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PREPARING MEMBERS OF THE SALVATION ARMY  
OF LANCASTER, PENNSYLVANIA, TO BE  
CHRISTIAN APOLOGISTS

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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Doctor of Educational Ministry

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by  
Dean Laurance Satterlee  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

PREPARING MEMBERS OF THE SALVATION ARMY  
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CHRISTIAN APOLOGISTS

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE .....	v
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Context .....	1
Rationale .....	4
Purpose .....	5
Goals .....	5
Research Methodology .....	6
Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations .....	7
Conclusion .....	8
2. THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR TRAINING CHURCH MEMBERS IN CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS .....	9
Introduction .....	9
Acts 17 as a Template for Christian Apologetics .....	10
The Effective Use of Historical-Theological Arguments in Apologetics .....	15
The Case for the Resurrection in a Non-Jewish Setting .....	16
The Use of Contemporary Rhetorical and Philosophical Arguments (Acts 17:16-34) .....	20
Conclusion .....	28
3. APOLOGETICS IN THE LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN: VOICES FROM HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARSHIP .....	30
Standing on the Shoulders of Giants .....	30

Chapter	Page
Explanation of Worldview .....	31
Strengthening Christians' Worldview .....	32
The Christian and Worldview Comparisons .....	39
Christian Apologetics and Engaging Objections .....	45
Conclusion .....	48
<b>4. THE PREPARATION, DEVELOPMENT, AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT .....</b>	<b>50</b>
Preparation .....	50
Curriculum Development and Evaluation .....	52
Conclusion .....	66
<b>5. PROJECT EVALUATION .....</b>	<b>68</b>
Evaluation of the Purpose .....	68
Evaluation of the Goals .....	69
Strengths of the Project .....	72
Weaknesses of the Project .....	73
Modifications to the Seminar .....	74
Theological Reflections .....	75
Personal Reflections and Conclusion .....	76
<b>Appendix</b>	
<b>1. CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS AND WORLDVIEW SURVEY .....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>2. TEACHING CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS CURRICULUM     EVALUATION RUBRIC .....</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>3. CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS LESSON PLANS .....</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>4. T-TEST FOR DEPENDENT SAMPLES .....</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>128</b>

## PREFACE

The completion of this doctoral research project was made possible by the love, support, and investment of many people. Family, friends, church members, leaders, instructors, and colleagues have, together, made investments in me and this process. I would like to express my thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Andrew T. Walker, who gave supervision, direction, and support to me during this process. Sincere appreciation is given to my editor, Betsy Fredrick, for her patient guidance and correction. I also wish to thank my professors at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary who have given of themselves in preparation, teaching, and interacting with my assignments to greatly add to my understanding of Christian apologetics and Christian education. Thank you, Dr. Ted Cabal, Dr. Timothy Paul Jones, Dr. Joseph C. Harrod, and Dr. Matthew D. Haste for your investment in me. I would also like to mention here, and give tribute to, my philosophy professor Dr. Byron Bitar, who went to be with the Lord in 2003. His passion for truth and for the development of the Christian's mind left a lasting impact on me as a young undergraduate at Geneva College. I had no categories for Christian apologetics then, but my studies under Bitar's influence was an integral part in the beginning of this lifelong journey.

I am grateful to the leadership of my denomination for their endorsement of this project and the furthering of my education. Particular thanks go to Colonel Janet Munn for her support of my proposal to pursue the D.Ed.Min degree.

There would have been no seminar to present, without the members of The Salvation Army of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, who responded to the invitation and participated. I am grateful for their confidence and for the privilege of teaching them, but also learning from them.

My family has been a tremendous source of blessing, encouragement, and motivation throughout this learning experience. My parents have always been a great support and have taken a deep interest in my educational journey, for which I am grateful. Thanks Mom for all the proofreading! To my beautiful wife, Marisa, and our three dear children, Eliana, Alexa and Jordan, I wish to say how thankful I am for their constant love and cheerleading throughout the process. They always believed in me and were invested in my personal development. I am blessed!

Finally, I give thanks to the Lord for his lovingkindness. I thank him also for the unexpected grace of learning to love him and worship him in study and in the rigors of learning to think well. I am determined to use the rest of my days, and the gifts he has given, to know him and make him known.

Dean Satterlee

Lancaster, Pennsylvania

December 2021

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Resistance against orthodox Christianity is on the rise in the Western world. Correspondingly, the need for Christian apologetics in the church is increasing. This handmaiden of evangelism<sup>1</sup> can be used of God to help train and equip the members of the church to proclaim the gospel and respond to objections as they are raised by individuals who hold alternative worldviews.

While the environment for the proclamation of the gospel becomes progressively hostile, the church need not be intimidated. Christians in every age have had to face antagonism of one degree or another. The conditions in which the early church was birthed was no different in this sense. When the apostle Peter wrote to encourage the persecuted believers of the primitive church scattered throughout Asia Minor, he exhorted them to affirm the Lordship of Christ and to be prepared to give a reason (*apologia*) for the hope they possessed, with gentleness and respect (1 Pet 3:15). The Salvation Army in the Western world, and in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, specifically, is simultaneously well positioned and desperately lacking in apologetic training to meet the demands of this hour.

#### **Context**

The context for this proposed ministry project was The Salvation Army of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, with a view toward The Salvation Army USA Eastern Territory

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<sup>1</sup> Lee Strobel, "Apologetics Is the Handmaiden of Evangelism," The Poached Egg Christian Worldview and Apologetics Network, November 27, 2013, <https://www.thepoachedegg.net/2013/11/lee-strobel-apologetics-is-the-handmaiden-of-evangelism.html>.

and beyond.<sup>2</sup> The Salvation Army corps (congregation) in Lancaster was planted in 1891 and was comprised of two congregations—one English speaking (which met weekly at 9:45 a.m.) and one Spanish speaking (which met weekly at 12:00 p.m.). Both congregations met for a united bi-lingual worship service on a monthly basis. The mission statement of The Salvation Army reads, “The Salvation Army, an international movement, is an evangelical part of the universal Christian Church. Its message is based on the Bible. Its ministry is motivated by the love of God. Its mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in His name without discrimination.”<sup>3</sup>

Like all ministry situations, The Salvation Army in Lancaster had strengths and weaknesses.<sup>4</sup> One of the strengths of this ministry context was that the congregation was home to a substantial number of retired Salvation Army ministers. As of May 2021, thirty-four retired officers were living in the greater Lancaster area and worshipped at The Salvation Army. These retired ministers included several missionaries who had experience ministering in Japan, the UK, Chile, and Zimbabwe. Despite this notable strength, The Salvation Army in Lancaster was lacking a discipleship program. Other than membership classes and Sunday School, there existed no system for disciple making. In connection with this deficiency was an absence of training in Christian apologetics. A review of the existing curriculum for membership indicated that Christian apologetics was not included in the subjects covered. Moreover, I found no evidence for past Christian apologetics training in the history of this church.

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<sup>2</sup> The Salvation Army in the United States is divided into four territories. The USA Western, Central, Southern, and Eastern Territories. The Salvation Army of Lancaster, PA, is located in The USA Eastern Territory, which is comprised of Northeastern Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, New York, all of the New England States, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands.

<sup>3</sup> The Salvation Army International, “Mission,” accessed July 19, 2019, <https://www.salvationarmy.org/ihq/Mission>.

<sup>4</sup> When I began my doctoral project, my wife and I had only been in leadership in Lancaster for nine months, Our assessment of the strength and weaknesses of array of ministries came into focus as the project moved forward.

At a denominational level, The Salvation Army is lacking in this dimension of teaching, which in turn means that the methods of making disciples are deficient on a denomination-wide basis. On a wider scale, none of the four Salvation Army seminaries (Officer Training Colleges) in the United States offer so much as an introductory or elective course in Christian apologetics.

In spite of this, there seemed to be a genuine interest in studying Christian apologetics among some of the membership. When we arrived, our biographical sketches were included in the worship bulletin, which included my educational background and my degree (MA) in Christian apologetics. This notation sparked a number of conversations with members of the congregation who, upon learning of my studies, have asked what Christian apologetics is. When I explained what Christian apologetics is, some responded by saying things such as, “our congregation needs that!” or “I would sign up for a class like that!”

While a recent Pew Research Center study ranked Pennsylvania twenty-seventh in the nation in terms of religious belief,<sup>5</sup> as newly transplanted outsiders, my wife and I became aware that many in this community (not just members of The Salvation Army) viewed the Lancaster area as a northern outpost of the Bible belt. Consequently, there appeared to be a resulting complacency toward evangelism within the Christian community here. This particular congregation was not immune to this kind of thinking. When my wife and I engaged in conversation with some of the retired ministers, we often have asked why they chose to retire in Lancaster. Invariably, one of the reasons given was the “conservative environment.” While some view the area as an extension of the Bible belt and based their retirement plans on that view, the fact is that the congregation is aging and is not effectively reaching the lost, nor making many new members. Additionally, the

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<sup>5</sup> Pew Research Center, “Most and Least Religious U.S. States,” February 29, 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/02/29/how-religious-is-your-state/?state=pennsylvania>.

18-35-year-old demographic is almost non-existent in this congregation as our church is failing to make or even maintain membership from this age range.

### **Rationale**

This church of approximately 150 members had no expression of Christian apologetics in its array of programs and ministries and no personnel trained (other than me) to lead in such a ministry. This deficiency in teaching resulted in a waning interest in (or perhaps fear of?) evangelism. A residual effect was a diminished effectiveness in evangelism. Those who do bother to evangelize can be hamstrung by the lurking thought of someone raising an objection or asking a question that will go unanswered. As the cultural tide turns against organized religion in general and Christianity in particular, rank and file Christians lack the capacity and confidence to respond to potential objections from outside the church or doubts from honest seekers within the church.

Worse yet, some within the church may have been influenced by pluralistic relativism. The thinking here is not ‘why should we evangelize?’ but rather that it is *wrong* to evangelize. A recent survey by Barna Group revealed that 47 percent of millennials who identify as Christians believe it is wrong to try and share their faith with someone from another worldview with the goal of persuading them to convert.<sup>6</sup> These results ought to shake the church from its slumber and stir our membership on to radical disciple making, which would include training in defending the faith. Moreover, the 18-35-year-old age group is practically non-existent in the current congregation. This fact is in keeping with the national trend of under 35s leaving the Christian faith in the Western world.<sup>7</sup> Christian young people today need to know why they believe what they believe, not just what they believe.

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<sup>6</sup> Barna Group, “Almost Half of Practicing Christian Millennials Say Evangelism Is Wrong,” accessed July 17, 2019, <https://www.barna.com/research/millennials-oppose-evangelism/>.

<sup>7</sup> LifeWay Research, “Most Teenagers Drop Out of Church as Young Adults,” January 16, 2019, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2019/01/15/most-teenagers-drop-out-of-church-as-young-adults/>.

Finally, and most importantly, the rationale for launching a seminar on Christian apologetics is based on the biblical mandate. First Peter 3:15 is a foundational verse for Christian apologetics. Beyond this verse, the Bible makes it clear that followers of Christ are to contend for the faith (Jude 3). Elsewhere one reads that the church is charged with the task of demolishing arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God (2 Cor 10:5). Finally, in the ministry of the apostle Paul (Acts 17) a template is provided for different approaches in making a defense of the faith to people living in different contexts. These texts together make a persuasive, biblical argument for apologetics in the life of the disciple of Christ. Disciples of Jesus can no longer sit idly by while the young people hemorrhage from the fellowship and those who do stay succumb to faulty thinking. The church stands on the authority of Scripture to sound the call to action. The time has come to make a change in the life of The Salvation Army congregation in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the project was to prepare members of The Salvation Army of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, to be Christian apologists, with a view toward enhancing their skills in evangelistic encounters.

### **Goals**

The training of interested congregants in Christian apologetics was achieved by meeting the following three goals:

1. The first goal was to assess a representative group of ten to fifteen members of the congregation of The Salvation Army of Lancaster with respect to their current understanding of Christian apologetics and the capacity to respond to popular objections to the Christian faith.
2. The second goal was to develop a ten-session curriculum to teach the representative members of the congregation of The Salvation Army a robust understanding of Christian apologetics.
3. The third goal was to increase participant knowledge of apologetics by training the representative members to defend the Christian Faith against the most common objections raised in today's culture.

## **Research Methodology**

Three goals determined the effectiveness of this project. The first goal was to assess the level of understanding of apologetics of the congregation of The Salvation Army of Lancaster. This goal was measured by administering Christian Apologetics & Worldview Survey (CAWS) which was given to twenty selected members.<sup>8</sup> This anonymous survey used numeric identification (utilizing a PIN designated by the participant). The survey assessed participants' familiarity of (1) the most common objections to the Christian faith and (2) Christianity's historical responses to these defeaters. This goal was successfully met when twenty members completed the survey and the results have been compiled and analyzed yielding a clearer picture of the current knowledge of Christian apologetics among members of The Salvation Army.

The second goal was to develop a ten-session curriculum to teach the congregation of The Salvation Army a robust understanding of Christian apologetics. This goal will be measured by an expert panel consisting of one faculty member from The Salvation Army College for Officer Training (PhD Psychology) and two Christian apologists (one holding an MA degree and one colleague pastor with a certificate in Christian apologetics). They utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.<sup>9</sup> This goal was successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation criterion meet or exceed the sufficient level.

The third goal was to increase participant knowledge of apologetics utilizing the developed curriculum to train the congregants in defending the Christian faith against the most common objections raised in today's culture. This goal was measured by re-administering the CAWS as a post-seminar survey, which was used to measure the

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<sup>8</sup> See appendix 1. All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use.

<sup>9</sup> See appendix 2.

change in knowledge regarding Christian apologetics.<sup>10</sup> The goal was considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores.

### **Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations**

The following definitions of key terms will be used in the ministry project:

*Officer.* An *officer* is a Salvationist who has left secular concerns at God's call and has been trained, commissioned, and ordained to service and leadership. An officer is a recognised minister of religion.<sup>11</sup>

*College for Officer Training.* Candidates for officership undergo an intensive, two-year course in residence at Salvation Army colleges. The curriculum combines theory and field practice, including Salvation Army doctrine, sociology and social work, psychology, Salvation Army regulations, homiletics, public speaking, Bible studies, church history, composition, community relations, business administration, accounting, and vocal and instrumental music.<sup>12</sup>

Two limitations applied to this project. First, the accuracy of the pre- and post-series surveys were dependent upon the willingness of the participants to be honest about their knowledge and understanding of the process of training apologists. To mitigate this limitation, respondents were assured that their answers would remain anonymous. A four-digit PIN (designated by the participant) ensured the anonymity of the survey responses. Second, the effectiveness of the training was limited by the constancy of attendance. If the participants did not attend all of the training sessions, then it would be difficult to measure how beneficial the training had been. To address this, sessions were recorded to

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<sup>10</sup> See appendix 1.

<sup>11</sup> The Salvation Army International, "Glossary of Terms," accessed July 16, 2019, <https://www.salvationarmy.org/ihq/2E8B895B1BBA4A0680256D4F00416D6B>.

<sup>12</sup> The Salvation Army USA: Eastern Territory, "Colleges," accessed July 16, 2019, <https://easternusa.salvationarmy.org/use/salvation-army-colleges>.

provide the teaching to those who may have missed a session due to illness or other reasons.

This project employed two delimitations. I compiled a list of potential participants that included those who were both current members of The Salvation Army and who demonstrated an interest and capacity to learn the subject matter.

### **Conclusion**

The Lord commands all believers in Christ to be prepared to give a defense for the hope that they possess. The challenges that face the Western church with regard to evangelism are difficult but not new. This project served to demonstrate that training members of the body of Christ in this discipline and increasing their knowledge is possible by God's grace.

CHAPTER 2  
THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR  
TRAINING CHURCH MEMBERS IN  
CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

**Introduction**

The calling to defend the Christian faith in the context of Western culture in the twenty-first century is daunting. Relativism, religious syncretism, and naturalistic materialism are worldviews held by an increasing number of people today.<sup>1</sup> Looking across the worldview landscape, one could get the impression that things have never been more challenging. How can Christians make the case for their faith against such opposition?

Disciples of Jesus look to God’s Holy Word for answers. His revealed will for the church provides the timeless principles which help with the task at hand. When the church turns its attention to the example of Christian apologetics as specifically demonstrated in the ministry of the apostle Paul, it discovers that challenges have always confronted those making the case for the gospel. That itself is an encouragement! Eckhard J. Schnabel says, “Wherever Paul proclaimed his message, trouble ensued both in the local Jewish communities and among the citizens of the cities.”<sup>2</sup> Believers should expect no less in the twenty-first century.

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Morrow, “Moral Relativism Is One of the Defining Characteristics of Gen Z,” Impact 360 Institute, February 2, 2018, <https://www.impact360institute.org/articles/moral-relativism-one-defining-characteristics-gen-z/>.

<sup>2</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on The New Testament, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 707.

## **Acts 17 as a Template for Christian Apologetics**

A study in the historical events of Acts 17 will show that, despite challenges, Paul strategically employed biblical, historical-theological and philosophical arguments in accordance with the diverse cultures and environments in which he found himself. With each approach he deftly brought the message of salvation in Christ to a particular audience.

### **The Effective Use of Scripture in Christian Apologetics (Acts 17:1-12)**

Following the dramatic events in Philippi (16:11-40) Paul, Silas, and the mission team made their way through Amphipolis and Apollonia until they reached the provincial capital of Macedonia, Thessalonica (modern day Thessaloniki). The sizeable population (40-50,000),<sup>3</sup> location along the *Via Egnatia*, and its substantial port (which served as the starting point of the main route from the Aegean Sea to the Danube River), made Thessalonica a prime target for mission work.<sup>4</sup> Unlike Philippi, Thessaloniki has remained an urban center since its beginnings in the fourth century BC.

The fact that Luke mentions the presence of a Jewish synagogue in this important city (v. 1) is contrasted with Paul's passing through Amphipolis and Apollonia, which, as C. K. Barrett suggests, may not have had a synagogue.<sup>5</sup> It was common practice for observant Jews to check in to a synagogue when traveling to other cities.<sup>6</sup> Luke states that this was Paul's regular custom.<sup>7</sup> The concept of using opportunities that come naturally in one's culture is important to note when giving thought to Christian apologetics, because

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<sup>3</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 703.

<sup>4</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 3:2536.

<sup>5</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, vol. 2 (New York: T & T Clarke, 2004), 807.

<sup>6</sup> Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 809.

<sup>7</sup> See Acts 13:5, 14; 14:1; 18:4; & 19:8.

Paul was acting within the norm by utilizing opportunities that came to him within the cultural and religious contexts in which he was moving. Here he begins his mission in Thessalonica among those who accepted and lived under the authority of Scripture.<sup>8</sup>

For the purposes of this study, consideration will first be given to the effective use of Scripture in defense of the gospel, but access to the synagogue for the Jew came part and parcel with opportunities to listen to and dialogue with other synagogue attendees about matters of the Law and the Prophets. To learn more about these kinds of exchanges the apostle Paul engaged in in Acts 17, particularly in Thessalonica and Berea, it is helpful to look to an event in the early days of Jesus' ministry.

### **A Glimpse into Synagogue Life**

Luke's gospel provides a detailed account of a teaching session which Jesus conducted at a synagogue (Luke 4:16-30). Following his temptation in the desert, he returned to Nazareth. Luke (again) uses the phrase, "as was his custom" (4:16), in reference to Jesus' attendance and subsequent teaching session. Aside from the obvious importance related to the Messianic prophecy, and fulfillment from the Isaiah 61 reading, some secondary details in the account help give understanding to first century synagogue protocol, which Paul would likely have followed in his own ministry. The synagogue was the safeguard for the physical copies of the Word of God. Jesus is described as physically holding the scroll of Isaiah. Additionally, Jesus returned the scroll to an attendant when he finished reading. This person was likely charged with the solemn responsibility of guarding and storing the scrolls.<sup>9</sup> Finally, Jesus stood to read the Scriptures and then sat down to teach on the matter.

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<sup>8</sup> Josh Chatraw and Mark. D. Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross: An Introduction for Christian Witness in Late Modernism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 191.

<sup>9</sup> Walter L. Liefeld and David W. Pao, *Luke*, in vol. 10 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper E. Longman and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 105.

## Paul's Apologetic Approach in Thessalonica

It was in similar fashion then, on three Sabbaths, that Paul “reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence” (Acts 17:2-3 NASB). The weaving together of the use of reason and Scripture is notable in this passage. The apostle did not consider the use of reason to be contrary to the use of Scripture. Christians may be led to think that reason and faith are incompatible, though nothing could be further from the truth. Every time a text is read, or dialogue is engaged in, intellect is involved. Craig Keener writes, “That Paul ‘reasoned’ or ‘dialogued’ with the Jews in the synagogue suggests the sort of dialogical method found in Plato and other philosophers.”<sup>10</sup> It is important to emphasize here that as a newcomer to the synagogue, Paul was not preaching, but engaging in dialogue that had the Scriptures at its foundation.<sup>11</sup>

In Thessalonica, Paul’s argument from Scripture hinges on two words—*explaining* (διδασκαλία), which means revealing or opening, and *giving evidence* (παρουσιάζω), or setting before (Acts 17:3). His approach was to first review the Law and the Prophets to reveal to the Jewish audience that their own Scriptures prophesied two main points concerning the awaited Messiah: (1.) He would suffer and (2) He would be raised from the dead.<sup>12</sup> Paul most likely would have drawn from Psalm 22, Isaiah 53 and Psalm 16:10 to underscore these points.

After establishing a biblical profile of the coming Messiah, he then pivoted to laying out (or testifying about) the events concerning the crucifixion and subsequent resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Paul demonstrated that these events lined up with the prophetic description of the Messiah, as depicted in their Scriptures. He was able to then

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<sup>10</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 2540.

<sup>11</sup> Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 504.

<sup>12</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 550.

present the eyewitness account of his personal encounter with the risen Jesus. This, no doubt, won the attention of the audience. Having succeeded at gaining their attention with this amazing story, he then concluded his argument by stating that Jesus of Nazareth was, therefore, the awaited Messiah. Ben Witherington III comments on this approach,

The form of the argument is that of the *enthymeme*, the rhetorical form of a syllogism, usually in three parts, but sometimes as here two parts are mentioned with the third implied. Luke intends to show that Paul did not just appeal to the emotions but presented reasonable arguments for his claims about Christ. The argument is as follows: (1) the Messiah must suffer and rise again as the proper interpretation of the Scriptures prove, (2) Jesus died on the cross and rose again (as Paul and various eyewitnesses would attest), (3) therefore, this Jesus Paul is proclaiming must be the Messiah.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Emmaus Road Connection**

Scholars have observed the parallels between this account of the apostle Paul reasoning from the Scriptures with the synagogue assembly, and the marvelous resurrection day passage which Luke alone includes in his gospel account of Jesus encountering two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). Simon Kistemaker notes, “Paul follows the example set by Jesus, who opened the Scriptures for the two men on the way to Emmaus. . . . Jesus showed them from the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead.”<sup>14</sup>

The question is then raised: how would Paul have known about this event and Jesus’ method if his debate sessions in Thessalonica (estimated to have taken place between AD 50-52)<sup>15</sup> happened prior to the writing of Luke’s gospel (estimated to have been written sometime prior to 67 AD)?<sup>16</sup> It is not beyond the realm of possibility to consider that these two men, Clopas and the unnamed disciple, recounted to Paul (or at

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<sup>13</sup> Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 505.

<sup>14</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, New Testament Commentary, vol. 17 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 613.

<sup>15</sup> Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 82.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Horton Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 95.

least conferred with him) and later to Luke the precise Scripture portions that Jesus used in his discussion on the road. This conversation may have taken place when Paul and Barnabas visited Jerusalem to debate the issue of circumcision for Gentile converts, as outlined in the Acts 15 narrative.<sup>17</sup> On this occasion, the former persecutor of the church laid his gospel message before the Jerusalem council (see Gal 2:1-6). The disciples' testimony could very well have been the common denominator, which would explain the similar language Luke uses to describe Jesus' teaching in the Luke 24 account, and to describe the interactions between Paul and the congregation in Thessalonica.

The question of which Scriptures Jesus taught from has been a source of intrigue through the centuries. B. P. Robinson shares a possible response:

One particular prophecy in the Old Testament that Luke will have been thinking of may be singled out for mention. The prediction put on the lips of Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15,18,19 that God would raise up a prophet like Moses himself who would speak in God's name give rise to an expectation in Judaism and Samaritanism of an eschatological figure who would teach with authority and perform the "signs and wonders" associated with Moses himself. (e.g. in Deuteronomy 34:11). The Deuteronomy 18 text is explicitly quoted in Acts 3:22-23 and 7:22-23 and 7:37 and its influence is to be detected in many other texts in Luke-Acts...When Cleopas and his companion speak of Jesus as 'a prophet as also when they refer to their shattered hope that Jesus had been going to liberate Israel. Similarly, when Jesus is said to have expounded 'the things about himself' in the Pentateuch (Luke 24:27), the text which Luke will principally have in mind is Deuteronomy 18.<sup>18</sup>

Paul's model for using Scripture in defense of the faith can then, in some measure, be traced back to Jesus' method<sup>19</sup> in this wonderfully rich post-resurrection account of the two downcast disciples who unwittingly crossed paths with their living

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<sup>17</sup> The prologue to Luke's gospel (Luke 1:1-4) makes it clear that he carefully investigated these matters and received testimonial accounts from eyewitnesses to Jesus' ministry. Richard Bauckham contends that when the proper name for a person appears in the account, it is likely to be the eyewitness testimony of the person named. See Richard J. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2017), 47.

<sup>18</sup> B. P. Robinson, "The Place of the Emmaus Story in Luke-Acts," *New Testament Studies* 30, no. 4 (1984): 481-97.

<sup>19</sup> David G. Peterson, *Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 477-78.

Lord. The result of Paul's dialogue with the Thessalonian Jews is that "some of the Jews were *persuaded* and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women" (17:4 NIV).

### **On to Berea**

This same approach is implied in Paul's ministry to the Bereans as described in Acts 17:10-15. He and Silas slipped out from Thessalonica under cover of night to elude an angry mob which had been stirred up to accuse them of treason against Rome. They made their way to Berea where the receptivity of the synagogue members is contrasted with the resistance they met in Thessalonica. As he once more made his reasoned appeal, the Bereans listened to the apostle's case and examined the Scriptures for themselves to see if what Paul was proposing was in agreement with the word of God. In both instances, the result of Paul's plea was that some, or most (in the case of the Berean Jews), were persuaded. Regardless of the degree of success, we can conclude that Paul was engaging in persuasive argumentation from Scripture. His objective was to use the Scripture in an apologetic argument to support the claim that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. Witherington's insight is again helpful here, "The art of persuasion had worked not least because Paul had based his (inartificial) proof on a source that both he and the audience recognized as authoritative—the Scriptures—but also because he appealed to them as people of intelligence who could discern the truth if the case was laid before them in good logical fashion."<sup>20</sup>

Reason and logical arguments are not antithetical to the use of Scripture but in fact are demonstrated in Scripture, as these two events and the teaching of Jesus confirm. Whether in an informal or formal setting, the Christian apologist is compelled to use Scripture as a part of his teaching methodology. Some occasions and circumstances warrant additional methodologies, however. Consideration will now be given to two

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<sup>20</sup> Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 505-6.

other methods exemplified in this same chapter of Acts.

### **The Effective Use of Historical-Theological Arguments in Apologetics**

The second method exemplified by Paul in Acts 17 proceeds from the first and has already been alluded to: the use of historical-theological arguments. In both Thessalonica and Berea, the apostle Paul used the Scriptures of the Old Testament to present a profile of the awaited Messiah, the One who would suffer death and be raised back to life. Paul proclaimed the historical events concerning the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and noted their theological implications with respect to each audience in all three cities where he ministered.

Once he laid out this biblical profile, he then transitioned to the method that involved proclaiming Jesus of Nazareth, who had been crucified and raised from the dead, as the Messiah. Paul made the case that Jesus historically met the prophetic requirements as outlined.<sup>21</sup> Schnabel indicates,

He (Paul) speaks about Jesus, Israel's Messiah, who has arrived on the scene, in particular about the necessity and the significance of his suffering, death and resurrection. The identification of the Messiah (whom the Jews expected as Israel's Redeemer) with Jesus is related in direct speech, underscoring the significance of this identification. In other words, Paul publicly proclaims . . . that Jesus is Israel's Messiah, the promised Redeemer, who suffered and died and whom God raised from the dead—*events that are part of God's plan*, as anticipated and revealed in the Scriptures.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Case for the Resurrection in a Non-Jewish Setting**

Of particular importance is that, although his starting point differed in this context (Athens), Paul steadfastly utilized the historical argument of recounting the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth in this non-Jewish context. Kistemaker observes,

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<sup>21</sup> The case is more explicit in Acts 17:3, and implicit in Acts 17:11.

<sup>22</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 704, emphasis added.

When Paul addressed the Council of the Areopagus, he faced an audience that differed from those in the synagogue worship services. Standing before the Athenian philosophers, he could not assume that they had any knowledge of the Scripture or of Jesus, who fulfilled the prophecies in Scripture. Paul had to begin his speech by teaching his audience the doctrines of God and creation. He continued his teaching with the doctrine of man, for man is God’s offspring. And he concluded his oration with the doctrines of judgment and the resurrection.<sup>23</sup>

The historical-theological case (the accounts of Jesus’ death, resurrection, and implications) for Jesus is the common denominator of the case for the gospel, which Paul explained and laid out in Thessalonica and Berea, as well as the address he gave to the members of the Areopagus (17:22-34). Rhetoricians typically held the most controversial component of their speeches until the end of their arguments,<sup>24</sup> which was referred to as *insinuation*.<sup>25</sup> On this last occasion, in Acts 17, the historical argument came at the apex of his rhetorical (philosophical) argument for the God of the Bible (17:29-31).

### **The Affirmation of Jesus’ Judicial Authority**

The apostle Paul declared that Jesus has been “appointed” (ὄρισεν) to judge the human race (Acts 17:31). The evidence for his qualification to serve as judge over the living and the dead from all nations is that he himself had been raised (ἀναστῆσας)—literally brought from the dead (physically) back to his feet. The word here for *evidence* (πίστις) is translated to mean *faith* almost everywhere in the New Testament, but here – alone<sup>26</sup> –used in the phrase πίστιν παρασχὼν πᾶσιν (*pistin paraschōn pasin*)—it means *proof*<sup>27</sup>—literally, “to show or grant proof to all”.

The resurrection of Jesus—proclaimed in this setting in Athens and wherever

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<sup>23</sup> Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, 640.

<sup>24</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 2667.

<sup>25</sup> Mikeal Parsons, *Acts*, Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 248.

<sup>26</sup> Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 853

<sup>27</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 570.

the apostle went was (and is for the church) the keystone for the gospel message, for all peoples everywhere. On this occasion it served to affirm Jesus' designation as Judge over all creation. In a Jewish context, the resurrection served to confirm Jesus as the awaited Messiah. For both audiences, Jesus was presented as the remedy for humanity's sinfulness.

### **Guardian of Tradition**

Christians charged with being prepared to give a reason for their hope look to the example in Scripture of the centrality of the resurrection testimony in Paul's ministry. On this occasion, he was simply applying the truth (historical events) he had witnessed for himself and that others had confirmed to him personally in Jerusalem. Although there is no record of any pastoral letters written to the church at Athens, two of his letters to the church at Corinth have survived, which, according to Acts, is where he traveled with the gospel following his stay in Athens. These letters provide insight into his teaching on the resurrection.

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is frequently dated to the AD mid-50s.<sup>28</sup> In 1 Corinthians 15 he begins a section that centers on the resurrection of Jesus. The wording and structure of verses 1-5 of the chapter are of particular importance to the historical testimony that formed part of the apostle's apologetic approach at Mars Hill. In verse 2 he states, "For I delivered [Παρέδωκα] to you as of first importance what I also received [παρέλαβον]." The phrasing here is intentional and reflects Paul's Jewish education and training in memorizing and preserving traditions.<sup>29</sup> He has included a creedal statement concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus which he makes clear did not originate from him. This teaching method circles back to the earlier point of Paul

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<sup>28</sup> Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 7 (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1983), 29.

<sup>29</sup> Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, The New American Commentary Series, vol. 28 (Nashville: B & H, 2014), chap. 6, ProQuest Ebook Central.

having received and confirmed this basic kerygmatic presentation of the gospel with the eyewitnesses who were members of the church in Jerusalem. George Montague writes, “This creed testifies to what is of first importance in Paul’s message. The many instructions he gives in this letter all flow from this source. He handed on what he also received, not merely from his vision of the risen Christ but also from the apostles in Jerusalem and the Christian community.”<sup>30</sup>

If the dating of the letter to the Corinthians is the AD mid-50s, and Paul learned this creed prior to teaching it in Greece, then it puts the historical testimony to the death and resurrection of Jesus back to within twenty years of the crucifixion of Jesus—which would be well within the lifetime of the first witnesses. This passage, then, gets down to the historical bedrock of the gospel. Since he proclaimed this in Corinth, he would have used this same formula in the agora and then the Areopagus in Athens.

### **History Lessons**

Christian apologists in the twenty-first century can glean three implications from the teaching of Paul to the church as outlined in I Corinthians 15. *First*, every Christian must be ready and able to recount his or her personal encounter with, and existential knowledge of, the risen Jesus. The greatest apologetic is the transformed life of a Christ follower. *Second*, every Christian should be able to make a basic argument for the historical resurrection of Jesus. This event sets Christianity apart from every other religion. It stands or falls on the resurrection of Jesus. John Warwick Montgomery notes,

The historic Christian claim differs qualitatively from the claims of all other world religions at the epistemological point: on the issue of testability. Eastern faiths and Islam, to take familiar examples, ask the uncommitted seeker to discover their truth experientially: the faith-experience will be self-validating. . . . Christianity on the other hand, declares that the truth of its absolute claims rest squarely on certain historical facts open to ordinary investigation.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> George T. Montague, *First Corinthians*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 413.

<sup>31</sup> John Warwick Montgomery, *Evidence for Faith: Deciding the God Question*, Cornell

*Third*, to accomplish the second implication state above, it may be necessary to present a basic argument for the historical reliability of the New Testament. The apostle Paul could relay his own encounter with Jesus along with the testimonies of the original disciples whom he had known directly. Succeeding generations of Christians point to the eyewitness testimonies as recorded in Scripture. The Gospels and the book of Acts are certainly more than history; they are the authoritative, inerrant Word of God. They are not less than history, however, and for the purpose of an honest examination of the claim (that Jesus rose from the dead) the skeptic should be invited to consider their status (at minimum) as ancient historical narratives that can be investigated and weighed on the merits.

### **The Use of Contemporary Rhetorical and Philosophical Arguments (Acts 17:16-34)**

Paul's next visit was to Athens, considered by many to be the most important stop on his second missionary tour.<sup>32</sup> As he had in Thessalonica and Berea, Paul began his ministry at the synagogue, where the people (Jews and God fearers) already had knowledge of the God of the Bible and a reverence for the Word of God. Although not stated, it can be safely assumed that he again made his case for the gospel, in the Athenian synagogue, by appealing to Scripture. He expanded his platform for preaching the gospel by going daily to the marketplace known at the Agora.

#### **Provoked by Idolatry**

The first aspect of Paul's ministry in Athens, which Luke mentions, is that his spirit was "provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols" (17:16 ESV) It would be erroneous to conclude that because there is no record of Paul having had a similar reaction in Thessalonica and Berea, that those cities, therefore, had no idols. Here

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Symposium on Evidential Apologetics (Dallas: Probe Books, 1991), 319.

<sup>32</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 558.

the text says that Athens was *full* of them.<sup>33</sup> John Stott renders the phrase (κατείδωλον) as being “submerged” in idols.<sup>34</sup> The immersion into this idolatrous environment caused Paul’s response. John Polhill says that Paul was “infuriated” at the sight.<sup>35</sup> He was, after all, still a monotheist—a Jewish Christ follower who trusted in the one true God and refused to worship idols.<sup>36</sup> Beyond anger, however, the apostle also felt a sense of intense grief<sup>37</sup> over the lost state of the city’s inhabitants. Richard Thompson describes Paul as being distressed.<sup>38</sup> His righteous anger over their worship of false gods did not, however, devolve into repulsion or religious prejudice and bigotry. The ability to subdue righteous anger is a key principle of Christian apologetics. His passion for the salvation of the Athenians is evidenced by his taking the gospel message out from the synagogue and into the public spaces.

Acts 17:17 states that Paul went daily to the Agora or marketplace. By the mid first century AD, Athens had two marketplaces. The older and by this time less popular Greek marketplace was located north of the Aereopagus, and the Roman market (forum) was located directly east of the Greek marketplace.<sup>39</sup> These marketplaces served as commercial, political, and philosophical centers where citizens gathered to do business,

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<sup>33</sup> In 2018, my wife and I had the privilege of participating in a tour of Greece and Turkey which traced the second missionary journey taken by Paul. This included a visit to Athens. While there, we visited the famous Archaeological Museum of Athens and I can attest that the evidence for the abundance of idols during this time period is sobering.

<sup>34</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: To the Ends of the Earth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 278.

<sup>35</sup> John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 366.

<sup>36</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 561.

<sup>37</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 722.

<sup>38</sup> Richard P. Thompson, *Acts: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2015), 288.

<sup>39</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 2579.

discuss current events, and debate the issues of the day. This setting made an ideal environment for the apostle to contend for the gospel in front of a predominantly Greek audience. He continued to use the same *διελέγετο* or dialogical method that allowed for commentary and questions from the audience.<sup>40</sup>

### **The Encounter with the Philosophers**

In verses 18-19 Paul was making his presentation concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and encountered a group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. Epicureans were essentially agnostic materialists who did not believe in the afterlife.<sup>41</sup> They would not have been supportive of the idolatry that permeated the Athenian culture.<sup>42</sup> Stoics were greater in number than the Epicureans and were pantheists who considered the divine to be found throughout nature.<sup>43</sup> They perhaps would have been a little more open to the idea of giving a hearing to this foreign religion. The proclamation of Paul in this very public and eclectic setting got the attention of both groups, who engaged him in debate. Some ridiculed him (likely the Epicureans)<sup>44</sup> and called him a *σπερμολόγος*, which literally means a seed stealing bird<sup>45</sup> (translated “babbling” in most English versions) accusing him of presenting plagiarized ideas. Others charged him with promoting false or foreign gods which was the same charge brought against Socrates.<sup>46</sup> The accusation of teaching about foreign gods may have been because

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<sup>40</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 724.

<sup>41</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 561.

<sup>42</sup> Thompson, *Acts*, 290.

<sup>43</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 366.

<sup>44</sup> Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 517.

<sup>45</sup> Thompson, *Acts*, 290.

<sup>46</sup> Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 515.

Paul was using the name Jesus and teaching of his Ανάστασις (resurrection) which may have been misunderstood to be a proper name of a presumed new deity.<sup>47</sup> The Stoics, who no doubt held greater influence if for no other reason than their majority status, wanted to hear more of this new teaching which Paul was presenting. So, they escorted him to the Areopagus. The council at the hill of Ares would have been something less than a trial, probably more like a hearing.<sup>48</sup> This influential body had the leverage (if not legal authority) to permit new religious or philosophical teaching. Ben Witherington's insight is helpful here: "In a free city like Athens the appropriate place to prompt an official hearing of some new teaching or ideas was before the Areopagus. Among other things the council would have had the responsibility for maintaining religious customs and order in the city, and to act as a court dispensing verdicts and justice when necessary."<sup>49</sup>

### **At the Areopagus**

Whether the apostle Paul was obligated or invited to appear, he stood in front of the council and began his address: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious [δεισιδαιμονεστέρους]" (17:22 ESV). Instead of going at the council with full force for the idolatry he'd seen—which caused him great distress—he makes a neutral comment. Scholars note that this introduction could have been interpreted as a compliment regarding their piety, or as mocking them for their outrageous superstitions.<sup>50</sup> Given that his remark did not cause an uproar, one can reasonably conclude that his audience understood it to be the former, although by the end of his speech they may have

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<sup>47</sup> Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 518.

<sup>48</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 728.

<sup>49</sup> Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 516.

<sup>50</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 2627-28.

concluded otherwise.<sup>51</sup>

He went on to recount to the council how he had walked through the city and observed the many “objects” of their worship (17:23 ESV). This introduction serves as an example for Christian apologists. Paul was certainly distraught over the intense levels of idolatry, but beyond that, he was utilizing the time by making a careful study of the culture in which he was now ministering and began to look for a point of contact from which he could begin his appeal<sup>52</sup> His study of the city led him to discover, among the objects of their worship, an altar which had been inscribed with the words: “To the unknown God” (17:23). This was his opening. He had been brought to the Areopagus because some who heard him in the Agora perceived that he was introducing a new god to the spectrum of deities in Athens. Paul seized the opportunity to assure them that the unknown god (which they had built a shrine to—as a contingency) was in fact the God which he would present to them. “What you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you” (17:23 ESV). He would not add one more foreign god to the mix. Kistemaker underscores this point: “In his speech Paul uses the inscription as a point of contact with the Athenians, who at this altar worshiped an unknown god. By their act of worship, the audience has to admit that they are open to receiving instruction about an unknown god, and that they are unable to worship a new god unless they know him.”<sup>53</sup>

Having vocalized the common ground that gained the interest of his audience, he pivoted to the body of his address. In contrast to his previous teaching sessions in the synagogues of Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens, he did not make an appeal to the Scripture—which would not have been recognized as an authoritative source for his

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<sup>51</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 371.

<sup>52</sup> Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 35.

<sup>53</sup> Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, 631.

hearers.<sup>54</sup> Make no mistake, however, he was presenting the God of the Bible and his doctrine was biblical. In fact, the Jew who would have heard (17:24) would have been drawn in their thinking to similar language in Isaiah 42:5 or Genesis 1-2, though not quoted. Instead, he moved into the categories of natural theology, anthropology, and Christology<sup>55</sup> while demonstrating his knowledge of Greek poetry and philosophy.

### **The Truth about God**

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul sets out to demark this God from any of the other gods in the Greek pantheon. He does this first by stating that this God “made the world [κόσμον] and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man” (17:24 ESV). In this one statement recorded by Luke, the apostle postulates God as creator of the universe, who is also the Lord of the universe and therefore cannot be contained in puny buildings or shrines since they are part of the “everything” in the universe, the “sum total of everything that exists.”<sup>56</sup> Bock says that by implication, God also therefore cannot be represented by an idol.<sup>57</sup>

Having established the first foundational truth that God is the source of and Lord of the universe, Paul goes on to explain His self-sufficiency or divine aseity: “Nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything” (17:25 ESV). Beyond his creative power, God is demonstrated to be the preserver and governor of that which he has made. He has no need of the sacrifices offered by mankind.

Often, the job of the Christian apologist is to help people define terms. What

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<sup>54</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, rev. ed. The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 335.

<sup>55</sup> J. M. English, “Elements of Persuasion in Paul’s Address on Mars Hill, at Athens,” *The American Journal of Theology* 2, no. 1 (January 1898): 101.

<sup>56</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 731.

<sup>57</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 565.

does it mean for example when I say the word *God*? Paul challenged the Athenians to give consideration to the folly of worshiping something that was inferior even to humans in that the objects of worship had *been made by humans*. The idea of one supreme being was not totally alien to the Greek culture. After all, Aristotle argued for the existence of a Prime Mover.<sup>58</sup> Some objections to Christianity are in fact based on a faulty understanding of the God revealed in Scripture and in creation. The Christian apologist who desires to follow Paul's example will winsomely reveal false concepts about God while contrasting them with the orthodox teaching about God.

### **The Truth about Mankind**

Having dealt with God's dominion over the universe and His self-sufficiency, Paul begins to discuss God's creation of humankind as part of the universe over which He is sovereign (17:26-27). There are some important points of difference from Greek thought to note here.

Not only is God *not* dependent on humanity, but the opposite is actually true—humanity owes its existence and sustenance *entirely* to the One true God. Again, drawing from the doctrine of creation, without reciting the Scriptures, the apostle explains the concept of every nation having descended from “one man,” which was a foreign idea to the Athenians. They maintained that, as a separate people, they had emerged from the soil and believed that as a separate race they were superior to the other nations, which they would have considered barbarians.<sup>59</sup>

Paul's teaching, then, addresses two faulty ideas and presents the truth. Man is made by God and all nations belong to him. He sets the times and boundaries in place for them. This provides the basis for teaching that mankind is made in God's image, that he

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<sup>58</sup> Aristotle, and Richard McKeon. *Introduction to Aristotle. Edited, with a General Introduction and Introductions to the Particular Works*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York, NY: Random House, 1947), 285

<sup>59</sup> Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 337.

therefore has worth in God’s sight, and that all nations have been made by him—which addresses the sin of racism and prejudice directly. The purpose for all of this is for humankind to “live on all the face of the earth” (inhabit) and to seek God and to find him (17:27a). The contrast with the earlier point is noteworthy. God cannot be contained or minimized to temples and statues, but man has been created to inhabit the earth. This is his designed realm. Keener explains, “God arranged the cosmos but also the nations.”<sup>60</sup>

The last purpose for the creation of humankind and God’s strategic alignment of nations and times is that he would seek for and know God. There is an element of natural theology here. The creation and order of the universe, including mankind himself, ought to spur humanity on toward seeking the creator. Then he said, “in him we live and move and have our being” (17:28). There is much debate among biblical scholars regarding the origin of this text. Although a clear determination cannot be made, it appears that Paul (or Luke) formulated this triadic expression in a format that would be recognized by the council<sup>61</sup> and would demonstrate his rhetorical skills—a skill admired by Greek culture.

### **Illustrating from the Arts**

Last, Paul quotes from a Greek poet Aratus of Soli in Cicilia when he states, “As even some of your poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring’” (17:28). Throughout the discourse on Mars Hill, Paul was demonstrating a knowledge of the art and philosophy that helped to form the culture in which he was ministering. Beyond that he knew how to illustrate the gospel points he was making (God as Creator and Lord of all, mankind created in his image, dispersed throughout the earth and dependent on him, with a need for knowing him) using these same elements from Greek culture. This point is very important to grasp in Christian apologetics. The capacity to analyze a culture and

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<sup>60</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 2649.

<sup>61</sup> Bertil Gärtner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation* (Uppsala, Sweden: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1955), 195.

utilize, with holy discretion, elements of the same culture to underscore the gospel message is now a requirement as the culture moves further along into a post-Christian society. Schnabel frames it well:

Paul's knowledge of Stoic and Epicurean philosophical concepts and his ability to use their formulations and quote a Cilician poet implies prior study of and interest in Greek and Roman traditions. Christian preachers and missionaries who neither know nor understand the intellectual and material culture in which they seek to proclaim the gospel cannot possibly know which ideas and formulations constitute points of contact and agreement that can help listeners to understand the new content of the gospel message.<sup>62</sup>

### **The Objection to Philosophy**

Some well-meaning Christians will no doubt raise the objection that using philosophy conflicts with what Paul taught later, when he wrote to the Church in Colossae, "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ" (Col 2:8). Some have argued that while Paul made an attempt in Athens to engage the Greeks in their own discipline, he did not have much success and then renounced that technique moving forward. The critics say this for two reasons. First, he had modest success in Athens, some mocked, and a few (Dionysius, Damaris and others) believed. Second, in the first letter to the Corinthian church he wrote, "And I, when I came to you brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom [ὑπεροχὴν λόγου ἢ σοφίας]. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (2:1-2 ESV). How should apologists respond to this argument?

First, it is important to note that Paul gave a qualifier when he warned the church in Colossae—they needed to be on guard against a certain kind of philosophy "according to human tradition" (Col 2:8). The best way to identify the bad philosophy

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<sup>62</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 746.

from the good is to study philosophy,<sup>63</sup> which is what Paul did. Second, in Athens Paul was engaging in the very form he taught later in the same letter when he said,

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. (1 Cor 9:20-22)

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has given consideration to the biblical, historical, and philosophical arguments for the gospel as demonstrated in the Acts 17 narratives. Other arguments, (such as scientific, moral), can be added to the cumulative case for the gospel. At the very least one can see biblical support for multiple methods, each tailored to specific circumstances and audiences. None had apparent 100 percent effectiveness in terms of conversion rates of the hearers. All can be considered effective in that the servant of God, surrendered to God's will, empowered by the Holy Spirit, prepared by effective disciplined study, can be used to call the world to salvation from sin through Jesus Christ and regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Now, more than ever, the church needs to raise up a generation of apologists, in the style of the apostle Paul, who can engage the secular culture in winsome, and authentic ways while demonstrating the capacity to clearly confront wrong ways of thinking and living, with the Truth.

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<sup>63</sup> James Porter Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul* (Colorado Springs: The Navigators, 2014), 69.

## CHAPTER 3

### APOLOGETICS IN THE LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN: VOICES FROM HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARSHIP

When I attempt to engage someone in conversation—whether I am presenting the gospel or not, I am interacting with a person who holds a certain set of beliefs. This belief system can be called a *worldview*. If I fail to understand the worldview held by my counterpart in conversation, then I will most likely fail in connecting with them. Moreover, if I desire to be effective in evangelistic conversations, I must know my own worldview. This chapter will explain the concept of worldview thinking and the interplay between the study of Christian apologetics and the Christian worldview.

#### **Standing on the Shoulders of Giants**

Having considered the biblical, historical and philosophical arguments (apologetics), taken from the study of Acts 17, this chapter will explore extra-biblical sources which support the defense of the gospel. The present age has been crowned the “golden age” of Christian apologetics by several prominent voices within the discipline.<sup>1</sup> It would be hard to dispute that statement. No movement gains prominence overnight, however. The perceptive student of Christian apologetics soon learns that the season of favor (in terms of number, breadth, and availability of resources) is a result, in large part, of the hard work of those who have preceded him through the centuries. This chapter will give ear to the voices of Christian apologists from centuries past who blazed the trail for those defending the faith today. Additionally, it will present voices from contemporary

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<sup>1</sup> Sean McDowell, “How Can You Make a Career in Apologetics?” July 13, 2016, <https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/how-can-you-make-a-career-in-apologetics>.

scholars in the field. Drawing from this deep well, I aim to demonstrate that the study of Christian apologetics edifies the Christian in three areas. The study of Christian apologetics (1) strengthens worldview, (2) increases one's ability to think critically about divergent worldviews, and (3) improves one's capability to graciously respond with reasonable answers to objections raised against Christianity by those holding alternative worldviews, thereby aiding his evangelistic efforts.

### **Explanation of Worldview**

The history of the English word *worldview* is linked to German Enlightenment philosopher Emmanuel Kant who, in 1790, conceived of *weltanschauung*, or worldview, as an understanding of the meaning of the world and of one's place within it.<sup>2</sup> Ironically, the concept was not a central theme to his teaching. Nevertheless, his idea has given rise to a category of study within the field of philosophy in general, and within Christian apologetics in particular. Various definitions and schools of thought concerning *worldview* exist and perhaps no one has done more to help the church think deeply about this topic than James Sire. In *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*, he submits his own revised definition of worldview:

A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundations on which we live and move and have our being.<sup>3</sup>

Not everyone has given consideration to the subject of worldview or worldview theory. Nevertheless, everyone has a worldview. A person's worldview will be formed (in large part) by the responses he gives to what can be called "the big questions." The answers to the big questions serve as markers or signals to guide a person through day-to-

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<sup>2</sup> Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 23.

<sup>3</sup> James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 141.

day living. What a person believes determines how he lives. Some of these questions include:<sup>4</sup>

1. Where did I come from?
2. Does God exist?
3. What can be known and how can anyone know it?
4. Who am I?
5. What is right and wrong and how do we know the difference?
6. What is the purpose of human existence?
7. What is wrong with humanity?
8. What is the solution for humanity's problem?
9. What happens after we die?

The framework by which a person navigates through their day to day living and their ever-changing circumstances and life events depends on how these are answered. This is true for the Christian as well. How does a Christian worldview answer the big questions?

### **Strengthening Christians' Worldview**

When the disciple of Jesus Christ studies Christian apologetics, he will first find that his own faith and worldview is bolstered as he studies the reasons for the faith he holds and wants to share with the world. Specifically, as he works through the fundamentals of Christian apologetics, he will necessarily give consideration to the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith and will see his faith grow as he learns of the good reasons for his beliefs.

Mark Allen shares a personal story concerning the role Christian apologetics played in the discipling of his son at a critical point in his life. Earlier in his life Mark had

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<sup>4</sup> For more on worldview questions see Ken Samples, *A World of Difference: Putting Christian Truth-Claims to the Worldview Test* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 21-22. Various scholars have compiled their own lists of the "big questions," including Sire in *Naming the Elephant*.

arrived at the conclusion that apologetics was “passe.” When his son was twenty-one and in his first year of college, he dropped out of college and began to socialize with friends who came from an atheistic worldview. Allen refers to this as a “crisis of faith” for his son.<sup>5</sup> He decided to introduce his son to various books on apologetics, hoping that this would bolster his faith. He was right. The material he gave his son opened the door for meaningful conversations that helped to address some of his doubts.

Returning to the framework (the answers to the big questions each worldview must answer) the next point for consideration is the *importance* each of these questions plays in the life of the believer. Perhaps the average person in the pew on a given Sunday has not given thought to the concept of forming a worldview and what its purpose is, but I would suggest that all have wrestled with most if not all the big questions. The integration of Christian apologetics into the local church curriculum and the application of this knowledge applied in the life of the individual believer can be a great help in the task of navigating through these big questions while maintaining an unwavering commitment to both biblical truth and intellectual vigor.

Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth living<sup>6</sup>. It could very well be added that the unexamined worldview is not worth holding. Before a Christian can begin to critically engage other worldviews, he must be able to prayerfully and thoroughly investigate how his own worldview answers the big questions. Christian apologetics is the discipline of formulating intellectually plausible and existentially persuasive responses to those questions (and objections) from a biblical and gospel-centered perspective.

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<sup>5</sup> Josh Chatraw and Mark D. Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross: An Introduction for Christian Witness in Late Modernism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 21.

<sup>6</sup> Plato. *The Last Days of Socrates: Euthypro, the Apology, Crito, Phaedo*. Translated by Hugh Tredennick. (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1987), 71-72.

A well-balanced study in Christian apologetics will empower the believer to think through the big questions from a biblical perspective and enable him to understand, from great thinkers, past and present, how his own faith actually has robust responses to each. I am not saying that because a well-educated person contends for Christianity that their level of education makes it true necessarily, but it can make the Christian worldview more plausible to the skeptic. A reading of the following concise responses (with supporting comments from Christian thinkers past and present) to the big questions will lend support to my contention.

### **Where Did I Come From?**

Philosophers call this the question of *origin*. Christianity holds that humans are made by God and bear his image. Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria in 328, speaks to this question in his work on the incarnation entitled *The Incarnation of the Word of God*:

For God is good—or rather, of all goodness He is Fountainhead, and it is impossible for one who is good to be mean or grudging about anything. Grudging existence to none therefore, He made all things out of nothing through His own Word, our Lord Jesus Christ; And of all these His earthly creatures He reserved a special mercy for the race of men. Upon them, therefore upon men who, as animals, were essentially impermanent, He bestowed a grace which other creatures lacked - namely, the impress of His own Image, a share in the reasonable being of the very Word Himself, so that, reflecting Him and themselves becoming reasonable and expressing the Mind of God even as He does, though in limited degree, they might continue forever in the blessed and only true life of the saints in paradise.<sup>7</sup>

### **What Kind of God (if any) Exists?**

Christianity affirms the biblical teaching of the existence of God. Christians understand that God exists first because of the existence of the universe, the moral law, the revelation of holy Scripture, and ultimately, through the revelation of God incarnate, Jesus of Nazareth. Francis Shaeffer writes, “The universe had a personal beginning—a personal beginning on the high order of the Trinity. That is, before ‘in the beginning’ the

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<sup>7</sup> William Edgar and K. Scott Oliphint, *Christian Apologetics Past and Present: A Primary Source Reader* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 1:177.

personal was already there. Love and thought and communication existed prior to the creation of the heavens and the earth.”<sup>8</sup>

### **What Can Be Known and How Can Anyone Know It?**

Philosophers call this the question of *epistemology*. Christianity holds that humans are rational creatures (this is connected to the first question) with the capacity to experience and gain understanding of the world around them. Christian philosopher J. P. Moreland defines knowledge in this way: “To represent reality in thought or experience the way it really is on the basis of adequate grounds.”<sup>9</sup> There are different categories of knowledge and humans do not need absolute certainty on a matter to know it is true. In fact, humans cannot be 100 percent certain of many things.

### **Who am I?**

This is known as the question of *identity*. Perhaps no topic is more relevant in Western cultures today than the topic of identity. This question is connected to the first and the sixth. Christianity says that I am a holistic being; body, mind, and spirit. In the words of Douglas Groothuis,

As bearers of the divine image, humans have a created nature and *telos* (or purpose) under God and within all of creation. This human nature fits the rest of the world and was intended to do so by God’s omniscient design. . . . On the other hand, humans are not divine— not even when they were in their original and pristine state. With God, they share the attributes of personality—agency, intelligence, creativity, rationality, emotion and relationality—but in a form forever finite limited and contingent. Humans are more like God than anything else in the universe, yet they are only a small part of the universe and they fall far short of the divine majesty discussed in Psalm 8. . . . While humans are integrated beings, they are not reducible to an assemblage of merely material parts, as is a computer or an automobile. Humans are embodied in highly developed souls; that is, they possess an immaterial substance which interacts with their physical dimensions.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space & Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1972), 21.

<sup>9</sup> James Porter Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul* (Colorado Springs: The Navigators, 2014), 56.

<sup>10</sup> Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: a Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith*

## **What Is Right and Wrong and How Do We Know the Difference?**

These questions can be categorized as the question of *morality* or *ethics*.

Christianity makes the claim that objective moral values do exist and that they have their source in the nature and character of God. This moral law accounts for both the sense of guilt humans have when they fail to meet God's objective standard, and the sense of anger they have when they are the victims of injustices committed by others. C. S. Lewis, professor of Medieval and Renaissance literature and famed Christian apologist frames it this way:

The moment you say that one set of moral ideas can be better than another, you are, in fact measuring them both by a standard, saying that one of them conforms to that standard more nearly than the other. But the standard that measures two things is something different from either. You are, in fact, comparing them both with some Real Morality, admitting that there is such a thing as a real Right, independent of what people think, and that some people's ideas get nearer to that real Right than others. Or put it this way, if your moral ideas can be truer, and those of the Nazis less true, there must be something—some Real Morality—for them to be true about.<sup>11</sup>

## **What Is the Purpose of Human Existence? Why am I Here?**

These questions can be combined and called the question of *meaning*.

Christianity teaches that mankind is made in the image of God, and as such humans are spiritual, intellectual, relational, volitional, and immortal beings. Humans are made, as such, to have relationship with their Creator. This meaning, this purpose, will include serving him and glorifying him to the rest of the world. St. Augustine famously put it this way when he said, “You stimulate him (man) to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they can find peace in you.”<sup>12</sup>

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(Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 86.

<sup>11</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 25.

<sup>12</sup> Edgar and Oliphint, *Christian Apologetics Past and Present*, 2:210.

## **What Is Wrong with Humanity?**

The Christian worldview holds that although he has been made in God's image, mankind has committed treason against his Creator and is living in rebellion. This is what the Bible calls sin. The original act of rebellion by humanity's first parents (as described in Scripture) has had a cataclysmic effect on the way humans relate and treat one another, and on the creation, in addition to severing their relationship with their Maker and Sustainer. The human race is living in violation of its purpose. This state of estrangement has sometimes been referred to as *the human predicament*. James Orr, Scottish theologian and philosopher, describes the human predicament:

The Christian view affirms the fact of the sin and disorder of the world, not as something belonging to the Divine idea of it, and inhering in it by necessity, but as something which has entered it by the voluntary turning aside of man from his allegiance to his Creator, and from the path of his normal development. The Christian view of the world, in other words, involves a Fall as the presupposition of its doctrine of Redemption.<sup>13</sup>

## **What Is the Solution for Humanity's Problem?**

Christianity makes the claim that the God of the Bible, takes the initiative in response to humankind's rebellion and resulting separation from him. Jesus, the Son of God, laid aside his divine privilege and took on human flesh. As if that was not humbling enough, this Jesus, innocent of any sin himself, bore the sins of the world, providing a reconciling atonement through his sacrificial death by crucifixion at the hands of the Jewish religious leaders and Roman authorities. His prior claims to divine authority were vindicated when he was raised to life again three days later. Philosopher Alvin Plantinga sums up,

According to fundamental Christian teaching, a central divine response to our predicament is the incarnation and atonement: the life, sacrificial death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the divine son of God. By virtue of this divine response,

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<sup>13</sup> Edgar and Oliphint, *Christian Apologetics Past and Present*, 1:387.

we human beings can be put right with God and live triumphantly with him in this life and the next.<sup>14</sup>

### **What Happens after We Die?**

The Christian worldview speaks of two destinations for the dead. Those who have rejected reconciliation to God by the forgiveness of sins in Christ will live in an eternal state of separation from God—an extension of the life of separation from God which they lived on earth. This eternal state of torment is called hell. Those who have received God’s offer of salvation from sin and new life in Christ will first go to an intermediate state as disembodied souls in Christ’s presence, awaiting the day of resurrection. The resurrection will see the faithful receiving incorruptible and immortal bodies. This will mark the end of death, suffering, and evil.

Second century church father and apologist, Irenaeus, defended the doctrines of heaven and hell in his book, *Against Heresies*:

Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Saviour, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father, “every knee should bow, of things in heaven,, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess” to Him, and that He should execute just judgment towards all; that He may send “spiritual wickednesses,” and the angels who transgressed and became apostates, together with the ungodly, and unrighteous, and wicked, and profane among men, into everlasting fire; but may, in the exercise of His grace, confer immortality on the righteous, and holy, and those who have kept His commandments, and have persevered in His love, some from the beginning of their Christian course, and others from the date of their repentance, and may surround them with everlasting glory.<sup>15</sup>

These quotations from prominent Christian apologists from the past and present, in response to the major questions of life, are just a sliver of the wealth of material available to the disciple of Jesus. I can personally testify to the way the discovery of the writings of these individuals has strengthened my own worldview. First because I realized I was not alone in wrestling with these questions (and others not mentioned); and

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<sup>14</sup> Alvin Plantinga, quoted in Edgar and Oliphint, *Christian Apologetics Past and Present*, 1:602.

<sup>15</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies / Adversus Haereses*, book 1, Roberts-Donaldson translation, accessed October 21, 2020, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/irenaeus-book1.html>.

second because, as witnessed here, God, in his grace, has raised up and equipped men and women for this specific ministry to the church and to the world. When a Christian comes to understand that others who have gone before have done much of the trailblazing, he is encouraged. Now, when I wrestle with questions that seem to challenge my faith, I am more likely to not get discouraged but to first think that somewhere, at some time, God has equipped (or is equipping) someone to help me. I am motivated to research issues to see how the Spirit of God has answered the church's need. The body of Christ functions properly when its newer members look to the teaching of the saints who have led the way in thinking about the big questions. This process of the disciple drawing on the teaching from those God has prepared is in keeping with God's design for the church.

### **The Christian and Worldview Comparisons**

Some within the church have raised objections to the study of Christian apologetics (and philosophy for that matter).<sup>16</sup> Some of these objections include (1) no one comes to faith through debates or arguments, (2) the Christian faith is a matter of the heart, not an intellectual endeavor, and (3) if Christians study apologetics and (by necessity) other worldviews, will they not be susceptible to renouncing their faith? The idea of this dichotomy between faith and the intellect is a relatively recent development in the church. Classical Christian teaching through the years placed a high value on both faith and reason. St. Augustine, in his "Sermon 76 on the New Testament," said "faith is understanding's step; and understanding faith's attainment."<sup>17</sup>

The study of Christian apologetics will bring the disciple of Jesus Christ into the field of engagement with other worldviews. Here, the intellect must not be abandoned but engaged, under the authority of the Holy Spirit. The discipline of apologetics will

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<sup>16</sup> Groothuis argues that when properly done, Christian apologetics is a dimension of the Philosophy of Religion. For more on this see Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, chap. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Augustine of Hippo, "Sermon 76 on the New Testament," accessed October 17, 2020, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/160376.htm>.

equip the Christian to evaluate the worldviews he encounters, which will be achieved by (1) the study of truth theories, (2) an introduction to logic and logical fallacies, and (3) the consideration of the answers other worldviews provide to the previously mentioned big questions contrasted with the answers provided by Christianity.

### **Theories of Truth**

A well-rounded Christian apologetics curriculum would include an introduction to *theories of truth*. How humans view truth, and truth claims, matters, and will influence their behavior. C. S. Lewis observes, “We are now getting to the point at which different beliefs about the universe lead to different behavior . . . .Religion involves a series of statements about facts, which must be either true or false. If they are true, one set of conclusions will follow about the right sailing of the human fleet; If they are false, quite a different set.”<sup>18</sup>

Until recently, the universal theory of truth was the *correspondence theory*. Sometimes referred to as *realism*, this says that truth is a statement or proposition which reflects things as they really are.<sup>19</sup> For example, the statement “Harrisburg is the capital of Pennsylvania” corresponds with reality, therefore it is true. It says something that is real. Aristotle precisely summarizes this view of truth: “To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true; so that he who says of anything that it is, or that it is not, will say either what is true or what is false.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 72.

<sup>19</sup> James Porter Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017), 130.

<sup>20</sup> Aristotle, “Metaphysics by Aristotle—Book IV,” trans. W. D. Ross, Classical Wisdom Weekly, accessed November 15, 2020, [https://classicalwisdom.com/greek\\_books/metaphysics-by-aristotle-book-iv/7/](https://classicalwisdom.com/greek_books/metaphysics-by-aristotle-book-iv/7/).

This seems commonsensical to most, but the correspondence theory of truth began to come under attack in the nineteenth century. Alternate theories developed to supplant the correspondence theory are the *coherence theory of truth* and the *pragmatic theory of truth*. The coherence theory of truth says that a particular belief, statement, or proposition is true only if it coheres easily with the total belief system a person holds.<sup>21</sup> The main challenge with this theory is that a person could have an entire belief system that is false. For example, I met a man in a day shelter for the homeless who was convinced he was Ronald Regan, the former President. Although his view of himself held together (for him) in his belief system, it did not match up with reality.

The pragmatic theory of truth basically holds that a belief is considered true if it produces wanted and favorable results.<sup>22</sup> There are a couple of problems with this theory. Under this theory, the question naturally arises—who gets to determine whether the results which are produced are favorable or not? Essentially, if my claim “works” for me it would be considered to produce the desired results and therefore could be categorized as true. But my claim might harm someone else. The results produced by my truth may not be beneficial to someone else, but this consideration requires a higher level of assessment.

I will not delve into other theories of truth. The point of giving these brief descriptions and examples is that the person studying Christian apologetics will encounter theories and learn how to recognize them when engaging others. As Christians become familiar with them, they can discern and weigh claims by persons they encounter who hold divergent worldviews.

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<sup>21</sup> Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations*, 142.

<sup>22</sup> Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 133.

## Logic

I remember in undergraduate studies being informed by my faculty advisor that I was required to take an introductory class in philosophy and logic to complete my degree in Biblical Studies. It sounded, at once, intimidating and dull. My perspective quickly changed, however, when the class started and I was introduced to the world of ideas and thinking—and thinking about thinking. I soon realized that philosophy and logic would become a life-long interest for me and that somehow I had been created to use the skills I was learning as part of my worship and service to God. I could love God with my mind. I ended up enrolling in as many philosophy classes as my schedule would allow.<sup>23</sup>

Somewhere along the line the subject of philosophy has become taboo for many in the church. This has come about by the abdication of philosophical studies in most Christian colleges and seminaries, but is also the result of the church coming under the influence of the worldview known as modernity, which considers knowledge to be only that which can be known empirically. So, churches have virtually given up serious philosophical consideration. These two factors have resulted in what J. P. Moreland describes as “an intellectual shallowness and a lack of cultural discernment in the body of Christ.”<sup>24</sup> This condition has not always existed within the church. For centuries, people (not just Christians) placed a high priority on the study of philosophy. Itinerant Anglican preacher and founder of Methodism, John Wesley, gave an address to a group of clergy members where he discussed the importance for the Christian minister to cultivate the life of the mind. He stressed the need for ministers to be well rounded thinkers and to engage their minds in the fields of geometry, history, literature, logic, and philosophy. On this occasion he remarked, “Ought not a Minister to have, First, a good understanding, a clear

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<sup>23</sup> I want to also honor the life and memory of my philosophy professor, Dr. Byron Bitar, whose passion for God and for teaching students how to love God with their mind was crucial in my learning to appreciate philosophy and logic.

<sup>24</sup> Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations*, 12.

apprehension, a sound judgment, and a capacity of reasoning with some closeness?”<sup>25</sup>

In my present ministry context, as pastor of The Salvation Army in Lancaster, I am observing a receding fervor for evangelism among our membership and a reticence to engage the culture from a biblical perspective. These factors are, I believe, in part, a result of a rising tide of anti-intellectualism within the body of Christ.

The well-developed course on Christian apologetics at the congregational level would address the intellectual deficiency (and thereby strengthen the members’ ability for worldview comparison) by introducing them to the basics of philosophical thinking and logic. The course should include the following:

1. Basic Syllogisms
2. Necessary and Sufficient Conditions
3. The Law of Non-Contradiction
4. The Law of the Excluded Middle
5. The Law of Identity
6. Common Logical Fallacies

This discipline of logic and argumentation should not be viewed as antithetical to a Christian’s faith but a reflection of the God who made him with the capacity to make well-reasoned arguments presented in a careful and logical fashion. Wherever the gospel has been preached, it has been presented as an argument to be considered. As the church betters its understanding and grasp of these concepts, it improves its capacity to weigh the arguments from competing worldviews.

### **Worldview Comparisons**

After gaining a basic understanding of the above-mentioned tools for worldview comparison, a Christian will be equipped to begin the process of learning how to compare

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<sup>25</sup> James H. Potts, *Living Thoughts of John Wesley: A Comprehensive Selection of the Living Thoughts of the Founder of Methodism as Contained in His Miscellaneous Works* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1891), 348.

divergent worldviews. Douglas Groothuis suggests eight criteria for what he calls “worldview evaluation.”<sup>26</sup> Ken Samples uses nine questions for his version.<sup>27</sup> James Sire offers four characteristics that the Christian’s chosen worldview should possess.<sup>28</sup> Because this project included the development and implementation of a Christian apologetics curriculum at the introductory level, I utilized Ken Samples’ test method as his book was written for the popular audience. His steps include: (1) *The Coherence Test*. Is the worldview logically consistent? Being logically consistent will not guarantee that a worldview is true. But if the same worldview is found to be logically inconsistent, it must be false. (2) *The Balance Test*. This asks, is the worldview appropriately balanced between simplicity and complexity? (3) *The Explanatory Power and Scope Test*. How capable (the power) is the worldview at explaining reality and how wide is the extent of its explanation (the scope)? (4) *The Correspondence Test*. This asks, how well does a particular worldview correspond with well recognized, observable facts, and how does it correspond to my experiences in the world? (5) *The Verification Test*. Are the fundamental truth-claims of the worldview able to be verified or falsified? (6) *The Pragmatic Test*. This question essentially asks, does it work? When it is lived out does it produce results? 6.) *The Pragmatic Test*. This asks, is the worldview sensible and useful? (7) *The Existential Test*. This test asks, how does the worldview match up with mankind’s need for purpose and meaning? (8) *The Cumulative Test*. Can the worldview be supported by evidence from diverse fields and disciplines? (9) *The Competitive Competence Test*. This final question asks, how does the worldview stand up against competing worldviews?

In performing the worldview test (comparison) the student of Christian apologetics reaches back into the his apologetics toolbox to utilize the skills he gained

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<sup>26</sup> Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 52-60

<sup>27</sup> Samples, *A World of Difference*, 33-37.

<sup>28</sup> James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 281-83.

through studying the theories of truth and a primer in logic and philosophy. While no worldview can answer every question satisfactorily, the disciple of Jesus can learn the skill of discerning which worldview provides robust answers for the majority of the questions. James Orr speaks of this exercise:

What now, it may be asked has Christianity to do with theories, and questions, and speculations of this sort? As a doctrine of salvation, perhaps, not much, but in its logical presuppositions and consequences a great deal indeed. Christianity it is granted, is not a scientific system, though, if its views of the world be true, it must be reconcilable with all that is certain and established in the results of science. It is not a philosophy, though, if it be valid, its fundamental assumptions will be found to be in harmony with the conclusions at which sound reason, attacking its own problems, independently arrives. It is a religion, historical in its origin, and claiming to rest on Divine Revelation. But though Christianity is neither a scientific system, nor a philosophy, it has yet a world-view of its own, to which it stands committed, alike by its fundamental postulate of a personal, holy, self-revealing God, and by its content as a religion of Redemption—which, therefore, necessarily brings it into comparison with the world-views already referred to. It has, as every religion should and must have, its own peculiar interpretation to give of the facts of existence; Its own way of looking at, and accounting for, the existing natural and moral order; its own idea of a world-aim, and of that “One far-off Divine event”, to which, through slow and painful travail, “the whole creation moves”. As thus binding together the natural and moral worlds in their highest unity, through reference to their ultimate principle, God, it involves a “Weltanschauung.”<sup>29</sup>

### **Christian Apologetics and Engaging Objections**

When Christians give sufficient time and energy to the study of Christian apologetics, their own worldview will be strengthened, their capacity to think critically about divergent worldviews will be increased, and finally, they will improve their ability to graciously respond with reasonable answers to objections raised against Christianity by persons holding alternative worldviews. This investment of time and study will result in the building up of his evangelistic efforts.

Christians are commanded to take the message of the gospel to the world. For each disciple the circumstances and context may be different. Culture, language, prevailing

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<sup>29</sup>Orr, James. *The Christian View of God and the World: As Centering in the Incarnation. Being the Kerr Lectures for 1890-91*. Eighth ed. (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1907) 8-9.

religious views, etc., differ depending on where a person lives and where the Lord places him. One thing, however, is certain: The gospel message will be met with resistance. Nowadays, especially in the West, not only the message of the gospel, but the *messenger*, increasingly, is being met with resistance. How will the church respond? How is the church responding? There seem to be a few options: (1) The Christian can withdraw, circle the wagons, so to speak, and wait for the present age to pass, hoping (by deepening his personal spiritual lives) to preserve a remnant to carry on the message in more favorable times. (2) He can abandon the emphasis on the spiritual and engage the world in purely intellectual debates, bringing his evidences and proofs for the existence of God and attempt to beat the secular academics at their own game. (3) The Christian can abandon the effort to defend long held doctrines of the church—which to the present generation seem archaic and polemical—and focus on current trends for a kind of social activism—Christianity alone. (4) The church can strengthen its ability to competently yet winsomely and compassionately respond to popular objections and resistance to the gospel—while finding common ground with others to work, as the body of Christ, to address the injustices in the world—from an unabashedly biblical worldview.

The fourth option is, I would contend, the biblical option. William Lane Craig exhorts the church to embrace the call to defend the faith:

It's no longer enough to teach our children Bible stories; they need doctrine and apologetics. Frankly, I find it hard to understand how people today can risk parenthood without having studied apologetics. Unfortunately, our churches have largely dropped the ball in this area. It's insufficient for youth groups and Sunday school classes to focus on entertainment and simpering devotional thoughts. We've got to train our kids for war. We dare not send them out to public high school and university armed with rubber swords and plastic armor. The time for playing games is past.<sup>30</sup>

Although I am drawing from extra-biblical sources in this chapter, it is imperative to reiterate the key biblical text commanding Christian apologetics in the

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<sup>30</sup> William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 19.

church. First Peter 3:15 says, “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” This verse can serve as a template to consider how the study of apologetics will empower the Christian to engage with the objections in the marketplace of ideas. First and foremost is the surrendering of his body, mind, and spirit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The gospel is not just another set of propositions to make the world a better place. It is the establishment of the kingdom of Heaven here on earth, inaugurated by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. My work to contend for the faith means nothing if I am not under the authority of the sovereign Lord. In surrendering to the Lordship of Christ, the Christian apologist places himself at God’s disposal. He should anticipate that the Lord, by his Spirit, will lead him into situations of engagement with persons who need the help that apologetics can offer.

Second, I am to be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks for the hope I have. An introductory level seminar in Christian apologetics can prepare the disciple of Jesus to give answers (*apologia*) to those who raise questions. This preparation will draw on various disciplines such as biblical studies, textual criticism, archaeology, poetry, natural theology, cosmology, philosophy, religion, history, etc. These multiple lines of evidence can be drawn upon to make the case for Christianity. This is known as the *cumulative case* approach—the method I used in my curriculum. Regarding this method of preparation and response, philosopher Richard Swinburne notes,

Scientists, historians, and detectives observe data and proceed thence to some theory about what best explains the occurrence of these data. . . . We find that the view that there is a God explains everything we observe, not just some narrow range of data. . . . The very same criteria which scientists use to reach their own theories lead us to move beyond those theories to a creator God who sustains everything in existence.<sup>31</sup>

These various lines of arguments for or in defense of the faith, must not be presented in a vacuum. It will require the apologist to develop the skill of listening and

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<sup>31</sup> Richard Swinburne, *Is There a God?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 2.

being aware of the context and needs of the person raising the question or objection. If a person raises the question of the presence of suffering and evil in the world, for example, then the appeal to the cosmological argument would be completely out of place. The preparedness, then, of the apologist is far more than the accumulation of information and deft tactics used to win arguments. Next is the third issue outlined in the text from First Peter: Christians are to give the reasons for the hope they have “with gentleness and respect.” The priority must always be the person. If I am in a situation where I am trying to give aid to a believer struggling with doubt, then my concern is to hear their struggle, affirm that they are not alone in their struggle, and demonstrate compassion. When Peter exhorts the believers to be prepared to give an answer to those who ask for the reason for the hope that they have, he is presupposing that people will *want* to ask them the questions. The ability to attract questions from the questioner requires a level of approachability and humility on the part of the apologist. This dimension of preparedness is connected to the last phrase of the command, “but do this with gentleness and respect.” In *Apologetics at the Cross*, Joshua Chatraw and Mark Allen outline the differences between what they refer to as “apologists at the cross” as compared to “apologists of glory<sup>32</sup>:

When apologists of glory engage others in apologetic encounters, they are seeking honor, power, and personal satisfaction. They feel a surge of pride when they confidently rattle off all the answers to any questions thrown at them and get a thrill out of intellectually checkmating their “opponents”. Moreover, they can be tempted to reduce Christianity to something more palatable for the sake of their own success. In contrast, apologists at the cross will engage others with humility, honesty, and a bold confidence in the apparent foolishness of the cross. The cross calls us to sacrifice our own personal triumphalism.

Christians will have done a disservice to the gospel if by their obnoxiousness they lose the person, even if they “win” the argument.

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<sup>32</sup> Chatraw and Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross*, 147.

## Conclusion

This chapter centered on the specific ways in which the Christian can further develop his worldview thinking through the study of Christian apologetics. The person who studies Christian apologetics will see his own worldview strengthened, develop the capacity to think critically about differing worldviews, and be better prepared to engage with people who hold different worldviews.

Since every Christian is called to engage the world with the gospel, every Christian can benefit from the discipline of apologetics. Because every Christian can benefit from the study of apologetics, the church should increase the availability of this dimension of disciple-making. Apologetics can no longer be thought of as a hobby for a select segment of the church, but as a mandatory component of the maturation process in Christ. I conclude with a quote from Douglas Groothuis:

Apologetics needs to be applied to the whole of life under the lordship of Jesus Christ. We should hear apologetics ringing out from the pulpit and being discussed in every level of Christian education. Apologetics should be a part of the core curriculum at Christian seminaries, colleges and high schools. Campus ministries should train their workers to defend Christianity and understand the weaknesses of other worldviews. Every level of publishing - Christian and secular- should feel the force of Christian persuasion, both at the academic and more popular levels. Christian academics whether at Christian or secular institutions, should strive to develop a Christian perspective on their disciplines, being unashamed of the gospel, yet wise as serpents and innocent as doves. . . . Christians need a confident, courageous, contagious, compelling conviction that Christianity is the flaming truth the world needs to hear, that it can withstand rational testing and that the God of truth sponsors our humble apologetic efforts.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 649-50.



CHAPTER 4  
THE PREPARATION, DEVELOPMENT, AND  
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE  
MINISTRY PROJECT

This ministry project was comprised of a ten-week course taught to a group of members of The Salvation Army on Tuesday evenings from February 9, 2021 through April 13, 2021. A pre-course and post-course survey were administered to the students who participated. The project was designed to address the stated goals of the project: (1) to assess a representative group of ten to fifteen members of the congregation of The Salvation Army of Lancaster with respect to their current understanding of Christian apologetics and the capacity they possess to respond to popular objections to the Christian faith; (2) to develop a ten-session curriculum to teach the congregation a robust understanding of Christian apologetics; and (3) to increase participant knowledge of apologetics by training the congregants to defend the Christian faith against the most common objections raised in today's culture.

**Preparation**

**Research Project Logistics**

On January 7, 2021, I submitted my ethics forms for using human subjects in research to my faculty supervisor, Dr. Andrew Walker, and the office of Professional Doctoral Studies. The forms were approved on January 13, 2021. On that same date I reviewed the church membership directory and identified forty individuals as potential participants in the seminar. An email invitation was drafted and sent out which gave an overview of the proposed seminar. Those who responded by affirming their desire to

participate were sent a follow-up email with the link to the pre-course survey and announcing the start date of February 9, 2021.

### **Apologetics Curriculum Development and Evaluation Process**

Chapter 2 of this project gave consideration to the biblical and theological foundations for training disciples of Jesus (members of the congregation) in Christian apologetics. In chapter 3, the voices from classical and modern scholarship—with respect to Christian apologetics and worldview thinking—were reviewed with respect to the edification of believers. The focus of this chapter will be the development, evaluation, and implementation of the apologetics training course.

### **Theme Selection**

The first task in the development phase was to decide on the subjects or themes to be addressed in the ten-week course. The following subjects/questions were selected to comprise the framework for each week's lesson:

1. What is Christian apologetics and why is it important?
2. Thinking about thinking: Logic, Philosophy and Truth.
3. The historical reliability of the Bible.
4. Evidence and arguments for the existence of God.
5. Are science and faith contradictory?
6. Did Jesus really rise from the dead?
7. The exclusivity of the Gospel (Christian particularism).
8. How can a loving God send people to hell?
9. What's sex got to do with it?
10. God and the problem of evil and suffering.

## **Textbook Selection**

The next step in the process of development of the course involved deciding upon a textbook to be assigned to the participants as supplemental reading. After considerable thought, *The Questions Christians Hope No One Will Ask* by Mark Mittelberg was selected.<sup>1</sup> The text served as an accessible introduction to several of the themes for the course and provided suggested resources which the students could utilize to further explore the subject matters.

## **Curriculum Development and Evaluation**

The development of the curriculum for the Christian apologetics course happened on a week-to-week basis during the length of the seminar. Each lesson outline was drafted a week to ten days prior to the date the material would be presented. The drafts were then presented to an expert panel for their review and feedback using the evaluation rubric.<sup>2</sup> The expert panel consisted of a faculty member at The Salvation Army College for Officer training in Suffern, New York with a PhD in Psychology; and two colleagues in Salvation Army ministry, one with an MA in Christian apologetics and the other with a certificate in Christian apologetics from Biola University.<sup>3</sup> Upon receiving the evaluations—any suggested edits were made to the outline. The outlines then served as the basis for the series of PowerPoint presentations which I developed prior to each class.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Mittleberg, *Questions Christians Hope No One Will Ask* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> See appendix 2.

<sup>3</sup> A fourth colleague in ministry with an MEd degree initially agreed to serve on the expert panel, however, unfortunately, due to two deaths in her immediate family within the span of a month, it was necessary for her to withdraw.

## Lesson 1

A word of thanks was expressed to all the participants at the beginning of the first class (seventeen were in attendance). In addition, I established some ground rules, including the importance of valuing each member of the class. I asked them to help create an environment where each person would feel appreciated. I asked for confidentiality to aid in making a space where questions and doubts could be raised, and we could each be heard and trusted. I reminded them that Scripture would hold the ultimate authority and the last word on any given subject, and that all views would be measured against the teaching of the Bible. Students were also informed that the sessions—which were presented virtually via Microsoft Teams—would be recorded for the benefit of any who might miss a class. Lastly, I outlined a rough schedule for each class, which was to be forty-five minutes of teaching, a five-minute intermission, twenty-five more minutes of teaching, and then fifteen minutes for questions and answers.

The lesson for week 1 began by giving two definitions for Christian apologetics. The first, from William Lane Craig, stated that Christian apologetics is “that branch of Christian Theology which seeks to provide a rational justification for the truth claims of the Christian faith.”<sup>4</sup> The second was from Ted Cabal, which states, “Christian apologetics is what you do when someone raises an objection to the Gospel/Christian worldview.”<sup>5</sup> The students were asked to provide objections to the gospel that they themselves have encountered or read. Several suggestions were offered.

Next, the class gave attention to the biblical case for Christian apologetics. This included focusing on a keystone text, 1 Peter 3:15. We noted that the three imperatives in the text are (1) set apart Christ as Lord, (2) be prepared to give an answer

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<sup>4</sup> William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 15.

<sup>5</sup> Ted Cabal, “Applied Apologetics” (class lecture presented at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, January 15, 2019).

(*apologia*) to those who ask for the reason for the hope we have, and (3) provide the answers with gentleness and respect.

I asked participants to provide other notable examples from Scripture that support Christian apologetics. These included Acts 17:16-34, 2 Corinthians 10:5, and Jude 3. The class also reviewed the study of Christian apologetics in the teaching of the early Church Fathers.

The last section of the session was dedicated to answering the question: Why study Christian apologetics? I noted that there are two principle reasons for studying apologetics: to strengthen the faith of the believer and to be equipped to respond to the objections of skeptics.

## **Lesson 2**

Lesson 2 was entitled “Thinking about Thinking” began by looking at the biblical basis for worldview thinking, truth claims, and philosophy, and their role in Christian apologetics. Fifteen persons attended. The key texts were John 18:36-37, 1 Corinthians 13:6, Matthew 22:37, and Isaiah 1:18-20. I presented the class with the five big questions that help frame a person’s worldview<sup>6</sup>: (1) where did I come from? (the question of origin); (2) who am I? (the question of identity); (3) why are we here? (the question of meaning); (4) how should we live? (the question of morality); and (5) where are we going? (the question of destiny).

Following the attention given to worldview thinking, the class considered an overview of the theories of truth, including the Pragmatic theory of Truth, the Coherence theory of truth and the Correspondence theory of truth. After the intermission, I presented the subjects of Modernism, Post-Modernism, and Relativism to the class.

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<sup>6</sup> Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 20.

The last section of this lesson involved an introduction to the laws of logic, which included the law of noncontradiction, the law of identity, and the law of the excluded middle. Students were asked to provide example for self-defeating statements that illustrate a violation of the law of non-contradiction. Some common logical fallacies were also reviewed, with illustrations of each being shared with the students.

### Lesson 3

Lesson 3 was titled “Why Should I Believe the Bible” and sixteen participants attended. The format for the third lesson was a series of four common objections raised against the reliability of the Bible. Each objection was considered, and a substantive response was presented.

The first objection raised was, “We cannot trust the Gospels because they are written late.” The response presented to participants in the following way:

1. None of the Gospels mention the fall of Jerusalem (AD 70)<sup>7</sup>.
2. Acts is the sequel to Luke and does not mention the martyrdom of Paul (AD 64). Acts is likely written in the late 50s to early 60s, and Luke therefore early to late 50s.<sup>8</sup>
3. The earlier date for Luke is corroborated by Paul’s apparent quoting from Luke (22:19) in 1 Corinthians 11:23-25. Since the majority of scholars date 1 Corinthians to AD 55, Luke would have to have been written prior to that date.
4. The Gospels are also corroborated by the writings of the early Church Fathers in the second century—meaning that the Gospels would have been well circulated by then.<sup>9</sup>
5. The discovery of P52 (John Ryland Papyrus), which is a fragment of the Gospel of John, was discovered in Alexandria, Egypt, and is dated to the mid-second century. The dating of the fragment, combined with the location, push the date of the autograph (original) back even earlier.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Geisler and Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith*, 239-40.

<sup>8</sup> Geisler and Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith*, 240.

<sup>9</sup> Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 431.

<sup>10</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *The Textual Reliability of the New Testament: Bart D. Ehrman and Daniel B. Wallace in Dialog*, ed. Robert B. Stewart (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 19.

The second objection raised in the class was, “We cannot trust the Gospels because they are anonymous.” The response presented to the participants consisted of the following three points raised by Brant Pitre:

1. No anonymous manuscript copies exist.<sup>11</sup>
2. If (for the sake of argument) all the autographs were anonymous, then what would explain the fact that all the second, third, and fourth generation copies are unanimous in title names?<sup>12</sup>
3. The argument that the titles were added centuries later to give them weight and influence does not match with the fact that Mark and Luke were not apostles or in the “inner circle” of the early church.<sup>13</sup>

The third objection addressed in the class was, “We cannot trust the New Testament because the gospel accounts went through so many oral tellings and re-tellings”—it is impossible to separate fact from embellished fiction. This is also known as the “telephone game” critique. The counterargument discussed in class consists of three points:

1. The discovery of an earlier copy of the book of Isaiah (dated 150 BC) among the Dead Sea Scrolls—compared with the Masoretic text of Isaiah (dates from the 9th century AD)—reveals that the text was preserved over a 1,000-year period with higher than 95 percent accuracy.<sup>14</sup>
2. The greater number of copies of a text—the better the comparison can be made to determine the accuracy in comparison to the original. There are approximately 5,500 New Testament manuscripts as compared to approximately 1,800 of Homer’s Iliad.<sup>15</sup> The comparison of the 5,500 (and growing) number of manuscripts shows the message has held fast.

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<sup>11</sup> Brant Pitre, *The Case for Jesus: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ* (New York: Image, 2016), 17.

<sup>12</sup> Pitre, *The Case for Jesus*, 18-19.

<sup>13</sup> Pitre, *The Case for Jesus*, 22-23.

<sup>14</sup> J. Warner Wallace, “Establishing the Reliability of the Old Testament: A Timely Test of Transmission,” *Cold Case Christianity*, June 21, 2019, <https://coldcasechristianity.com/writings/establishing-the-reliability-of-the-old-testament-a-timely-test-of-transmission>.

<sup>15</sup> Clay Jones and Josh McDowell, “The Bibliographical Test,” August 13, 2014, <https://www.josh.org/wp-content/uploads/Bibliographical-Test-Update-08.13.14.pdf>.

3. The telephone game is designed to purposely distort the message as it is passed along, whereas in the Jewish culture, preserving oral history and written scriptures both have a high priority.

The fourth objection which I discussed states, “We cannot trust the NT because of the immense number of textual variants.” The counterargument begins with an acknowledgement of the immense number of variants that even conservative evangelical scholars allow—more than 400,000 (as compared to 130,000 total words in the New Testament). I shared that the reason there are so many variants is because there are many manuscript copies, which increase the possible copy errors. In addition, textual critics can determine the original word/spelling by making comparisons between the copies. I noted that *none* of the essential Christian doctrines are affected in any way by any of the variants. The vast majority are simple errors in spelling or copying.

#### **Lesson 4**

Seventeen people attended the fourth lesson, which was titled “Evidence and Arguments for the Existence of God.” The key biblical texts presented included Romans 1:19-20; Psalm 19:1-4, and Psalm 97:6. Prior to considering the arguments for the existence of God, the class reviewed three types of reasoning, which are deductive, inductive, and abductive.

The first argument for the existence of God that the class reviewed was the Kalam Cosmological Argument.<sup>16</sup> This argument (using deductive reasoning) states,

1. Whatever begins to exist has a cause.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause.

The second argument for the existence of God discussed was The Fine-Tuning Argument,<sup>17</sup> which states,

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<sup>16</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 111.

<sup>17</sup> Geisler and Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith*, 95.

1. Every design has a designer.
2. The universe has a highly complex design.
3. Therefore, the universe has a designer.

The last argument for the existence of God considered was The Moral Argument. This argument is as follows:

1. If God does not exist, then objective moral values and duties do not exist.
2. Objective moral values and duties do exist.
3. Therefore, God exists.

After each argument was presented, the class watched a short, animated video from *Reasonable Faith*, which helped reinforce the teaching. The class ended with a fifteen-minute period of questions and answers.

## **Lesson 5**

Lesson 5 was attended by fifteen persons and dealt with the question, “Are Science and Faith Contradictory?” The first issue the class examined was the opinion (popular in secular academy today) that science is superior to faith (a view held by Jerry Coyne, Richard Dawkins, and others). I noted that not everyone, however, agrees. Some scientists today do not hold such a view (John Lennox, James Tour, Douglas Axe, etc.) and see the two fields of science and theology as being compatible rather than incompatible.

After examining some passages of Scripture that affirm the believer’s use of reason in concert with faith (e.g., 1 Cor 15:14-19; Acts 1:3; Luke 1:1-4) we turned attention to notable figures in the history of science who were also believers in God, including Galileo, Kepler, Pascal, Boyle, Newton, and Pasteur. I also introduced the class to notable scientists who are Christians, from the modern era, such as Francis Collins, Bill Phillips, and Brian Heap. This review helped to make the point that being a Christian does not negate one’s ability to do good science.

The class then considered the questions which science can and cannot answer. I reminded them that while science is good at helping explain the natural order of things in the natural world, it cannot provide the ultimate answers to the bigger (worldview) questions we considered in lesson 1.

The last segment of the class dealt with how to respond (in conversation, social media, etc.) to the so-called “God of the gaps” argument and Darwinian evolution. I noted that the existence of specified complexity, irreducible complexity, and information (in the DNA molecule of every living cell) provide formidable challenges to naturalism. The class ended with fifteen minutes of questions and answers and a closing prayer.

## **Lesson 6**

Seventeen people attended lesson 6, entitled “Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?” I began by asking the class for suggested key texts from the Bible that deal with the resurrection of Jesus. These included 1 Corinthians 15:1-22, Galatians 1:11-24, Matthew 28:1-10, and Acts 1:1-3.

Following the review of these texts, the class was presented with David Hume’s argument against miracles, which consists of three propositions. The first says that any so-called miracle event has a higher probability of being explained by natural causes. The second proposition contends that claims of the miraculous arise from “ignorant and barbarous nations,” which makes the testimonies unreliable. The third says that since many competing faith systems make miraculous claims, and they cannot all be true, they cancel each other out.<sup>18</sup>

The class then considered how they might respond to someone who presented Hume’s argument to them to discredit the claim that Jesus was raised from the dead. The possible response consists of three points:

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<sup>18</sup> Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), 533-38.

1. If God exists, then miracles are possible (not necessarily common). We reviewed the arguments for God's existence discussed in lesson 4.
2. The accounts of miraculous events in the Bible often include the doubt and disbelief of many of the original eyewitnesses themselves.
3. Miraculous claims from competing religions ought to be compared based on the quality and quantity of evidence. In this case the resurrection of Jesus is accounted for in multiple early, independent, eyewitness sources—as opposed, for example, to the claims of Mormonism or Islam.

Having looked at Hume's argument against miracles and the components of the counterargument, the class then examined the minimal facts argument for the resurrection of Jesus:

1. Jesus died by crucifixion.
2. Jesus was buried in an identified tomb.
3. Jesus' disciples claimed to have had encounters with the risen Jesus soon after his death and burial.
4. Many of the disciples maintained these claims despite great suffering and (in some cases) martyrdom.
5. Saul of Tarsus and James the brother of Jesus were both transformed from skeptics to fervent leaders of the early Christian movement.

Following the minimal facts argument for the resurrection of Jesus, I presented the alternative (natural) theories to explain the minimal facts:

1. The unknown tomb/wrong tomb
2. Legend
3. Twin
4. Hallucination
5. Spiritual Resurrection
6. Disciples stole the body.
7. Authorities hid the body.
8. Swoon
9. Jesus was an alien.

Using the abductive reasoning method, the theory which best explains the minimal facts is that Jesus actually, physically, rose from the dead. The class ended with questions and answers and a time of prayer.

## **Lesson 7**

Lesson 7 was titled “The Exclusivity of Christianity and The Question of Hell” and had sixteen in attendance. The class reviewed key texts from the Bible, which included Acts 17:16-31, Deuteronomy 6:1-19, Romans 10:9-17, and Revelation 20:7-15. Following the review of key texts, the class discussed the topic of Religious Pluralism. I asked the question, “Do all roads lead to Rome?” Or to put it another way, “do all religions lead to the same god?” The class considered the story of the blind men and the elephant and noted that although this story is often used to support the idea of religious synchronism, the narrator of the story has a view that allows him to see that it is, in fact, an elephant that the men are touching. In attempting to show tolerance to all religions by equating them, well intentioned persons can end up offending their adherents in the process.

Next, the class gave attention to the objection, which states, “Jesus never claimed to be God.” The class was presented with a case for the divinity of Jesus based on texts from the synoptic Gospels as well as the Gospel of John. Also noted was the high Christology in the Epistles.

The last portion of the class was directed to the question of hell. The class discussed what the Scripture means when it speaks about the wrath of God. It was noted that God does not lose his temper or have fits of rage. His wrath is his righteous anger, which is actually a manifestation of his love. The class then considered the definition of hell and looked at multiple texts from the Gospels that provide insight into the nature of hell and determine the factors that result in a person going to hell. In the end, no one is sent to hell but chooses hell by rejecting God. The class reviewed three views on hell: (1) Universalism, (2) Annihilationism, and (3) Eternal Punishment. The class ended with a time of questions and answers and then prayer.

## Lesson 8

Lesson 8 was titled “What’s Sex Got to Do with It? (Part I)” and was attended by sixteen people. As the Western world increasingly moves away from a biblical view of human sexuality, the church will need to wrestle more and more with this issue to be equipped to respond to objections against it. The class first looked at several key texts from Scripture to help frame the discussion, including Proverbs 18:13, Genesis 2:15-25, Matthew 19:1-12, John 4:4-26, and 1 Corinthians 6:9-20. The class examined three dimensions in which humans reflect the *imago Dei*<sup>19</sup> (Gen 1:26-28): resemblance, relational, and representative.

The class was asked to provide specific objections raised against the biblical view of marriage and sexuality. Some of objections were:

1. Is God anti-gay?
2. Why would God be against the expression of my sexuality if he made me this way?
3. Jesus never taught against homosexual/transgender behavior so what’s the big deal?
4. Why are Christians obsessed about the Old Testament prohibitions against homosexuality if they ignore other prohibitions, such as eating shellfish and making clothing out of blended fabrics?

I stressed the importance of not “taking the bait” on these objections but rather learning to “raise the level” of the question. I then suggested some counter questions which do just that, such as,

1. If God has revealed his will regarding the expression of human sexuality, does that matter?
2. When a person zooms out from looking exclusively at LGBTQ issues, isn’t it clear that all humanity has been broken by sin? And this brokenness affects all dimensions of our lives, including our sexuality.
3. Does the Bible differentiate between sexual temptation and sexual behavior?

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<sup>19</sup> Kenneth Richard Samples, “What Does It Mean to Be Made in the Image of God?” September 5, 2017, <https://reflectionsbyken.wordpress.com/2017/09/05/what-does-it-mean-to-be-made-in-the-image-of-god/>.

The class then reviewed the model of Jesus (John 4:4-30; 39-42) in dealing with sexual sin, as described by Mark Mittelberg.<sup>20</sup> He suggests that when Christians engage with someone who is living a lifestyle outside of the biblical model for sexuality they should:

1. Affirm God's love.
2. Extend God's grace.
3. Affirm biblical sexuality rather than simply speaking against certain behaviors.
4. Affirm the Truth as taught in Scripture.

The class ended with questions and answers and prayer.

## **Lesson 9**

Lesson 9 had fifteen persons attending and was titled “What’s Sex Got to Do With It? (Part II).” The class continued with the theme from the previous week by working to formulate possible responses to the objections the class had identified the previous week.

The first objection the class dealt with was the so-called silence of Jesus on the matter of homosexual behavior. We considered the following:

1. This argument suffers from the logical fallacy known as (*argumentum e silentio*—the argument from silence). Jesus was “silent” on many other matters, such as slavery, child sacrifice, and spousal abuse, but a person cannot assume his silence equates his support of those practices.
2. Jesus was a Torah observant Jew, and all he ever did was raise the bar on ethics and morality (see the Sermon on the Mount in Matt 5-7).
3. The gospels do provide a record of Jesus’ affirmation of the biblical model for marriage and sexuality (Matt 19:1-10).
4. Since Christians affirm that Jesus is God, he is ultimately involved in the inspiration of all of Scripture, including the texts which prohibit homosexual behavior.

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<sup>20</sup> Mark Mittleberg, *The Questions Christians Hope No One Will Ask* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2011), 189-211.

The second objection the class considered was the happiness or fulfillment objection, which, simply stated, asks, “Why would a loving God not want a person to fulfill homosexual/transgender desires and so find happiness and contentment in this world?” I noted that *all* Christians are called to sacrificial living—taking up one’s cross in obedience to Christ. The Christian’s primary aim is not happiness in this life, but in the next.

The last objection the class was presented with asks, “Why do Christians observe the Old Testament prohibitions against homosexual behavior while ignoring other prohibitions, such as planting fields with mixed seeds, eating shellfish and certain styles of haircuts?” I reminded the class that the Old Testament laws completed three types of functions. The first function was to set the nation of Israel apart as a distinct people. The second was to restrain people from harming themselves and others. The third function of the Old Testament Law was to diagnose and expose sin. As a follow up to these three functions, we considered the three kinds of categories into which the Law could be placed: civil law, ceremonial law, and moral law.

Lastly, when responding to the charge of selective conformity to Old Testament prohibitions, the class was presented with two clarifying questions that proved useful: (1) were the surrounding (gentile) nations held accountable for the same law? and (2) how does the New Testament teaching on the specific law match up with the Old Testament teaching? If the teaching is consistent across Scripture and the gentile nations are accountable to God for the same law, then the law has universal application. After a time of questions and answers, the class closed in prayer.

## **Lesson 10**

Lesson 10 was titled “God and the Problem of Evil and Suffering,” and was attended by thirteen people. As in the past, the class looked at key texts from the Bible to help set the stage for our discussion. These included Genesis 45:48; 50:19-21, Job 31:35-37; 38:1-42:6, 2 Corinthians 4:5-18, Romans 8:28-39; and 1 Peter 1:3-12.

Following the key biblical texts, we considered some clarifying questions and categories. I explained that when someone presents this objection to Christianity it is often because of some great personal pain or traumatic experience. I suggested the following question could be asked of a person: “Of all the questions you could raise against Christianity, why this one?” We reviewed the difference between the *philosophical* problem of pain and suffering and the *pastoral* problem of pain and suffering and noted that it is imperative to deal with the pastoral problem first and the philosophical problem at a later time.

Next, we considered the meaning of the word *evil*, noting especially Augustine’s definition—the *privatio boni*.<sup>21</sup> We noted that evil is divided into two general categories, moral and natural. The definition of *theodicy* was also reviewed.

Returning to the philosophical problem of evil, I shared the argument made famous by Hume that (1) if God is willing to stop evil but he is not able, then he is not all powerful, and (2) if God is all powerful but not willing to stop evil, then he is not all loving. If he is both willing and able to stop evil, why does evil still exist?<sup>22</sup>

To equip the class to respond to this kind of argument I presented the response from Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga, known as the Free Will Defense.<sup>23</sup> Plantinga says that God cannot cause free creatures to only choose what is right—otherwise they would not be free. We discussed the idea of God having good reason for creating a world in which evil is permitted (for a time). The class provided examples of situations where pain and suffering are permitted (on a small scale) with the purpose of achieving the greater good.

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<sup>21</sup> “The Confessions (Book VII),” accessed June 25, 2021, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110107.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> David Hume, quoted in Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 10.

<sup>23</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, 30.

The last subject covered in this last session was the Probability Problem of Evil or The Evidential Problem of Evil. If a skeptic or atheist grants (for the sake of their argument) that God could have sufficient moral reasons for allowing evil, then the question remains: why so much evil? They conclude that the amount of evil in the world makes it highly improbable that God exists. To respond to this, we drew from a response developed by William Lane Craig.<sup>24</sup> Craig contends that, as finite beings, humans are simply not able to always know the purpose for which God allows evil and suffering to exist. He suggests that humans must always weigh the existence of pain and suffering against the full scope of evidence for the existence of God and the truths of Christianity. Lastly, he proposes four specific doctrines that serve to increase the probability of God's existence:

1. The chief purpose of life is not happiness but to know God.
2. The fallenness of humanity and its effect on creation.
3. God's ultimate purpose is not realized in this life but in the next.
4. Knowing God is an incommensurable (immeasurable) good, which will (in eternity) far outweigh the temporal pain and suffering of this life (2 Cor 4:17).

The session ended with a time of questions and answers and prayer. I expressed my sincere thanks to the participants.

### **Conclusion**

This ministry project included a twelve-week process of lesson preparation, review by expert panel, lesson revision, and lesson delivery. The project was intended to create, implement, and assess an introductory Christian apologetics course for a select group of members of The Salvation Army of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Sixteen persons participated. A pre-course survey was administered to the participants to gauge the levels of knowledge and comfort with the subject matter. Following the conclusion of the

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<sup>24</sup> William Lane Craig, *Hard Questions, Real Answers* (Wheaton, IL, Crossway, 2003), 94-100.

seminar, the same survey was administered to measure any growth in the participants' understanding and preparedness. The last phase of the project is the evaluation phase.

## CHAPTER 5

### PROJECT EVALUATION

The previous chapter described the development and implementation of an introductory course on Christian apologetics for members of The Salvation Army of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. This final chapter will serve to evaluate the effectiveness of this ministry project, giving particular consideration to the success of the project with respect to the stated purpose and goals of the project (as outlined in chap. 1). This chapter will also outline a number of strengths and weaknesses of the project and suggested adjustments to be made for future versions of the course. Finally, I will note some personal and theological conclusions with respect to this ministry project.

#### **Evaluation of the Purpose**

The purpose of this ministry project was to prepare members of The Salvation Army of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, to be Christian apologists with a view to enhancing their personal evangelistic encounters. The rationale for the project was based on three things. First, the church membership had never been provided with an opportunity for this type of instruction and were lacking this as part of their spiritual formation and discipleship training. The resulting effects from this deficiency were a reduced fervor for and preparedness for evangelism. Second, the influence of pluralistic relativism in the culture had potentially led some members to conclude that evangelism was unnecessary or even wrong. The third and most important reason for conducting this ministry project was the biblical mandate to be prepared to give an answer to those who ask for the reason for the hope Christians have—stemming from 1 Peter 3:15.

Chapter 2 of this project took an in depth look at the biblical model of apologetic methods used by the apostle Paul as recorded in Acts 17. The model provided by Paul demonstrates that biblical, historical, and philosophical arguments can be utilized in making a case for the gospel. These approaches can be supplemented by other arguments (such as scientific, aesthetic, and moral) in evangelistic endeavors. Paul's ability to utilize popular philosophy and rhetoric to engage the public square for the gospel serves to challenge believers in the present age to be equipped for similar engagements. The purpose of the project is supported by the observations gleaned from the events in Acts 17.

Chapter 3 of this project centered on the development of the Christian worldview through the study of Christian apologetics. It was shown that persons who participate in a formal course of Christian apologetics can be better prepared to engage with persons holding differing worldviews. This can be accomplished by learning to think critically about opposing worldviews and by learning more about the worldview they themselves possess. The commission to evangelize and make disciples of every nation is applicable to all Christians; therefore, all Christians ought to have some training in and exposure to Christian apologetics.

Chapter 4 of this project offered a detailed review of the development and implementation of the Christian apologetics training seminar at The Salvation Army of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. It was demonstrated that fifteen persons participated in the course (seven of whom attended all ten sessions) and that the participants were engaged with both the reading material and the material presented in class.

### **Evaluation of the Goals**

The success of this project hinged on the development and achievement of three goals. The first goal was to assess a representative group of ten to fifteen members of the congregation with respect to their understanding of Christian apologetics and their capacity to respond to popular objections to the Christian faith. Both pre and post-tests were administered to the seminar participants to measure possible increases in their

knowledge of the subject matter. The second goal was to develop a ten-session curriculum to teach the representative members of the congregation of The Salvation Army a robust understanding of Christian apologetics. The curriculum was developed by selecting subject matters to be covered, identifying and selecting a text to provide reading material for the students, and the development of lesson outlines to be used in the seminar. The last goal of the project was to increase participant knowledge of apologetics by training the representative members to defend the Christian Faith against the most common objections raised in today's culture. The baseline to measure this last goal was established by administering the pre-course survey which gauged each person's level of comfort and familiarity with particular subject matters within the field of Christian apologetics. The same survey was administered at the conclusion of the seminar to ascertain any potential increase in these levels.

### **Goal 1**

The first goal was to assess a representative group of ten to fifteen members of the congregation of The Salvation Army of Lancaster with respect to their current understanding of Christian apologetics and the capacity to respond to popular objections to the Christian faith. The process of addressing this goal included administering a pre-seminar survey (CAWS) to determine each student's initial level of knowledge and familiarity with themes related to Christian apologetics and responses to common objections raised against the Faith. The same survey was administered at the conclusion of the seminar, after which, a *t*-test (dependent samples) was conducted to verify whether a positive, statistically significant change in the pre- and post-test scores could be demonstrated.

Responses from the participants were given ordinal values. Statements 4-22 were straight scored on a Likert scale from "1" (strongly disagree) to "6" (strongly agree). The pre-seminar survey was administered (via Google Forms) in January 2021 and completed by twenty participants. The first goal was accomplished in terms of completing

the pre-seminar assessment of twenty participants in the area of Christian apologetics. However, in the end, since only seven participants were able to correctly complete both the pre- and post- seminar surveys, the number of participants fell to three below the goal of ten.

## **Goal 2**

The second goal was to develop a ten-session curriculum to teach the members of The Salvation Army a robust understanding of Christian apologetics. This goal was measured by an expert panel consisting of one faculty member from The Salvation Army College for Officer Training (PhD Psychology) and two Christian apologists (one holding an MA degree and one colleague pastor with a certificate in Christian apologetics). They utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum. This goal was successfully met when I submitted the draft of nine lesson plans<sup>1</sup> to the panel and they reviewed each and responded with a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation<sup>2</sup> criterion, meeting or exceeding the sufficient level.

## **Goal 3**

The final goal of this project was to increase participant knowledge of apologetics by training the congregants to defend the Christian Faith against the most common objections raised in today's culture. The post-seminar survey was administered in April 2021 and was successfully completed by seven participants. The data was then imported into an Excel spreadsheet. Three of the post-seminar surveys were excluded due to issues with the PINs. This resulted in seven participants who successfully completed both the pre-seminar survey and the post-seminar survey in addition to attending all ten

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<sup>1</sup> I ended up splitting lesson 9 plan into two lessons.

<sup>2</sup> See appendix 3.

sessions. The tool for measuring whether this goal was successfully met was a *t*-test for dependent samples comparing the pre-seminar survey scores of the seven participants prior to their participation in the seminar and their post-seminar scores of the same survey. This goal was met when the *t*-test demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre- and post-training survey scores:  $t_{(6)} = -7.16455, p < .0001$ .<sup>3</sup>

### **Strengths of the Project**

One of the strengths of the project was the cross-section of members who participated in the seminar. The members included five retired pastors, several middle aged-couples, and a number of residents from our New Beginning's transitional living community for men living in recovery from alcohol and drug addiction. The mix of individuals brought persons with ministry experience as well as persons who came to faith in Jesus out of very difficult circumstances. Additionally, we had a balanced number of males and females as well as minority representation in the class.

A second strength of the project was the textbook. Mark Mittelberg's *The Questions Christians Hope No One Will Ask* is an excellent introductory level text for Christian apologetics. It is accessible for the average church member and does not speak over the heads of those who have not had any exposure to the discipline. At the same time, it winsomely addresses some of the most popular objections to Christianity in the western world. Mittelberg also provides recommended, reputable resources with each chapter, which helps the student, who wants to learn more, know where to go for further study.

A third strength of the project was the lesson plans and PowerPoints I developed for the course. These both required a lot of time and hard work, but the hard work in preparation led to focused, supported discussions and class interaction. For future editions of the seminar (which I intend to repeat annually) I will have most of the teaching material

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<sup>3</sup> See appendix 4.

in hand, with some periodic updating and expansion as objections in the world change. Having this series of talks/lessons on file will also equip me to take the seminars outside the church, perhaps as a guest speaker for retreats or weekend seminars with apologetic themes. I can inform those who might invite me in the future of the various topics I can address and pick the ones which meet the needs of the given circumstance.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

The seminar was conducted from February 9, 2021, through April 6, 2021, during the COVID 19 pandemic. At the time the seminar was to begin, our church was not meeting in person, only online. We did not resume in person worship until midway through the seminar and that was with limited seating and other mitigation and protocols in place. This meant that the seminar had to be presented virtually via Microsoft Teams. While I am grateful that I was able to move forward with teaching the seminar, having to conduct it remotely limited some of the teaching methods I could utilize. I was unable, for example, to ask people to form small groups to discuss a topic among themselves. Roleplaying became problematic as well. Some members struggled with the technology, such as logging on and muting and unmuting microphones. I struggled sometimes with sharing content such as the PowerPoint slides or video clips from Youtube.

A second weakness of the project was the administration of the pre- and post-seminar surveys. Because we did not meet together in a classroom, I was unable to administer hard copies of the surveys. I relied solely on a survey designed on Forms by Google Docs. This posed problems for many. Looking back, it would have been beneficial to demonstrate how to complete the survey during an online session. A couple participants forgot their PINs, which meant that they could not complete the post-seminar survey. I would encourage future students to write their PINs down.

A third weakness of the seminar was the amount of material I attempted to cover in each session, particularly the last two sessions: biblical sexuality and the problem of evil and suffering. The seminar would probably be better served by expanding to twelve

sessions (if no topics are dropped). The post-seminar survey allowed a section for participants to make comments regarding the class and several mentioned that the class material was too dense for the allotted time, and the sessions too long.

A fourth weakness was the fact that I did not schedule or arrange to have dialogue with the members of the expert panel who reviewed and critiqued the lesson plans for each session of the seminar. None of the panelists live near where I live and minister, so the easiest and fastest way of getting the evaluation rubrics back in hand was via email. The panelists I picked were very well qualified in terms of their academic backgrounds or personal experience in the field of Christian apologetics. After living three years in the community where I presently minister, I have not made acquaintance with anyone locally who equals these qualifications. But the value of sitting together around a table (physically) with the panel, getting the responses in live time and with the interaction of all the members, would be an improvement for the seminar and would help me improve as a teacher of Christian apologetics.

### **Modifications to the Seminar**

I have described four of the weaknesses of the project. To improve future editions of the seminar, I would address each of these. First, when at all possible, I would prefer to teach the seminar sessions in person as opposed to remotely by video. The restrictions under COVID 19 were just that, restrictive. I would like to see future renditions of the seminar include some kind of field trip or practical training experience where students get out and get immersed into a situation (or situations) where they are exposed to opposing worldviews and are given the time and space to interact with persons holding those worldviews. Having said that, the option of offering the seminar to other groups or congregations *anywhere* where there is an internet connection opens up other kinds of possible avenues for training believers in Christian apologetics.

Second, I would expand the session 2 and session 8 into two sessions each, thereby increasing the length of the seminar from ten sessions into twelve. This would

help reduce the density of material covered per session.

Third, I would design a way of receiving constructive criticism on the sessions and material in live time and in person. The process cannot quite be duplicated in terms of forming an expert panel to review newly designed lesson plans (as the lesson plans now exist) but I would design a short survey for each lesson to give to participants and (when possible) form a response panel from a representative group of participants to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the classes as we go through the curriculum together.

Finally, I would address the challenges of the online pre- and post-seminar survey by demonstrating to the students how to complete it. Perhaps I would budget time within the seminar itself for the surveys—and then I could be available to assist if a problem arises. This should result in a higher rate of successful completion.

### **Theological Reflections**

In chapter 2 of this project, I attempted to lay out a biblical foundation for teaching Christian apologetics. I examined the various methods of defending and promoting the Christian faith, which the apostle Paul employed in his second missionary journey as documented in the Acts 17. These included contending for the faith using Scripture, historical evidence (the resurrection of Jesus), and philosophy/the arts.

Other texts from the Scriptures explicitly exhort the church to defend the faith. Some are more implicit. I made reference to some of these (from both categories) in the opening chapter of this project. The command from the apostle Peter to “set apart Christ as Lord” and to “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Pet 3:15) is not for an elite group of Christians. It is for *all* Christians.

The experience of researching Christian apologetics using both Scripture and history served to solidify this understanding that Christians have been involved in defending the faith since the church was born. While not everyone will or can dedicate their academic careers to the field, every believer must be equipped at the lay level to

defend and promote the faith in a culture and environment that is increasingly antithetical to Christianity.<sup>4</sup>

Most Christians will never be called to stand in a public forum to contend for the faith (Jude 3), but all can expect (or should expect!) to be engaged in one-on-one conversations at the dinner table, coffee shop, break room, in the car, or on social media, where they will have the opportunity to respond to popular objections to the faith. Are we ready? Is the church ready? Can the church do this with gentleness and respect? I would contend that if the church had been ready then it most likely would not be in the crisis it finds itself in, in this cultural moment.

The church does not have the luxury of leaving Christian apologetics to a few famous debaters or eloquent academics. The battle is meant to be waged at the ground level with every member participating. Each person is providentially placed within a circle of influence that is unique to them. The study of Christian apologetics, then, is a dimension of disciple making. It is certainly not the only dimension of disciple making, but it is a crucial dimension of disciple making.

### **Personal Reflections and Conclusion**

I type this section at the end of the process of both my doctoral studies as well as the process of developing and implementing a training seminar on Christian apologetics. What an experience! I am overwhelmed with thanksgiving to the Lord as I reflect on how this journey has affected me personally. The academic component has been enriching. Although my Master of Arts degree is in Christian apologetics, I have grown in my personal capacity to do apologetics as a result of my reading, assignments, class lectures, discussions, and interactions with faculty and fellow students. The planning, preparing, and execution of the seminar was a monumental learning experience. I have taught on many occasions, but it has almost always been using material someone else has created.

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<sup>4</sup> I am speaking here of the environment in Western society and culture.

This was the first curriculum that I designed from start to finish. I offer some observations about myself through this process.

First, I am passionate about Christian apologetics! I enjoyed the process and laying out the scheme of how to present a topic. I listened to hours upon hours of lectures and read dozens of articles on the subject matter. I returned to many of my class notes from my graduate studies at Biola University. I bought books for just about every topic presented in class. I want to be a winsome witness who can at least cause the skeptic to stop and consider whether the Christian story is a plausible one.

Second, I appreciated the feedback from the expert panel, more than I thought I would. The discipline of allowing peers into the creative process is important. I am reminded of the creative community which was known as “The Inklings.” This group of writers, including C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien, met during the 1930s and 1940s in Oxford, England. The dynamic they created, which often included brutally honest critique and commentary, served to spur the individual writers on toward greater works of literature. The synergy of peer review and counsel is undervalued, and I am taking away from this project a higher view of this exercise.

A third observation is how greatly I have benefited from the approach to the Doctor of Educational Ministry project; specifically, the emphasis on research and writing. While I do not anticipate any further formal education at this level, I am excited to take the skills I developed to other areas of study in the future. I hope to turn my attention to the writings of the early Church Fathers and church historians and then perhaps begin an investigation into the history of Christian apologetics in my denomination, The Salvation Army.

Finally, I want to give praise and honor to the Lord for his sustaining grace and for making the way possible for me to embark on this journey. At the end it is clear that this has been much more than an academic pursuit (although certainly not less than that!). The project served to be a tool in His toolbox to work for my spiritual formation and the

development of my character. The nights have been long. There have been hundreds of hours of reading and note taking. In the process I have had to go deeper in my faith, and deeper in my dependence on the Lord for a fresh giving of his strength. Many times, when I felt weakest, I simultaneously sensed the Lord giving new understanding and insight to his eternal truth. This served to motivate me more to share with his people that which he has given me. I am challenged by the charge Jesus gave to his disciples when he commissioned the twelve: “Freely you have received, freely give” (Matt 10:8b). This I intend to do, until Jesus comes or calls me to be with him.

## APPENDIX 1

### CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS AND WORLDVIEW SURVEY

The following instrument is the Christian Apologetics & Worldview Survey (CAWS). Some general questions are followed by a twenty-statement survey with a six-point Likert scale. The instrument's purpose was to assess each participant's pre-project and post-project levels of theological understanding and confidence in understanding and utilizing basic principles of Christian Apologetics.

## CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS AND WORLDVIEW SURVEY

### Agreement to Participate

The survey which you are about to complete is designed to measure your knowledge with respect to Christian apologetics and its relationship to evangelism. The research is being conducted by Dean Satterlee for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project at The Salvation Army, Lancaster, PA. The survey will be administered prior to the start of the project and again at the completion of the ministry project. Participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are providing informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

1. In order to maintain anonymity please provide a 4 digit PIN \_\_ - \_\_ - \_\_ - \_\_.
2. How many of the ten sessions on Christian apologetics did you attend? (*only to be answered in the post-project survey*) \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Have you had previous training in Christian apologetics? Yes      No  
If yes, please describe:

### Part 1

Directions: Respond to the statements by giving your opinion, using the following scale. Circle your response.

SD	strongly disagree
D	disagree
DS	disagree somewhat
AS	agree somewhat
A	agree
SA	strongly agree

- |   |                           |
|---|---------------------------|
| 4. I am confident giving a definition for the term Christian Apologetics.                           | SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA |
| 5. When called upon, I feel prepared to give a defense for the Christian faith.                     | SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA |
| 6. I can provide reasons to contend for the historical reliability of the Bible.                    | SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA |
| 7. I can engage with someone who believes that Darwinian Evolution has eliminated the need for God. | SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA |
| 8. I can articulate scientific arguments for the existence of God.                                  | SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA |

9.	I would feel comfortable responding to someone who says “I believe all religions lead to the same God.”	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
10.	I can respond to someone who says the contradictions in the Bible make it unreliable.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
11.	I am able to demonstrate that the discipline of Christian Apologetics is biblical.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
12.	I feel prepared to answer how an all-loving, all-knowing, all-powerful God could allow suffering and evil in the world.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
13.	I feel comfortable articulating philosophical arguments for the existence of God.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14.	When someone says it is insensitive to teach that Jesus is the only way to salvation, I am able to provide a response.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
15.	In my view, all Christians have an obligation to evangelize.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
16.	I am proficient in responding when someone states objective truth does not exist.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
17.	I am able to lay out the case for the resurrection of Jesus based on commonly accepted facts.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
18.	I am comfortable providing a credible answer when asked “why did God command genocide in the Old Testament?”	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
19.	It is easy for me to identify common self-contradicting statements.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
20.	I am able to make the case for biblical sexuality with compassion.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
21.	It is easy for me to identify texts from three gospels that show Jesus made the claim to be divine.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
22.	I feel prepared to share the gospel with someone who holds a different faith perspective.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

## APPENDIX 2

### TEACHING CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

The curriculum evaluation rubric assessed the biblical faithfulness, scope, teaching methodology and practicality of the Christian apologetic curriculum presented to the participants at The Salvation Army, Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

Name of Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Christian Apologetics Curriculum Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary</b>					
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Biblical Faithfulness</b>					
The lesson was sound in its interpretation and application of Scripture.					
The lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible.					
<b>Scope</b>					
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.					
The curriculum sufficiently exposes the participants to the range of apologetic issues.					
<b>Teaching Methodology</b>					
The lesson was clear, containing a big idea.					
The lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.					
<b>Practicality</b>					
The curriculum clearly details how to identify apologetic issues when evangelizing.					
At the end of the course, participants will be able to better utilize these methods when engaging with non-believers					

## APPENDIX 3

### CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS LESSON PLANS

#### Session 1

#### 1) What is Christian Apologetics and Why Should we Study it?

- a) Week 1 will introduce the branch of Theology known as Christian apologetics. Students will be presented with the reasons why Christian apologetics is important in their discipleship and spiritual formation.
- b) *Learning Outcomes: Students will be able to give a definition for the term Christian apologetics and have a grasp of its function in the Church. Students will be able to provide biblical examples/support for the use of Christian apologetics as a supplementary tool for evangelism as well as discipling new believers and seekers.*

#### 2) Outline

Prayer (1 minute)

Introduction & Expectations (5 minutes)

- We are all learning. No one of us has all the answers. God intends for us to depend on each other and all together on him.
- Scripture is the ultimate authority over every subject matter.
- Confidentiality – safe space to speak of difficult issues – a place to share burdens – those we are trying to persuade to consider the Gospel.
- Will try to budget time in each teaching block for questions – and time at the end of each session.

#### I. Christian Apologetics – What is it? (5 minutes)

##### A. A technical definition:

Christian Apologetics has been defined as “that branch of Christian Theology which seeks to provide a rational justification for the truth claims of the Christian faith.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 15.

- B. A practical definition – “Christian apologetics is what you do when someone raises an objection to the Gospel/Christian worldview.”<sup>2</sup>

**Exercise** – ask students for possible objections to the Gospel – perhaps some they have heard themselves – or one that was a barrier for them personally – before coming to faith.

II. The Biblical Case for Apologetics (15 minutes)

A. Keystone text:

I Peter 3:15 (NIV) which says:

*“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an **answer** to everyone who asks you for the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...”*

The Greek word for **answer** in this text is the word *apologia* which is a term meaning *legal defense*. So a simpler way of understanding Christian Apologetics is giving a defense of the Christian Faith. Or thinking about it another way it is making a case for Christianity.

B. Exegeting the text

1. **Lordship of Christ** is preeminent in the life of the evangelist/apologist
2. **Preparation** is imperative – that’s why we’re here – ongoing – never ending – we don’t wait until we arrive to begin the work of apologetics
3. **Give an answer** – respond to....with a reason
4. Do this with *gentleness* and *respect* – When engaging in Christian apologetics – we remember we are trying to win persons first – not arguments. We make arguments – we do not win arguments.

C. Other Examples from Scripture/**Exercise** (5 minutes) – ask participants for examples

Possible examples

**Acts 17:2** – Reasoning from the Scriptures in Thessalonica

**Acts 16:17** – Reasoning in the synagogue in Athens –

**Acts 19:9** – Paul led discussions in the hall of Tyrannus.

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<sup>2</sup> Ted Cabal, “Applied Apologetics”( class lecture presented at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, January 15, 2019).

1. Apologetics is both *offensive* and *defensive*

*Offensive* - not in the sense of offending (the Gospel is offensive enough) – in the sense of taking the initiative. Having a positive impact on culture. *Making the case.* **II Corinthians 10:5**

*Defensive* - deals with opposition or objections raised against the Gospel– **Philippians 1:7**

III. Apologetics in Church Tradition (2 Minutes)

Justin Martyr  
Athanasius  
Tertullian  
Origen  
Augustine  
Anselm

IV. Why Study Apologetics? (10 Minutes)

A. To Strengthen the Believer-Strengthen the Church

1. All of us have doubts from time to time. We have questions too! – illustration from Ephesians 4:14-15
2. To equip ourselves for evangelistic conversations

“Many Christians do not share their faith with unbelievers simply out of fear. They’re afraid that the non-Christian will ask them a question or raise an objection that they can’t answer. And so they choose to remain silent and thus hide their light under a bushel, in disobedience to Christ’s command. Apologetics training is a tremendous boost to evangelism, for nothing inspires confidence and boldness more than knowing that one has good reasons for what one believes and good answers to the typical questions and objections that the unbeliever may raise. Sound training in apologetics is one of the keys to fearless evangelism.”<sup>3</sup>

B. To Respond to Sincere Skeptics and Seekers

**Play video of Alan Shlemon from STR here – *The Importance of Studying Apologetics Regularly.***

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<sup>3</sup> William Lane Craig, “Christian Apologetics: Who Needs It? Reasonable Faith,” accessed February 1, 2021, <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/apologetics/christian-apologetics-who-needs-it/>.

<https://www.str.org/w/the-importance-of-studying-apologetics-regularly>

Illustration: Raj – the car salesman in New Haven CT. I was unprepared to speak intelligently about the differences between Christianity and Islam

Time for Q&A (30 Minutes)

Assignment: Memorize I Peter 3:15

End with Prayer.

## Session 2

### Thinking about Thinking

- a) Week 2 will consider brief introductions to worldview thinking, theories of truth, objective truth claims, Relativism/Post-Modernism, and common logical fallacies. Additional consideration will be given to conversational tools for having meaningful dialogue with those holding different Worldviews.
- b) *Learning Outcomes: By the end of this session, participants of the seminar will be able to define the correspondence theory of truth. They will be able to provide examples of common self-contradicting statements, they will be able to identify and provide examples for the three basic laws of logic and identify some common logical fallacies. Additionally, they will know three questions which will serve to help in Apologetic conversations.*

### Lesson Preparation:

Write lesson outline  
Submit lesson to expert panel  
Make Power Point for lesson  
Send out invitations  
Set up classroom/computer

### Lesson Outline:

Prayer (1 minute)

Key Biblical Texts:

John 18:36&37

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."<sup>37</sup> "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

I Corinthians 13:6

"Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth."

Introduction:

Quote:

"The American pollster George Barna has reported that only 9 percent of "born again Christians" possess a biblical worldview. He defines such a worldview in the following way: 'A biblical worldview was defined as believing that absolute moral truths exist; that such truth is defined by the Bible; and firm belief in six specific religious views. Those views were that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life; God is the all-powerful and all-knowing Creator of the universe and He still rules

it today; salvation is a gift from God and cannot be earned; Satan is real; a Christian has a responsibility to share their faith in Christ with other people; and the Bible is accurate in all of its teachings.”<sup>4</sup>

I. Worldview – What is it? (10 minutes)

Norman Geisler & Frank Turek:

The five most consequential questions in life:

- A. Origin: Where did we come from?
- B. Identity: Who am I?
- C. Meaning: Why are we here?
- D. Morality: How should we live?
- E. Destiny: Where are we going?<sup>5</sup>

Watch Impact 360 Worldview video/quiz (4 minutes)

<https://www.impact360institute.org/videos/whatsyourworldview/>

II. Theories of Truth (10 minutes)

“We are now getting to the point at which different beliefs about the universe lead to different behavior . . . religion involves a series of statements about facts, which must be either true or false. If they are true, one set of conclusions will follow about the right sailing of the human fleet; If they are false, quite a different set.”<sup>6</sup>

A. Pragmatic

The pragmatic theory of truth basically holds that a belief is considered true if it produces wanted and favorable results.<sup>7</sup>

Problems:

1. Who gets to determine what is “favorable”?
2. My truth might “work” for me but it might harm somebody else.

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<sup>4</sup> Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), 120.

<sup>5</sup> Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 20.

<sup>6</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 72.

<sup>7</sup> Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 133.

## B. Coherence

The coherence theory of truth says that a particular belief, statement, or proposition is true only if it coheres easily with the total belief system a person holds.<sup>8</sup> The main challenge with this theory is that a person could have an entire belief system that is false. For example, I met a man in a day shelter for the homeless who was convinced he was Ronald Regan, the former President. Within his system—it held together (for him) but it did not match up with reality.

## C. Correspondence

Until recently, the universal theory of truth was the *correspondence theory*. Sometimes referred to as *realism*, this says that truth is a statement or proposition which reflects things as they really are.<sup>9</sup> For example, the statement “Harrisburg is the capital of Pennsylvania” corresponds with reality, therefore it is true. It says something that is real.

Aristotle: “To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true; so that he who says of anything that it is, or that it is not, will say either what is true or what is false.”<sup>10</sup>

This theory rests on the concept of objective Truth. There are things – ideas – propositions which are true for everyone:

e.g.  $2+2=4$  is true here. It was true in 1492. It is true on the moon.

## III. Relativism – (5 minutes)

A. Definition – “when it comes to morals (that which is ethically right or wrong) people do their own thing. Ethical truths depend on the individuals and groups who hold them.”<sup>11</sup>

Or

There is no objective truth and there are no objective moral values.

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<sup>8</sup> James Porter Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017), 142.

<sup>9</sup> Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations*, 130.

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle, “Metaphysics by Aristotle—Book IV,” trans. W. D. Ross, *Classical Wisdom Weekly*, accessed November 15, 2020, [https://classicalwisdom.com/greek\\_books/metaphysics-by-aristotle-book-iv/7/](https://classicalwisdom.com/greek_books/metaphysics-by-aristotle-book-iv/7/).

<sup>11</sup> Francis J. Beckwith and Greg Koukl, *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 28.

But Ethics are not personal preferences:

Illustrations:

Mint Chocolate Chip is the best ice cream – is a personal – it's not objective it's subjective

Murder is wrong – is an ethical/moral claim – it's objective

The house feels cold - subjective

The house thermostat reads 68 - objective

(5 minute break here)

IV. Post-Modernism – (5 minutes)

No universal truth exists – There are no meta-narratives (overarching stories of truth which apply universally. Fragments of truth.

Illus: The parable of the blind men and the elephant.

V. Laws of Logic (10 minutes)

A. The Law of Noncontradiction

Nothing can be what it is not.  $A \neq \text{non } A$   
A chair is not a starfish

Self-defeating statements:

I cannot speak a word of English  
There is no truth  
All truth is relative  
He's only mostly dead

Ask for suggestions from the class

B. The Law of Identity

Something is what it is.  $A=A$

C. The Law of the Excluded Middle.

Something is either true or false. No statement and its denial can both be true. This does not mean that there are not gray areas.

Jesus is God.

I am a Pittsburgh Steeler fan.

VI. Common Informal Logical Fallacies (20 minutes)

A. Ad-Hominem – attacking the person or their character rather than responding to their argument.

Illus: “Elton John is a terrible musician....look how tacky his costumes are!”

B. Circular Reasoning – “The claim uses its claim to prove its claim”<sup>12</sup>

e.g. Christian : “I believe the Bible is true”

Skeptic: “How do you know it’s true?”

Christian: “Because it says it is true.”

C. Confirmation Bias – making an argument based on a personal bias

e.g. “I read several news stories about radical Muslim terrorists – it’s obvious all Muslims are terrorists.”

D. Non Sequitur (it does not follow) – making a conclusion which cannot be proven by previously established premises or conclusions.

e.g. The last time the Pittsburgh Pirates won the World Series, Disco was popular. When Disco makes a comeback, the Pittsburgh Pirates will win the World Series.

E. Straw Man Argument: Presenting a weak or false version of your opponent’s argument and then knocking it down.

e.g. Teacher: “We should prohibit students using their cell phones while in class”

Student: “So you want to eliminate technology from the classroom? What are we going to go back to the Flintstones?”

As Christians we should seek to present Steelman versions of the arguments of those we disagree with. That is we should work hard to present a person’s actual view or argument before presenting our argument against that position.

F. Red Herring – avoiding the other persons argument by changing the subject.

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<sup>12</sup> Got Questions, “What Are Some Examples of Circular Reasoning in Issues That Christians Debate?,” accessed February 3, 2021, <https://www.gotquestions.org/circular-reasoning.html>.

e.g. Skeptic: “Why do Christians worship Jesus?... he never claimed to be God”

Christian: “Actually there are multiple accounts in the Gospels which make it clear that he did and his hearers understood that he did.”

Skeptic: “Why should we trust the Bible? It’s been copied so many times we can’t even really know what the original text actually said.”

For more examples check out:

<https://thevisualcommunicationguy.com/rhetoric-overview/the-logical-fallacies/>

## VII. Conversational Tools<sup>13</sup> (ten minutes)

From: *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*  
By Gregory Koukl

- A. What Do You Mean by that? (gathering information)
- B. How Did You Come to that Conclusion? (reversing the burden of proof)
- C. Have You Ever Considered?.....

Role playing:

1. The amount of evil and suffering in the world proves there is no God.
2. The Bible supports polygamy, suppression of women and slavery.
3. It’s insensitive for Christians to claim that Jesus is the only way to God.

Q&A – 15 minutes

Closing Prayer.

Assign Chapter 3

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<sup>13</sup> Gregory Koukl, *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

### Session 3

#### 3) Why Should I Believe the Bible?

- a) In lesson three, the students will be presented with four of the most common objections raised against the historical reliability of the New Testament. These are: 1.) The Gospels were written late (long after the eyewitnesses were dead), 2.) The Gospels are anonymous. 3.) The oral tradition went through many variations and retellings. And 4.) When looking across the entire collection of ancient NT manuscripts, there are over 400,000 variants/textual errors.
- b) ***Learning Outcome: The students will be able to formulate credible responses to the objections outlined above. They will understand the discipline of textual criticism and its role in dating the Gospels. They will be able to state that no ancient manuscript copies of the Gospels exist which are anonymous. They will be able to give a summary of Kenneth E. Bailey's models for oral tradition and will know why the Informal Controlled model best identifies the traditions passed down in the Gospel accounts of Jesus. They will understand the term textual variant and will be able to explain that the amount of textual variants in the NT manuscripts actually supports their authenticity and accuracy.***

#### Lesson Preparation:

1. Link for Team meeting for class sent via email to all students
2. Prepare Power Point/electronic handout for class
3. Assign Chapter Three of *The Questions Christians Hope No One Will Ask*.
4. Send out invitations

#### Lesson Outline:

Prayer (1 minute)

- I. Mythconception #1 – We can't trust the New Testament because the Gospels were written late.

Counter Evidence:

- A. The Gospels do not describe the fall of Jerusalem (70 A.D.)
- B. Acts was written after Luke (it is the sequel to Luke) and does not describe the martyrdom of Paul (64 A.D.)<sup>14</sup> or Peter (65 A.D.)<sup>15</sup> - which means Acts was probably written in late 50's or early 60's and Luke written in early 50's. Mark written earlier than Luke – Luke and Matthew draw heavily from Mark.
- C. Earlier dating for Luke is corroborated by Paul's apparent quoting from Luke (22:19) in I Corinthians 11:23-25 – Majority of scholars date I Corinthians to 55 A.D.
- D. Church Fathers (2<sup>nd</sup> century) corroborate Gospels – which means they would have been well circulated by that time.

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<sup>14</sup> Sean McDowell, "Was Paul Beheaded in Rome?," December 14, 2015, <https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/was-paul-beheaded-in-rome>.

<sup>15</sup> Sean McDowell, "Was Peter Crucified Upside Down?," October 22, 2015, <https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/was-peter-crucified-upside-down>.

- E. P52 – John Ryland papyrus – dated 2<sup>nd</sup> century – Alexandria, Egypt.<sup>16</sup> (show class the replica of P52)
- II. Mythconception #2 – We can't trust the New Testament because the Gospels are anonymous

Here's an example from Bart Ehrman, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina:

*What came as a shock to me over time was just how little actual evidence there is for the traditional ascriptions of authorship that I had always taken for granted, and how much real evidence there was that many of these ascriptions are wrong. It turned out the liberals actually had something to say and had evidence to back it up; they weren't simply involved in destructive wishful thinking. There were some books, such as the Gospels, that had been written anonymously, only later to be ascribed to certain authors who probably did not write them (apostles and friends of the apostles). Other books were written by authors who flat out claimed to be someone they weren't.*<sup>17</sup>

Dr. Brant Pitre (PhD) makes the following counter argument<sup>18</sup>

- A. No anonymous manuscripts exist – anywhere – wherever any ancient manuscript of a NT gospel is discovered – they have the titles we have in our bibles – even manuscript fragments.
- B. If – for the sake of argument – one grants that the originals were anonymous – how could one account for all the second – third -fourth generation copies around the ancient world – every-one bearing the titles?

As Martin Hengel states:

*If the Gospels had first circulated anonymously and had been given their titles only at a secondary stage and independently of one another in the different communities, because a title was needed for announcing reading in worship, this must necessarily have resulted in a diversity of titles, as can be illustrated by many examples from antiquity...There is no trace of such anonymity.*<sup>19</sup>

- C. If – as those who argue in favor of anonymous gospels claim – the names were added centuries later – to add importance and authority to the writings – why Mark and Luke? They were not apostles nor did they hold any places of importance in the gospel accounts.

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<sup>16</sup> Timothy Paul Jones, *Conspiracies and the Cross* (Lake Mary, FL: FrontLine, 2008), 17-19.

<sup>17</sup> NPR, "Jesus and the Hidden Contradictions Of The Gospels," March 12, 2010, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=124572693>.

<sup>18</sup> Brant Pitre, *The Case for Jesus: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ* (New York: Image, 2016), 15-23.

<sup>19</sup> Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 2000), 55.

III. Mythconception #3 - We can't trust the New Testament because the gospel accounts went through so many oral tellings and re-tellings – it's impossible to separate fact from embellished fiction.

Again – Bart Ehrman:

*The evidence that distorted memories were beginning to emerge soon after Jesus's life – or even during his life- can be found in the written accounts that begin to appear forty years or so later, that is in our canonical Gospels. Often these accounts cannot be reconciled with one another. But anytime you have two or more irreconcilable accounts, they cannot all be historically accurate. Someone, then, is changing or inventing the stories.<sup>20</sup>*

Also known as the telephone game critique.

Counterarguments:

- A. Masoretic text (9<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) and Dead Sea Scrolls (150 B.C.) copies of Isaiah less than 5% difference in text over 1,000 year of transmission.<sup>21</sup> Jewish community took preservation of the text very seriously.
- B. The greater number of copies – the better comparison we can make to determine the original. We have approximately 5,500 NT manuscripts as compared to approximately 1,800 of Homer's *Illiad*.<sup>22</sup> The comparison of the 5,500 (and growing) number of manuscripts shows the message has held fast!

Check out CSNTM:

<http://www.csntm.org/>

- C. The rules of the telephone game lend themselves to skewing the message. Repeated once, at a whisper. The events recorded in the gospel were life changing events – miracles – healings. Events not easily forgotten. Also Jesus was an itinerant teacher who likely repeated parables and teachings.

Illus – my experience at 9/11 stationed in NY Temple – if I got together with some of TSA veterans who served there in those days – we could reconstruct a pretty accurate account of TSA's response - Lt. Cols. Ray & Sandy Jackson, Major Mark Mackneer, Major Elijah Kahn,,etc....20 years later.

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<sup>20</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus Before the Gospels* (New York: Harper Collins, 2017), 58.

<sup>21</sup> J. Warner, "Establishing the Reliability of the Old Testament: A Timely Test of Transmission," June 21, 2019. <https://coldcasechristianity.com/writings/establishing-the-reliability-of-the-old-testament-a-timely-test-of-transmission>.

<sup>22</sup> Clay Jones and Josh McDowell, "The Bibliographical Test," August 13, 2014, <https://www.josh.org/wp-content/uploads/Bibliographical-Test-Update-08.13.14.pdf>.

**Exercise:** Ask students to share life changing events which they remember – from many years ago.

**5 Minute Intermission here**

- IV. Mythconception #4 – We can't trust the NT because of the immense number of textual variants.

There are over 400,000 textual variants in the NT manuscripts. Only 130,000 words in the NT

*We don't have the originals! We have only error-ridden copies, and the vast majority of these are centuries removed from the originals and different from them, evidently, in thousands of ways. There are more variations among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament.*<sup>23</sup>

- A. The reason we have so many variants is because we have so many manuscripts. The more copies you have the higher the number of copy errors.
- B. The reason we can know the original is because we can compare the copies to each other.

Illus: grocery list comparison. I may misspell zucchini – but I know what it means and I can compare it to other lists where I've spelled it correctly to know the right spelling.

Zuchinni  
Zucchini  
Zuchini  
Zuckinni

- C. None – NONE of the variants affects any central doctrine of the Christian faith.

D.A. Carson states:

*"What is at stake is a purity of text of such a substantial nature that nothing we believe to be doctrinally true, and nothing we are commanded to do, is in any way jeopardized by the variants."*<sup>24</sup>

- V. Mythconception #5 – We can't trust the New Testament because of all the contradictions in the gospels.

Ask students for examples of contradictions in the gospels.

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<sup>23</sup> Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus—The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007), 7, 90.

<sup>24</sup> D. A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 56.

Examples from Mittelberg chapter 3:

What was written on the cross over Jesus' head (Matt 27:37; Luke 23:38; John 19:19)

How many angels were at the empty tomb? (Matt 28:2; Mark 16:5; Luke 24:4)

How many blind men outside the gates of Jericho? (Matt 20:30; Mark 10:46)

Watch video of Dr. Mark Strauss here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mA-j6hKunyU>

A. Paraphrasing and Interpretation<sup>25</sup>

1. Authentic voice vs. authentic words

Luke 6:20  
Matthew 5:3

B. Abbreviation and Omission

Mark 11:12-14, 20-25  
Matthew 21:18-22

C. Re-ordering of events and sayings

Order of temptations of Jesus in the wilderness  
Matthew 4:1-11  
Luke 4:1-13

D. Reporting of similar events and sayings

How many times did Jesus clear the temple?

Matthew 21:12-13  
Mark 11:15-17  
Luke 19:45-46  
John 2:13-17

Q&A – (15 minutes)

Prayer

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<sup>25</sup> Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 388-92.

## Session 4

### 4) Evidence and Arguments for the Existence of God

- a) Week 4 will consider to three types of reasoning, inductive, deductive, abductive—with particular emphasis given to abductive reasoning. The students will be presented with three philosophical arguments for the existence of God. The Kalaam Cosmological Argument, The Argument from the Fine Tuning of the Universe (Anthropic Principle), and The Moral Law Argument.
- b) ***Learning Outcome: By the end of this class, students will be able to state and define the three types of reasoning – giving particular detail to abductive reasoning. Students will memorize and recite the three philosophical arguments for the existence of God covered in this lesson.***

### Lesson Preparation:

Prepare lesson outline

Prepare Power Point

Send out invitation to participants with reminder to read Mittelberg Chapter 1

### Lesson Outline:

Prayer (1 minute)

Key Texts:

Romans 1:19-20

Psalm 19:1-4

Psalm 97:6

#### I. Three types of Reasoning

##### A. Deductive

A=B

B=C

Therefore A=C

Illus:

All spiders have eight legs.

Black widows are spiders

Therefore – Black widows have eight legs

##### B. Inductive

Drawing conclusions from specific observations

Illus – taking quarters out of my pocket. If I continue to take coins out of my pants pocket and each time I take a quarter out. Eventually you will conclude that my pocket contains only quarters.

### C. Abductive (forensic)

Asking the question: “What’s the best explanation for the data that we have collected and observed?”

Illus – my parents arrive home (when I was a boy) and discover the window on the garage door is smashed. With a baseball lying outside and the glass lying outside on the driveway. If I claim that my friend was playing baseball outside with me and he threw the ball and broke it, that explanation doesn’t fit with the data. Otherwise, the ball and glass would be *inside* the garage.

Ask students for fields/professions which use abductive reasoning. (e.g. homicide detectives, paleontologists, cosmologists) Ask them for other everyday events which cause us to use this.

## II. The (Kalam) Cosmological Argument<sup>26</sup>

Whatever begins to exist has a cause.  
The Universe began to exist.  
Therefore the Universe has a cause.

### A. Whatever begins to exist has a cause...

The importance of the words *begins to exist* - being cannot come from non being.

Scientists call this *The Law of Causality* – : “whatever begins to exist must have a cause”

*“I never asserted so absurd a proposition as that something could arise without a cause.”<sup>27</sup>*

### B. The Universe Began to Exist

Scientific evidence for the beginning<sup>28</sup>:

1. Einsteins theory of relativity
2. Edwin Hubble’s observation of the galactic red shift
3. Penzias’ & Wilson discovery of Cosmic Background Radiation
4. Second Law of Thermodynamics

*“Astronomers now find they have painted themselves into a corner because they have proven, by their own methods, that the world began abruptly in an act of creation to which you can trace the seeds of every star, every*

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<sup>26</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 111.

<sup>27</sup> David Hume, quoted in J. Y. T. Grieg, ed., *The Letters of David Hume* (New York: Garland, 1983), 1:187.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978).

*planet, every living thing in this cosmos and on the earth. And they have found that all this happened as a product of forces they cannot hope to discover. That there are what I or anyone would call supernatural forces at work is now, I think, a scientifically proven fact.*"<sup>29</sup>

C. Conclusion – the Universe has a cause

Play *Kalaam Cosmological Argument* video from Reasonable Faith here

<https://youtu.be/6CulBuMCLg0>

INTERMISSION HERE

III. The Fine-Tuning Argument (The Anthropic Principle)<sup>30</sup>

Every design has a designer  
The Universe has a highly complex design  
Therefore the Universe had a Designer.

A. Every design has a designer

Watches have watchmakers  
The Model T had Henry Ford

This seems like common sense to us

B. The Universe has a highly complex design

Fundamental constants are “set” at precisely the right settings to promote and sustain life.

These include:

1. Oxygen level – 21% - any higher – spontaneous combustion, any lower – life would suffocate
2. Atmospheric Transparency – too much transparency = too much solar radiation. Not enough = not enough solar radiation
3. Moon-Earth gravitational interaction – effects on tides and rotation
4. Carbon Dioxide level – greenhouse effect or detriment to photosynthesis
5. Gravity – If the gravitational force was changed by the smallest percent, the sun would not exist and by default, the earth would not exist.

Astrophysicist Hugh Ross – lists 35 such parameters for fine tuning in his book – *The Creator and the Cosmos*

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<sup>29</sup> "A Scientist Caught Between Two Faiths: Interview with Robert Jastrow," *Christianity Today*, August 6, 1982, 14.

<sup>30</sup> Geisler and Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith*, 95.

C. Therefore, the Universe has a designer

“Astronomy leads us to a unique event, a universe which was created out of nothing and delicately balanced to provide exactly the conditions required to support life. In the absence of an absurdly improbable accident, the observations of modern science seem to suggest an underlying, one might say, supernatural plan.”<sup>31</sup>

Arno Penzias – Nobel Laureate – co-discoverer of the CBR

Play Reasonable Faith – Fine Tuning video here:

<https://www.reasonablefaith.org/videos/other-videos/the-fine-tuning-of-the-universe/>

IV. The Moral Argument

If God does not exist – then objective moral values do not exist.  
Objective Moral values do exist  
Therefore, God exists

“Though we have been taught that all moral values are relative to individuals and cultures, we can’t live like that. In actual practice we inevitably treat some principles as absolute standards by which we judge the behavior of those who don’t share our values. What gives us the right to do that, if all moral beliefs are relative? Nothing gives us the right. Yet we can’t stop it. People who laugh at the claim that there is a transcendent moral order do not think that racial genocide is just impractical or self-defeating, but that it is wrong. The Nazis who exterminated Jews may have claimed that they didn’t feel it was immoral at all. We don’t care. We don’t care if they sincerely felt they were doing a service to humanity. They ought not to have done it.”<sup>32</sup>

Play Reasonable Faith – Moral Argument Video here:

<https://www.reasonablefaith.org/videos/short-videos/the-moral-argument/>

Q&A – (fifteen minutes)

Closing prayer

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<sup>31</sup> Walter Bradley, “The ‘Just-So’ Universe: The Fine Tuning of Constants and Conditions in the Cosmos,” in *Signs of Intelligence*, ed. William Dembski and James Kushiner (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 168-68.

<sup>32</sup> Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008), 152.

## Session 5

### 5) Are Science and Faith Contradictory?

a) Week 5 The students will be presented with the following concepts: 1.) The popular narrative that Science is superior to Faith (they are irreconcilable). 2.) Faith and Reason are compatible in the Scripture, 3.) The historical/present day harmony between leading scientists and the Christian faith. 4.) Science vs. Scientism and their limits. 5.) Intelligent Design (complexity of life) as a counterargument to Darwinian Evolution.

b) ***Learning Outcome: By the end of this week, Students will be able to recall and present major figures in Science (historical and present day) who were/also Christians. They will be able to differentiate between Science and Scientism, Mechanism and Agency, Macroevolution and Microevolution. They will be able to present the case (with examples) of irreducible complexity and specified complexity in biology as evidence for a Designer.***

**Lesson Preparation:** Prepare lesson outline  
Prepare Power Point  
Send email with invitation

### **Lesson Outline:**

Prayer (1 minute)

Key Texts:

Psalm 8  
Psalm 19:1-4  
Romans 1:18-20

#### I. Faith vs. Science? (12 minutes)

##### A. Popular opinions – Science superior to Faith

“Nevertheless, is it possible to have a constructive dialogue [between science and faith]? My response is that anything useful will come from a monologue – one in which science does all the talking and religion the listening.”<sup>1</sup> Jerry Coyne

“It is fashionable to wax apocalyptic about the threat to humanity posed by the AIDS virus, ‘mad cow’ disease and many others, but I think that a case can be made that faith is one of the world’s great evils, comparable to the smallpox virus but harder to eradicate. Faith, being belief that isn’t based on evidence, is the principal vice of any religion”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Richard Dawkins, “Science a Religion?” *Humanist in Canada* 31, no. 4 (1998): 6–9.

## B. Dissenting opinions – Science and Faith compatible

“Where is the evidence that religious faith is not based on evidence? Mainstream Christianity contends that faith and evidence are inseparable. In fact, *faith is a response to evidence, not rejoicing in the absence of evidence.*”

## II. Faith and Reason in the Scriptures: (10 minutes)

Isaiah 1:18  
Matthew 8:5-13  
Mark 2:1-12  
Luke 1:1-4  
John 20:30-31  
Acts 1:3  
I Corinthians 15:14-19  
Others??

## III. Faith as the Foundation for Science (10 minutes)

### A. Notable Scientists who were believers in God

Galileo – (1564-1642) –

His contributions to science include: the discovery of the topography of the moon, discovery of four of Jupiter’s moons, the rays of Saturn, sunspots, the phases of Venus, and the invention of a type of microscope.<sup>34</sup>

“though Holy Scripture cannot err, nevertheless some of its interpreters and expositors can sometimes err in various ways”<sup>35</sup>

Kepler – (1571-1630) –

Pascal – (1623-62) –

He made substantial contributions to the mathematics and is recognized as the creator of the mathematical theory of probability. He invented the barometer and the syringe.<sup>36</sup> He was a pioneer in the field of hydraulics – inventing the hydraulic press and developing *Pascal’s Principle* which states that when pressure is applied to a confined liquid, that pressure is transmitted equally in all directions without the loss of force.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Nancy K. Frankenberry, *The Faith of Scientists: In Their Own Words* (Oxfordshire, UK: Princeton University Press, 2008), 9.

<sup>35</sup> Maurice A. Finocchiaro, *The Galileo Affair: A Documentary History* (Berkeley: University of California, 1989), 49.

<sup>36</sup> Frankenberry, *The Faith of Scientists*, 84.

<sup>37</sup> Jean Orcibal and Lucien Jerphagnon, “Blaise Pascal,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, accessed January 8, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Blaise-Pascal>.

Pascal's *Penses* – compilation of pithy theological/apologetic insights – including Pascal's wager

Boyle – (1627-91) –  
Newton – (1642-1727) –  
Pasteur – (1822-95)-  
Kelvin – (1824-1907)-

B. Notable Scientists who are Christians

Francis Collins – Director of the Human Genome Project – *The Language of God* - current head of the NIH  
Professor Bill Phillips – Winner of the Nobel Prize for Physics 1997  
Sir Brian Heap – former Vice President – Royal Society  
John Polkinghorne – Professor of Quantum Physics – Cambridge

“Men became scientific because they expected law in nature and they expected law in nature because they believed in a lawgiver”<sup>38</sup>

INTERMISSION (5 minutes)

IV. Limits to Science (10 minutes)

A. What Science can do (answer)

Science explains  
Science enables us to understand the natural world

B. What Science cannot do (answer)

Science – investigating and theorizing about the natural orders  
Scientism – Science is the only way to truth and it can, at least in principle, explain anything<sup>39</sup>

Illus: Aunt Matilda's Cake<sup>40</sup> –

*How is the Cake made?* - **ask students** (question of Science) – ingredients, combination, baking process

*Why was the Cake made?* (question of Ontology or Teleology)

Science cannot answer questions such as:  
Why did the universe come into existence?  
What is the meaning of human existence?  
What happens after we die?

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<sup>38</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (London: Collins, 1947), 110.

<sup>39</sup> John C. Lennox, *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* (Oxford: Lion Books, 2009), 39.

<sup>40</sup> Lennox, *God's Undertaker*, 41.

Where do the laws of nature come from?  
Where does morality come from?

V. What about the God of the Gaps? (10 minutes)

- A. Mechanism
- B. Agency

e.g. – Lightning was once believed to be caused by the gods. Once we came to understand electricity and weather patterns, we eliminated the need for the gods as the explanation. But is this correct?

The Model T Ford

Caused by the law of combustion or by Henry Ford?

VI. What about Evolution? (10 minutes)

- A. Random Mutations
- B. Natural Selection
- C. Which Evolution? – Microevolution vs. Macroevolution

VII. The Complexity Problem (10 minutes)

- A. Irreducible Complexity

The bacterial flagellum – *Darwin's Black Box* - Michael Behe  
The human cell

*Show video of Bacterial Flagellum here*

- B. Specified Complexity

DNA – genetic code

Q& A – (fifteen minutes)

Closing prayer

## Session 6

### 6) Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?

- a) Week 6 - Students will be presented with David Hume's argument against miracles and counter arguments. They will be introduced to a version of the minimal facts argument for the Resurrection of Jesus. They will also be introduced to the most popular alternative (naturalistic) theories to explain the events surrounding the resurrection.
- b) ***Learning Outcome: By the end of this week, Students will be able to explain David Hume's argument against miracles and will be able to make counterarguments against Hume. The students will be able to recite a version of the minimal facts argument for the resurrection of Jesus. They will also be able to identify some of the most common alternative theories and explain how each falls short of providing the best explanation for the historical data and why.***

### Lesson Preparation:

Prepare Lesson outline  
Prepare Power Point presentation  
Send out invitation along with Resurrection Bingo activity sheet

### Lesson Outline:

Prayer (1 minute)

Key Texts:

I Corinthians 15:1-22  
Galatians 1:11-24  
Matthew 28:1-10  
Acts 1:1-3

Ask for other suggested texts here

- I. David Hume's Argument against miracles<sup>41</sup>. (18<sup>th</sup> Century Scottish philosopher)
  - A. Higher Probability that so-called 'miracles' can be explained by natural causes.
  - B. Miracle claims come from the superstitions of "ignorant and barbarous nations"- i.e. we lack credible witnesses.
  - C. The cancellation argument  
  
e.g., The miraculous giving of the golden tablets – Mormonism  
The miraculous visions/dreams of Muhammed – Islam

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<sup>41</sup> Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 533-38.

## II. Responding to Hume's Argument

A. If God exists – then miracles are possible (though not common – that's what makes them miracles!)

1. We have already discussed evidence for the existence of God:

- a. The beginning of the Universe
- b. The fine-tuning of the universe
- c. The moral law
- d. Specified complexity (information in the DNA code) and irreducible complexity (nanotechnology in the biological world)

2. Credible evidence should be weighed for miracle claims

B. The accounts of the miraculous in scripture include doubt and disbelief of the original eyewitnesses.

“If there ever were men who did not know the laws of nature at all they would have no idea of a miracle and feel no particular interest in one if it were performed before them. Nothing can seem extraordinary until you have discovered what is ordinary. Belief in miracles, far from depending on an ignorance of the laws of nature, is only possible insofar as those laws are known.”<sup>42</sup>

C. Claims for the miraculous from competing religions should be compared based on the quality - quantity of evidence.

The miracles of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus are accounted for in multiple, early, independent, eyewitness sources (4 gospels, Pauline epistles) as opposed to the claims from Mormonism & Islam for example.

## III. The Minimal Facts Argument for the Resurrection of Jesus

A. Death by Crucifixion

1. Attested in the four gospels
2. Lucian confirms the event and the location<sup>43</sup>
3. No credible counterevidence.

B. Buried in an identified tomb – Joseph of Arimathea

C. The Disciples claim of having encounters with the resurrected Jesus –

D. The Cost of Making these claims

E. Transformed Skeptics

### Intermission Here

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<sup>42</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), 65.

<sup>43</sup> Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2010), 305.

IV. Naturalistic Hypotheses

- A. Unknown Tomb
- B. Wrong Tomb
- C. Legend
- D. Twin
- E. Hallucination
- F. Spiritual Resurrection (“you ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart”)
- G. Disciples Stole the Body
- H. Authorities Hid the Body
- I. Swoon Theory
- J. Passover Plot
- K. Jesus was an Alien

V. Abductive Reasoning & The Resurrection

Which theory best explains or accounts for the minimal facts which are widely accepted (granted) by an overwhelming majority of historians and Bible scholars?

(Play Resurrection Bingo here) -Ask students which facts the theory doesn't account for

- A. Unknown Tomb/Wrong Tomb – e.g. does not account for disciples testimony – does not account for conversion of the skeptics Saul & James – does not account for willingness on the part of the disciples to suffer greatly (with no historical records of any recantations) for the proclamation of the resurrection
- B. Legend
- C. Twin
- D. Hallucination
- E. Spiritual Resurrection
- F. Disciples Stole the Body
- G. Authorities Hid the Body
- H. Swoon Theory
- I. Passover Plot
- J. Jesus was an Alien

Q&A

Closing time of prayer

## Session 7

### 7) The Exclusivity of Christianity and The Question of Hell

- a) Week 7 - Students will be introduced to the concepts of religious pluralism and the exclusivity (or particularism) of Christianity. They will be presented with the Biblical texts which support Christian particularism (exclusivity). Additionally, the question of Jesus claim to divinity will be examined. Lastly, the doctrine of hell will be investigated and defended.
- b) ***Learning Outcome: By the end of this week, Students will be able to respond to the popular argument for religious pluralism by making the case for Christian particularism (exclusivity). They will be able to respond to the claims that Jesus never claimed to be God in the gospels by demonstrating the accounts which give evidence to the contrary. Finally, students will be equipped to respond to the question – “Why would a loving God send anyone to hell?”***

#### **Lesson Preparation:**

Prepare Lesson outline  
Prepare Lesson Power Point  
Send out invitation

#### **Lesson Outline:**

Prayer (1 minute)

Key Texts:

Acts 17:16-31

John 14:1-6

Deuteronomy 6:1-19

Isaiah 45:22

Romans 10:9-17

Luke 16:19-31

Revelation 20:7-15

#### I. Religious Pluralism

Religion – “a set of beliefs that attempts to explain the nature of the sacred and how humans can become in harmony with it.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 569.

A. Superficially Distinct but Fundamentally the Same? Or  
Fundamentally Distinct and Superficially the Same?

“The religions of the earth do not greatly differ in rites and forms; They do greatly differ in what they teach ... The truth is that the difficulty of all the creeds of the earth is not as alleged in this cheap maxim: that they agree in meaning but disagree in machinery. It is exactly the opposite. They agree in machinery; almost every great religion on earth works with the same external methods, with priests, scriptures, altars, sworn brotherhoods, special feasts. They agree in the mode of teaching; What they differ about is the thing to be taught...Creeds that exist to destroy each other both have scriptures, just as armies that exist to destroy each other both have guns.”<sup>45</sup>

B. The Blind Men & the Elephant revisited

“all rivers lead to the ocean”  
“all roads lead to Rome”

C. Truth is – by definition – exclusive

Christianity holds that Jesus is God – and that he was crucified  
Islam holds that Jesus was not crucified

Christianity holds that God is the creator of the universe  
Buddhism does not believe in a creator God.

Christianity believes in the existence of evil  
Christian Science denies the existence of evil

These views cannot all be true. They might all be false – but they cannot be simultaneously true – and note that Christianity is not the only religion to take exclusive positions.

*“Among spiritual faiths, there are many different philosophies, some just opposite to each other on certain points. Buddhists do not accept a creator; Christians base their philosophy on that theory.”*<sup>46</sup>

- The Dalai Lama

In Attempting to show tolerance to all religions – by calling them equal – we can actually sound offensive to them.

Play *How Can Jesus Be The Only Way* video here (by Reasonable Faith)

<https://youtu.be/RRyq6RwzLEM>

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<sup>45</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: Image Books, 1959), 128-29.

<sup>46</sup> The Dalai Lama, *Kindness, Clarity, and Insight* (New York: Snow Lion 1984), 45.

## II. Jesus Never Claimed to Be God

*“During his lifetime, Jesus himself didn’t call himself God and didn’t consider himself God, and ... none of his disciples had any inkling at all that he was God.”<sup>47</sup> – Bart Ehrman*

A. The Gospel of John is discredited as being the one furthest removed (in time) from the historical events in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore the claims to deity (The Seven I Am’s ) Are discredited–

1. I am the bread of life 6:35, 48, 51
2. I am the light of the world 8:12; 9:5
3. I am the door of the sheep 10:7, 9
4. I am the good shepherd 10:11, 14
5. I am the resurrection and the life 11:25
6. I am the way, the truth, and the life 14:6
7. I am the true vine 15:1

For the sake of argument – if we allow for this – Are there any accounts in the other gospels which give evidence that Jesus claimed to be God? What about the epistles?

B. Building the case for Jesus’ divinity from Matthew – Mark – Luke

Matt 2:2 – The Magi worship the infant Jesus – no account of his Jewish parents rebuking them.

Matthew 3:4-11 – temptation of Jesus –“do not put the Lord your God to the test” (vs. 7)

Matthew 12:1-8 “one greater than the Temple is here” (vs. 7) & “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath” (vs. 8) (also Luke 6:5)

Matthew 14:32 – the disciples worship Jesus after he walks on the water.

Matthew 16:13-20 – Peter’s Confession of the Christ

Matthew 23:33-37 – “I am sending you prophets”

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<sup>47</sup> NPR, “If Jesus Never Called Himself God, How Did He Become One?,” April 7, 2014, <https://www.npr.org/2014/04/07/300246095/if-jesus-never-called-himself-god-how-did-he-become-one>.

Matthew 28:8&9 – The risen Jesus worshipped by the women disciples.

Mark 2:1-12 – “so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins....” (Luke 5:17-26)

Mark 10:18 – the Rich Young man “why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone” (vs. 18)

Mark 14:61-64 - the reaction of the High Priest to Jesus’ statement

Luke 7:48 – forgives the sin of the woman who anoints him.

Luke 17:15-19

### C. The High Christology of the Epistles

Philippians 2:5-11

I Corinthians 15:20-28

Colossians 1:15-20

## INTERMISSION

### III. Why Would A Loving God Send People to Hell?

#### A. What do we mean by a God of wrath?

1. God does not lose his temper or go on a rampage.
2. God’s (righteous) anger – flows out from his love

Psalm 145:17-20

e.g. when someone threatens or violates someone we love – we respond (justifiably so) in anger – and may use force to intervene or protect our loved ones.

“Think how we feel when we see someone we love ravaged by unwise actions or relationships. Do we respond with benign tolerance as we might with strangers? Far from it...Anger isn’t the opposite of love. Hate is, and the final form of hate is indifference...God’s wrath is not a cranky explosion, but his settled opposition to the cancer...which is eating out the insides of the human race he loves with his whole being.”<sup>48</sup>

– Rebecca Pippert

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<sup>48</sup> Rebecca Pippert, *Hope Has Its Reason* (Harper, 1990), chap. 4, quoted in Keller, *Reason for God*, 73.

## B. What Do we mean by hell?

1. Eternal Fire? – Matthew 18:9 – Matthew 25:41 Luke 16:24
2. Eternal Darkness – Matthew 22:13; Matthew 25:30
3. Torment vs. Torture – Christ on the cross – Mark 15:34
4. Infinite punishment for temporal crimes?
5. Spiritual quarantine

“There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done, and those to whom God says in the end, ‘thy will be done’. All that are in hell choose it. Without that self-choice, there would be no hell.”<sup>49</sup>

Hell is – in the end – evidence for the love of God and the justice of God. Sometimes we ask the question - Why doesn't God do anything about the evil and wickedness in the world. (a question we will address in our last session) The doctrine (and reality) of hell says, that in the end – he will!

Ezekiel 33:11

6. Three views on hell:
  - a. Universalism – everyone is saved eventually
  - b. Annihilationism – the wicked are destroyed – not eternally punished
  - c. Eternal punishment

“We believe in the immortality of the soul, in the resurrection of the body, in the general judgment at the end of the world, in the eternal happiness of the righteous and in the endless punishment of the wicked.” Doctrine eleven

Q&A –

Prayer

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<sup>49</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: Harper, 2001), 75.

## Session 8

### 8) *What's Sex Got To Do With It?*

- a) Week 8 - The students will be presented with three dimensions of the biblical principle of the *Imago Dei* and its implications for us as disciples of Jesus. The students will work together to express forms of the objections (with respect to sexuality and the LGBTQ issues) that modern, western culture raises against Christianity. The students will be asked to learn to “raise the level” of the question/objection when raised by a seeker/skeptic. The students become acquainted with the *grace and truth* framework for addressing questions of sexuality as outlined by Mark Mittelberg in the text. The students will work through three (3) specific objections/questions raised and will be offered approaches to respond to each (Silence of Jesus, the Question of personal happiness and fulfillment, and the Question of Old Testament prohibitions)
- b) ***Learning Outcome: By the end of this week, students will be able to identify a key biblical text which supports the principle of the Imago Dei and will be able to communicate the three dimensions in which the Imago Dei is evidenced. The students will be able to recognize and state forms of the objections raised (with respect to sexuality and LGBTQ issues) in a charitable and consistent fashion. The students will gain the ability to ‘raise the level’ of the question instead of ‘taking the bait’ (e.g. “are you for or against homosexuality?”). The students will be capable of implementing Jesus’ model of Grace and Truth as outlined in the Mittelberg text. The students will gain competency in providing responses to specific forms of objections to the biblical mandate for sexuality.***

### **Lesson Preparation:**

Prepare lesson outline  
Prepare Power Point  
Send out invitation  
Remind class to read Mittelberg Chapter Seven (7)

### **Lesson Outline:**

Prayer (1 minute)

Key Texts:

Proverbs 18:13

Genesis 2:15-25

Matthew 19:1-12

John 4:4-26

I Corinthians 6:9-20

Introduction:

Read from *Straight & Narrow: Compassion & Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* by Thomas E. Schmidt – pgs. 11-13 – not just a theological (doctrinal) issue but also a relational issue. Not just a relational issue – but also a theological (doctrinal) issue.

## I. The Imago Dei

Genesis 1:26-28

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, “Let us make<sup>[au]</sup> humankind<sup>[av]</sup> in our image, after our likeness,<sup>[aw]</sup> so they may rule<sup>[ax]</sup> over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle, and over all the earth,<sup>[ay]</sup> and over all the creatures that move<sup>[az]</sup> on the earth.”

<sup>27</sup> God created humankind<sup>[ba]</sup> in his own image, in the image of God he created them,<sup>[bb]</sup> male and female he created them.<sup>[bc]</sup>

<sup>28</sup> God blessed<sup>[bd]</sup> them and said<sup>[be]</sup> to them, “Be fruitful and multiply! Fill the earth and subdue it!<sup>[bf]</sup> Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every creature that moves on the ground.”

Three Dimensions:<sup>50</sup>

- A. **Resemblance** – we have some attributes which God has – spiritual, rational, volitional, relational, immortal, powerful
- B. **Relational** – reflecting the community which has been eternally existent in the fellowship of the Trinity.
- C. **Representative** – gives emphasis to the role which humans are designed to fulfill in taking dominion over the earth (Genesis 1:28)

Bearing the image of God comes with great privilege and great responsibility. Every human we meet is made in the image of God and we are responsible to act as such. (Luke 12:48)

## II. Common Objections

Objections made against the biblical view of marriage and sexuality can take multiple forms: (ask for class participation here)

- Is God anti-Gay?
- Why would God be against the expression of my sexuality if he made me this way?
- Jesus never said anything against LGBTQ behavior so what’s the big deal?

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<sup>50</sup> Kenneth Richard Samples, “What Does It Mean to Be Made in the Image of God?” September 5, 2017, <https://reflectionsbyken.wordpress.com/2017/09/05/what-does-it-mean-to-be-made-in-the-image-of-god/>.

- Why are Christians obsessed about the OT prohibitions against homosexuality if they ignore other OT prohibitions such as eating shellfish and making clothing out of two kinds of material?
- Others?

### III. Raising the Level of the Question

- A If God has spoken regarding human sexuality – does it matter?
- B. From LGBTQ issues to the broader issue of human sexuality. – recognizing that all of us are broken – and this brokenness affects all areas of life including our sexuality.
- C Differentiate between attraction (temptation) and behavior.

### IV. The Model of Jesus – Grace and Truth<sup>51</sup> (John 1:14-17) – (this is drawn from Mark Mittelberg – *The Questions Christians Hope No One Will Ask* pgs. 189-215)

John 4:4-30; 39-42

#### A. Affirm God’s love

“Nothing will cleanse of prejudice faster than getting into a genuine relationship with a member of whatever group we have tended to look down upon. It’s really hard to hate people who have become your friends!”<sup>52</sup> – Mark Mittelberg

speaking with her, acknowledging her, treating her with dignity, breaking the societal barriers:

1. Samaritan
2. Woman
3. Co-habiting with a man (not her husband) – 5X divorcee

Notice her response in verse nine

Jesus the “Friend of Sinners” (Luke 7:34)

#### B. Extend God’s Grace –

Genuine concern for her spiritual need. (4:10; 13-14)

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<sup>51</sup> Mark Mittleberg, *The Questions Christians Hope No One Will Ask* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2011), 189-215

<sup>52</sup> Mittleberg, *The Questions Christians Hope No One Will Ask*, 194.

“What was distinctive was his incredibly generous spirit even toward those who had lived in gross disobedience to God for years. He expended enormous effort and exhibited great compassion in the search for the lost. Jesus did not wait for the lost to come to him. He went looking for them.”<sup>53</sup>

### C. Affirm Biblical Sexuality

Genesis 2:24

Matthew 19:1-12

“I believe that we as Christians need to focus primarily on making the case *for* biblical sexuality, not *against* gay sex. That’s why I think Jesus’ interactions with the woman at the well are so relevant to this discussion. Second, those who see this issue differently often try to explain away the texts that do seem to prohibit sex between members of the same gender. Therefore, we risk getting embroiled in the particulars of interpreting those texts instead of putting the issue back into the broader context of God’s stated purpose for sex, which is within the sanctity of [heterosexual] marriage.”<sup>54</sup>

### D. Affirm the Truth:

Leviticus 18:22  
Leviticus 20:13  
Deuteronomy 23:18  
Romans 1:24-27  
I Timothy 1:8-11

Play Video of Sam Allberry here:

<https://youtu.be/mCLms7J84JY>

## INTERMISSION

### V. Specific Questions:

#### A. Silence of Jesus

1. Argument from Silence (*argumentum e silentio*) – what did Jesus say about child sacrifice, slavery, spousal abuse, etc...?
2. Jesus was a Torah Observant Jew – all he ever did was *raise the bar* on ethics and morality.

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<sup>53</sup> Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 212.

<sup>54</sup> Mittleberg, *The Questions Christians Hope No One Will Ask*, 202.

3. Knowledge of Jesus' affirmation of biblical sexuality – Matthew 19:1-10
4. Since Jesus is God – he is ultimately involved in the inspiration of all of scripture<sup>55</sup>

#### B. Happiness/Fulfillment

“Every Christian is called to costly sacrifice. Denying yourself does not mean tweaking your behavior here and there. It is saying ‘no’ to your deepest sense of who you are, for the sake of Christ. To take up a cross is to declare your life (as you have known it) forfeit. It is laying down your life for the very reason that your life, it turns out, is not yours at all. It belongs to Jesus. He made it. And through his death he has bought it.”<sup>56</sup>

#### C. Selective Observance of Old Testament Prohibitions –

Leviticus 19:19; - mating two kinds of animals, planting fields with two kinds of seeds, clothing made from two kinds of material  
Leviticus 19:27; - haircuts  
Deuteronomy 14:21 – cooking goats in mother's milk

##### 1. Functions of the Law<sup>57</sup>

- a. To Distinguish
- b. To Restrain
- c. To Diagnose

##### 2. Categories of the Law

- a. Civil
- b. Ceremonial
- c. Moral

##### 3. Clarifying Questions:

- a. Were the nations surrounding Israel held accountable for the same law?

“The Bible tells us – just to give one example – that God judged Israel for eating unclean animals, but the Bible

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<sup>55</sup> Alan Shlemon, *The Ambassador's Guide to Understanding Homosexuality* (Signal Hill, CA: Stand to Reason, 2013), 17.

<sup>56</sup> Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?* (Epsom, UK: Good Book, 2019), 11.

<sup>57</sup> Geoff Ashley, “Christian Responsibility and Mosaic Law,” The Village Church, accessed July 2, 2020, <https://www.tvcreources.net/resource-library/articles/christian-responsibility-and-mosaic-law>.

never tells us that God judged the nations of the world for eating unclean animals. Why? Because it is not intrinsically sinful to eat a pig rather than a cow (although in the ancient world, in particular, it might have been a lot more unhealthy to eat a pig), but it was intrinsically sinful to commit other sins, such as murdering another human being.”<sup>58</sup>

- b. How does the New Testament teaching on the specific law match up with the Old Testament teaching?

“In short, the coming of Christ changed how we worship, but not how we live. The moral law outlines God’s own character his integrity, love, and faithfulness. And so all the Old Testament says about loving our neighbor, caring for the poor, generosity with our possessions, social relationships, and commitment to our family is still in force. The New Testament continues to forbid killing or committing adultery, and all the sex ethic of the Old Testament is restated throughout the New Testament (Matthew 5:27-30; 1Corinthians 6: 9-20; 1 Timothy 1: 8-11). If the New Testament has reaffirmed a commandment, then it is still in force for us today.”<sup>59</sup>

Play Jackie Hill video here:

[https://youtu.be/ZLAe\\_JBvVwg](https://youtu.be/ZLAe_JBvVwg)

Questions

Prayer

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<sup>58</sup> Michael Brown, *Can You Be Gay and Christian?* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma Media, 2014), 113.

<sup>59</sup> Tim Keller, “Old Testament Law and the Charge of Inconsistency,” 2012, [https://www.redeemer.com/redeemer-report/article/old\\_testament\\_law\\_and\\_the\\_charge\\_of\\_inconsistency](https://www.redeemer.com/redeemer-report/article/old_testament_law_and_the_charge_of_inconsistency).

## Session 9

### 9) *God and the Problem of Evil & Suffering*

- a) Week 9 - The students will review/read key biblical texts which deal with evil and suffering. The students will be presented with probing questions which will aid in helping the skeptic/seeker to navigate this most difficult question. The students will be presented with the categories/definitions for evil and theodicy. The students will give consideration to the logical (philosophical) problem of evil and the probability (evidential) problem of evil and be presented with responses to each.
- b) ***Learning Outcomes: The students will be able to identify key biblical texts which address the subject of evil and suffering. The students will memorize key probing questions which will aid them in guiding the sincere skeptic/seeker to identify the process by which they came to the conclusion that God does not exist. The students will learn the definitions for evil and theodicy and will be able to identify two sub-categories of evil and give examples for both. The students will have the capacity to recognize the two arguments against the existence of God (logical problem of evil, probability problem of evil) and will be able to construct viable responses for each.***

#### **Lesson Preparation:**

Prepare lesson outline

Prepare Power Point presentation

Send out meeting invitation with a reminder to read Chapter 5 of the Mittelberg text.

#### **Lesson Outline:**

Prayer (1 minute)

Key Texts:

Job (Chapters 31:35-37; 38:1-42:6)

Genesis 45:4-8; 50:19-21

II Corinthians 4:5-18

Romans 8:28-39

I Peter 1:3-12

Introduction: Putting human faces on an existential/philosophical question

“Our son Aaron had just passed his third birthday when our daughter Ariel was born. Aaron was a bright and happy child, who before the age of two could identify a dozen different varieties of Dinosaur and could patiently explain to an adult that dinosaurs were extinct. My wife and I had been concerned about his health from the time he stopped gaining weight at the age of eight months and from the time his hair started falling out

after he turned 1 year old. Prominent doctors had seen him, had attached complicated names to his condition, and had assured us that he would grow to be very short but would be normal in all other ways. Just before our daughter's birth, we moved from New York to a suburb of Boston, where I became the rabbi of the local congregation. We discovered that the local pediatrician was doing research in problems of children's growth, and we introduced him to Erin. Two months later - the day our daughter was born - he visited my wife in the hospital and told us that our son's condition was called progeria, rapid aging. He went on to say that Aaron would never grow much beyond three feet in height, would have no hair on his head or body, would look like a little old man while he was still a child, and would die in his early teens.

How does one handle news like that? I was a young inexperienced rabbi, not as familiar with the process of grief as I would later come to be, and what I mostly felt that day was a deep, aching sense of unfairness. It didn't make sense. I had been a good person. I had tried to do what was right in the sight of God. More than that, I was living a more religiously committed life than most people I knew, people who had large, healthy families. I believed that I was following God's ways and doing his work how could this be happening to my family? If God existed, if he was minimally fair, let alone loving and forgiving, how could he do this to me?"<sup>60</sup>

or consider the Atheist – Neuroscientist/Philosopher Sam Harris:

in *Letter to a Christian Nation*: "Somewhere in the world a man has abducted a little girl. Soon he will rape, torture and kill her. If an atrocity of this kind is not occurring at precisely this moment, it will happen in a few hours, or days at most.... The same statistics also suggests that this girl's parents believe—as you believe—that an all-powerful and all-loving God is watching over them and their family. Are they right to believe this? Is it *good* that they believe this? No. The entirety of Atheism is contained in this response."<sup>61</sup>

Not just a question from Atheists – Christians can also wrestle with this question. Matthew 11:1-3

When people raise this issue – “Why Does God Allow Evil & Suffering?” as Christian apologists and disciples of Jesus, we need to get clarification before proceeding.

## I. Clarifying Questions – Defining Categories

### A. The Pastoral Question vs. Philosophical Question

Clarifying question: “When did this question/issue become real to you?” or “Of all the questions you could raise against Christianity/God why this one?” - This will usually cause the person to reflect on some crisis event. In this moment – we need to refrain from responding with an answer – and respond with a pastoral heart. Illustration – Job's friends – sat in silence for seven days!

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<sup>60</sup> Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), 3-4.

<sup>61</sup> Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 50-51.

“When someone is in shock and pain because something bad just happened, we are wise to hold off from trying to answer any questions or offering some kind of rationale for why we think God allows such things - valid as those thoughts may be. It’s better to delay those conversations by saying something like, well that’s a really good question that we can talk about sometime, but I’m pretty sure what you need most right now is not a deep philosophical discussion about pain and suffering. Let’s talk about that later, for now, how can I help you get through this?”<sup>62</sup>

Once we have moved deliberately through the pastoral phase, we can move into the intellectual phase of responding to the question.

## B. Definitions

**Evil** – Augustine taught that evil is a privation of good (*privatio boni*)<sup>63</sup> The absence of something good

“Evil then is what ought not to be, for evil is at least the unpleasant (as in a rotten peach) if not harmful or deadly (as in cancer or murder)”<sup>64</sup>

Darkness to light  
Cold to heat  
Sickness to health

**Moral Evil** – that evil which man commits against man (or himself)

Theft  
Murder  
Child abuse  
Lust

## Natural Evil

Cancer  
Hurricanes  
Mold  
CoVID 19

**Combination** – e.g. – Hurricane Katrina – natural evil (hurricane) combined with moral evil (corrupt and inept governments)

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<sup>62</sup> Mittleberg, *The Questions Christians Hope No One Will Ask*, 129.

<sup>63</sup> *The Confessions of Augustine*, book 7, chaps. 11-13, accessed September 13, 2021, <https://www.stoa.org/hippo/>.

<sup>64</sup> Clay Jones, *Why Does God Allow Evil? Honest Answers for Life 's Toughest Questions* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2017), 19-20.

## Theodicy (literally – justification for God)

### II. The Problem Stated Philosophically

“Is He willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then He is impotent. Is He able, but not willing? Then He is malevolent. Is He both able and willing? Whence then is evil?”<sup>65</sup> – David Hume

In modern terms:

If God is willing to stop evil but not able – then he is not all powerful.

If he is all powerful but not willing to stop evil – then he is not all loving.

If he is both willing and able to stop evil – why does evil still exist?

### III. Five Errors<sup>66</sup>

- A. Atheism
- B. A finite God – *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* - Kushner
- C. God is not all Loving
- D. Evil is Imaginary
- E. Reincarnation

### IV. Alvin Plantinga’s Free Will Defense – *God, Freedom and Evil*

“A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all. Now God can create free creatures, but He can’t *cause* or *determine* them to do only what is right. For if He does so, then they aren’t significantly free after all; they do not do what is right *freely*.”<sup>67</sup>

It is possible that God has a good reason for creating a world which permits evil – we may not understand or comprehend in this world.

If this can be demonstrated to be true on a small scale, then it is possible that it is true on a larger scale

e.g. When we take our children to the doctor for a vaccine – we allow the perceived evil of the pain of the shot – because of the greater good achieved. Our young children lack the capacity to

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<sup>65</sup> David Hume, quoted in Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 10.

<sup>66</sup> Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 617-21

<sup>67</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 30.

comprehend this. All they understand is that we allowed (or even facilitated!) the pain and suffering.

Illustration: Noseeums vs. St. Bernards in the pup tent<sup>68</sup>

Show video - *Suffering and Evil – the Logical Problem* by Reasonable Faith

<https://youtu.be/k64YJYBUFLM>

Q & A and Intermission here

V. The Probability Problem of Evil (or Evidential Problem of Evil)

Even if it's possible that God has sufficient moral reasons to allow evil, if he is all good and all powerful – why so much evil and suffering in the world?

“...the variety and profusion of evil in our world, although perhaps not logically inconsistent with the evidence of the theistic God, provides, nonetheless, rational support for atheism, for the belief that the theistic God does not exist.”<sup>69</sup>

While the skeptic/atheist concedes that it's possible that God could have morally sufficient reasons to allow a world with evil and suffering, the *amount* of evil and suffering make it highly improbable that God exists.

VI. The Response to the Probability Problem of Evil<sup>70</sup>

- A. We are not in a position to know why God may allow evil and suffering to exist
- B. Consideration should be given to the full scope of evidence – including the evidence for God's existence and the Truth of Christianity
- C. Four Doctrines which also increase the probability of God's existence - (ask students for biblical examples of each).
  - 1. The Chief Purpose of Life is not Happiness, but the Knowledge of God.
  - 2. Mankind is fallen – and living in rebellion against the Creator God and His purpose.

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<sup>68</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 466.

<sup>69</sup> William I. Rowe, “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1979): 335-41.

<sup>70</sup> William Lane Craig, *Hard Questions, Real Answers* (Wheaton, IL, Crossway, 2003), 94-100.

3. God's ultimate purpose is not achieved in this life but in eternal life.
4. The Knowledge of God is an incommensurable (immeasurable) good.

Play the Probability Problem of Evil Video from Reasonable Faith – here:

<https://youtu.be/cxj8ag8Ntd4>

Q &A – Closing Prayer

APPENDIX 4

T-TEST FOR DEPENDENT SAMPLES

Table A1. T-test: Paired two sample for means

	<i>PRE-TEST TOTAL</i>	<i>POST-TEST-TOTAL</i>	
Mean	75.14286	96.57143	Good
Variance	146.4762	82.95238	
Observations	7	7	
Pearson Correlation	0.756646		
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0		
df	6		
t Stat	-7.16455		
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.000187		
t Critical one-tail	1.94318		Good
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.000373		
t Critical two-tail	2.446912		

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## ABSTRACT

### PREPARING MEMBERS OF THE SALVATION ARMY OF LANCASTER, PENNSYLVANIA TO BE CHRISTIAN APOLOGISTS

Dean Laurance Satterlee, DEdMin  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Andrew T. Walker

This project attempts to train and prepare members of The Salvation Army of Lancaster, Pennsylvania to be Christian apologists. Chapter 1 outlines the history and ministry context of The Salvation Army along with the goals of the project. Chapter 2 presents the biblical and theological foundations of Christian apologetics by exegeting three passages in Acts 17 (Acts 17:1-12; Acts 17:29-31 & Acts 17:16-28). Chapter 3 involves an examination of current and classical scholarship with respect to the application of Christian apologetics in the life of the believer. Chapter 4 deals with the project itself, including the preparation of lessons, the pre-course survey, the subject matter of each lesson, and the post-course survey. Chapter 5 serves to evaluate the project with particular respect to the goals as outlined in chapter 1.

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