidence from the cross

On the cross, a person could breathe only by pulling up with their arms and pushing up with their legs. After a person had been on the cross long enough to grow weak, Roman soldiers would break his legs so that the victim could not push himself up. This caused the victim to suffocate.

The Jewish leaders did not want to leave Jesus on the cross during the Passover observance. Because of this, the soldiers came to break the legs of Jesus and the two thieves. However, they did not break Jesus' legs because he was already dead. Roman soldiers who were assigned to crucifixion duty knew well how to determine if a victim was dead. They knew Jesus was dead.⁵⁷

One way that Roman soldiers confirmed that a victim of crucifixion was truly dead was to thrust a spear into the victim's side. Blood and water flowing out was a sign of death. If the person was still alive, only blood would spurt out. When the soldier pierced Jesus' side, "at once there came out blood and water."⁵⁸ This confirmed to the soldier that Jesus was dead.

The centurion was able to confirm to Pilate the Jesus was dead. Jesus' body was then wrapped in bandages and was laid in a tomb. No one was in doubt that Jesus was dead.

⁵⁶ Adapted from Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (MI: Zondervan, 1998), 195

⁵⁷ John 19:31-33

⁵⁸ John 19:34

Why Was the Tomb Empty?

Both Jewish and Roman historians acknowledged that Jesus was killed by crucifixion. The next question involves the empty tomb. The apostles preached that Jesus rose bodily from the grave. They taught a physical resurrection. They knew that the tomb was empty.

The Gospels confirm the empty tomb. The Roman guard did not deny that the tomb was empty; the Jewish leaders did not deny that the tomb was empty. Imagine that the disciples had invented the story of the Resurrection. It would have been easy for the Roman or Jewish leaders to produce the body - and this would have been the end of Christianity. Instead, news of the empty tomb inspired many people to believe in Christ.

Unbelievers have tried to give other explanations for the empty tomb. They say:

The disciples stole the body.

As soon as the tomb was found empty, Jewish leaders suggested that the disciples stole Jesus' body.⁵⁹ In the second century, a Jewish writer, Trypho, said,

Jesus, a Galilean deceiver, we crucified, but his disciples stole him by night from the tomb and now deceive men by asserting that he has risen from the dead and ascended into heaven.⁶⁰

► Is this a good explanation? Why or why not?

There are at least two pieces of evidence against this theory.

First – to steal the body, the disciples would have had to overpower a trained Roman guard, move a heavy stone, and sneak away with the body. These same disciples ran away in fear when Jesus was arrested. It is inconceivable that they would now have the courage to face a Roman guard.

The Roman guards faced a death sentence if they failed in their duty. They had every reason to be vigilant. There is no reason to believe that they were overpowered by the weak disciples, or that they fell asleep on duty.

Second – if the disciples stole the body, they *knew* the Resurrection story was a lie. In the words of Josh McDowell, "Who would die for a lie?" Yes, people have died *believing* that a lie was the truth, but very few people would die *knowing* that they were dying for a lie.

To believe that the disciples stole the body requires us to believe that eleven men risked their lives for a story that they knew was untrue. They did not gain riches or power from this story; they were hunted and killed because of this story. Think how the disciples died:

⁵⁹ Matthew 28:11-15

⁶⁰ Quoted in Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*

- Peter was crucified.
- Andrew was crucified.
- Matthew was beheaded.
- James, son of Alphaeus was crucified.
- Philip was crucified.
- Simon was crucified.
- Thomas was killed by spears.
- Bartholomew was crucified.
- James, the son of Zebedee, was killed by the sword.

These men gave their lives for the conviction that Jesus rose from the dead. They did not die for a lie.

The Roman or Jewish authorities removed the body.

Some skeptics suggest that the Romans or Jews removed the body. They say that the Romans or Jews hid the body so the Christians could not find it.

► Is this a good explanation? Why or why not?

This answer makes no sense. The Jews wanted to destroy this new religion; the Romans wanted to keep peace between the Jews and Christians in Jerusalem.

As the Christian religion began to spread, the Romans or Jews could have produced the hidden body to prove that Jesus was still dead. They had every motivation to prove Jesus was not raised from the dead. There is no reason for them to hide the body.

Jesus did not die; he was unconscious when he was buried.

The “swoon theory” is popular among many Muslims today. They say that Jesus did not die on the cross. Instead, he fainted because of the pain and loss of blood. The soldiers thought he was dead, so they buried him. In the tomb, Jesus revived and came out of the tomb. His followers believed he had risen from the dead.

► Is this a good explanation? Why or why not?

For this theory to be true, think of all that must happen:

- Jesus would have to survive a terrible flogging and the loss of blood on the cross.
- He would have to fool soldiers who were trained to kill and to confirm death.
- After awaking from his “swoon,” this weakened man would have to push away a heavy stone from the tomb.
- He would have to overpower the Roman guards assigned to the tomb.
- In this weakened state, he would have to appear so powerful that his followers would be convinced he was Lord of Life and Victor over Death.

This does not match anything we read about the crucifixion and resurrection. The only option that makes sense of all the facts is that Jesus rose just as he said he would.

Section B Review

List three explanations that skeptics give for the empty tomb. For each explanation, give one reason that the explanation is insufficient.

What Happened after the Resurrection?

The evidence for the Resurrection does not end at the tomb. Jesus appeared to hundreds of people in the weeks after the Resurrection. The Resurrection transformed their lives – and continues to transform lives today.

The evidence of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus

One of the most complete lists of post-Resurrection appearances is **Paul's list** in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8. Paul wrote this list around A.D. 55, twenty to twenty-five years after the Resurrection. This list of witnesses includes Peter, the twelve disciples, and James.

Paul mentioned a group of more than 500 people who had seen the risen Jesus. Most of these people were still living. If Paul's account was wrong, they could point out his error! Paul knew that people would not challenge his word.

The four **Gospels** record the testimony of those who saw Christ after the Resurrection. These early Christians risked their lives for their testimony. Many died for their belief. If the Resurrection had not taken place, they would have known it. They would not have died for what they knew was a lie.

One of the remarkable aspects of Jesus' post-Resurrection appearances is the record of **women as the first witnesses**. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and Salome were some of the first people at the tomb.⁶¹ Today, this might not seem important; but in the ancient world, this is a strong support for the truth of the Gospels.

In the first century, a woman's testimony was not accepted in court. Because of their low social status, women had no legal standing. Even the disciples at first rejected the testimony of these women.⁶²

If the Gospel writers were inventing this story, they would have not included women as witnesses of the empty tomb. A fiction writer would have used credible witnesses such as respected religious leaders to testify to the Resurrection. Instead, the writers of the Gospels wrote the story exactly as it happened.

⁶¹ Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-11; Luke 24:1; John 20:11-18

⁶² Luke 24:11

In historical research, we give great credibility to eyewitnesses. The same should be true when we study the historical truth of the Resurrection. These were the first eyewitnesses. Their testimony should be considered as a valuable witness to the truth of the Resurrection.

The evidence of transformed lives

Another evidence for the Resurrection is its impact on other people. Many in the first century were convinced of the truth of the Resurrection. Their lives were transformed by the risen Christ. Just a few names will illustrate this point.

Paul, the greatest enemy of Christianity became its greatest advocate. He traveled through the Roman Empire testifying to the truth of the Resurrection.

James, Jesus' half-brother, was a skeptic during Jesus' earthly life. However, seeing Jesus alive after the Resurrection convinced James of the truth of Jesus' claim to be Messiah. James became the leader of the Jerusalem church.

Ongoing impact in the Church

To celebrate the Resurrection each week, early Christians moved their **day of worship** from Saturday to Sunday. Because the Resurrection occurred on the first day of the week, they worshiped on the first day of the week. Early Christians celebrated Easter to commemorate the literal, physical Resurrection of Jesus.

Art from the first centuries show the Christian conviction that "Jesus is Lord." The coin at the right includes symbols that were popular in the early church.⁶³

First, it intersects two letters from the Greek alphabet: **χ** (*chi*) and **ρ** (*rho*), the first two letters of the Greek word "*Christòs*" or "Christ." Then, it adds **α** (*alpha*) and **ω** (*omega*) the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet, signifying that Jesus is the beginning and end of all things.



The walls of the catacombs show another summary of early Christian beliefs, the fish symbol. The Greek word for fish was *ἰχθύς* (*ichthus*).⁶⁴ Each letter reminded early Christians of some aspect of belief about Jesus of Nazareth. The fish symbol became a simple creed for early Christians: Jesus Christ, God's Son and our Savior.



⁶³ Image: "CE30928 Moneda", taken by Angel M. Felicísimo on Feb 7, 2016, retrieved from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/elgolem/24386520264>, licensed under CC BY 2.0, cropped and desaturated from the original.

⁶⁴ Image: "ICTHUS", retrieved from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ICTHUS.gif>, public domain.

i = *Iesous* (Jesus)
χ = *Christos* (Christ)
θ = *Theou* (God's)
υ = *Uios* (Son)
ς = *Soter* (Savior)

You can see how highly the early Christians esteemed Jesus. They worshiped Christ as the Living Lord. The best explanation for their worship is a literal bodily resurrection of Jesus, the one they believed had conquered death as the Lord of Life.

Section C Review

1. Why is it significant that the Gospels include women among the first witnesses to the Resurrection?
2. Why is it significant that the early Christians worshiped on the first day of the week and celebrated Easter each year?

What Do Fulfilled Prophecy and the Resurrection Prove?

The messianic prophecies that were fulfilled in the life of Jesus demonstrate that he was the predicted Messiah. Long before the birth of Jesus, Jewish rabbis agreed that these prophecies would point to the Messiah. The fact that detailed prophecies concerning the Messiah were fulfilled hundreds of years after the predictions demonstrates that God inspired the prophecies, that God guided the birth of Jesus, and that God sent Jesus as the Jewish Messiah!

► Why is the Resurrection so important to the Christian faith?

The Resurrection is central to the Christian faith because it proves that Jesus is who he claimed to be — the Son of God, God in the flesh. Only God has the power to raise the dead, and God would not raise a liar. We will later show that Jesus claimed to be God. The Resurrection testified to the truth of Jesus' claim.

The Resurrection gives validity to Jesus' claim that his death would "ransom many."⁶⁵ The Resurrection shows that Jesus has power over death. Because of this, Jesus is able to give life to his followers as he promised.

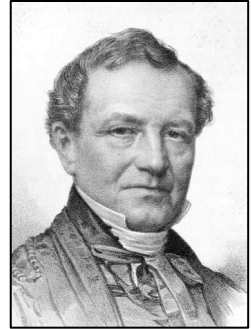
Apologetics in Action - The Testimony of Simon Greenleaf

Simon Greenleaf (1783-1853) was one of the founders of Harvard Law School. For many decades, his *Treatise on the Law of Evidence* was considered the greatest book on legal evidence.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Matthew 20:28

⁶⁶ Image: "Simon Greenleaf", retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Simon_Greenleaf.jpg, public domain.

Greenleaf was also a Jewish agnostic who believed the resurrection of Jesus Christ was a hoax. When a student challenged him to study the evidence, Professor Greenleaf determined to prove that the Resurrection was simply a myth. Instead, he became convinced that the Resurrection is an historical fact.



Because he recognized the powerful evidence for the Resurrection, Greenleaf became a committed Christian. His writings have inspired some of today's greatest apologists – including Josh McDowell and Lee Strobel, whom we have studied in this course.

After studying the evidence for the Resurrection, Greenleaf wrote, **"If the evidence for the resurrection was set before any unbiased courtroom in the world it would be judged to be an historical fact—Jesus Christ rose from the dead!"**

Greenleaf's most famous book was called, *The Testimony of the Evangelists: The Gospels Examined by the Rules of Evidence*. In this book, Greenleaf applied the rules of legal evidence that are used in a law court. He concluded that any fair court of law would recognize the Gospels as legal evidence. This leading legal scholar of the early nineteenth century recognized that an examination of the historical evidence shows that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was fact, not fiction.

Conclusion

"Lee," Jia responded, "I understand your hesitation to believe in the Resurrection. It seems impossible! But you are ignoring historical evidence for the truth of this story. It isn't true that people in the ancient world expected dead people to come back from the grave. Yes, some of them believed in ghosts – but they believed that the ghosts were dead people. No one believed that the ghost was really a person returned from the grave.

"The people of the ancient world may not have known modern science, but they knew that *dead people stay dead*. The disciples were shocked by the Resurrection. None of them expected to see Jesus alive. They believed only after they were confronted with overwhelming evidence that, 'He is not here, for he has risen.'⁶⁷

"...modernists like to imagine they are the first people in history to notice that dead people stay dead. But the disciples knew that dead people stay dead. Dead Messiahs stay dead. Everybody knows that. Yes, they believed in a resurrection at the end of time, but not today.... Easter was a surprise.... That is the foundation of the church, of Christian faith, of Christian life and hope and love and laughter and witness. Easter is not just unlikely, it's impossible. *But it happened.*"
- Adapted from an Easter Sermon by N.T. Wright, April 11, 2009

"The apostle Paul, a Jew who fought against the Christian faith, became a believer after he met the risen Lord. Remember, Paul wrote his letters while hundreds of people who

⁶⁷ Matthew 28:6

witnessed his death were still alive. If Paul's testimony was false, they would know! But Paul wrote without fear of contradiction:

...Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he 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, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.⁶⁸

"Lee, Paul knew that Jesus Christ rose from the grave. Jesus is the Son of God who died for our sins and who demonstrated his power over death by the Resurrection. And if we believe on him, we can share in his victory over death. We can have eternal life!"

⁶⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

Lesson 7 Assignments

(1) Apologetics and the Head: The test for this lesson will be different than previous lessons. Instead of writing answers to questions, you will present the answers in a class debate. The class leader will pretend to be a skeptic who denies the truth of the Resurrection. You will present the evidence for the Resurrection that you have learned in this lesson.

For example – if the “skeptic” argues that Jesus did not really die on the cross, you will give reasons that we can be sure Jesus was dead. If the skeptic says that the Resurrection story was invented by the disciples, you can point to the testimony of the women as a reason to believe the story. As you prepare for this debate, organize the information from this lesson in a way that will help you answer questions that skeptics may have about the Resurrection.

(2) Apologetics and the Heart: In Romans 1:4, Paul says that the Resurrection testifies that Jesus was the Son of God. Then in Romans 6, Paul shows that we who “die with Christ” are united with him in his resurrection. This has a powerful implication in our daily Christian life. We are now “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 6:11).

Think about your daily Christian life. Do you struggle with repeated temptation in some areas? If so, meditate on the truth of Romans 6. You are dead to sin and alive to God. Because of the Resurrection, you can live in daily victory over sin. This week, take time to thank God daily for continuing victory over sin.

(3) Apologetics and the Hands: At the end of Lesson 5, you asked an unbeliever to allow you to share the blocks that support the Christian faith. Talk with this person again and share the information you have learned in this lesson. Ask them if you can share the evidence for the truth of the Resurrection. Before your meeting, pray that God will prepare his or her heart for the truth. Report on your conversation at the next class meeting.

Lesson 7 (Review Guide)

- (1) List three specific messianic prophecies fulfilled in the life of Jesus.
- (2) What does the fulfillment of many specific messianic prophecies demonstrate about the origin of the prophecies?
- (3) List three explanations that skeptics give for the empty tomb. For each explanation, give one reason that the explanation is insufficient.
- (4) Why is it significant that the Gospels include women among the first witnesses to the Resurrection?
- (5) Why is it significant that the early Christians worshiped on the first day of the week and celebrated Easter each year?
- (6) Write 1 Corinthians 15:3-6 from memory.

Lesson 8

Jesus' Claim to Be God

Note

VERY IMPORTANT: Before beginning Lesson 8, do the debate assigned at the end of Lesson 7. Depending on the size of your class, this debate may take an entire meeting. Please do not rush through this activity. This is your chance to make sure you can apply the information in Lesson 7.

Introduction

"Jia," Lee said hesitantly, "I have been thinking a lot about our talk. If Jesus truly rose from the dead, that is pretty powerful! I must admit, you gave good evidence for the Resurrection as historical fact instead of a myth. All of that is impressive. I hope you won't be offended that I still have another question."

"Of course not," Jia responded. "I'm not trying to win an argument. I am trying to share the most important thing in my life. What is your question?"

"Everything you have said makes sense. But how does that prove that Jesus is God? A great man? Sure! A great teacher? Sure! Maybe even greater than the Buddha. But, God? Why can you not accept that he was just a great teacher? Why must you say that Jesus was God?"

► How would you answer Lee? How do we know that Jesus was God?

Did Jesus Claim to Be God?

Kenneth Copeland is a leading teacher in the prosperity gospel movement. According to Copeland, Christ came to him in a vision and said:

Don't be disturbed when people put you down and speak harshly of you. They spoke that way of me. Should they not speak that way of you? The more you get to be like me, the more they're going to think that way of you. They crucified me for claiming that I was God. But I didn't claim I was God; I just claimed I walked with him and that he was in me.⁶⁹

Copeland says that Jesus did not claim to be God. Many others agree with Copeland; they say that Jesus did not claim to be God. Is this true? Or did Jesus claim to be divine?

► How would you answer Kenneth Copeland? Did Jesus claim to be God?

⁶⁹ Kenneth Copeland, quoted in Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, (Oregon: Harvest House, 1993), 137-138

If Jesus claimed to be God, he was the only leader of a major world religion to make this claim. Mohammed never claimed to be God; Buddha never claimed to be God. If Jesus claimed to be God, this sets Christianity apart from any other major religion. We will look at Jesus' claims in two parts – his claims during his ministry and his claims during his trial.

What Did Jesus Say During His Ministry?

Jesus claimed to be the "I AM" of the Old Testament.

Jesus said, "...before Abraham was, I AM."⁷⁰ When a Jewish audience heard those words, they knew that Jesus was pointing to Jehovah's revelation at the burning bush. Moses asked, "Who shall I say sent me?" God responded, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"⁷¹ When Jesus said, "I AM," his listeners knew that he was claiming to be Jehovah.

Jesus claimed to be one with God the Father.

Jesus said, "I and the Father are one." When he said this, the Jews picked up stones to stone him. Why? Because they knew that he was claiming to be God. They said, "...you, being a man, make yourself God."⁷² They did not try to stone him because he was a great teacher; they did not try to stone him for his good works; they tried to stone him because he claimed to be God.

When Kenneth Copeland says, "Jesus never claimed to be God," it shows that Copeland does not understand Jesus' teaching as well as Jesus' Jewish listeners understood him! Even Jesus' enemies knew that he was claiming to be God.

The Buddha insisted that he would point his followers to "the way." But Jesus did not say, "I will *show* you the way." Instead, Jesus said, "I *am* the way."⁷³ Even if you reject Jesus' claim to be God, you should not deny that he made the claim. Jesus claimed to be God.

Jesus claimed to possess divine attributes.

► Read each of these verses and list the attribute that Jesus is claiming.

Matthew 18:20 _____

John 17:5, 24 _____

Jesus claimed the attributes, or characteristics, of God. He claimed to be omnipresent; he claimed to be eternal. These are qualities that are only true of God. When Jesus made these statements, his audience knew that he claimed to have attributes that belong only to God.

⁷⁰ John 8:58

⁷¹ Exodus 3:14

⁷² John 10:30, 33

⁷³ John 14:6

Jesus claimed power to perform divine acts.

Jesus claimed **power to forgive sins**. In Mark 2, Jesus told a paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." The Jewish listeners complained, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" In response, Jesus did something to prove that he had power to forgive. He healed the paralytic.⁷⁴ The healing was a testimony to Jesus' divine power.

Jesus claimed **power to give eternal life to those who believe in him**. Jesus told his listeners that he had "come down from heaven." He said that "everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."⁷⁵

When the Jews asked Jesus to "tell us plainly" who he was, he said, "I told you, and you do not believe." But, for those who believe, "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish."⁷⁶ Only God can give eternal life. By promising eternal life, Jesus claimed to be God.

What Did Jesus Say at His Trial?

At Jesus' trial, he claimed to be God. After witnesses testified, the high priest asked Jesus, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus answered, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven."

The high priest immediately knew that Jesus was claiming deity. The high priest "tore his garments" and said... "You have heard his blasphemy."⁷⁷

Jesus' answer included three parts:

- "Are you the Christ?" *"I am."*
- "Are you the Son of the Blessed?" *"I am."*
- *"You will see the Son of Man..."*

"Are you the Christ?" Jesus claimed to be the Messiah.

The word "Christ" is a translation of the Greek word for "Messiah." By claiming to be Messiah, Jesus claimed to be God. Jeremiah promised a day when Messiah's name will be "The Lord (Jehovah) is our righteousness."⁷⁸ Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would be called "Mighty God."⁷⁹ When Jesus testified, "I am the Christ," he claimed these titles ("The Lord our Righteousness" and "Mighty God") for himself.

⁷⁴ Mark 2:1-12

⁷⁵ John 6:40

⁷⁶ John 10:24-28

⁷⁷ Mark 14:61-64

⁷⁸ Jeremiah 23:6

⁷⁹ Isaiah 9:6

"Are you the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus claimed to be the Son of God.

Jesus often referred to God as his "Father." Was Jesus claiming to be a son of God in the sense that we are all sons of God? No. Jesus claimed to be the *only* Son of God.

Jesus said, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son."⁸⁰ For Jesus to be the Son of God means that he had a one-of-a-kind relationship with the Father. Jesus also said that he dwelt in the bosom of the Father.⁸¹ This was a very special Father-Son relationship.

Jesus said that he and the Father were one.⁸² In fact, Jesus said that we must honor the Son as we do the Father.⁸³ When Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, he was claiming to be one in essence with God the Father. It means that he is God the Son, possessing the same nature as the Father. This is why Jewish leaders were upset at Jesus' affirmation that he was the Son of God.

"You will see the Son of Man." Jesus claimed to be the Son of Man.

In response to the high priest's question, Jesus said, "You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven." This was a reference to the Old Testament book of Daniel.

Daniel said, "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven."⁸⁴ The term "Son of Man" was a messianic title. When the high priest heard Jesus' answer, he knew that Jesus was claiming to be Messiah.

Conclusion

Jesus was not convicted for what He did; he was not crucified for healing people or for teaching people to love their neighbor. Jesus was crucified for who he said he was. The people who heard Jesus speak knew that he was claiming to be God. Those who say, "Jesus never claimed to be God" do not understand Jesus' words as well as the Jewish people who heard him speak during his earthly ministry.

Jesus certainly claimed to be God. And he backed up those claims with his actions. Not only did Jesus heal the paralytic to show he had the power to forgive him; but he also did many other miracles, showing his power over nature and even death itself. He raised Lazarus from the dead, calling himself the "Resurrection and the Life." Jesus' own resurrection especially proved that he was who he said he was, which was God in the flesh.

Section A Review

1. List four statements during Jesus' ministry showing that he believed he was God.

⁸⁰ John 3:16

⁸¹ John 1:18

⁸² John 10:30

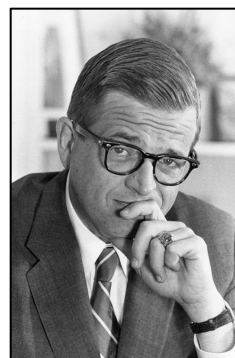
⁸³ John 5:23

⁸⁴ Daniel 7:13, *King James Version*

2. List three statements at Jesus' trial showing that he believed he was God.

Apologetics in Action - The Conversion of Chuck Colson

Chuck Colson (1931-2012) was a member of President Richard Nixon's White House staff.⁸⁵ However, Mr. Colson began to realize that his life was empty. As he sat in his White House office one day, he asked himself, "What is life about? There must be more to life than this." That day, Chuck Colson realized that he did not know the true meaning of life.



In 1972, after he left his White House job, Chuck Colson had a meeting with Tom Phillips, the president of a large company. Colson noticed that Tom seemed more at peace than in the past. When he asked why, Tom said he had given his life to Christ.

Two years later, Chuck Colson's world was turned upside down. Because of some of his actions while he worked in government, Colson learned that he would be sent to prison. In the midst of this turmoil, he visited with Tom Phillips again. Phillips shared the gospel with Chuck Colson. Driving home that night, Colson stopped his car and prayed for God to forgive his sins.

After completing his prison sentence, Chuck Colson continued to serve God faithfully. In fact, he devoted his life to ministering to people in prison. He spent nearly forty years in ministry. He traveled around the world visiting prisoners in some of the worst prisons in the world; he founded Prison Fellowship, an organization that continues to reach prisoners with the gospel.

In 1984, Chuck Colson gave a speech at the National Religious Broadcasters Convention in which he testified to the evidence for the truth of the Gospels. In his speech, Mr. Colson said that Watergate convinced him that the Resurrection happened just as the Gospels report it. This is part of Mr. Colson's speech:

What is the evidence of Jesus' resurrection? The eyewitness accounts of the apostles. The eleven apostles and Paul went about the then-known world for 40 years proclaiming that Jesus had risen from the dead. Never—though they endured persecution, beatings, prison and ultimately, all but one, a martyr's death—did they renounce the fact of the literal resurrection of Jesus Christ.

What has all this got to do with Watergate? Ehrlichman, Haldeman, Mitchell, and myself (the leaders in the Nixon White House) believed passionately in the President. We had at our fingertips every imaginable power and privilege. Yet even with the privileges of the most powerful office in the world, the threat of jail was so

⁸⁵ Image: "Chuck Colson", Nixon Presidential Library, retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chuck_Colson.jpg, public domain.

overpowering that one by one, those involved deserted their leader to save their own skin.

How does this support the truth of the Resurrection? Simply this: Watergate demonstrates human nature. No one can ever make me believe that eleven ordinary human beings would endure beatings, prison, and death without renouncing that Jesus Christ was risen from the dead.

Only an encounter with the living God could have kept those men steadfast. Otherwise, the apostle Peter would have denied Jesus to save his own life. He had already done it three times.

The evidence is overwhelming. Those men held to that testimony because they had seen Christ raised from the dead. And if he was resurrected, that affirms his deity.⁸⁶

The Decision: Is Jesus God?

Another way to approach the claims of Christ is to consider the alternatives. The New Testament portrays Jesus as a man who claimed to be God. What are we to do with this? There are five options, only one of which could be true: Jesus was either a legend, a guru, a liar, a lunatic, or Lord.

Was Jesus a Legend?

Could Jesus have been a legend? Some skeptics argue that Jesus did not exist, or that the historical Jesus did not say or do the things the New Testament claims.

► Is it possible that the New Testament is unreliable and that the Gospels are mere legends?

The stories of Jesus cannot be legend. We have seen that the New Testament is historically reliable. The trustworthiness of the New Testament is confirmed by the Bibliographical Test, the Internal Evidence Test, and the External Evidence Test. The New Testament gives an accurate picture of Jesus - who he was, what he did, and what he said. Jesus was not a legend.

Was Jesus a Guru?

Could Jesus be a guru or Eastern mystic? Some skeptics say that Jesus was similar to teachers of Hindu theology. They say that Jesus taught that we are all gods.

► Is it possible that Jesus was an Eastern guru who believed that every human is a god?

Jesus was a Jew raised in a strictly monotheistic culture.⁸⁷ He became a teacher of the Jewish scriptures. No Jew would believe that we are all gods. Every Jewish child memorized

⁸⁶ This is adapted from a speech delivered by Chuck Colson at the National Religious Broadcasters Convention in February, 1984.

⁸⁷ *Monotheistic* means to believe in only one transcendent God.

the *Shema*: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”⁸⁸

Jesus’ teaching was not the teaching of an Eastern mystic, but the teaching of a Jewish rabbi who believed in one transcendent Creator.

Was Jesus a Liar?

Could Jesus be a liar? Some skeptics say that Jesus knew he was not divine. They say that he lied to his followers. They say that he was like Jim Jones, an American cult leader who led 900 people to commit suicide in Guyana; or Shoko Asahara, a Japanese cult leader who led his followers in a sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway.

► Is it possible that Jesus was a liar who deceived his followers?

Peter Kreeft said that Jesus could not be a liar because of his character. He was “unselfish, loving, caring, compassionate, and passionate about teaching truth.”⁸⁹ Even Jesus’ opponents could find nothing to say against him. At his trial, they had to find false witnesses.

Kreeft said that Jesus could not be a liar because he had no motivation to lie. “Liars lie for selfish reasons, like money, fame, pleasure or power. Jesus gave up all worldly goods, and life itself.” Instead, Jesus’ claim to be God “brought him hatred, rejection, misunderstanding, persecution, torture and death.”⁹⁰

Jesus could not be a liar because of the Resurrection. If we accept the Bible as historically reliable, we must accept Christ’s Resurrection as true. Only God can raise the dead, and God would not have raised Jesus from the dead if he were a liar.

Was Jesus a Lunatic?

Some people would say that Jesus did not lie, but that he mistakenly believed he was the Son of God. In the quote above, C.S. Lewis showed that an ordinary human who believes that he is God must be insane.

► Based on the life of Jesus portrayed in the Gospels, is it possible that Jesus was a lunatic who falsely believed he was God?

“I am trying to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say: I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God; but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”
- C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

⁸⁸ Deuteronomy 6:4

⁸⁹ Peter Kreeft, *Handbook on Christian Apologetics*, (IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 160

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Only a person who is mentally ill would believe that he is the Almighty Creator. Imagine that you met someone on the street who said and truly believed, “I am Napoleon” or “I am Alexander the Great.” You would know that this person was mentally ill.

If Jesus was an ordinary person who believed he was God, he must have been mentally ill. But psychologists say that Jesus had no marks of mental illness. He was perfectly balanced in his personality.

Jesus’ teaching showed his practical wisdom. His care for those who were suffering showed a love for others that you do not expect from a mentally ill person. Jesus was certainly not a lunatic.

Was Jesus Lord?

If Jesus was not a legend, a guru, a liar, or a lunatic, the only remaining option is that he was exactly who he said; Jesus was Lord. Like his disciples after the Resurrection, we must worship Jesus as Lord and God!

Our conclusion from looking at these five options is consistent with the General Argument for Christianity that we learned earlier. Since the New Testament is historically accurate, we have sufficient reason to believe that Jesus rose from the dead and fulfilled dozens of messianic prophecies. These two things show that Jesus is who he claimed to be—the Son of God, God come in the flesh.

In this lesson, we have seen that Jesus is the divine being he claimed to be. Since Jesus is God, we must accept him as an infallible authority. He is absolutely trustworthy. We must therefore accept his claim to be the only way to God. We must also accept his claim that the Bible comes from God. Christianity is true. How we respond to that truth is crucial.

Section B Review

1. What are the five options to consider for Jesus’ claim to be God?
2. Briefly state the problem for each of the first four options.

Conclusion

“Lee,” Jia said, “We are at a crucial point. We have seen evidence for the existence of God; we have seen evidence for creation; we have seen evidence for the reliability of the New Testament; we have seen evidence that Jesus is who he said he was.

“Lee, in our conversations, we have seen that:

- The New Testament is historically reliable and trustworthy.
- Jesus rose from the dead, and he fulfilled dozens of Messianic prophecies.
- Jesus’ Resurrection and fulfillment of prophecy show that he was who he claimed to be—the Messiah, the Son of God, God come in the flesh.

- As the Son of God, Jesus is an infallible authority.
- Jesus Christ taught that the Bible is the Word of God and that he is the only way to God.

"Since all of this is true, there is only one possible conclusion. If Jesus was God, we must believe what he said: The Bible is the Word of God, and Jesus is the only way to God. Therefore, Christianity is true.

"Lee, my question is, 'Will you believe? Are you willing to surrender your life to the authority of Jesus, the only begotten Son of God?'"

With tears in his eyes, Lee responded, "Jia, do you remember telling me about 'Doubting Thomas?' That is who I am; I need a lot of evidence. But last week, I read more about Thomas in your Bible. After he saw the evidence, Thomas said, "'My Lord and my God!'"⁹¹ Thomas' eyes were opened, he saw the evidence, and he believed.

"Jia, I have seen the evidence – and I believe. As I read about Thomas, God opened my eyes to the truth of the Bible. I was blind, but now I see! I am ready to surrender my life to Jesus. Will you pray with me?"

Lesson 8 Assignments

(1) Apologetics and the Head: You will begin the next class with a test over the review questions from Lesson 8. Study these questions carefully in preparation for the test.

(2) Apologetics and the Heart: Many professed Christians say, "I believe," but it is only a mental decision. In John, the word "believe" implies a willingness to obey. If we do not obey, we do not believe. Do you believe? Are you living in full obedience? If you are not, commit yourself to complete and total obedience to God.

(3) Apologetics and the Hands: Talk to an unbeliever about Jesus' claim to be God. Before you show them what Jesus said, ask, "What do you think about Jesus? If he was not God, who do you think he was?" Show them that the only reasonable option is that Jesus was the Son of God (God the Son), just as he said. Take notes about your conversation to share with the class at your next meeting.

⁹¹ John 20:28

Lesson 8 Test

- (1) List four statements during Jesus' ministry showing that he believed he was God.
- (2) List three statements at Jesus' trial showing that he believed he was God.
- (3) What are the five options to consider for Jesus' claim to be God?
- (4) Briefly state the problem for each of the first four options.
- (5) Write the six premises and conclusion for the General Argument for Christianity.
- (6) Write John 20:30-31 from memory.

Lesson 9

The Uniqueness of Christianity in a World of Religions

Introduction

At the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago, a Parliament of Religions allowed representatives from each of the world's major religions to speak. Speakers from each religion tried to convince the audience that their religion was superior to the others.

The last representative was Joseph Cook, a pastor representing the Christian faith. Just before Cook spoke, the Hindu speaker attacked Christianity as "the worst of all religions" because it called people "sinners."

Instead of attacking any other religion, Joseph Cook began telling the story of Lady Macbeth from Shakespeare's great play. He told how Lady Macbeth, out of jealousy and ambition, persuaded her husband to murder Duncan the king while he was a guest in their castle.

Soon Lady Macbeth was tormented by guilt. During the day, she was ambitious and bold. But at night, Lady Macbeth would sleepwalk through the palace, repeatedly washing her hands and crying, "There's a spot. Will these hands ever be clean?"

Joseph Cook asked the representative of each religion, "Is there anything in your religion that can wash the guilt and blood from Lady Macbeth's hands?" No one spoke. No religion could wash the blood from Lady Macbeth's hands. Rev. Cook then turned to the audience and concluded, "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin!"

In this lesson, we will see that Christianity is different than all other religions. The difference between the gospel and other religions is this: we believe that God entered our world in the person of his Son, Jesus, to provide a way to forgive our sins and restore us to his image.

Is Christianity the Only True Faith?

A very common question that Christians face is, "Aren't all religions the same? They are just different paths to the same goal. As long as you find the path that fits you, it is fine."

► How would you respond to a Hindu who said, "Christianity and Hinduism are two paths to the same goal"?

The following discussion will help us see better what sets Christianity apart from all other worldviews.

There are five major beliefs regarding the existence and nature of God: Atheism, Pantheism, Panentheism, Polytheism, and Monotheism.

Atheism teaches that there is no God. It denies there is anything beyond the natural world.

Pantheism teaches that there is a divine being, but that this being is not distinct from the world. The pantheistic god is not a personal being who created the universe. He is a Spirit or Mind who is identical to the universe. Hinduism is an example of a pantheistic religion.

Panentheism teaches that God is distinct from the world but that he is dependent on the world for his existence. There is a co-dependence between God and the world.

Polytheism teaches that there are many gods. Mormonism is an example of a religion that is polytheistic. However, the Bible teaches that there is only one divine being.

Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god."⁹²

Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me.⁹³

None of the worldviews just mentioned provides a path to reconnect man and God. These beliefs are contradicted by the Bible and by philosophical and scientific evidence. The evidence we have studied in this course points to a transcendent, independent, eternal, non-physical, intelligent God who created the universe and who interacts with humankind.

Monotheism teaches that there is one transcendent, eternal, personal, divine being. The three largest monotheistic religions are Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. These religions teach that God intervened in the world to bring about our salvation.

Judaism, founded by God through Abraham and Moses, was fulfilled in Christ. Except for Messianic (Christian) Jews, modern Judaism has rejected Jesus as the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies. The Jewish sacrificial system pointed to Jesus as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. Modern Jews have no basis for forgiveness if they reject Jesus. They don't even do sacrifices anymore.

Islam was formed during the seventh century in Mecca and Medina. Mohammad created a false religion based on perversions of Judaism and Christianity. There are many common beliefs among these religions since they have common roots, but from its beginning Islam has led people away from the truth of Christ's deity and his death and resurrection.

Islam has no adequate basis for forgiveness because it does not have a substitutionary atonement. In Islam, one can be forgiven only if his good deeds outweigh his bad deeds. However, we know that no amount of goodness, even if we had any, could ever make up for our sins against an infinitely holy God.

Only **Christianity** has a way for forgiveness of sins. We were in need of a mediator to bridge the gap between man and God. Sin alienated us from God, but a mediator who was

⁹² Isaiah 44:6

⁹³ Isaiah 43:10

both God and man could provide atonement and bring reconciliation.⁹⁴ As God, Jesus represented God to man. As man, Jesus represented man to God. He was the divine-human mediator, who through his death and resurrection brought God and man together.

Jesus had to be both God and man to accomplish what he did. A sacrificial death was necessary to atone for sin. Only as a human could Jesus die. And only as God could Jesus be an adequate atonement for our sins against an infinite God. Also, Jesus needed to be divine to destroy death and sin through the power of his resurrection.

The atoning death and resurrection of Jesus the God-man distinguish Christianity from any other religion. Only Christianity provides a way for man to be forgiven of his sins and to be reconciled to God through faith. Only Christianity provided a way to restore man to God's image. That is why Jesus said that he was the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and that no one could come to the Father except through him.⁹⁵

Section A Review

1. What are five major beliefs regarding the existence and nature of God? Define each.
2. What is the difference between Christianity and the other major beliefs?

Is the Doctrine of the Trinity Essential for the Christian Faith?

If Jesus is God, does that mean there is more than one God? No. The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that there are three Persons in the one divine being called God. These three Persons are the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. There are many reasons to defend the doctrine of the Trinity against those who oppose it.

The doctrine of the Trinity (one God revealed in three persons) is a distinguishing characteristic of Christianity. This doctrine distinguishes Christianity from Judaism and Islam, the other two major monotheistic religions.

Islam rejects the doctrine of the Trinity, even though Muslims believe in one transcendent personal God. Muslims say that God can't have a son, so they reject Jesus as the Son of God, or God the Son. Part of the problem is that Muslims think that Sonship implies a natural physical fathering. That is not the Christian doctrine of the Sonship of Jesus. There was never a time when the Son was not the Son. His Sonship is not physical; Sonship refers to a special relationship that Jesus has had with the Father from all eternity. Jesus was Son before he was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary to live among us as a human.

Some non-Christians think that Christians are tri-theists.⁹⁶ But that is not the case. Christians are monotheistic. We believe that there is only one divine being, but that there

⁹⁴ 1 Timothy 2:5; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21

⁹⁵ John 14:6

⁹⁶ A *tri-theist* believes in three separate gods.

are three Persons within that one being. These three Persons share the exact same nature. They are not separate gods.

The Biblical Evidence for the Trinity

Here is a biblical case for the Christian doctrine that there is one God who has revealed himself as three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The following premises are all taught in the Bible. This forms the basis of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Premise A: There is only one God.

"Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is One Lord."⁹⁷

"For I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is none like me."⁹⁸

Premise B: The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all identified in Scripture as God.

"...God the Father...."⁹⁹

"...the Word was God.... The Word became flesh."¹⁰⁰

"...why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit... You have not lied to men but to God."¹⁰¹

Premise C: These three relate to one another and to the world as distinct Persons.

At the baptism of Jesus:¹⁰²

- The Son was baptized
- The Holy Spirit descended like a dove
- The Father spoke from heaven, saying, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit could not be the same person; they are each acting in different roles at the same time.

Near the end of his ministry, Jesus said he would ask the Father to send us "*another* Helper"—the Holy Spirit.¹⁰³ There are three distinct persons involved in this request.

⁹⁷ Deuteronomy 6:4

⁹⁸ Isaiah 46:9

⁹⁹ Galatians 1:1

¹⁰⁰ John 1:1, 14

¹⁰¹ Acts 5:3-4

¹⁰² Mark 1:10-11

¹⁰³ John 15:26

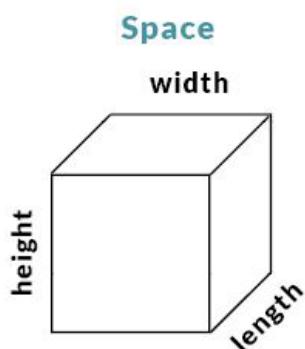
Conclusion: The one true God of the Bible has revealed himself to exist in three distinct Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is one in nature, but three in Person.

Although the word *Trinity* does not appear in the Bible, the doctrine of the Trinity is based on clear Scriptural statements. The Bible clearly shows the existence of *three* distinct Persons. Each of these Persons is identified as the *one* God of the universe.

This is not a contradiction because Christians do not say that God is both one person and three persons. Christians do not say that God is both one God and three Gods. Instead, Christians say that God is one in essence and three in person.

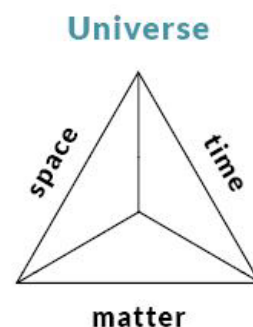
An Illustration of the Trinity

The universe is one of the best illustrations of the Trinity. The *entire* physical *universe* (uni = one) consists of *three and only three* essential aspects – space, time, and matter. If you were to take away any of these three, you would no longer have a universe.



Space consists of *length*, *width*, and *height* – three in one. If you were to take away any of these dimensions, you would no longer have space.

Time consists of *past*, *present*, and *future* – three in one. If you were to take away any of these aspects, you would no longer have time.



Matter consists of *energy* in *motion* producing *phenomena* – three in one. Without energy, there can be no motion or phenomena. Without motion, there can be no energy or phenomena. If there are no phenomena, it is because there is no energy or motion.¹⁰⁴

The idea of “three in one” is part of the very nature of the universe. Could it be that God made his universe to reflect his trinitarian nature? I believe that God left his fingerprints on creation. Just as the one universe exists as space, time, and matter, the one God exists as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

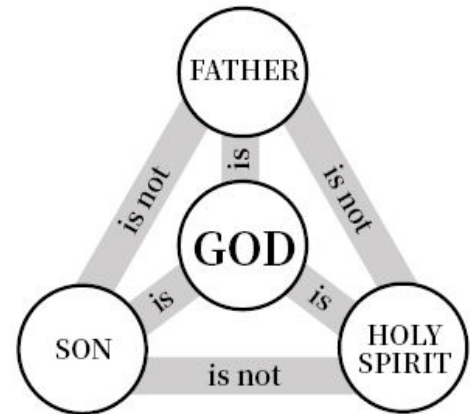
¹⁰⁴ For more information, see Nathan Wood, *Trinity in the Universe* (MI: Kregel Publications, 1984).

A Traditional Diagram of the Trinity

The biblical doctrine of the Trinity has been taught by the church since the apostles. To the right is a diagram that the church has used to describe the Trinity.

The doctrine of the Trinity is essential to Christian doctrine.

Some say that it is not important to believe the doctrine of the Trinity, but they are wrong. The doctrine of the Trinity is the basis of key teachings that are essential to the gospel. For example, those who deny the Trinity usually deny that Jesus is God. But if Jesus is not God, his death did not provide salvation.



If we deny that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct, we deny God's personal or relational characteristics. For instance, God would not be a loving God from all eternity if he had to wait until he created in order to love anyone. But if God is more than one person, these Persons could love one another from all eternity.

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are Persons living in relationship with each other.

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not impersonal entities. They each possess personhood and live in personal relationship with each other. We call them Persons because they live in relationship with one another. Each member of the Trinity can refer to himself as "I" and to another member of the Trinity as "You." Though the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God, they are distinct Persons who love one another, give to one another, communicate to one another, and live for one another. They are true Persons.

The doctrine of the Trinity affects human personhood and relationships.

The Trinity is the source of our personhood. God made us in his image. Like the Trinity, we are able to relate to one another and to God. We have a mind, a will, and emotions that give us this ability.

The Trinity affects the way we relate to one another, as well as to God. Since the members of the Trinity live in self-giving love for each other, we also should live in loving relationships with others. That is the way that God made us. We were made in the image of God. We were made to love others as the members of the Trinity love each other.

► Can you explain the doctrine of the Trinity to a Muslim who believes that Christians believe in three gods?

Section B Review

1. What are the three premises and conclusion that show the biblical evidence for the doctrine of the Trinity?

2. What three aspects of the universe illustrate the doctrine of the Trinity?

How Should Christians Respond to Animism?

In Africa, many unbelievers have great respect and even fear of the spirits. These people often ask a Christian, "Why should I trust a God whom I cannot see when my family has met with the spirits of our ancestors? We have seen their power. We see that they exist. Why should we worship a God we cannot see?"

Whether it is called "Animism" or "Tribal Religion" or "Traditional Religion," this view provides a great challenge to Christian apologetics. When you try to evangelize among animists, they are unlikely to ask questions like, "What is the manuscript evidence for the Bible?" or "What is the cosmological argument for the existence of God?"

Randall McElwain once asked a group of African pastors, "How do you prove the existence of God to unbelievers?" They responded with laughter. "Everyone in Africa is smart enough to know that there is a God! Only Americans and westerners are foolish enough to doubt God's existence. Our people do not ask 'Is there a God?' They ask, 'Which god is the most powerful?'"

How should a Christian apologist respond to animism? We will look at four questions:

1. What is animism?
2. What is the difference between animism and Christianity?
3. Can animism and Christianity be blended?
4. How can we best communicate the gospel to animists?

What is Animism?

Animism pictures natural forces and human ancestors as living beings with distinct identities. "Nature spirits" inhabit objects such as animals, plants, and rocks. "Ancestor spirits" are family members who have died. They are often treated with respect as honored members of the group.

According to most tribal religions, these spirits are limited. Their power comes from their non-physical state. They are often unpredictable and can cause great trouble for humans. They can operate unseen because they do not have a body, but they do not have unlimited power. Because of this, they can be controlled by a witch doctor or other religious figure. They can sometimes be controlled through "magical" phrases or talismans.

Many animistic practices are focused on appeasing the spirit world. Whether it is money burned as an offering to ancestors or sacrifices to the nature spirits, animists try to appease the spirit world.

What is the Difference Between Animism and Christianity?

Fear instead of love

Perhaps the greatest difference between animism and Christianity is the relationship between God and man. In animism, the relationship between man and the nature spirits or the ancestors is one of fear. Animists often live in constant fear of what their ancestors may do. There is no shared greeting or relationship. The goal of most animists is to give enough respect to the spirits to avoid trouble. Offerings and prayers are used to satisfy the demands of the spirits. Sorcerers or shamans are paid to control the spirit world.

By contrast, Christians worship a God who pursues a relationship of love with his people. God walked in the Garden with Adam and Eve. God sent his Son to live among us and to die to pay the penalty for our sin. Christ has already appeased the just wrath of God. Our sin brought God's wrath, but God provided an atonement through the gift of his only Son.¹⁰⁵

Because Jesus has already paid the price for our sin, our relationship with God can be one of love, not fear. If we respond to his offer of free salvation, God has promised that we will spend eternity in his presence. We do not have to live in fear. We can live in a relationship of love.

Fatalism instead of hope

Animists see death as a source of terror. There is no promise of life after the grave. There is no promise of reunion with family. There is no hope of a merciful God.

By contrast, Christians look forward to eternity in the presence of a loving God. To the Christian, life is moving towards a future of unending joy.

Remote spirits instead of a personal God

Another difference between animism and Christianity is animism's emphasis on spirits rather than on God. Even animists who recognize a supreme God give more attention to spirits than to God.

By contrast, Christians should give their attention to God not to the spirit world. The Bible testifies to the reality of the spirit world. However, the Bible gives few details about this world. The Bible teaches us nothing about how to contact spirits (either good spirits or bad). It says nothing about how we can use the power of the spirits to help us. Why? Because God alone is the source of our power and knowledge.

¹⁰⁵ John 3:16

Can Animism and Christianity be Blended?

Some Christians have said, "Yes, Christianity is the true religion. However, we can blend the Christian faith with the traditional religions of animistic people." The blending of true Christianity and other religions is called **syncretism**.

Many "independent churches" in Africa have combined a Christian message with African tribal religion. This often started with a sincere attempt to contextualize the gospel for Africans. Some African pastors recognized the failure of many western missionaries to communicate the gospel in Africa without all of the cultural "baggage" of the west. These pastors wanted African Christians to sing African songs, wear African clothing, and worship in a genuinely African manner.

Although these efforts began with good intentions, many churches have adapted practices that are contrary to the gospel. In this "syncretistic Christianity," God is remote, just as the spirit gods are remote. Ancestors are seen as mediators between worshipers and God. There is little emphasis on Christ's atoning death. Instead, pastors emphasize power over the spirit world, miraculous healings, and dream interpretation.¹⁰⁶

If all religions are equal, syncretism would be acceptable. However, as we have seen earlier, there is only one path to God. Humanity can come to God only through Jesus Christ. All other paths are false. They do not lead to God. We cannot follow a false path and the true path at the same time.

Imagine that I offered you a cup of liquid. I said to you, "This cup has two drinks mixed together. One of the drinks in the cup is very healthy. The other drink is a deadly poison that will kill you. I mixed them together, so that you will get some of both drinks." Would you drink from the cup? Of course not! The poison has ruined the healthy drink.

In the same way, it is impossible to worship God and to worship false religions at the same time. Paul said, "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons."¹⁰⁷

In the Old Testament, some people in Israel wanted to worship Jehovah while they also worshiped the false god Baal. Elijah asked them, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him."¹⁰⁸

In our doctrines, in our worship practices, and in our lifestyle, we may follow Christ or we may follow false gods. We cannot do both.

¹⁰⁶ Winfried Corduan. *Neighboring Faiths*. (IL: Intervarsity Press, 1998), 156

¹⁰⁷ 1 Corinthians 10:21

¹⁰⁸ 1 Kings 18:21

How Can We Best Communicate the Gospel to Animists?

Because the strongest aspect of animism is fear, **Christians must show the power of God over fear.** By showing Christian love and by carefully sharing the good news of the gospel, a Christian can help an animist overcome their fear of the spirits. Until that fear is overcome, many animists will be afraid to respond to the gospel. Christians must show, through their love for their animistic neighbors and through their confident faith in a good God, that love for God casts out fear. John wrote, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love."¹⁰⁹

Jesus Christ delivers from fear.

John Seamands told the story of the Iban tribe in Malaysia. This animistic tribe lived in constant fear of dreams, rodents, and even a certain bird. When a group of Chinese Christians came to Malaysia after the Boxer Rebellion, the Ibans were amazed that the Christians walked through the forest without fear. They asked, "Aren't you afraid of the evil spirits?" The Chinese Christians answered, "No! Our God is alive. He loves us and he is more powerful than any other force." Today, there are thousands of Iban Christians. Their first testimony is often this, "Jesus Christ has delivered me from fear."¹¹⁰

Because the gospel is not limited to western lifestyles, **Christians must not think the gospel is the same as western culture.** In the early twentieth century, some missionaries tried to establish a "little Britain" in other countries. People in western suits and ties sang western hymns while sitting on benches in a western style church with a steeple. We must bring the gospel in a way that communicates effectively to those we are trying to reach.

Finally, because syncretism has often weakened the gospel, **Christians must communicate the gospel clearly.** We must introduce animists to a personal God who loves them and desires relationship. We must introduce animists to Jesus Christ who died to make atonement for our sins and who rose from the grave in victory over death.

We must not replace the core message of Christ's life, atoning death, and resurrection with efforts to impress animists with miraculous signs and wonders, or prayer techniques to "force" God to do what we ask. Our God is not a tribal spirit to be manipulated; he is the sovereign of the universe. When we teach that God can be manipulated through prayer techniques and "faith rituals," we bring him to the level of a tribal god. An apologetic for animists must never weaken the gospel for the sake of impressing an audience.

¹⁰⁹ 1 John 4:18

¹¹⁰ Much of the material in this section is adapted from John T. Seamands, *Tell It Well*, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1981).

Jesus Christ is more powerful than evil spirits.

Animists who are hearing the gospel for the first time will often compare the power of the Christian God with the power of their tribal spirits. A powerful apologetic for animists is the demonstration of the power of God. While we must not try to manipulate God into working according to our plan, we should be sensitive to allow his Spirit to work through us to demonstrate God's power.

A missionary to the Philippines visited a little girl who had come down with a mysterious illness. This girl was from a tribe that had only recently heard the gospel for the first time. Everyone in the village knew that that girl's sickness was demonic. Satan was attacking the village because the people had responded to the preaching of the gospel.

The missionary said, "I could feel the power of evil." The missionary and Filipino pastors prayed for the girl in the name of Jesus Christ. They sang songs about the power of Jesus' name and the power of his shed blood. The girl was instantly delivered. Her healing was a great testimony to this animistic tribe. They saw that God was more powerful than their tribal spirits. They no longer feared the spirits.

Section C Review

1. Define *animism*. What is the greatest difference between animism and Christianity?
2. Define *syncretism*. Why is syncretism not acceptable for Christians?

What about Those Who Have Never Heard the Gospel?

The Bible teaches that Jesus is the only way to heaven. This raises a very difficult question. What about the person who dies without hearing the gospel? Is there any hope for this person? Could they have been saved?

I believe that the answer is yes. My answer is not based on a direct biblical response, but upon a set of biblical truths that indirectly relate to the question. God is a just and loving God who is not willing that any should perish. He provided everyone in the world a way of salvation, and the Holy Spirit is in the world drawing everyone to Christ through various means. I believe that if a person without access to the Bible responds to the general revelation of creation and conscience by seeking God from the heart, God will reveal to him enough information for salvation. This information may come through a missionary, an angel, dreams, or a direct revelation from God.

This special revelation may be limited. There is no biblical teaching that the entire historical content of the gospel is necessary in order to trust in Christ for salvation. The faith that saves can be based on a limited understanding of the content of faith.

The object of this person's faith is still Christ, though he may not yet know the name of Jesus or the doctrine of the Trinity. This believer may simply understand that the Creator

God has somehow provided a way to bridge the gap between man and God. Without a full revelation of the gospel, this seeker may place his faith in the One sent to bridge that gap.

This does not mean that people can believe anything they want. Through God's grace, the seeker must forsake the false gods around him, recognize his helplessness, and reach out in faith to the true Creator God. When this seeker later learns more about Christ, he must embrace the truths of the gospel. He cannot deny basic Christian doctrines.

The doctrine of *prevenient* grace is important for this question. Prevenient grace is defined as "the grace that goes before salvation." The Bible teaches that this grace is extended to everyone in the world. Paul wrote, "The grace of God bringing salvation has appeared to all men."¹¹¹ Prevenient grace is universal, but it is also resistible.

If God's grace that brings salvation appears to "all men," this implies that God will provide a way to respond to the grace. If one responds to prevenient grace, no matter how far removed he is from missionary influences, God will give him or her more light and grace.

This grace can enable the seeker to exercise faith in Jesus. This grace is effective even if the seeker has not heard the full message of the gospel or if God reveals the truth through an angel or dreams. God will save anyone who seeks the one true God of creation with his whole heart.¹¹²

No one will stand before God and truthfully say that it was impossible for him to find the true God and trust in Jesus. If we do not seek God, we will realize at the judgment that we had opportunity to seek the true God. If we truly sought God with our whole heart, we would be given enough truth to trust in Christ for salvation.

Evangelism is still important. Though it is possible for an unevangelized person to cry out to God for mercy, it is still important that Christians actively share the gospel. Hearing the gospel makes it much more likely that someone will respond to the truth. Christians who share the gospel are not just delivering a message; they are speaking to the conscience of sinners. They are trying to motivate sinners to give their hearts to God.

Since God draws everyone to himself, everyone will have an opportunity to seek and find the true God. Response to God is made easier when Christians pray for the lost and actively share the gospel. The doctrine of prevenient grace should inspire us to more evangelism, since we know that God is at work in every heart. If God saves some people apart from our work, how much more will he do if we intercede for the lost and witness to them?

Missionaries have found many cases in which God prepared unevangelized people for the gospel. Missionaries have been able to connect the gospel to elements of the people's culture. This has made it easier for the people to understand and respond to the gospel. To read more about this, read Don Richardson's books *Eternity in Their Hearts* and *Peace Child*.

¹¹¹ Titus 2:11

¹¹² Jeremiah 29:13

► What elements of your culture show God's prevenient grace preparing the way for the gospel?

Section D Review

What is the doctrine of prevenient grace?

Apologetics in Action - The Conversion of Lamin Sanneh

Dr. Lamin Sanneh (1942-2019)¹¹³ was the D. Willis James Professor of Missions and World Christianity at Yale University, where he also served as a Professor of History. Professor Sanneh studied Arabic and Islamic Studies in England and Beirut, Lebanon. He taught at both Harvard University and Yale University.

Dr. Sanneh was raised a devout Muslim in Gambia. He enjoyed the excitement of Ramadan and the opportunity to show his religious devotion during this time of fasting. As a young man, Lamin was a very committed Muslim who enjoyed the discipline of his Islamic faith.

As he read the Qur'an, Sanneh often was drawn to what the Qur'an said about Jesus. It teaches that Jesus was a prophet and a messenger from God, but that Jesus did not die on the cross. Sanneh became interested in the life of Jesus. However, he was afraid that this interest would lead him away from Islam. He prayed that God would protect him from his interest in Jesus!

However, Sanneh's interest grew even more intense. He could not escape this question, "Who died on the cross?" The Qur'an said that Jesus did not die, but that God put someone else in Jesus' place. Sanneh wanted to know, "Who did God put in the place of Jesus?" He began to think, "Maybe Jesus really did die on the cross. Maybe God allowed this. If so, why did God allow Jesus to die?"

Dr. Sanneh began to think about his own life. He had experienced tragedy in his family. He asked, "What if God allowed Jesus to suffer as part of our world? What if Jesus died on the cross to defeat death?" He began to realize that the cross was necessary as God's way to enter our world.

It was much later that Dr. Sanneh received a copy of the Bible. But God's Spirit had opened Sanneh's eyes to the need for a Savior. When Sanneh received a copy of the Bible, he began to read Acts and Romans. He learned that God had provided justification not through his rigorous disciplines, but by grace through faith. He began to see that it is only through grace that we can be freed from our inability to please a perfect God.

Professor Sanneh became a believer because God opened his eyes to his need for a Savior. God then used his Word to show Lamin Sanneh the path to God.

¹¹³ Adapted from Lamin Sanneh, "Jesus, More Than a Prophet" in Kelly Monroe, *Finding God at Harvard: Spiritual Journeys of Christian Thinkers*, (MI: Zondervan, 1996).

Lesson 9 Assignments

(1) Apologetics and the Head: Take a test over the review questions from Lesson 9. Study these questions carefully in preparation for the test.

(2) Apologetics and the Heart: Much of the material in this lesson speaks to the questions of animists or Muslims. Do you know people in either of these religions? If so, giving the gospel to them is more than simply preparing a list of questions and answers. To be effective, our witness must be given in the power of the Holy Spirit. Begin to pray that God will

- Give you an opportunity to share the gospel with your animist or Muslim friend
- Give you anointing to share the gospel with power and clarity

(3) Apologetics and the Hands: Talk to an animist or Muslim. If you are speaking with an animist, show how God's perfect love casts out fear. If you are speaking with a Muslim, show how God is Three-in-One.

Lesson 9 Test

- (1) What are five major beliefs regarding the existence and nature of God? Define each.
- (2) What is the difference between Christianity and the other major beliefs?
- (3) What are the three premises and conclusion that show the biblical evidence for the doctrine of the Trinity?
- (4) What three aspects of the universe illustrate the doctrine of the Trinity?
- (5) Define *animism*. What is the greatest difference between animism and Christianity?
- (6) Define *syncretism*. Why is syncretism not acceptable for Christians?
- (7) What is the doctrine of prevenient grace?
- (8) Write Acts 4:11-12 from memory.

Recommended Reading

This course is an introduction to the study of Apologetics. If you wish to study further, you will benefit from the books suggested here.

Craig, William Lane. *On Guard*. Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010.

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Little, Paul. *Know Why You Believe*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2008.

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McDowell, Sean. *A New Kind of Apologist: Adopting Fresh Strategies; Addressing the Latest Issues; Engaging the Culture*. Eugene: Harvest House, 2016.

Qureshi, Nabeel. *No God but One: Allah or Jesus?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016.

Palau, Luis. *God Is Relevant: Finding Strength and Help in Today's World*. Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2010.

Strobel, Lee. *The Case for Christ*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013.

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Introduction to Apologetics

Record of Assignments

Student Name _____

On the table below, initial when each assignment has been completed. The “Apologetics and the Head” assignments are considered “complete” when the student achieves a score of 70% or higher. All assignments must be successfully completed in order to receive a Certificate from Shepherds Global Classroom.

Lesson	Apologetics and the Head	Apologetics and the Heart	Apologetics and the Hands
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			

Request for Certificate from Shepherds Global Classroom

Application for a Certificate of Completion from Shepherds Global Classroom may be completed on our webpage at www.shepherdsglobal.org. Certificates will be digitally transmitted from the president of SGC to instructors and facilitators who complete the application on behalf of their student(s).