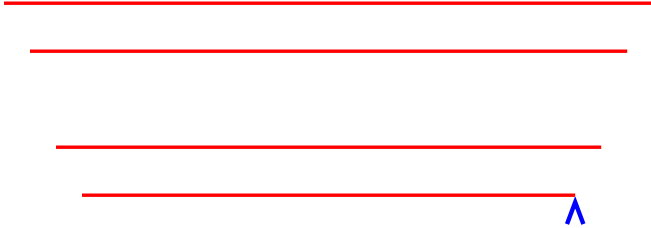


Defending the Faith

A Crash-Course in Apologetics



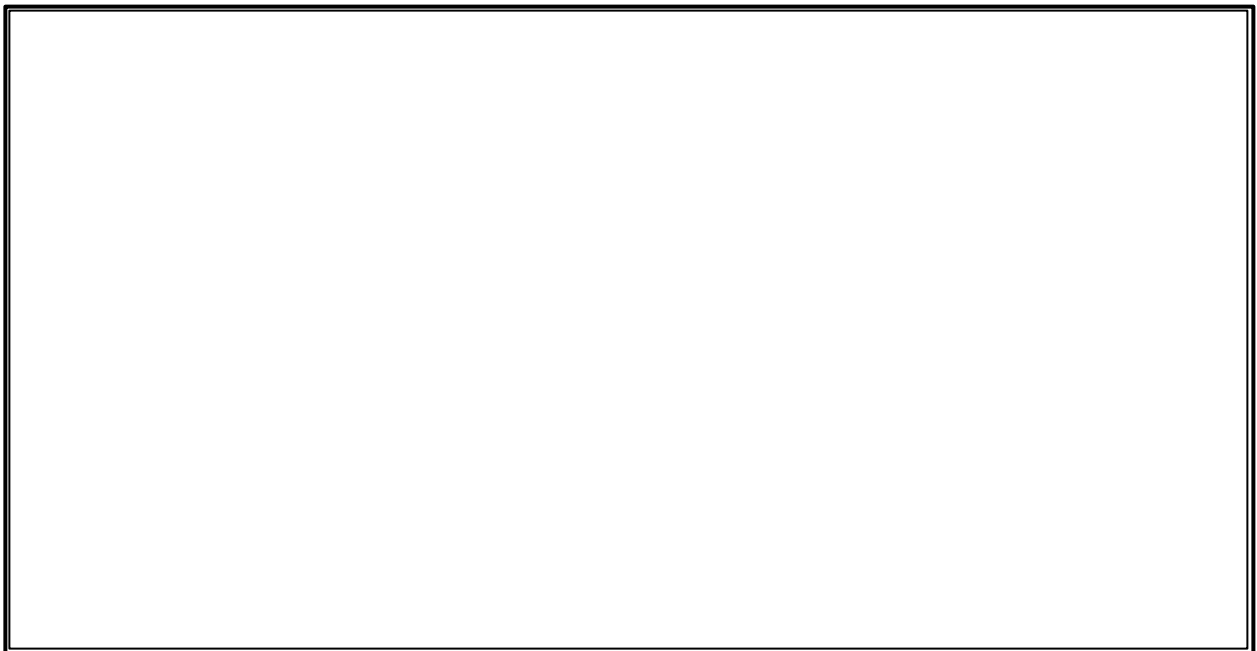
COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course is NOT...

1. A course in Christian philosophy or epistemology.
2. A course in personal evangelism.
3. Greg *doing* apologetics—that takes a lot more time than we have.

The goals of this course are to...

1. Introduce you to the science of Christian apologetics.
2. Answer the most common objections to the truthfulness of Christianity.
3. Give you as much kingdom ammunition as can be done in 16 hours of class.



WE OFFER THE TRUTH

Lesson One

For Such a Time as This:
Hitting both the heart & the head

Lesson Two

How can you think your religion is the only true one?

LESSON 1

For Such a Time as This: Hitting both the heart & the head

For Such a Time as This

Often Christians actively giving themselves to ministry get so bogged down in the details of their churches and ministries that they fail to see the big picture of what God is doing in the present age. Where has God placed us within his sovereign plan? Within the long-term progress of God's kingdom, where are we right now?

When we take a step back and look at what God is doing in the world, we come face-to-face with some startling statistics. The Christian faith started with just a handful of disciples following their risen Savior's calling, but has grown steadily through peace and persecution, alike. While the hottest sellers in any Christian bookstore seem to be the books promising doom and gloom in the immediate future, God's kingdom is in fact expanding at a remarkable rate.

Percentage of the world professing to be Bible-believing Christians:

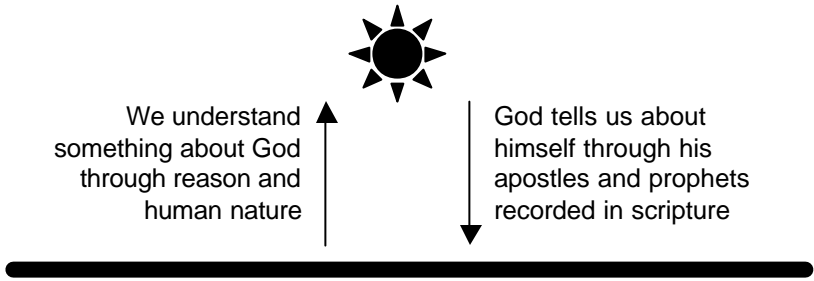
1%	1430 AD	(1 to 99)
2%	1790 AD	(1 to 49)
3%	1940 AD	(1 to 32)
4%	1960 AD	(1 to 24)
5%	1970 AD	(1 to 19)
6%	1980 AD	(1 to 16)
7%	1983 AD	(1 to 13)
8%	1986 AD	(1 to 11)
9%	1989 AD	(1 to 10)
10%	1993 AD	(1 to 9)

If these numbers are just *half* true, then we are in the midst of the largest and most expansive spiritual revival in human history. Jesus himself told us that his kingdom would start small like a mustard seed but grow into a mighty tree (Matthew 13). The prophets of the Old Testament had foreseen an age after the Messiah's coming when all the peoples of the earth would come to worship Yahweh (Isaiah 2), and that is what is happening today. Today, almost half the population of South Korea claims to have been born again. A third of the people of Chile, once a bastion of dead, syncretistic Roman Catholicism, are now bible-believing evangelical Christians.

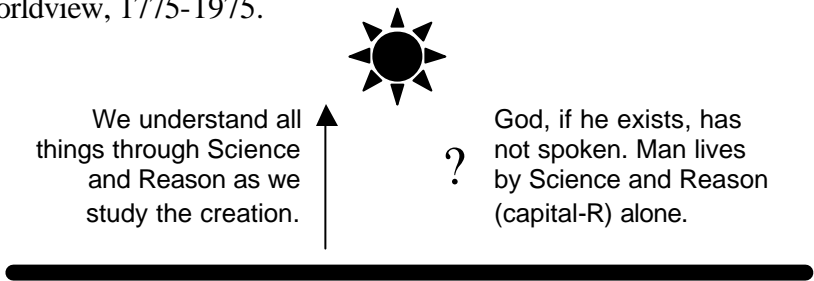
But while millions of people are coming to faith in Jesus Christ, Christians seem to be having less and less impact upon Western civilization. In America, the secular culture becomes more depraved every year. If premarital sex became okay in the sixties, abortion in the seventies, greed in the eighties, and homosexuality in the nineties, what moral barriers remain? While there are more believers than ever, their culture is becoming less biblical in its thinking.

Understand the Times We Live In

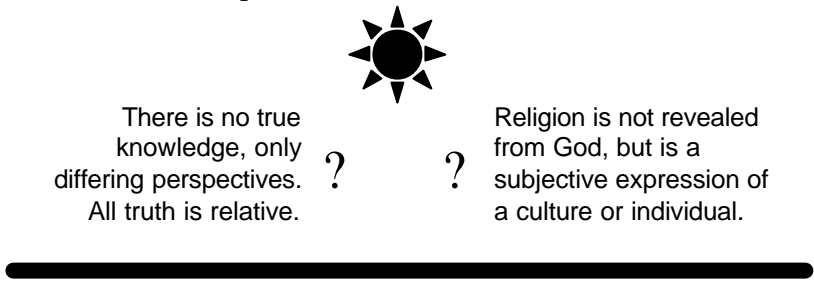
1. The Classical/Biblical Worldview, before 1775.



2. The Modern Worldview, 1775-1975.



3. The Postmodern Worldview, 1975-present.



Within a relativistic postmodern culture, the Christian religion is increasingly coming under attack for its ‘intolerance.’ Whereas the baby boomers twenty years ago saw religion as irrelevant, today a generation is being taught that Christianity is not only irrelevant, but outright dangerous. Christianity is blamed today for hatred in the world, oppression, and war. Christians are no longer to be ignored by a secular culture; they are to be attacked and silenced.

And the greatest danger is that the church is tempted to surrender and become like the world. Several denominations met this past year to consider blessing “holy unions” of gay couples, and some of the oldest denominations in the America now condone abortion and teach that salvation is possible through human religions without faith in Jesus Christ. It is more important than ever that lay leaders in the churches get serious training in theology and apologetics.

You are the generation that has seen the largest increase ever in 2,000 years of the Christian history. But you are also the generation that is watching the churches begin to mimic the world's thinking. God has called you to help insure that the gains of the past century are solid enough to be multiplied in the twenty-first century. We seek not just saved souls, but transformed lives and a transformed culture. Western civilization as it once stood is dead or dying, and a new synthesis of religion and society is being born.

A new civilization is arising, and you today have an enormous opportunity to impact it, mold it, and press the stamp of Jesus Christ deeply into it. One hundred years from now, what will the world look like? If the numbers of conversions are accurate, we have a better opportunity than ever before to be salt and light in the world. Christ's kingdom is expanding, and the future looks bright so long as the church doesn't lose its saltiness.

A definition of apologetics

1. Defending the faith (??????), not apologizing. Apologetics: The intellectual defense of the truthfulness of Christianity. This requires an examination of the evidences—historical and rational—for historic Christianity.
2. Christianity has always been under attack, and God has always raised up apologists to challenge the unbelief that is always fashionable.
3. Apologetics on the offensive. We aren't defending a Christian society, but seeking to challenge a 'post-Christian' society. 2 Corinthians 10:4-5.

Why God commands you to be an apologist

1. Converting people is 100% God's job.
2. The responsibility to get the message out is 100% ours.
3. God promises to use you to accomplish his eternal purposes.
4. God calls you not just to present the faith, but also to seek to persuade. Jude 3

Some guidelines from God on how to be an apologist

1. Respect people even when they're wrong
 - He's created in God's image just like you.
 - He's a sinner just like you, and deserves God's wrath just like you.
 - Sin has had its way with him, just like with you.
 - He has God's offer of mercy just like you.
 - He needs the Holy Spirit to help him believe, just like you.

2. You're a helper as well as a warrior. Say you disagree, but don't argue with them. God has put you there to help them see the truth, not to do battle with them. Your battle is with the forces that have control over him.
3. Only use methods that promote the truth. You cannot deceive people into the kingdom of God. It's tempting to throw in bad arguments if they sound convincing.
4. Always speak to their heart as well as their head.
5. Watch out for smokescreens. They may not even realize that's what they're doing.
6. Challenge their fundamental idolatry. Romans 1.
7. Point everyone to Jesus Christ, not to yourself or your ministry. They may want you to be their mediator—don't do it! They must approach God on their own through Christ.

REMEMBER: No one is able to repent until they see that God has obligated himself to receive any broken sinner who comes to him with faith in Jesus.

AND DON'T FORGET: No one needs to take *your* word for it. They need to believe what *God* says.

WHAT THEY NEED TO REALIZE: Jesus demands your life. What are you doing with Jesus?

AND FINALLY, REMEMBER the warning C.S. Lewis gave about the devil's tactics with the apologist. The truthfulness of what you're defending doesn't rest upon your arguments, but on the fact that the truth is true.

Back to the Truth: My Pilgrimage

I was not born into a Christian home. My father was an atheist, and our household was not a religious one. My education was a liberal one, and my Christian life has been lived awash in a sea of academic skepticism. But as Luther said: *Spiritus Sanctus non est scepticus*. The Holy Spirit is not a skeptic. He's made me able to see what I had never before dreamed could be true. And the more I study Christian theology, the more amazed I become at the sheer brilliance of Christianity—the coherence of the Bible, the accuracy of its perspective, the factuality of its claims, the depth of its insight into human nature, and the sheer power of Jesus Christ over all of history and in my own life. I am convinced that only the Christianity of the Bible, passed down through the ages to us, can truly make sense of life in this universe. I am convinced that life is only found in Jesus Christ, and I am ready to stake my soul's destiny on that remarkable claim.

Lesson 2

How can you think your religion is the only true one?

When I was sixteen years old, I remember my American History teacher making us memorize Bunn's Law of History. The law was named after my American History teacher, Mr. Bunn. Mr. Bunn made it up. But a lot of people seem to have bought Bunn's Law. I still have it memorized:

*BUNN'S LAW:
ALL TRUTH IS RELATIVE TO THE PERCEPTION OF THE INDIVIDUAL.*

All truth is relative. Absolute truth does not exist. Objective truth does not exist. What does that mean? This is the cardinal argument used by Christianity's opponents today. They aren't claiming that their perspective is absolutely right; they're just offended that we think that Jesus Christ is the only Savior. They're mad that we think biblical Christianity is the only religion given by God for people today. Why can't we just accept all religions as true?

A culture that's forgotten how to think

Some have observed that we live in the most irrational age in human history. This irrationality, called postmodernism by some and relativism by others, is seen in everyday statements that defy the laws of reason—statements like these:

"For you there is a God. But for me there isn't a God. Maybe we can both be right."

"For me it's wrong to have an abortion. But for someone else, it might be right. It's all relative."

"All religions are valid, if the people are sincere."

Discussion:

What areas do you see relativism infiltrating the church? The culture? What's the difference between saying that truth is relative and saying that there are some issues that Scripture does not address?

Relativism doesn't work

1. NOT WITH OTHER KINDS OF KNOWLEDGE

While no one wants to sound judgmental, relativism simply doesn't work. Try it in math class. "For me, Miss Root, $1+1=3$." WRONG. Absolutely wrong. Addition is not a matter of opinion, but fact. $1+1=2$, whether you like it or not. $1+1=2$ even if you think it's 3.

Truth is not relative, but absolute and objective—true whether you realize it or not. When Miss Root gives you an "F" for saying $1+1=3$, she isn't being judgmental. She just wants you to understand truth. Miss Root is more concerned with teaching truth than she is in boosting her students' self-esteem. Miss Root realizes that $1+1$ actually equals 2, and that no other answer is correct. Truth deals with facts, not opinions. Remember the difference:

FACTS...

make truth claims
are true (or false)
are accurate (or inaccurate)
are objective
describe reality (or don't)
are true whether you believe them or not

"There are chairs in this room."

"There is a God."

"Abortion is morally wrong."

OPINIONS...

don't make truth claims, only state preferences
are neither true nor false
can't be judged accurate or inaccurate
are subjective
describe your emotions
are personal

"Chairs are prettier than tables."

"God's existence is neat."

"I personally don't like abortion."

Certainly our assumptions color the way we see things, but the truth is the truth no matter how we feel about it. If a tree falls in the woods and there is no one there to see it happen, did it still happen? Of course it did. Check back later—the tree will be on the forest floor. Videotape it; you can watch it at home. Truth is that which corresponds with reality. Don't ever say "For me personally..." if you're talking about truth. That is NOT humility; it's unbelief. People will pressure you to do it, but don't. Never relativize the Almighty God!

2. NOT WITH MORALITY

Relativism doesn't work with morality, either. You can be sincere and still be wrong. Think about it—is right or wrong really just a personal thing? When people say things like this, challenge them on it. Say, "You don't really believe that, do you?" Think about it...

"I personally don't think ax-murder is right, but I can't impose my morality on others. It's all relative."

"For me, the Holocaust was bad. But if the Nazis were sincere, it was right for them."

"If someone sincerely thinks it's right to destroy all species on earth except humans, pillage the environment, pave over the rainforest, and leave the planet a barren wasteland, then they should do that. Just so long as they're sincere."

3. NOT WITH RELIGION

And relativism *especially* doesn't work with religion. Religions make truth claims. These claims may be true. They may be false. But they do attempt to describe reality as it actually is. And when religions contradict each other, it may be that none of them is correct. Or it may be that one is right and the others are wrong. But they cannot *all* be true. When we say there is a God, either there actually is a God who exists (whether we like it or not), or there is *no* God at all (and never will be no matter how much we pray or believe in him). We're talking about reality here.

Think about It. Relativism leaves Us Absurd.

Either there is a God or everything is absurd. If there actually is a God who made us, then humans have a purpose (God)... a reason we exist. If there is no God, then there is no purpose to life. We have no meaning. The only significance we have is what we give ourselves. We have no *objective* worth. We're \$7.32 worth of chemicals, and nothing more. Everything is arbitrary and absurd...

...arbitrary because there is no objective reason to make one choice over another.

...absurd because every action is therefore meaningless.

The atheist French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre was right on this point. If God doesn't exist, then it really doesn't matter what you do. Who's to say your right? Who's to say your wrong? If we weren't designed to act in a certain way, then it doesn't matter how we act. Period. If it's all relative, then there's ultimately no reason to make one choice over another.

The Little Old Lady

Francis Schaeffer used to tell the story of a little old lady crossing the street. You're walking down the street and see a little old lady trying to cross a busy intersection. If truth is relative, then you have 3 equally valid options.

1. You can try not to make eye contact and hope she doesn't ask you for help.
2. You can stop and help her cross the street.

3. You can push her in front of a car.

There is absolutely no reason to choose any one of these options over the other if truth is relative. But the fact that 33% of the time people don't push Ethel in front of a car seems to indicate that they think that pushing little old ladies in front of cars is wrong. And the fact that almost everyone in every culture at every time considers murder to be bad would seem to demonstrate that human beings were created with a universal moral law that tells us that some things are right and others are wrong.

The 5-Year Old

Think about that nagging question that 5-year-olds ask. They ask it constantly, and drive their parents crazy when they ask it. "Why?" they ask.

"Timmy, don't play with matches."

"Why?"

"Because I said so."

"Why?"

"Because you could start a fire, and we don't want that."

"Why?"

"Because it could burn down our house, and we don't want that."

"Why?"

"Because we'd have to live outside, which wouldn't be good."

"Why?"

"Because we might get sick, which isn't good."

"Why?"

"Because sickness can kill you, and you don't want to kill anybody."

"Why?"

"Because it's bad to kill people."

"Why?"

"Because.... Because God said so."

Ultimately every question goes back to a grounding in God. Why is it wrong? Why right? Why prefer one course of action over another? If we keep a mind as open as that of the 5-year old, we ultimately have to start with God—or everything is absurd. Either God is and has spoken, or nothing really matters.

HOMEWORK

Think about these discussion questions over the next week. You may want to jot down your thoughts.

1. Knowing that young people today have been raised in a postmodern culture, what differences do you see in their attitudes from those raised a few decades earlier? What remains the same?
2. Of the guidelines on how to be an apologist listed in Lesson 1, which strikes you the most? Why? Which is hardest for you? Easiest? Why? Who do you know who could model for you strength in your area of weakness?
3. How can you tell the difference between manipulating someone and trying to persuade them?
4. Think of a non-Christian that you know. If they were to say that they don't see how anyone could think his religion was the only true one, how might you respond?
5. Look over the discussion questions on the first page of Lesson 2. What answers could you come up with?

GOD IS

Lesson Three

Absolute Proof for the Existence of God

Lesson Four

How do you know the Bible is God's Word?

Lesson 3

Absolute Proof for the Existence of God

There's a lot of really great evidence that God does in fact exist:

1. The existence of God explains the universal longing of the heart.

Billions of people have believed in a god, people of differing cultures and times, differing places and customs. Mankind is irreversibly *homo religiosus*, a religious creature. Even philosophies that had no god eventually had to invent one—this was clearly the case within Buddhism. The Buddha did not teach the existence of a deity, but the Buddha's followers over the centuries converted Gautama Buddha himself into a god, and he is still revered as such by millions of Buddhists today.

And this shift is also a shift to a *personal* deity. An abstract “force” does not satisfy the needs of the human heart—we need to know that *someone* is out there, not just *something*. This same shift was evident within Hinduism. The monistic impulse of Upanishadic Hinduism, with its highly philosophical *Brahman*, an abstract higher power, was overshadowed over time by devotion to individual, personal gods. We humans arrive on this earth incomplete, sensing a deep need within our souls for the divine. This is the “God-shaped void” in each heart.

Atheism—the denial of God's existence—simply doesn't satisfy the longings of the human heart. Man cannot live without God. When people are denied a god, they invent one to satisfy their hearts.

2. Humanity needs an ultimate point of reference by which we can determine our own meaning.

This is a point the braver atheists like Sartre have conceded. Their suggestion, of course, is that humanity *has* no meaning, no purpose, no ultimate significance. We cannot find our significance in ourselves—we long to exist for something greater. As was discussed in the previous lecture, if there is no God who exists and has spoken, we are left absurd creatures whose every action is arbitrary. It should come as no surprise that the fervor of UFO people seems so very religious in its zeal! They *want* someone to be out there, so that we can have a point of reference from which to consider our own existence! Those searching for extraterrestrial life often argue that humanity's reason for existence—its purpose and destiny—will only be discovered when we make “first contact” with another life form. I would suggest that that other life form is the One that created us, that made contact for our salvation 2,000 years ago. We find our destiny only in him, for whom and by whom we were created.

3. The existence of God best explains humanity's sense of right & wrong.

Everyone has an idea of the perfect, a concept of the good, true and beautiful. This deep moral sense, what C.S. Lewis called the Tao or the Law of Common Decency, had to come from *somewhere*. Compare the great moral systems of the world through the ages. They are remarkably similar. Faithfulness in marriage, honesty in speech, goodwill toward other people, not shedding human blood, honoring one's parents—all are moral principles found in every society. Confucius died long before Jesus, but summarized his Law of Reciprocity (*shu*) by stating, “What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.”

This universal sense of right and wrong, what philosophers historically called *natural law*, cannot be explained very easily without appealing to humanity's creation by a moral God. And these moral principles are not merely the products of human cultures. Were this so, we would see a lot more variation from one society to the next. But we find them, not only in every culture, but also ingrained in the human conscience. As Paul explained, God's moral law is “written on their hearts” (Romans 2:15). *This had to come from somewhere.*

4. The existence of God alone can fulfill our longing for justice.

This follows from our universal sense of right and wrong. It's interesting to note that the skeptic Immanuel Kant best developed this argument. Having attacked the traditional logical proofs for the existence of God (some would suggest unconvincingly), Kant proposed an argument of his own. All human beings experience injustice in this life. Our longing for things to be put right—our hunger for vindication—is not fulfilled in this life. The wicked prosper while the righteous suffer. For our notion of justice to have any meaning, there must be a judgment after this life, a judgment that necessitates a supreme Judge, God.

5. Other pieces of evidence

Many people have claimed a personal experience of God. While these experiences are not all the same, they do suggest that something is going on in the spiritual realm. Further, when religion is weighed in the balance of history, few can deny that belief in God has had a powerful and largely positive role in history. While religious warfare and religious persecution (including the Roman Catholic Crusades and Inquisition) tarnish religion's track record, the most effective ethical systems in history have all been tied to the existence of God.

6. The God of the Bible isn't one we'd invent

The accusation is often made that religion is a crutch for the weak. People invent gods to protect them from the harshness of reality. If the people are hunters, they invent a warrior god to help them in the hunt and to ward off competing tribes. If the people are farmers, they invent rain gods and fertility gods to insure a good harvest. God's simply reflect the needs of the culture that creates them. This accusation is lodged against all religions.

And this is a great observation. The Bible makes it too. In Romans 1, for example, Paul tells us that people invent God's, or idols, for their own benefit. But they do this after they have already suppressed the knowledge of the one, true God. Why would they want to do that? Because the real God, Yahweh, the God of the Israel, won't be manipulated for personal benefit like an idol.

The God of the Bible, a holy Judge who damns sinners, a consuming fire, an infinitely powerful being who commands all people to repent and humble themselves before him, is hardly the type of god that people would willingly invent. If we were going to invent a god, he'd be much friendlier, much more manageable, and far more willing to play by our rules and follow our agenda.

WHEN EVIDENCE ISN'T ENOUGH, WE HAVE PROOF

The top of this page doesn't promise "really good evidence for the existence of God." It promises proof, so proof shall soon be offered.

Evidence is submitted to help ascertain *proof*. It deals with likelihood.

Proof is stronger than evidence. *Proof* deals with certainty. *Proof* has been reached when the evidence is so probable as to leave one morally bound to come to a particular conclusion. *Proof* is evidence beyond a reasonable doubt.

But before we get there, it might be helpful to look at what might be called three irrational approaches to the question of God's existence:

1. The Relativist: For me personally, God exists, but for other people, he may not.

Hold on. Either there is a God who actually exists (whether we believe in him or not), or there is no God and never will be (no matter how much I want him to exist). When Christians say there is a God, we mean that this God actually exists? we're talking about reality. Either God exists for everybody and some don't realize it, or God doesn't exist for anybody, and some are deluded into thinking God does exist.

2. The Atheist: There is no God. Period.

But to *know* that God doesn't exist, you'd have to be God:

1. You'd have to be everywhere at the same time (*omnipresent*) in order to know that there is no God anywhere.
2. You'd have to know absolutely everything (*omniscience*) to be sure there is no God.
3. You'd have to be all-powerful (*omnipotent*), since someone might otherwise have the power to hide God from you.

An omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent being is the definition of God. To know God doesn't exist, you must be God. Your being God proves God exists.

3. The Agnostic: *We simply cannot know whether God exists.*

How convenient. All the perks of atheism with none of the need for proof. But the same problem arises. In order to *know* that it's impossible to know God exists, you'd have to be omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent. Agnosticism assumes that God doesn't exist, since if God did exist, he would (by definition) have the power to make himself known.

None of these 3 approaches even attempts to prove itself. In fact, there are very few things we can actually prove. Think about *proof*. There are all kinds of things we believe without proof. We take things on faith all the time. Historians tell us that George Washington crossed the Delaware River. But can you prove that? Were you there? Do you have videotape of the event?

Or, for that matter, how do you know that 1967 ever *actually* existed? Can you prove it? How do you know that the world didn't start in 1972? Can you prove that the pre-1972 world isn't just a really big sham? Imagine implanted memories, doctored textbooks, and more. Or just rent *The Matrix*. Proof is hard to come by. We take most of what we believe on faith, but God has made sure that his existence (at least) is obvious to people willing to think things through.

There's lots of *evidence* for the existence of God, but there is also *proof*. In fact, anything can function as proof for God's existence. *EVEN _____ CAN PROVIDE ABSOLUTE PROOF FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD.*

4 possible explanations for stuff (the universe), demonstrated by a shoe

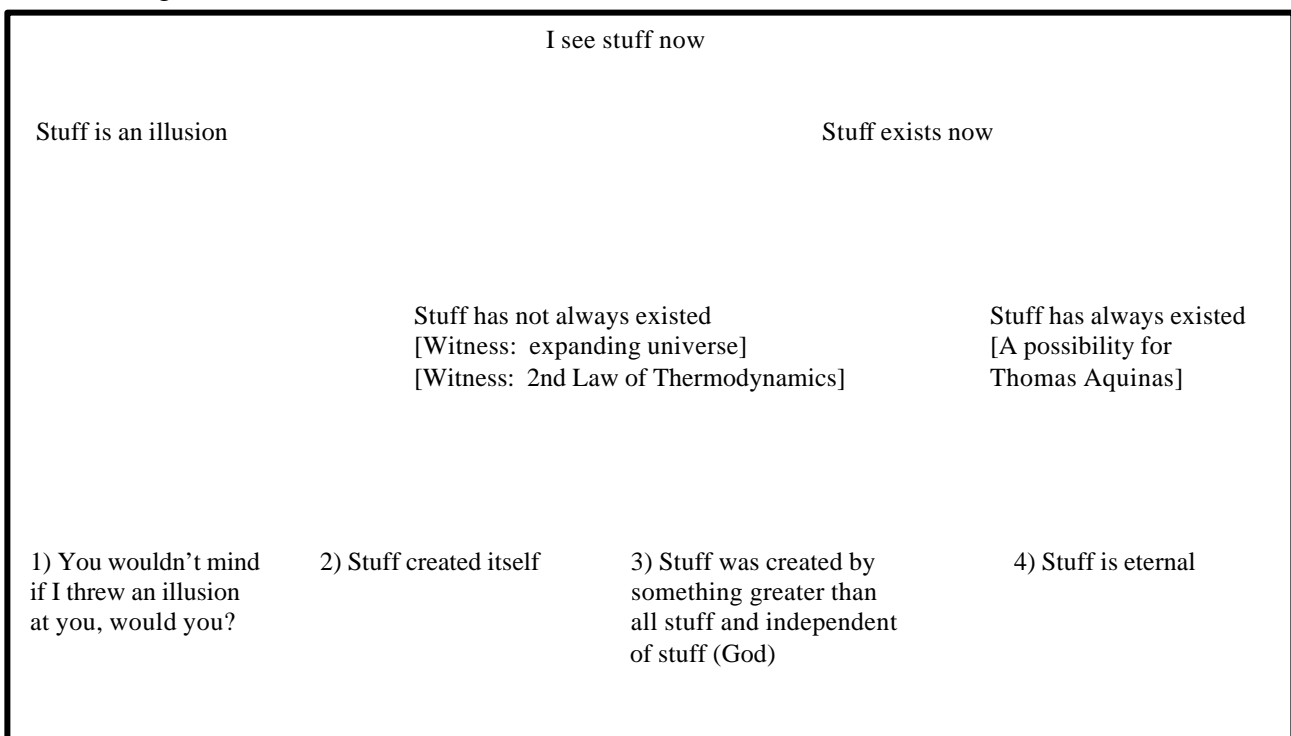
There are only four options, given the fact that you see a shoe (or anything else in the large category of “stuff”). Considering the options leaves one no alternative but to conclude that God, in fact, must exist.

Option 1: The universe as an illusion

But what if other people from different cultures all see the shoe? You see the shoe. Smell it. Listen to it and feel it. Taste it, if you dare. Run a battery of tests on the shoe? it can be demonstrated to exist. Or if you want to suggest that the shoe is an illusion, we’ll see if you flinch when I throw it at you. Or try something bigger than a shoe, like a ready-mix cement truck. If you see such a truck barreling down the road at you, do you sit back and say, “I see an illusion of a truck?” If you get out of the way on a consistent basis, then (like it or not) you trust your own sense data. You base your life on the assumption that the material world does actually exist.

Option 2: The self-created universe, "The universe created by chance"

This is the most impossible of all the options, even though it seems to be the most popular among skeptics. The universe could not have created itself; that’s absurd. The problem is that the universe would have had to exist before it existed. The universe would have had to been in existence first in order to exercise the power of creation on itself. It would have to be and not be at the same time and in the same relationship. This is a flagrant violation of the law of non-contradiction.



Other people re-phrase this option by saying that “chance” created the universe. But (to borrow an argument from R.C. Sproul) *chance* is not a *thing*. Chance is *nothing*. Chance has never caused anything to happen. Flip a coin. Is it heads or is it tails? Let’s say it’s heads. What force did chance exercise upon that coin to cause it to come up heads? None at all. The force of the toss, the vector at which it was flipped, the gravity of the earth, wind currents, landing point, and whether you turned it over or not at the end? all of these factors exerted an influence. Chance is just a term we use to describe mathematical probability. Chance is not a thing and therefore cannot “create” anything. Chance doesn’t exist. It is not a thing. It is nothing.

Before the universe existed, nothing existed (apart from God, given he exists). Nothing really means *no thing*. Nothing is not just a big black void. You can imagine a black void. A black void is something. But nothing is *nothing*. There would have been nothing in existence before everything came into existence, and nothing cannot do something. Nothing especially can’t create the universe.

The classic Latin phrase is *ex nihilo nihil fit*. Nothing can do *nothing*.

Option 4: The eternal universe

The Second Law of Thermodynamics leaves little doubt that this is an impossible option. This principle, known as *entropy*, observes that the universe in which we live moves constantly from order to disorder. Everything naturally gets less organized as time goes on. The fact that we’re not now at a point of maximum disorder proves that there must have been a beginning, a point at which the move to disorder began. (If the universe has existed infinitely (always), the universe would have reached a point of infinite disorder? but we’re far from that degree of disorder.) Similarly, the fact of an expanding universe (and the consequent big bang theory, for what it’s worth) leaves the option of an eternal universe with few modern supporters.

But before modern astronomy came to our aid on this point, Christians had to argue against this notion of an eternal universe. The medieval Christian thinker Thomas Aquinas (1225- 1274AD) pointed out that, even if the universe *were* eternal (and we now know it isn’t), God must *still* exist. Thomas pointed to the fact of intelligence within the world. The basic elements of our universe cannot organize themselves intelligently. To put it more philosophically, matter does not contain within itself an organizing principle.

If you broke the whole universe down into its basic elements (the periodic table... or even more basically, the materials comprising the tiniest particles), you will see that matter does not possess intelligence in itself. Yet the universe shows signs of intelligence at every level, great and small. Chameleons change colors, protons revolve around nuclei, plants bend toward sunlight, and people design shoes. Matter has been acted upon intelligently, so a God with intelligence greater than all the intelligence in the universe must exist to account for it. There must be something with intelligence (and therefore *some one*) outside of the world of matter to account for the intelligence in matter.

Option 3: The universe as created by God

The material world (stuff, including the elements that make up the shoe) was created by a being greater than all the power in the universe and containing intelligence greater than all the intelligence in the universe. This is the only option left. God created the universe. Like it or not, the shoe provides absolute proof for the existence of God.

It comes as no surprise then that Paul can write in the first chapter of Romans (1:18-20):

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

God's power, eternity and deity are clearly seen, understood, and plain to humanity, seen in the created world, Scripture says, so that no one can claim ignorance when God's judgment falls.

Lesson 4

How do you know the Bible is God's Word?

One of the first Bible studies I attended as a new Christian challenged me to imagine a book...

- written by over 40 different authors
- written in 3 different languages
- written within very different cultures
- written on 3 different continents
- written over a 1,600-year period
- written by kings as well as peasants, philosophers & fishermen, prisoners & doctors
- written on hundreds of controversial issues

What kind of book would we have?

I thought, “a mound of inconsistency so confusing so as to produce an all-time worst-seller.” But add one element—GOD overseeing all these authors—and what do we get? *The Bible, the best-selling book of all time.*

The Bible's Claim

The Bible claims to be actual communication from God to humanity. Notice these biblical passages:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:20-21

The Bible claims to be the very Word of God (*verbum Dei*), indeed, the very words of God (*verba Dei*). But this claim often raises a number of objections.

Objection #1: The Bibles we have today are nothing like the biblical books as they were originally written.

This is a real concern people have. The question of whether or not the Bible was God's Word 2,000 years ago is irrelevant if the Bible we read today is substantially different from what was originally written. Until the invention of the printing press around 1450, all literature was hand-copied and scribes could make mistakes in copying. It's hard to know if errors are present with many ancient works simply because few early hand-written copies exist. But this is not a major concern with the biblical documents:

1. There are over 24,000 surviving partial or complete manuscripts of New Testament books today. By comparison, the next largest number is for Homer's *Iliad*, with only 643 surviving manuscripts. We have only 7 copies of Pliny's *History* and only 10 of Caesar's *Gallic Wars*? but we don't hesitate to trust them.
2. Furthermore, the New Testament has unusually early manuscripts compared with other ancient literature. Our earliest copy of Pliny's *History* dates to 750 years after Pliny's death. A lot can happen in 750 years. And the earliest copy of *Gallic Wars* was copied 1,000 years after Caesar's death. By contrast, some early New Testament fragments date to within 30 years of their first writing, as with the John Rylands papyrus found in Egypt. There simply wasn't enough time between the original writing and our earliest manuscripts to allow for much corruption.
3. There are over 84,000 quotations from the New Testament (mainly from sermons) dating to the early centuries of the Church. In fact, even if we didn't have a single manuscript of the Bible today, we could reconstruct all but 11 verses of the entire New Testament from material within 150 to 200 years from the time of Christ.
4. Similarly, with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the 1950s, we now have copies of the entire Old Testament from before the time of Christ? complete copies of every book except Esther.

Modern translations of the Bible (New International Version, New American Standard Bible, etc.) are translated directly from these earliest biblical manuscripts.

Objection #2: The Bible is just a book of fairy-tales. Its account is not historically reliable.

While there are letters and songs and laws and doctrinal teachings in the Bible, the most common genre within the Scripture is history. Observers point out that the Bible is an historical document in that it consistently gives accurate information on the geography, chronology, people, places, customs, nations and events recorded within it.

The Bible is therefore unusual compared to other human religious literature. The *Book of Mormon*, even though relatively recent, nevertheless reads like a cheap nineteenth century American gothic novel. It describes an entire pre-Columbian civilization which shows no signs of ever having existed. There simply never was a highly advanced Jewish civilization in ancient New York. There is today, but not before Columbus. Or compare the Bible with the Hindu *Vedas*, which explain that the moon is 150,000 miles higher than the sun and shines with its own light (like a big GE light bulb), adding that the earth is triangular and flat (like a giant *Dorito*), earthquakes also caused giant elephants that tromp about underneath the giant *Dorito*.

When viewed against other ancient religious literature, *no one* can accuse the Bible of being a book of fairy tales. Where corroboration is possible, archaeological evidence has placed the Bible's historicity in a very favorable light. Here are a few examples:

1. For centuries, the Bible's critics taught that the early biblical cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were mythological? until the discovery in 1974 of tablets dating to 2400 B.C. in ancient Ebla, tablets which appear to describe transactions with these supposedly mythic cities.
2. For centuries, critical scholars mocked the Old Testament for describing a great "Hittite" empire, considered mythological, an empire of which nothing else was known until the turn of the twentieth century, when the Bible was once again vindicated by archaeology.
3. Even biblical Jericho, once thought to be legendary, has been unearthed. And its walls did collapse? outward, not inward as would normally take place in battle? but exactly as recorded in the biblical history.
4. Nelson Glueck, a renowned Jewish archaeologist, said this, "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference."
5. And extra-biblical sources also confirm key elements of the biblical narrative. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus wrote about John the Baptist and mentioned Jesus by referring to "James, the half-brother of Jesus, the so-called Christ." And the Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus wrote of "Christus" who "was put to death by Pontius Pilate, Procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius." Even the Jewish *Talmud*, a collection of writings from the Jewish authorities who lobbied Rome for Jesus' execution, describes Jesus as a "sorcerer," one who performed miracles (albeit in their view through the power of Satan).

Objection #3: Even if the Bible is good history, that doesn't mean that it's right about questions that can't be historically investigated.

Sure, maybe Jericho's walls did fall outward, that doesn't mean that God is a Trinity! Again, a reasonable point. The Bible could be generally accurate history, reliably transmitted, and still be wrong in its theological perspective. At this point the Bible gives us a test for assessing the validity of those who claim to speak for God. Reliable prediction, a part of the prophet's role in speaking forth God's Word to the people, was to serve as a litmus test for whether or not a prophet was true or false. In Deuteronomy 18:21-22, the question is raised:

'How can we know a message has not been spoken by the LORD?' If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.

Predictive prophecy is unique to the Bible. In the writings of Buddha, Confucius, and Lao-tse, we don't find a single example of predictive prophecy. And in the Koran, Mohammed makes only one prophecy? a self-fulfilling prophecy that he would return one day to Mecca. Wow. Yet the Bible has many specific prophecies, some short range but many long-range. Witness the following:

1. *Genesis 12:3*, which promises that every nation on earth would be blessed through Abraham's descendants. This was written down when the Jews were just one small tribe in a cultural backwater. Today, Christian, Jews and Moslems all trace their spiritual ancestry back to Abraham.
2. *Isaiah 53*, which describes how the messianic servant of God would have to suffer and die for the sins of other people.
3. *Micah 5:2*, which predicts that the messiah would be born in Bethlehem, which in Jesus' day was small but which in Micah's day was tiny. Jesus could not have force-fulfilled this prediction.

Why I believe the Bible is Inerrant

Ultimately, I believe the Bible is God's inerrant Word—completely trustworthy and without error—because Jesus teaches me to believe this. I accept that the Bible is perfect because Jesus says it's perfect. It's undisputed that Jesus taught that the Bible was from God and that it was without error. “I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (Matthew 5:18). Jesus taught that even the accents on the letters of the words were there at God's direction. This is often called *verbal inspiration*—the *verba* or words themselves are from the Holy Spirit. Since Jesus speaks to the issue, the real question is not, “Is the Bible reliable?” The real question is, “Is Jesus reliable?” R.C. Sproul maps it out this way:

Premise A—The Bible is *basically* reliable as an *historical* record.

Premise B—On the basis of this history we have enough evidence to conclude that Jesus is the Son of God.

Premise C—Since Jesus is the Son of God, Jesus is totally trustworthy.

Premise D—Jesus teaches that the Bible is **more** than basically good history. It is the very Word of God.

Premise E—That Word, since it is God's Word, is *completely* trustworthy because God is completely trustworthy.

Conclusion—On the basis of the authority of Jesus Christ, the Christian Church believes the Bible to be completely trustworthy, that is inerrant and infallible.

The real question, then, is not what we make of the Bible, but what we make of Jesus Christ. Was the Jewish rabbi from Nazareth a liar? Or was he a lunatic? Or is he the Lord?

HOMEWORK

Think about these discussion questions over the next week. You may want to jot down your thoughts.

1. Why do you think people tend to act on very little evidence in most areas, but demand so much proof in religious matters? Is proof enough to convert someone? What examples can you find in the ministry of Jesus that would help you answer that question?
2. How do the different arguments in Lesson Three speak to the head? How do they speak to the heart? Which do you find the most convincing? Some of the arguments work best in a classroom setting. How might you use each of these if you were having a cup of coffee with a friend who is considering the case for Christ?
3. You quote a passage from the Bible to a family member, who responds, "That Bible is nothing like the Bible that was originally written. In two thousand years, the message has been corrupted. A priest once told me that the apostles originally believed in reincarnation, but that the Church removed that from the Bible around 400 AD, replacing it with the concept of resurrection." Where do you begin? What do you know that could help this person see more clearly?
4. A man is only as good as his word. What does God's fulfillment of his promises tell you about the character of our God? How might you develop this argument so that it spoke both to the heart and to the head?
5. A man in your church says he doesn't see how any thinking Christian could consider the Bible to be inerrant. How might you respond?

GOD HAS SPOKEN

Lesson Five

200 years of critical scholarship have proven the Bible isn't accurate history.

Lesson Six

But the Bible was created by the Church in 396AD!

Lesson Seven

Surely you don't take the Bible Literally?

Lesson 5

200 years of critical scholarship have proven the Bible isn't accurate history

The Christian who goes to college almost invariably has a religion instructor who casually suggests that two centuries of higher critical scholarship on the Bible have demonstrated the book to be full of contradictions and utterly untrustworthy. We hopefully demonstrated that the Bible is accurate history in the last lesson. Nevertheless, we have to deal with the question of higher criticism, the type of biblical scholarship done in most universities over the past century.

1. Higher Critical scholarship is part of the project of Modernity

To understand Higher Criticism, we need to locate it within the larger intellectual program of Modernity. Modernism, remember from the first lesson, was an attempt beginning with the Enlightenment to make human reason alone a source of truth. The possibility of God acting within history—be it through miracles, an incarnation, prophecy or an inspired Bible—was rejected outright. Man was the measure of all things, and he could attain truth without any help from outside this universe. Each area of knowledge, then, was redefined to further this modernist vision.

Education, for example, ceased to be about religious character formation and became simply information-dumping. Biology and paleontology were forced to take upon themselves, not the glorious task of investigating God's good creation, but instead the task of proving that God didn't create the creation at all. Philosophy took upon itself the task of disproving the possibility of God speaking to humanity, and—you guessed it—religious studies received the call to de-supernaturalize all religion, and especially Christianity, locating Christianity among the religions of the world as just another superstitious attempt to spiritualize a world that had no real spiritual existence. Enter Higher Criticism.

Thus these “200 years of critical scholarship” were not really about scholarship in the sense of investigating new data. Rather, the purpose of this critical scholarship was to undermine the credibility of the claims of Jesus Christ. But if the Church as an important cultural institution was to continue, then one simply could not reject Jesus outright. Instead—and notice the idolatry here—the path they chose was to redefine Jesus in such a way as to fit with the Modernist vision for the world. Jesus had to cease being a religious figure and become instead a moral instructor and ethicist. He was stripped of his miracles, his claims to divinity as the Son of God, and his promise to return. He was turned into a Jewish Confucius. And to this day “scholars” of this type assume that Jesus was just a Jewish ethicist, even though they present their findings to the media as objective scientific data. Take the infamous Jesus Seminar as an example. Each year around Easter and Christmas these academics announce to the press that their scientific research shows that Jesus didn't really rise from the dead, wasn't really the Son of God, wasn't born of a virgin, and didn't perform miracles. How do they know? They cite no evidence. None at all. Not even bad evidence.

2. Higher Critical “scholarship” assumes its own conclusions

In *The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus Really Say?* for example, the Jesus Seminar states that Jesus definitely did not say 82% of what the gospels say he said. The remaining 18% is doubtful, but may be authentic. How did they get this information? They voted. They gathered together and voted on which verses they thought Jesus would have actually said. No outside evidence was taken into consideration. How did they know? They came to their decisions by following “Seven Pillars of Scholarly Wisdom,” which they printed in their book. They did not seek to *establish* any of these pillars; they function as *assumptions* on which their conclusions are based.

Among the pillars? The Jesus who lived in history is nothing like the Christ we see in the Bible. That’s a powerful assumption going into this project, don’t you think? From that assumption they then examine the Bible and conclude “scientifically” that Jesus was not what the Bible says he was. This isn’t science! It’s just Unitarianism! Another pillar? John’s gospel is a complete fabrication. That’s the assumption going in. The Jesus Seminar then examines the Bible and concludes “scientifically” that John’s gospel is a complete fabrication. No wonder they don’t need evidence. This game is easy. Want another of their pillars? The real Jesus never said he would return and never spoke of judgment. They then “conclude” that Jesus never spoke the sayings that speak of a coming judgment and a second coming. They’re a part of that 82%.

3. Higher Critical scholarship in really just unbelief.

The Books of Moses: One finds unbelieving assumptions at work when higher critical scholars suggest that the five books of Moses are actually a cut-and-paste amalgam of four different sources. This is assumed, not demonstrated. The only instance in which a source other than Moses is evident is with the account of Moses’ death. Critics do terrible violence to the integrity of the books, taking away their narrative and leaving us only with a de-contextualized reading.

Paul’s Letters: The same circular reasoning is at play with Paul’s books, many of which are said by some to be forgeries. How do they know? Because Colossians, for example, speaks of Jesus as being God, and Paul didn’t believe Jesus was God. How do they know that? Because the Pauline books that speak of Jesus as Divine weren’t really written by Paul. This is circular reasoning. Still, I remember hearing of an examination of a higher critical textbook that found that the book’s author was actually half a dozen different authors.

The Gospels: When applied to the gospels, this kind of scholarship stresses the differences between one gospel and the next. Do the gospels differ? Of course they differ—otherwise God would have only given us one of them. But difference does not imply contradiction. Were I to ask each of you to write down what I’ve been doing for the past ten minutes, each of you would write a different account. But none of you would be lying. Your accounts would *differ*, but not *contradict*. Higher Criticism tells us almost nothing about the biblical books themselves. It only tells us about the philosophical and religious presuppositions of the critics. After a decade of theological education in seminaries and universities, I am convinced that religious scholars dropped the ball 200 years ago when they stopped believing the Bible and put themselves over it instead of under it. Theologians today need to pick the ball back up where it was left. It was actually the Swiss theologian Emil Brunner—a critical scholar himself—who summarized the

whole religious project of Modernity in one word: *unbelief*.

Lesson 6

But the Bible was created by the Church in 396AD!

Both traditionalist Roman Catholics and secular skeptics will often make use of a the same argument in order to further their respective agendas. Both Roman Catholics and unbelieving skeptics seek to undermine the authority of the Bible. The Catholic Church wants to establish the Catholic bishops as an equal or higher authority, while secular skeptics are seeking to remove biblical authority altogether. Their argument starts at a common point of agreement in their positions—the Bible was created by the Church around 400 A.D. Their arguments then take two slightly different twists.

The Catholic Version

Since the Church created the Bible centuries after Jesus, the Church is the ultimate authority in religious matters—not the Bible. While the Bible and the Church are technically equal in authority, since both speak for God, the Church existed first, and its creating the Bible implies that the Bible’s authority itself is derived from that of the Catholic bishops. If the Bible is infallible (incapable of error), it’s only because the Church that created the Bible is infallible.

The Catholic Conclusion: You need to become a Roman Catholic and accept the Catholic Church’s interpretation of the Scriptures as the only acceptable interpretation, even if what the Church tells you appears to contradict the instructions you are given in the Bible.

The Liberal-Skeptical Version

Since the Church created the Bible centuries after Jesus, the Bible has no more authority than the Church that created it. Even if God had inspired some Scripture, the Church could have picked the wrong books. There were hundreds of books that competed for a position in the New Testament. How are we to know that the right books were selected?

The Liberal-Skeptical Conclusion: We can really put whatever books we want into our Bibles. The books I don’t like I won’t include in my personal Bible.

I recently dealt with the liberal version of this argument with a person who had asked me about it on my website. In my years in the Theology Department at St. Louis University—a Jesuit, Roman Catholic theology department—I dealt with the Catholic version of the argument all the time. A friend of mine who was a monk tried it on me, as did the department’s resident Catholic traditionalist. A little historical background on the New Testament canon can help answer this question. Unfortunately, believers who are ignorant of Church History and of classical Christian theology are at a major disadvantage when critics—liberal or Catholic—raise this objection.

Carthage, North Africa, 396/397 A.D.

The decision people have in mind when they say the Church created the Bible around 400 A.D. is the Third Council of Carthage, a provincial meeting of Christian leaders about 396 A.D. This council affirmed that the books that had a rightful claim to divine inspiration were the books in the present-day New Testament. This “decision” was later reaffirmed by the Sixth Council of Carthage in 419 A.D., a decision forwarded on to other bishops throughout the known world. Several observations need to be made about this event however, observations that spin both the Catholic and liberal version of the objection on their heads.

1. The early Church never thought it was creating the Bible.

The bishops at Carthage understood themselves to be *submitting* to the Bible, not creating the Bible. They were fighting against a host of heretical books that were then being produced by Gnostic sects. Their goal was that the Church would submit itself to the real Bible, the one inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore bearing complete and total authority in all manners to which it speaks.

Indeed, the language the council uses is *not* that “the Church hereby creates the Bible, with the following books...” Rather, they say, the Church “receives” the following books.... This statement—“We receive”—is a statement of submission to God. It could be summarized as follows: God has given only these New Testament books, so we submit to these books by receiving them as the Word of the living God. By using the phrase “we receive,” the Church was emphasizing that it saw itself *under* these books, not over them.

I’ll lay it on the line. There is no reference in all the literature of the early Church that describes the Church as having “created” the Bible or having “produced” the Scriptures. Rather, they saw the biblical books as writings given by God through his holy apostles, books the Church obediently receives as an authority over the Church, an authority to which the Church must submit itself.

2. The conclusion they came to was nothing new.

The churches had come to the same conclusion previously. The earliest canon of Scripture of which we have record is the Muratorian canon from about 150 A.D. A *canon* (literally a *reed* or *measuring rod*) was a list of books that were included in the Bible. Lists became needed for a number of reasons. To begin with, of course, the different biblical books were usually written on separate scrolls—they were individual *books*, not chapters in a single book. Also, heretics came into the churches seeking to remove biblical books that contradicted their own teachings, or seeking to add books of their own.

One of the earliest of Christian heretics was Marcion, and his heresies occasioned the writing down of the Muratorian canon in Italy. Marcion taught that the God of the Old Testament was an evil God, while the God of the New Testament was a God of love. Marcion therefore rejected the Old Testament and those parts of the New that sounded too much like the Old. (He was only left with parts of Luke and a few of Paul’s letters. Funny how that works.)

The Muratorian canon lists the books read in the Italian churches as Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, all of Paul's letters, James, John's letters, Jude and Revelation. He fails to mention only Hebrews and Peter's letters—and this only fifty years after the last of the apostles had died. About 170 A.D., Irenaeus lists the same books as appear in the New Testament today, as did Clement of Alexandria around 200 A.D. To suggest that the Church failed to agree substantially on the contents of the Christian Bible until almost 400 A.D. is an argument based on deception. The church had always received the New Testament books as the authoritative Word of God.

3. They had good reasons for rejecting the books they rejected.

A number of modern scholars have promoted the idea that hundreds of books were competing for a position in the New Testament canon. In a sense, they are correct—in the same sense that the books in the *Book of Mormon* are competing for a position in the Christian Bible today. But, just like today, Christians then knew which books belonged and which were bogus Gnostic frauds—they didn't have to debate the question!

The Fathers of the Church categorically rejected Gnostic additions to the canon without need for discussion. Some briefly considered a couple books—particularly the Shepherd of Hermas—that were sound in doctrine. But the apostolic community did not produce these books, though the books were good books, and these books clearly recognized the writings of the New Testament as a higher authority than themselves.

4. They had good reasons for including the books they included.

Jesus had given authority to apostles, messengers who carried his full authority. Among the tests they relied upon to discern which books were authentically from God and which were not, the Fathers of the Church looked at a book's...

Apostolicity: The instruction given by these apostles, like that given by the prophets of the Old Testament, was overseen and inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore to be preached in the churches and included in the canon. Close companions of apostles may have been the authors of some of the books—Luke, Paul's companion, wrote Luke and Acts, just as Peter's co-worker Mark wrote a gospel, one that the early church viewed as "Peter's" gospel. The reason Hebrews was not always included on some canonical lists was precisely because no one knew for certain who had written it. Paul? Barnabas? Apollos? Still, Hebrews was clearly a product of the apostolic community and passed the other tests as well.

Universality: Had churches all over the known world accepted the book, or was it just a regional variation? It was to be expected that some of the shortest of books may not have made it to some outlying rural areas, but did churches all over read them?

Antiquity: Had the book been accepted by Christians in the Church's earliest days? If a book didn't appear until the third century, it was definitely a fraud. But the books they decided on had all been in use since the days of the apostles. The Gospel of Thomas was definitely out!

Theology: A final point involved the theology of the books. If the book contradicted any book that was known to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, then the errant book was obviously not in the canon. The amazing point, of course, is that all the books chosen passed all four tests.

5. And the church wasn't infallible; the books were.

I'll grant (over against Catholics) that the men who collected the Books into a single canon WERE fallible. No human being since the apostles has been INCAPABLE of error in matters of doctrine. The traditional Protestant stance is that the church's act of collecting the books into a single volume was "a fallible collecting of infallible books." In other words, was it *possible* that the men who collected the books were mistaken in some way? Yes. It was *possible*. The books—not the men who collected them—are infallible and inerrant. The books—not the fourth century bishops—were directly inspired by the Holy Spirit. Is it *likely* that they blew it and let some uninspired books into the canon? No. It's very, *very* unlikely. Don't let anyone make an unwarranted modality shift at this point. "Could" and "Did" are different. To say that error was possible is not the same as saying that error actually happened. A skeptic would have to first demonstrate where the early Christians went wrong in discerning which books were inspired. And, I'm confident, they can't do this.

The reason we receive the current books in our Bibles as canonical is not because Rome tells us to, nor is it because it's a "tradition". The reason we receive them as canonical is because they continue to bear witness to their Divine inspiration and apostolic authority, just as they did when earlier Christians received them in, say, the fourth century. We apply the same tests today that they applied then, and we come to the same conclusions.

6. The Bible is a Package Deal. Please take it or leave it.

The experience of Marcion should show us that we simply can't pick and choose which books of the Bible we'll keep and which ones we'll get rid of. His experience demonstrates that as soon as you chuck one piece of it out the window, you quickly have to throw out more and more until you have nothing left. I think it was actually Thomas Aquinas who remarked that if you believe the parts of the Bible you agree with and not the parts you don't agree with, you don't believe in God but in yourself.

And one of the amazing things about the New Testament is the way one biblical author vouches for another. Jesus spoke for his apostles, saying that the Holy Spirit would remind them of everything he had taught them (John 14:26). Peter vouches for Paul, speaking of his writings as "scriptures" in 2 Peter 3:15-16. Jesus also speaks for the Old Testament, referring to its 3-fold division (what Jews today call the Tanak, the "T" for Torah or Law of Moses, the "N" for Nebiim or Prophets, the "K" for Kethuvim, or Writings/Psalms). Jesus says "Everything must be fulfilled which is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms" (Luke 24:44). If you throw out one book, soon you have to throw out all of them, because they testify to each other's authority. Don't like Paul? You have to reject Peter as well, then. And to reject Peter is to reject Jesus who commissioned him, which is to reject God himself. The Bible is not a buffet where you can pick and choose. It comes to us from God as a package deal.

Lesson 7

Surely you don't take the Bible Literally?

This could be the slipperiest yet most common question believers face today. If you say, “Yes. I take the Bible literally,” they may think you're an unsophisticated Bible reader who doesn't understand that you have to read a book according to its genre, or type of literature. We read the Psalms as poetry, 2 Chronicles as history, and we realize there's a difference. (...I hope.) We don't think that when Jesus says, “I am the door,” that he has a doorknob instead of a belly button. We recognize imagery and interpret it as the figure of speech it is. So there are good reasons *not* to say, “Yes. I take the Bible literally.”

But if we say, “No. I don't take the Bible literally,” then what do they hear? They hear us saying, “Oh no. The Bible is a silly old book full of myths. We have to spiritualize it and make it mean what we want it to mean.” We risk misunderstanding whether we answer yes or no. It's kind of like when someone asks you, “So, have you always been gay?” Answer yes or no and you're in trouble. Some questions just need a longer answer. Here's my answer to the question.

1. What do you mean by *Literally*?

Do I take the Bible literally? Well, that would depend on what you mean when you say “literally.” Are you asking me whether I believe what the Bible teaches? Yes, I do. And so should you, because the Bible is the voice of God. You don't exist for yourself, but for him. Unbelief is an ugly thing. I belong to the Lord, and I follow his voice.

But if you're asking me if I read all biblical books as if they were laboratory logs, then the answer is no. The biblical books are communicative events in which human authors communicate to us God's will through the working of God's Spirit in them. Thus God used human language to let us know how he sees things. To understand the Bible, we need to understand the language the authors used, which includes lots of different types (genres) of literature—poetry, proverbs, histories, letters, laws.

This is really what we mean when we say we read the Bible literally. We take it according to its *litera*—according to its language and type of literature. In other words, we read the Bible according to its discourse meaning, the meaning the words had in the language in which they were originally written. Each of these types of literature carries its own rules. Hebrew proverbs, for example, spoke in couplets of two lines, while poetry used imagery that wasn't meant to be taken literally. Historical books, however, don't rely on this kind of imagery and are intended to be read literally. We read the gospels, for example, just like we'd read a history today.

If you're asking me if I believe the Bible, again, my answer is yes. I believe it and work to understand it, especially since I know that God inspired it in human language so that I could gain this understanding by carefully studying that human language.

2. The Bible's not like Modern Art

The key we have to realize that God was speaking to humanity when he spoke through the biblical authors. He used normal human language, so we read the Bible like any other book—just realizing that God is the ultimate author. The Bible isn't like a work of modern art, where God just gives us an abstract canvas and says, "Here. I painted it. You interpret it." The Bible is communication from God himself. I want to know what it really means. I don't want to pour my own meaning into it, and thus miss what our Creator is filling us in on.

Don't think that God speaks some different, super-spiritual language that we aren't able to understand. Sometimes people say dumb things like, "Human words just can't hold lofty Divine thoughts." God, being almighty, is more than able to communicate with us in whatever language he's chosen. And thankfully for us, he chose human language—not some spiritual mystery-language that we'd have to "de-code"! Indeed, God has stooped down to our level so we'd understand—using what John Calvin in the sixteenth century called "the lisp of God"—literally, the God's baby talk.

It was the Protestant Reformer Martin Luther who best answered the spiritualizers of his day. He explained, "God is a spirit, so his literal meaning is spiritual." I know postmodern scholars have attacked the adequacy of human language to actually communicate from one person to another. But I also know that these same scholars have made names for themselves *writing books* about the inadequacy of human language to accurately communicate. And they've persuaded people through human language, which tells me they were wrong all along.

3. Christians have always read the Bible literally

Even before Christians had individual Bibles of their own, they were very concerned to take every word of the Bible literally and to handle them with extreme care and precision. Before the printing press, published materials were very costly, and most churches only had one copy of the canonical writings, which were read and preached in worship and in classes. The culture was oral, so people relied much more heavily than we do on memorization. But they had their Bibles very well-memorized. Christians have always opposed teachers who would alter God's Word in any way.

I remember coming across an instance that Augustine (about 400 A.D.) recounts in which a bishop in North Africa was shouted out of his pulpit by an angry congregation when he changed one word from an Old Testament text (...the pastor had just started using Jerome's translation from the Hebrew, rather than the Greek Septuagint). I remember another instance when a pastor was almost expelled by his congregation for substituting the Bible's use of a common word for "chair" with a more elegant word like "chaise" or "divan." Even before our brothers long ago had Bibles to take home with them, they had their Bibles memorized much better than we do, and they did not tolerate any alteration to the inerrant biblical text. God has spoken to us with literature, so we have to read it literally, lest we deceive ourselves into believing worthless ideas of our own making rather than the treasures that God has given us in the Scriptures.

HOMEWORK

Think about these discussion questions over the next week. You may want to jot down your thoughts.

1. What doubts about the Bible are most likely to plague you? What do you remind yourself of when those doubts come? What are the answers that most satisfy your heart? Which questions do you most need answers to?
2. Explain what circular reasoning is. How do we see this circular reasoning at work with the Jesus Seminar? What's wrong with circular reasoning?
3. What was the project of Modernity? What did Modernity demand that religious studies become? How has that affected how religious scholars handle the Bible?
4. A Catholic friend says to you, "The bible is great, but the Bible was given to you by the Church. You'll never understand the mysteries of the Bible until you become Catholic. How might you respond?"
5. A friend tells you, "I really like what Jesus teaches, but I really hate Paul. He's a sexist. I don't believe him." What points would you want to make in your continuing discussions with this friend?
6. "Surely you don't take the Bible *literally*?" Discuss.

ALL MUST COME TO JESUS

Lesson Eight

How do you know Jesus is the Son of God?

Lesson Nine

What about the Innocent Native who's never heard about Jesus?

Lesson 8

How do you know Jesus is the Son of God?

In Lesson 5, we observed the tendency among liberal theologians to de-supernaturalize Jesus into a Jewish Confucius. They sought to keep a Jesus-as-teacher figure without having to commit to a Jesus as God-Man-Savior figure. This is serious heresy. Christianity rises or falls with Jesus. Christianity is not a philosophy, but a Person. There can be no Christianity without Christ. “If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.... If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17).

Whatever he was, *Jesus was definitely NOT just a good moral teacher !#?@!!!* People seem to want to be nice to Jesus, but don't want to have to give their lives to Jesus. So they say silly things like this...

“I think Jesus was a great guy and all, but I wouldn't say he was the Son of God or anything like that.”

1. “Great Guy” is not an option

Jesus went out of his way to make sure that *NO ONE* would be able to get away with this kind of statement. Jesus claimed to be a lot more than a good guy or a moral teacher. He claimed to be the Son of God. We have a record of this claim in numerous different biblical books, each written by a different author. Steve Kumar observes how Jesus claimed:

- To forgive sin Matthew 9:1-8
- To judge the world John 5:27, 30
- To give eternal life John 3:16
- To be sinless John 8:46
- To be the object of faith John 8:24
- To answer prayer John 14:13
- To be worthy of worship Matthew 14:33 (which he willingly received in John 20:28)
- To be the Truth John 14:6
- To have all authority Matthew 28:18
- To be one in essence with God John 10:30

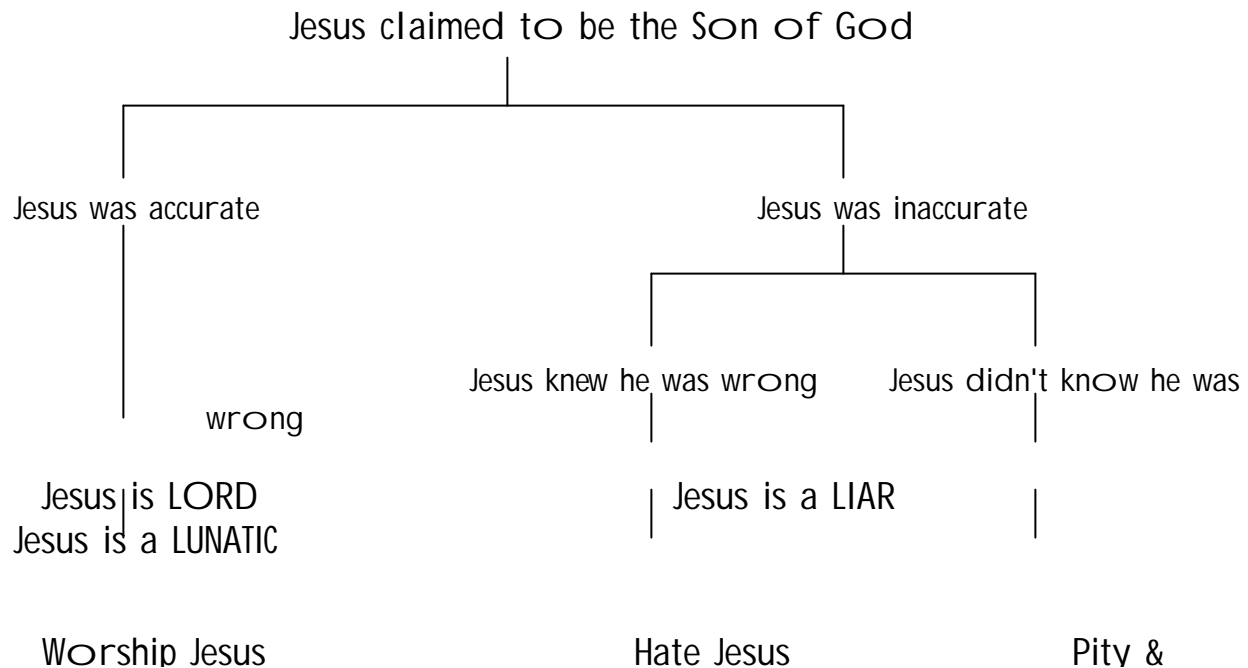
The Jewish leaders who lobbied to kill Jesus also acknowledged that he claimed to be the Son of God. That's why they wanted him dead. Religious fanatics don't kill you for telling people to love each other. They kill you for major heresy, like claiming to be the Son of God, making yourself an equal to God. And remember, in Jewish custom, the firstborn son is equal to his father and receives everything that belongs to the father. The claim to be God's only begotten son was a claim to be equal to God himself. The Jewish *Babylonian Talmud* even confirms that Jesus performed miracles, though it implies that he did them through the power of Satan.... Jesus

was a lying “sorcerer” who sought to lead the people into idolatry.

2. There are only three options

C.S. Lewis set forth for his readers the simple trilemma by which Jesus confronts us all. You see, once Jesus claimed to be God's Son, only three options remained: Jesus was either a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord.

The Trilemma:



When we look at the record of Jesus' life, do we see the life of a liar? Do we see a lunatic?

A LIAR? Was deception at the core of a man condemned for showing mercy to those despised by the ruling religious authorities? And if Jesus was lying, could he have hidden it from his closest companions, or were they in on it too? It has been said that three men can keep a secret so long as two of them are dead. Yet Jesus' disciples never admitted he was lying, if he was. Indeed, early tradition holds that ten of the Eleven died martyrs deaths. Would all these men die for a lie?

A LUNATIC? If Jesus was crazy, no one noticed it at the time, not even the men he traveled with for three years. His enemies didn't claim he was crazy, but wicked and demonic. Do crazy people claim to be God? Sometimes. But only one man could back up his claim with miracles, fulfilled prophecy, and a resurrection from the dead. And we should remember that insanity in a leader is usually characterized by violence. But Jesus—if crazy—was one of the few who could hold together lunacy and power in a perfect bond of peace.

3. What if Jesus had never been born?

What would the world be like if Jesus had never been born? No single figure in human history has had a greater positive impact upon world civilization than Jesus of Nazareth. Consider...

- Jesus' impact on the status and dignity of women. An old rabbinic saying stated, "It is better to teach your dog than a woman." Jesus rejected this attitude, affirming instead the Old Testament principle that man and woman were equally created in God's image. Indeed, one of the most common criticisms of Jesus was that he spent time teaching women. Though not pastors (presbyters, or elders), women were active leaders in the early church, and it was only after the Roman emperor Constantine converted to Christianity that he repealed ancient Roman laws forbidding women from choosing to remain single. It could be said that modern feminism (despite its often anti-Christian rhetoric) could only have arisen in a culture heavily influenced by the followers of Jesus Christ. Feminism could not have arisen in Hindu India, where widows were encouraged to throw themselves upon their husbands' funeral pyres so as to burn to death. Nor could it have arisen in the Moslem world, where women have traditionally been in practice the property first of their fathers and then of their husbands. The dignity of women was championed first by Jesus and his people.

- Jesus' impact on the value of human life. Again, it was the followers of Jesus who insisted that every human life be protected equally by law. Again one finds that Jesus' followers were the ones who stepped in to love those who were not wanted. Pagan Rome had viewed babies (inside the womb or outside) as the property of their parents, to be disposed of at will. Both abortion and infant exposure were common practices in ancient Rome. Yet Christians risked arrest to rescue exposed infants, and some (like Basil) even opened homes for unwed mothers. It was largely through pressure from Christians that Rome outlawed both abortion and infanticide in the third century—even though Christianity was still not a legal religion. It has only been with the return of pagan values in the late modern era that Western society has again begun to discard the lives of the infants (especially through abortion) it deems unwanted.

- Jesus' impact on the poor and oppressed. This struck me when I first moved to St. Louis. I was coming from a very new city (most of the Washington, D.C. area had been built since World War II), and much of St. Louis was older. As I drove to my first apartment, I passed Deaconess Hospital, then Missouri Baptist Hospital, then St. John's Mercy Hospital, then the Protestant Children's Home. What was the deal here? Jesus had taught us to love our neighbor as ourselves, and his people had evidently done that a century ago when these institutions were founded. Then I thought of World Vision, and the Salvation Army, and the thousands of charitable Christian ministries. Why don't these people just spend more time caring about themselves? How could one man's life have made so big a difference?

- Jesus' impact on the emergence of civil liberties. Why is it that democracy and civil liberties seem to flow from those nations most affected by biblical Christianity to those least so? This is the pattern of history. Sure, there have been Inquisitions and Crusades (terrible sins which God will judge, really), but these events are so noticeable precisely because they seem to go so strongly against the thrust of Jesus' ministry. Look at a map. Those nations most affected by Bible-based, Reformation Christianity during the Protestant Reformation are the same nations (England, Scotland, the Scandinavian states, Switzerland, Holland) in which civil liberty became cherished most. The American Revolution (whatever you think of it) was even called the "Presbyterian Rebellion" by many in England, because it was seen as an outgrowth of the respect for civil liberty cultivated among the Reformed churches here.

- Jesus' impact on the rise of science. Again, look at the scientific revolution. It only arose as Christians began questioning the influence of Greek philosophy in medieval learning (Aristotle had caused the most trouble here) and gained a renewed vision for the biblical truth that God created the world *good* and gave man dominion over it. The world was therefore worthy of study, just like God had invited Adam to participate in creation by naming the animals. Modern science did not emerge in India, but in those areas most affected by the teachings of Jesus.

- Jesus' impact on the arts and music. Most of the art and music produced in Europe for over 1,000 years was inspired on some level by Jesus. And even the rise of "secular" art in Europe in the sixteenth century was preceded by a Protestant Reformation that stressed the biblical principle of bringing all of under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Any topic for art could honor God, these biblical Christians insisted, so the still life and the landscape flowed out of biblically-saturated Reformation Holland.

- Jesus' impact on education. Remember that those Christians who sought most strongly to be faithful to Jesus were the ones who most valued education—they needed education in order to read the Bible. Most of the colleges and universities in Europe and North America were founded by Christian churches. Schools like Harvard, Yale and Princeton were founded to train pastors in the Bible and theology—as well as other subjects, since truth was what mattered most to the Christians. One of Protestant reformer Martin Luther's biggest social programs was the establishment of public schools throughout Germany, and his *Luther Bible* is credited with first unifying the German language. And still today, the best schools in much of the third world are the ones established and staffed free of charge by Christian missionaries.

If you judge a tree by the fruit it bears, then the only possible conclusion one can come to is that Jesus was not a liar and was not a lunatic, but was telling the truth. Jesus is in fact the Son of God who continues to impact the world to this day.

Lesson 9

What about the Innocent Native who's never heard about Jesus?

If salvation is only available by turning to Jesus of Nazareth, now ruling as Cosmic King in heaven, then how can God judge those who have never heard about Jesus? If people go to hell for rejecting Jesus Christ, wouldn't God be unfair to condemn to eternal punishment people who have never had a chance to trust Jesus? The Christian God is an evil God, the argument goes, if God is an exclusivist. God would be wrong to condemn those who never had a chance. It's unjust of God to save exclusively those who follow Jesus. How can the Christian answer this accusation against our Lord?

1. There are no innocent natives.

Were there an innocent native somewhere, he would be perfectly able to receive salvation without Jesus. Jesus came to save sinners only—those who are perfect and completely righteous don't need forgiveness. Those who already have a good relationship with God don't need to be adopted as sons and daughters. It was the Savior himself who said that well men don't need a physician.

Unfortunately, no one is well. Look at the world. Do you honestly think that everything is okay? Do people treat others as well as themselves? Do we treat our environment well? Do we only do what we believe will bring God the greatest honor? Do we even *think* about God's honor when we're making decisions? Look at the world. It's sick, and it's a sickness unto death.

2. Consider against whom you have sinned.

Perhaps those who have never heard about Jesus have never sinned against Jesus. But they have heard of God, and they've sinned against him. To sin against Jesus is serious, but to sin against the One who sent him is no better! R.C. Sproul notes the presumption hidden within the innocent native question. "The unspoken assumption at this point is that the only damnable offence against God is rejection of Christ" (*Reason to Believe*, 50).

Remember the greatest commandment? Jesus said that the greatest commandment—the thing that God wants more than anything else, is for us to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Think about that. The German reformer Martin Luther thought about it during his years as a monk. He realized that if this was the Lord's *greatest* commandment, then the world's most intensely evil sin must be to disobey it. The most depraved, hell-worthy transgression must be to love God with half our hearts, with 75% of our souls, with a third of our strength. Sin is a serious thing. We have all committed the worst sin, and we do so constantly. Consider sin against God...

All sensible people agree that there is a difference between virtue and vice, and that virtue should be rewarded and vice punished, all the more when there is a victim involved. Bear in mind the victim of our sin. All sin is ultimately sin against God. This means that God is every sin's victim.

AUTHORITY: Think about God's authority. If I were to lie to you, I'd be worthy of punishment. If I were to lie to a police officer, though, I'd deserve more punishment. Why? Because I'm lying to one with authority. If I were then to lie to a judge in a law court, I would deserve an even stiffer sentence, since the judge has even more authority than a police officer. What then should we think of lying if it's directed against God, as all sin is? God has infinite authority, so sin is therefore worthy of infinite punishment, whether you've heard about Jesus or not.

PURITY: Also consider God's purity. We think a criminal worthy of punishment if he shoots a drug dealer in a deal gone bad. We think it's worse if a criminal shoots a nun who's feeding hungry children. Why? Because it's a crime against greater purity. A crime against the infinite purity and holiness of God the Father himself is worthy of infinite punishment.

3. God's Goodness requires Judgment upon all.

Think of God's goodness. Often people naively assume that God's goodness will somehow keep him from damning us. To the contrary! What hath darkness to do with light? It's precisely God's goodness that drives him to condemn people who carry sin. Consider the story of The Good Policeman.

The Good Policeman was walking down Main Street one day when he saw a little old lady with a walker trying to cross the street. As he watched the little old lady, he saw a large Buick fly past him and come to a screeching halt next to the little old lady. Three young men hopped out of the car, laughing. One of them pushed the old lady to the ground, while another started kicking her in the abdomen, then the legs, then the face. Another of the men smashed his heel into the old woman's face while she screamed in pain. Even from a distance, the Good Policeman could hear bones crack. Finally, one of the young men did the unthinkable. He pulled a knife out of his belt and slit the woman's throat. But the Good Policeman witnessed these events. So as the men walked back toward their vehicle, he rushed up to them and thrust his hand out in front of them and said, "Hi. I'm the Good Policeman. And I want you to know that I LOVE you."

What's wrong with the story? Is it a 'good' policeman? Of course not! A good policeman would have run up to the men, arrested them, and taken them to court to be punished! This is not a *good* policeman, but an *evil* one! If he were good, his goodness would *require* the guilty to be *punished!* Yet we expect God to be like the Good Policeman—all love and mercy and grace, with no punishment, no justice, no vengeance, no anger, no wrath. We expect him to see our sin and rebellion and just say, "I love you!" God *cannot* be good *unless* he punishes evil. The difficult question is not why God condemns sinners to hell, but why he *doesn't* condemn *all* sinners to hell! For that, we have to understand the cross, where Jesus was punished *in our place*, so that all who seek him might stand before God blameless, the punishment for their sins already paid in full by our willing scapegoat Jesus.

We deserve nothing but contempt from God. I've known people who haven't been converted to Christ until they heard people who seemed more "religious" and more "righteous" than they were confessing that they themselves were worthy of hell. That's when it hits home. People

think, “Wow, if this holy-roller thinks he deserves to burn in fire, then what chance have I got?” I’ve found the reality of it really hits home when I very soberly confess, “You know, I think God is really angry with humanity. He’s really mad at us. Things aren’t okay between us and God”

4. Being religious makes it worse, not better.

People think that somehow being religious makes one immune from judgment for sin. But the picture God gives us in the Bible is just the opposite. Religious people are some of the worst, because their religion is not an attempt to seek God, but a sophisticated way of rejecting God. Paul lays this out for us in Romans 1-3.

God has communicated to us in nature, but we’ve responded with idolatry—Romans 1:18-32.

Human religion is evidence not of seeking God, but of replacing him. Religion actually increases guilt rather than diminishing it. To corrupt that which is holy is worse than ignoring it altogether.

God has communicated to us in our hearts, but we’ve used this to judge others—Romans 2:1-16.

God has written his moral law on every human heart, but no one has obeyed him. This law, called natural law by philosophers, the Tao by C.S. Lewis, condemns us rather than saving us. We see others sin, and judge them in our hearts, only to sin ourselves on another occasion.

Those who have God’s laws in the Bible are also unrighteous—Romans 2:17-29; 3:9-20.

The Jews in Paul’s day—including Paul himself, the Pharisee of Pharisees—failed to benefit from God’s law because they saw it as a means of self-righteous achievement and pride.

5. There is no damnation without representation.

Even if it could be demonstrated that someone had lived a life without committing any specific sinful act, God would still be perfectly just in condemning that person. Even as tiny babies in the womb, we are sinners who bear the guilt of our corporate human rebellion against God. Our lawful representative and family head, Adam—what theologians call our “federal” head—declared our rebellion against God on our behalf when he sinned against the Lord in Eden.

Remember—Adam’s children didn’t start off in the Garden all over again. The judgment God placed on Adam comes to all his descendents, all his constituents—all those he represented. Adam’s children received Adam’s curse, the expulsion from the Garden, the thorns and thistles, the pain, the death, and the hell. “Surely I was sinful at birth,” the Psalmist laments, “sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5). “From birth the wicked go astray, from the womb they are wayward and speak lies” (Psalm 58:3). Paul deals even with the possibility of those who didn’t have a clear commandment against which they sinned, “Nevertheless death reigned... even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam.... The result of one trespass was condemnation for all men” (Romans 5:14).

Sound unfair? This is how representative government works, even today. Are you an American? Why aren't you a subject of the British crown? Because a group of men chose for you to rebel against England in 1776. When Thomas Jefferson declared his personal independence from Britain two centuries ago, he was placing you in rebellion against the British crown as well. Seem unfair? Shouldn't you have had the right to personally choose your national status? Sorry. That's not how federal government works—federal, based on the people's *representatives*. And our representative Adam (even his name being the Hebrew for *man*) blew it for us. We are conceived and born in rebellion against God even before we've had a chance to sin.

6. And we add to our guilt daily. We *sin* because we're *sinner*s.

If God were to damn us just because of Adam's sin, he would be just. But we don't stop with Adam's sin, returning to God begging for mercy, promising never to sin ourselves. We rebel against our Creator constantly in word, thought and deed. Sin has so affected us as to become our natures. We can't *not* sin—we are sinners. Firefighters fight fires; candlestick makers make candlesticks, and sinners sin. It's what we do because it's what we are. "There is no one who seeks God" (Romans 3:11).

7. It's not a question of *liking* hell.

I don't like the thought of tornados. They scare me, and I don't want to believe in them. But I can't say that tornados don't exist. I can't tell you, "Oh, you'll never get hurt in a tornado." I can't say that because tornados do exist. We're talking about reality, not preferences. Facts, not opinions. I don't want to believe in death either, but I do because it's real. Similarly, I believe in hell because it's real. Everyone goes there unless Jesus changes his or her destiny.

Why do I believe it? I believe in hell because Jesus instructs me to believe it. He warns me about hell. Indeed, over half the references to hell in the entire Bible come from the lips of Jesus himself—Jesus, friend of sinners, compassionate toward those enslaved to sinful hearts. Jesus above all others has the right to warn us about hell. Jesus took upon himself the hell of God's wrath when he hung upon the cross. The true terror of the cross was not capital punishment, but the fact that God poured out his wrath upon his Son, judging Jesus in my place. Jesus experienced God's hatred, felt the Father's love turning from him. Jesus was forsaken by God so that we who are so ripe for God's judgment might never be forsaken.

8. People without Jesus probably wouldn't enjoy heaven.

This is a point that C.S. Lewis made. We are naturally drawn toward our delights. In a poll of Hollywood celebrities, most said they believed in heaven. But when asked to describe heaven, not one of them mentioned God. While the Bible tells us very few details about heaven, the one thing the Bible is clear about is that in heaven we will *see God*. The brilliance of God's perfections will light up the city. People who aren't looking for God have no business entering the gates of heaven. They wouldn't enjoy it. If their joy isn't in the Lord, but in other things, they could never be happy in heaven. Joseph Stiles observed that misery lies in the opposition

between the mind and its object. He writes, “[The] unholy heart feels, and must ever feel, the deepest aversion to everything that exists or transpires in holy Heaven” (*Future Punishment*, 4).

9. *You have heard. What are YOU doing with Jesus???*

HOMEWORK

Think about these discussion questions over the next week. You may want to jot down your thoughts.

1. If you were to die tonight, how certain are you that you'll go to heaven?
2. If you were to stand before God and he were to ask you, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" how would you respond?
3. These above two questions are diagnostic questions. Like a test an auto mechanic runs to discover a car's problems, these questions can help our hearers diagnose the state of their soul. How do you think an unbeliever is likely to respond? How would you then use these answers to explain the gospel of Jesus Christ?
4. An acquaintance of yours tells you he thinks Jesus is a great spiritual leader. You know your friend is not a believer. How could you make the most of this situation? He tells you he can't accept that Jesus is God's Son. How would you map out an answer?
5. "Christianity is dangerous for human society—just look at the Crusades and the Inquisition." What positive evidence could you offer to show that Jesus has had a good effect on human society?
6. "I could never believe in a God who damns people to hell without giving them a chance. The Christian God is so unfair." Respond.
7. A cousin tells you she's not worried about his soul, because she believes in a God of Love. What points might you want to develop in your ongoing conversations with her?
8. Study Romans 1-3 carefully. Paul begins the section in 1:18 by saying that God is showing his wrath against all sin. What specific points would show the guilt of the pagan, who worships a God other than Yahweh? The Moralist, who criticizes the sins of other people? The religious Jew, who claims that he is superior to others because of his religion? What different phrases does Paul use to summarize his conclusion in 3:9-18? What ought our response be to this revelation of God's wrath (3:19-20)? What message does Paul then introduce to his readers who by now realize they have no righteousness of their own (3:21-4:8)? Was this a new message, or was this same gospel taught in the Old Testament?
9. If we're eternally drawn to what we delight in, then what light does this shed on your own walk with God? Is your faith more about not doing the wrong things, or about seeking and enjoying the Lover of your soul?

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Lesson Ten

How could a good, all-powerful God create a world full of suffering & evil?

Lesson Eleven

The Trial: Is God Selfish?

Lesson 10

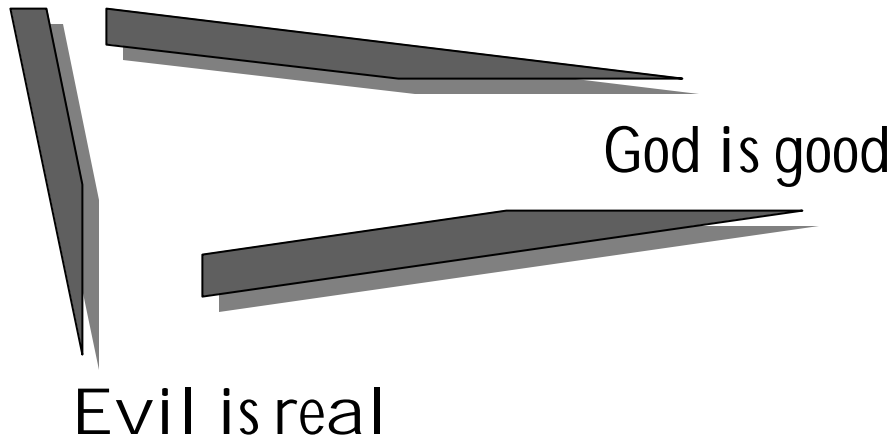
How could a good, all-powerful God create a world full of suffering & evil?

Often an objection believers hear to the truthfulness of Christianity relates to the problem of evil. Philosophers state the objection at a sophisticated level in logical propositions. But even those without professional training experience the problem of evil. The world is full of suffering, death—babies born deformed, children dying of starvation. Hitlers and Stalins murder millions. How could a good, all-powerful God have created such a universe? Believers may express this objection in a more reverent fashion—How can a good and sovereign God tolerate suffering?

In last week's Story of the Good Policeman, it is clear that the Good Policeman would have been just to punish the criminals, but why wouldn't a Good Policeman prevent the crime in the first place? Is God too weak? Or is he just an evil God?

The Argument from Evil: These 3 points are incompatible—We must get rid of at least one of them:

God is all-powerful



Three Heretical Answers (*Don't EVER say any of these!*):

Heretical Solution #1: Free-will theism (Clark Pinnock)/process theology. *God has no power to change things.*

Heretical Solution #2: Christian Science, eastern religion. *Evil is just an illusion.*

Heretical Solution #3: Dualism. *There is a dark side to the Force, Luke.*

The issue is not that God's goodness, God's power, and evil's reality can't fit together, but that there are additional pieces to the puzzle that fit between them and hold them together.

1. Free Will is a partial answer.

Free will gives a partial answer to this question of evil and suffering. It goes like this.

- God made humanity with free will.
- Evil is a result of human choices. Our first parents chose to sin.
- As a result of sin, this world has been plunged into suffering.

Evil, therefore, finds its origin not in the Creator, but in the creature. God receives no blame for evil—we do. We get the credit for evil because we're the ones who chose to abandon God.

2. As a result of free will, history is discontinuous.

There was no evil in God's original creation. But Adam had free will—he was able to sin or to not sin. And he chose to sin. And Adam's choice affected more than just himself. He represented all of humanity. Indeed, Adam represented the whole world (he had dominion over it), and when Adam was sinning, the whole world was declaring war on God. Thus even the natural world was plunged into suffering—animate as well as inanimate (the ground being cursed in Genesis 3 and thus awaiting full salvation at Christ's return—Romans 8:19-22). This discontinuity is what Christians call the Fall. The world is *good* (Gen. 1), but *fallen* in rebellion against God.

How could God create a world full of evil and suffering? He didn't. He created a world in which people enjoyed communion with God, intimacy with each other, perfect harmony with the creation, and everlasting life—a world with no suffering, no sin and no guilt. History is radically discontinuous. The world changed at the Fall.

And the fact that the Bible says the world is good but fallen certainly makes sense of life. Human beings are capable of great beauty and kindness, but also great evil. Children are cute, but selfish. Adults are smart, but manipulative. The Bible accounts for both the glory and the shame of being human. We're God's image, but an image marred and distorted by our divorce from our Creator.

The Christian philosopher Blaise Pascal spoke of the grandeur and misery of humanity. We are capable of great things, but are always capable of pondering an existence better than the life we now have. Thus we find ourselves in misery precisely because we have the ability to contemplate a better existence. Perhaps the fact that we can imagine a life without suffering is itself a

reminder deep within our human consciousness of the life we once enjoyed in loins of father Adam—a life we have lost and can only regain through the redemptive intervention of God in human history. This is a redemption that will only be complete when Jesus Christ returns.

3. If you want God to eradicate evil, you're demanding that he eradicate us. God's alternative to eradicating evil people is to redeem them.

Remember the words of Peter: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). You blame God for evil in the world? I assure you he can take care of the problem right now—but you won't like the way he does so. Is there evil in your heart? He can destroy your heart at any moment. The amazing thing, though, is that God doesn't do this. He made your tongue, and you use it to speak against him—but he is patient with you. For now.

Redemption is God's striking alternative to eradication. Rather than destroying his fallen creation, he has chosen to restore a people for himself, a people who one day will live with him in a restored creation (2 Peter 3:13).

4. Evil is not a thing, but a privation of the good.

This was the point that Augustine made in the fourth century when refuting the dualistic Manichean cult out of which he had come when converted to Christ. Mani had taught that there were two eternal creator-Gods, one evil and one good—the evil God accounting for evil in the world, the good God accounting for goodness. Augustine wrote *On the Nature of the Good* to demonstrate that evil as a created thing does not exist. Since there is no evil thing in creation, and evil creator-God is irrational. Evil is not a thing, but a condition that good things have. God created all things good (Genesis 1), and evil is a condition they have when they have lost some of their initial goodness. Even Satan has no creative power, but is himself just a fallen creature.

Sex, for example, is a good gift of God. Adultery is the perversion of a good thing by robbing it of the good context for which it was designed. People are not evil in the sense that a human liver is a bad thing. Rather, humans are evil insofar as they have fallen from the condition in which God first designed them. Evil, then, is not a thing. Evil is a lack. Evil is a negative. Evil is a privation of the good.

This is even how human language has developed. Injustice, for example, assumes the prior existence of justice. Injustice is a *lack* of justice. Immorality is a privation of morality, unkindness a lack of kindness. Sin, biblically speaking, is a failure to achieve God's standard of perfection, falling short of our design, a "missing the mark". R.C. Sproul makes the observation well: "Our language betrays the fact that to think about and conceptualize evil, we must do it against the backdrop of the good" (*Reason to Believe*, 127).

Thus a philosopher like Descartes in the seventeenth century could answer the skeptics who argued that if God exists, he must be evil. Descartes agreed that *there could be nothing in the effect (creation) that was not also in the cause (God)*, but added that evil is not a thing, but a lack. The creation's now having less goodness does not require a reality of evil within God's nature. It only requires that beings with free will chose to seek a lesser good than the good for which they were created—a seeking of lesser goods that offends God and is therefore called evil.

5. But free will is only a *partial* answer.

But this still doesn't answer *how God could allow* such evil to happen. Free will is kind of a lame answer to the problem of evil. Why would God create beings that are *capable* of making evil choices? The fact remains that if God is good and all-powerful, he nevertheless created millions of people knowing they would sin and thus suffer the wrath of hell forever.

Wrong answer: It is better for God to create beings with free will than beings without free will.

- Problem #1: This assumes that having the ability to sin is better than not having that ability. We would then be better than God, since God cannot sin. [God can't sin, and No, God is not a robot.] The ability to sin isn't freedom.
- Problem #2: In heaven, we will no longer be able to sin, yet will still not be robots. We'll just want what's good. This is better than being able to sin.
- Problem #3: God certainly could have planned for history to happen differently. God could have kept the serpent out of the garden. Or God could have given Adam a desire to obey God, as we will have in heaven.
- Problem #4: The Bible says that even sinful human choices are a part of God's plan. Read Ephesians 1:11 and Romans 8:28. Our freedom does not limit God's sovereignty.

6. God Allows evil to achieve a Greater Good.

This argument has two versions. The more common form of the argument is that God allows evil in order to give us opportunities to love. Without evil in the world, there would be no one needy of compassion, no one we would need to forgive, no enemies to love as ourselves. As Romans 8:28 states, "And we know that in all things God works together for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

But this passage says a little less and a little more than some people realize. Less? God's good purpose isn't for everyone here, but only for "those who love God." More? The good that God brings about here is less about opportunities *for us to do* greater good, and more about *God* doing something good *for us*.

Often the way the greater good argument is presented seems lacking. The good aspects that people usually point to—opportunities for us to show love and mercy, a greater appreciation of goodness through its comparison with evil—may not outweigh the evil in question. Is my opportunity to show mercy really worth some else's going to hell? I'm not so sure.

7. The Greatest Good is greater than our good.

This is where I'm likely to lose some people. But this is where the rubber hits the road and we find out who really loves God and who just loves themselves and God for their own sake (i.e. fire insurance). This is also where we get deep.

Here we go... (*Drumroll*)...

For God to plan a universe in which evil exists is a good thing if that evil will be used by God to bring greater glory to himself.

There. I said it. Now everyone can scream about how unfair God is. I'm not sure why, but people always get upset when I present God's glory as a higher good than our comfort. Hmmm. Does this make God the author of evil? No. Not if human agents choose with their own wills to do the evil acts. Is God making the ends justify the means? No. That would only be a valid concern if God's actions themselves were sinful, which they aren't. For God to use *someone else's* sinful acts to accomplish a good purpose is not evil. Indeed, it's making a good use out of events that would otherwise have none.

7a. **Joseph as an Example of God's Use of Evil:** The classic biblical illustration of this point is the account of Joseph's enslavement in Egypt. Joseph's brothers sought to kill him, selling him into slavery. Joseph was wrongly accused and jailed. Still, all of this evil and suffering was necessary to accomplish a greater plan that God had. Millions of people were spared from famine. Joseph's wicked brothers had an evil plan, an evil plan that God incorporated into his own good plan in order to accomplish a greater good. As Joseph explained to his brothers, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:19-20). God intended evil to befall Joseph in order to achieve the greater good of saving many lives.

ILLUSTRATION: *The story of the Doctor and the Little boy with Heart Failure*

7b. **The Greatest Example of Man's Evil overruled for God's Glory:** The greatest evil in history was planned by God to achieve the greatest good in history. We see in the murder of Jesus the most wicked act ever perpetrated by a human being—*deicide*, the killing of God. Yet in that same act we see the salvation of the world, the defeat of Satan, and the glory of God's justice displayed for all the cosmos to witness. Was the murder of Jesus evil? Yes. Were the murderers responsible for their evil? Certainly. Why did God plan such an evil deed? For a greater good, so that he might have a people to declare the praises of him who called them out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9).

Examine how God instructs us in Acts 2:23 and 4:27-28.

1. God planned the sin.
2. The sinners were responsible for their actions.
3. God overruled their sin in order to achieve a Greater Good.
4. That Greater Good is our salvation and from that God's glory.

7c. The Tapestry—dark now, but beautiful someday: Out of all the billions of ways that God could have planned history, this is the plan God chose. God chose to bring about a world full of evil and suffering. If history is a tapestry, there are beautiful stitches full of creativity and beauty. But there are also dark and foreboding stitches.

We will only see God's purpose for most of the dark stitches at the end of history when we can look back and see the finished product. Then we will see a beautiful image prepared by God himself after thousands of years of work. Then we will realize that nothing was pointless, but that God's good purpose was at work even when human beings in their sin had wicked plans of their own. Then we'll see how God was bringing glory to himself all along.

Think back to the life of Job. Job never knew why he suffered. He accepted the suffering as from God, saying, "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised" (Job 1:21). Was Job's suffering meaningless? No.

Job didn't know what was going on. God had made a wager with Satan, and Job's sufferings were a test to see if God was worthy of worship in his own right, or simply because God gave Job wealth. Job's faithfulness demonstrated that God was worthy with or without his blessings. God was glorified, and Satan was proved to be a liar. Did God do evil? No. Satan and his human agents committed the evil acts. God allowed them to do this evil (just like he allows us to do evil), limiting only their ability to kill Job. *God was good. God was all-powerful. The evil was real.* (You can ask Job about it someday.) *And a greater good—God's glory—flowed from it all.*

7d. The Eternal Display of God's Justice & Mercy is the Greatest Good: God allows evil, not primarily so that *we* can do a greater good, but so that *he* can do a greater good. And that greater good isn't mainly *our* glory, but *his* glory. God's glory is the display of his perfections—his goodness, his mercy, his holiness, his justice, his wrath, his patience, and his righteousness. That greater good is the display of God's character. Look at Romans 9:19-24:

- God allows our free evil choices so he can make his wrath known. This would be impossible without evil.
- God allows our free evil choices so he can make his mercy known. This too would be impossible without evil.
- A world with evil is thus eternally significant in a way that a world without evil would not be.

8. But is God selfish? Would Divine self-centeredness bring into question God's Goodness?

This Greater Good argument raises another question. What kind of God would do such a thing? What kind of God would make creatures that he knows will reject him, just so he can put his wrath on display? What kind of God would still create a person when God knows that that person will suffer in hell forever? Is God a monster? Isn't God being just a little bit *selfish*?

Lesson 11

The Trial: Is God Selfish?

DEFENDANT: God

OCCUPATION: Maker, ruler, judge of heavens and earth

ADDRESS: Everywhere, particularly “the heavens”

CHARGE: Being selfish

EVIDENCE:

1. Hell, Fires of. Billions will suffer there, and the Defendant says he will do it to “display his wrath.” Defendant even threatens that “they will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb” (Revelation 14:10).
2. Intolerance of non-Christian religions. He calls them idolatry and says he will punish them.
3. Intolerance of numerous behaviors that people enjoy.
4. Insistence that people focus all attention on Defendant all the time. Intolerant of those who do otherwise.
5. Multiple unexpected outbursts of anger.
 - a. Nadab & Abihu, whom Defendant burned with fire while they offered sacrifices in Defendant’s temple (Leviticus 10:1-7).
 - b. Uzzah, whom Defendant struck dead while trying to keep Defendant's ark from falling to the ground (1 Chronicles 13:9-11).
 - c. Ananias and Sapphira, whom Defendant killed while they were donating money to Defendant's church (Acts 5:1-11).
 - d. Christians in Corinth whom Defendant killed because they ate their communion bread too quickly (1 Corinthians 11:29-32).
6. Repeated remarks that everything must happen for Defendants own glory (1 Corinthians 10:31). Refusal to share glory with others (Isaiah 48:11).

DEFENDANTS PLEA: Guilty as charged.

1. The Bible says God is supreme in God's own heart.

There are lots of passages in the Bible that honestly trouble a lot of readers—passages where God kills people, punishes people, says things that seem intolerant, offensive, even selfish. Whenever a passage in the Bible rubs us the wrong way, it should give us pause, because the problem is not with the Bible, but with us.

What is it we don't understand about God's character that makes some of God's actions seem so unfair? There is one simple truth that—once grasped—makes us see things as God sees them and unlocks a renewed understanding of God and God's ways. One single passion drives God's heart. That passion, as teachers like Augustine and Jonathan Edwards have helped us to see, is this: *God's primary concern in everything he does is to bring glory to himself.*

God is chiefly concerned with his own fame. God is self-centered. Selfish, one might even say. If there's one thing we know from the Bible, it's that God is chiefly concerned with the honor of his name—just look at the prayer Jesus taught us to pray (Matthew 6:9-13). Before ever getting to us and our needs, we pray for God's name to be honored, for God's rule (kingdom) to be furthered and for God's will to be done.

Even when God saves sinners from their sins—a supreme act of generosity—God insists that he's doing it for his own benefit more than for ours. Observe how God speaks of salvation in Isaiah 48:11: *"For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another."*

2. There can be no Greater Good than God *by definition.*

Think about it. If it is humanity's highest purpose to glorify God, how can we expect God to have a lesser purpose? Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love God with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength. God has not disobeyed this commandment. The first commandment was to have no other gods before the LORD. God is not an idolater. As John Piper explains, the most passionate heart for God in all the universe is God's heart. God's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy himself forever.

Read the words of J.I. Packer:

If it is right for man to have the glory of God as his goal, can it be wrong for God to have the same goal? If man can have no higher purpose than God's glory, how can God? If it is wrong for man to seek a lesser end than this, it would be wrong for God, too. The reason it cannot be right for man to live for himself, as if he were God, is because he is not God. Those who insist that God should not seek His glory in all things are really asking that He cease to be God. And there is no greater blasphemy than to will God out of existence.

God is ultimate, not us. And true religion ultimately exists not for humanity, but for God. This is only reasonable. It is wrong for a man to be self-centered because that man is not actually the center of the universe. God is, always has been, and always shall be the center of the universe.

Were God to act as if another were central to the universe, that “other” would be God. It is wrong for man to judge, as if he were God, because he isn't God. But God is God, and it is right for him to perform the functions that are only worthy of God. Besides, God's perfect character is the very standard of good and evil. Whatever God desires is good. Self-centeredness—what the Bible calls God's *deity* (Romans 1)—is of the *essence of God's being God*.

3. Rejecting God's self-centeredness is the heart of idolatry.

To insist that God exist for my benefit is the core assumption behind all idolatry. We make God over in our image so that he can bend to our desires, not us to his. Jonathan Edwards suggested that until God's selfishness is precisely what attracts us to God, we have not yet begun to love God at all, but only ourselves. The heart of true worship is in line with God's heart, and wants nothing more than for the King to be magnified. Let us remember Henry Blamires' warning:

If we try to change the face of eternal God, we indulge in the supreme idolatry, beside which perhaps, in the scale of sin, adultery weighs like a feather and murder like a farthing. Yet the sin is committed among us, within Christendom, within the Church—maybe within ourselves; for are we sure, after all, that we prayed to the true God this morning?

Idolatry, in its most basic form, is making God into an instrument rather than an end. *All true evangelism and every true apologetic MUST challenge the core idolatry of the human heart.* Martin Luther noted that if we preach the gospel at every point except that point at which it's currently under attack, then we have not preached the gospel of Jesus Christ.

4. God alone is not an Instrument.

Augustine explained that everything in the universe is one of two things. It is an *instrument* or it is an *end*. An *instrument* is something that has a purpose greater than itself—a function for which it exists and to which it is subservient. That purpose or function is the *end* for which it exists. Everything, Augustine explained, is an instrument. Pencils exist to write, toasters to make toast, mirrors to show a reflection. Even people are instruments—we have a purpose that is higher than ourselves. We have a function, a reason for our existence, a meaning to life. That purpose, or end, is the glory of God. We exist for God, to be agents by which his perfections are displayed.

Only God is not an instrument. God exists in himself, by himself, and for himself. He was not created, so he has no function beyond himself. He alone is the end for which all other things were created. Christians need to be extra careful not to make God into a means to a greater end of human salvation. To say that God exists to achieve some higher purpose of salvation is to commit the ultimate idolatry—to make God into an instrument for some purpose higher than

himself. God is not an *instrument*, but the *end* for which we exist. This is why the English revivalist George Whitefield cried, “Let the name of Whitefield perish, so long as God is glorified!” Our salvation is the instrument to the higher end of praising God (1 Peter 2:9)!

5. Only God's glory can answer every question.

The quest for truth ends when the seeker finds the answer to the questions of life—the one final answer that ultimately resolves every other question. The ultimate answer to every question—after all else is said and done—is “to glorify of God”:

- Why did God create us? Isaiah 43:6-7
- Why did God rescue the Israelites from Egypt? Psalm 106:7-8
- Why did God raise up Pharaoh? Romans 9:17
- Why did God defeat Pharaoh? Exodus 14:4
- Why did God spare Israel in the wilderness? Ezekiel 20:14
- Why will God not reject believers? 1 Samuel 12:20-22
- Why did God restore Israel after the exile? Ezekiel 36:22-23, 32
- Why does God answer our prayers? John 14:13
- Why does God forgive sins? Isaiah 43:25
- How could David ask God for forgiveness? Psalm 25:11
- What is the Holy Spirit's ministry? John 16:14
- What should motivate everything we do? 1 Corinthians 10:31
- Why did God strike Herod dead? Acts 12:23
- Why is Jesus coming back? 2 Thessalonians 1:9-10
- What is God's plan for the earth? Habakkuk 2:14

6. God's glory and humanity's good are not mutually exclusive.

This teaching tends to hit people like a ton of bricks. Why? Is this a terrible notion? Not at all—this is it a cause for *joy*! If what we really want is for our Father to be honored, then no teaching should thrill us more! God's self-centered majesty is what I find most beautiful about God—that God is God and there is no other! More than one Christian has been surprised by the joy he has experienced after giving his life over to God. Think about it—If we were created to glorify God, then glorifying God is True Humanism. We're fulfilling our humanity most completely when we're living for God. We satisfy the deepest longings of our hearts when we seek our satisfaction in the Lord's perfections, base our dignity on his honor, ground our thinking in his wisdom, and give our lives over to furthering his fame. To state that human beings are a means to an end of God's glory is not to lower humanity's position, but to raise it up to its true position of dignity.

7. For One rightly self-centered, God sure has been generous.

Indeed, God had no obligation to save anybody, but generously chose to glorify himself not merely by displaying his justice against guilty sinners, but by displaying his mercy to sinners as well. The Lord is even referred to in the Scriptures as “the giving God.” Realize this; if God is the Greatest Good, then what is the most generous gift God could give? Himself. As Jesus tells us, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Indeed, throughout the Scriptures, God gives himself to his people in a binding covenant, so that He belongs to us and we belong to him.

HOMEWORK

Think about these discussion questions over the next week. You may want to jot down your thoughts.

1. A friend remarks, “I don’t see how a good God could possibly have created a world full of so much suffering.” How would you respond?
2. How does the Christian belief in an historical Fall make sense out of the world we live in?
3. Why did the instructor say that free will is only a partial answer to the problem of evil? What’s the problem with the assertion that a creature who is free to sin is better than one who is not free to sin?
4. Why do you think people feel so uncomfortable saying that God allows evil in his plan in order to bring glory to himself?
5. The instructor stated that the rejection of God’s self-centeredness is the heart of human idolatry. Why is this so? Why is it only reasonable that God be self-centered?
6. A co-worker says, “I don’t see how God can tell me what to do. What right does he have to meddle in my life?” How do you respond? How could you point him to Jesus in the midst of this?
7. This apologetic lesson is as likely to make a believer hate Christianity more as it is likely to convert him. Why? If true evangelism has not taken place until you’ve challenged the idolatry of the human heart, then what should we make of gospel presentations that make sinners feel good but not challenged? Some have said to me, “If you teach God’s self-centered glory, no sinner will come to Jesus.” By human means, this is true—unless *what* happens???

CREATION & MORE

Lesson Twelve

Darwinian Evolution explains human existence; we don't need a Creation.

Lesson Thirteen

Christians are hypocrites!

Lesson Fourteen

Christianity is a product of Western culture.

Lesson 12

Darwinian Evolution explains human existence; we don't need a Creation

What once was an easy starting point for Christian evangelism is now under attack by many in the scientific establishment. The Bible begins its message with the account of Creation. Creation is what makes us need the Bible's message. God made us. We are accountable to him. If we have turned from him, we are under judgment and needy of a Savior. When Paul preached Christ in Athens, he stressed that there was one God who had created all people. "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands... From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places they should live" (Acts 17:24-26).

Paul continues, explaining that because God made all people, we are all accountable to seek him and ripe for judgment because of our idolatry. Creation marks the starting point for the good news of Jesus Christ. People are responsible to God because God made them. But Creation is under attack today by many in the Darwinian establishment. How do Christians respond to the allegation that Darwinism has made creation an unnecessary assumption?

1. Darwinian evolution was not a factual scientific discovery.

In 1859, Charles Darwin published his book *On the Origin of Species by Natural Selection* and introduced into the western world the theory of macroevolution, of the evolution of all life from a single-celled organism, which itself would have evolved from non-living matter.

- *It was not a discovery, but an old idea:* The theory expounded by Darwin was not truly new. Various theories of evolution had existed in eastern religion, and the theory was already popular on a philosophical level among the intelligentsia of Darwin's day. Discoveries imply that something actually exists that is now being uncovered.
- *It was not scientific, but religious and philosophical:* Darwin himself was not a scientist, and had no training in the sciences. His education had been in theology, not biology, and his agenda was religious, not scientific. Darwin's goal was to provide a scientifically believable theory by which human existence could be explained without having to accept the existence of a God. In this sense, Darwin was a product of the Enlightenment, and what Modernity demanded—a secular explanation of life—the English theologian Darwin willingly provided.
- *It was not factual, but hypothetical:* Darwin was not proposing a theory to explain data. He had no data. Darwin documented no specific evolutionary mechanisms by which one species could change into another, for example, and he illustrated his work with no transitional forms between species. Evolution is a theory, not a fact. It is a hypothesis only—a hypothesis that is only valid if hard, objective, scientific data is presented with such a preponderance as to leave that theory the only logically consistent explanation of the data.

2. Life cannot come from non-life.

The biggest problem with evolutionary science lies in evolution's very first step. The probability of even one of the simplest single-celled organisms developing from non-living matter has been calculated at one chance in $10^{100,000,000,000}$. I have no clue how they got this number, but needless to say the chances are effectively zero. Even if this estimate of probability is significantly off, non-living matter simply could not have turned into a living being—even a simple living being—no matter how spicy the primordial soup was.

And this statistic was calculated under ideal controlled conditions. How much more impossible would naturalistic evolution have been with human beings—not just single-celled organisms—and that under thoroughly un-ideal circumstances! Naturalistic evolution simply could never have happened—a conclusion an increasing number of non-Christians are beginning to realize.

3. Mutants aren't progress.

Mainstream evolutionists claim that the variations between species are the result of a process of natural selection whereby small mutations in the parent species over time add up to major differences—birds from reptiles, or mammals from fish. The problem with this logic is that it could only work if the entire change occurred at once. There are extreme limitations on the positive effects of mutations—mutations almost always end in sterile and weak animals that quickly die off. Natural selection is unable to provide a mechanism for evolutionary changes as large as new organs or new species in higher life forms

For natural selection to work, each tiny change must itself produce a positive benefit that helps it—and not the parent line of the species—win out in the struggle to survive. The appearance of an eyeball, for example, would have had to include hundreds of individual mutations over time that would have eventually resulted in a complete eye. But what good is 5% of an eye? 5% of an eye does not give you even 5% vision—it is a useless mutation. What good is a fish with 7% of a lung? Or stubby, bumpy appendages that might one day evolve into legs? Such mutations would serve only as limitations. A small animal gradually developing wings would first have to develop proto-wings. Such forelimbs would likely become awkward for life on the ground long before they became helpful for gliding or flying.

4. Biochemical complexity trumps appearance-based claims.

Often people have tried to pull the *comparative morphology* card on me. Comparative morphology is a fancy name for “look sort of alike”. It goes like this. Examine the appearance of a chimpanzee in the womb, and compare that with the appearance of a human in the womb. We look a lot alike. This kind of argument was more impressive before the molecular revolution of the 1960s. Now we can examine the chimp's and the baby's DNA, and there are lots of differences. Sure, some will add, there is a 99% genetic similarity between all primates. But that 1% is huge. And those percentages refer only to the appearance of the placement of the chemical “letters”—they don't even hint at the vast difference in genetic *content* afforded by those letters.

Mere biological and physical similarity between living species does not necessarily imply common ancestry—it could imply a common Creator. Demonstrating that a similarity exists does not demonstrate *how* that similarity came to be.

And the molecular revolution has demonstrated the incredible complexity of living systems at the molecular level. At the biochemical level, one finds a complex world of instruments comprised of innumerable interdependent and finely adjusted pieces. These manifold elements collaborate within carefully balanced systems. To alter even the tiniest part of any of these systems results in failure and death. There are natural limits to biological change, and the level of interdependence demonstrated by the various systems of life make evolution a biochemical impossibility. The various mutations within Darwin's proposal would *each* have had to result in a working and balanced system. Indeed, as Michael Behe has argued in *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*, each species can only tolerate a very limited degree of evolution, regardless of the length of time involved. Each species has an irreducible complexity that prohibits change at the species level or higher.

5. The only hard evidence—the fossil record—supports creation, not evolution.

- *No transitional forms*—Charles Darwin and the early evolutionists predicted that, as time passed, thousands of transitional forms would be found, intermediate steps between species. In fact, there would be hundreds of steps just between modern man and his man-ape ancestor, the “missing link” that was to bring the primates together. Charles Darwin himself warned that unless transitional forms could be found in the fossil record, the theory of evolution was worthless speculation. A century and a half later, *not one* such transitional form has been discovered for which one might make a watertight argument.

- *Troubled Evolutionists*—This lack of evidence troubles some of the world's leading evolutionists. In America, the question of evolution has become so politicized that lines have hardened and evolutionists are unwilling to admit the weakness of their theory. Outside of the American context, however, many of the leaders in evolutionary anthropology have questioned the very foundations of evolutionary theory. Dr. Cohn Patterson of the British Museum of Natural History, for example—respected for his book on evolution—commented on the lack of transitional forms in his own study: “If I knew of any (transitional forms), fossil or living, I certainly would have included them.” He went on to say, “I will lay it on the line—there is not one such fossil for which one might make a watertight argument.” Solly Zuckerman, a leading researcher in this area, wrote in *Beyond the Ivory Tower*:

“If we exclude the possibility of creation, then obviously man must have evolved from an ape-like creature. But if he did, there is no evidence of it in the fossil record.”

Notice that Zuckerman accepts evolution, not because there is evidence for it, but because he cannot accept the only alternative—creation!

- *Abrupt appearance followed by stasis*—Leading evolutionist Stephen Jay Gould has admitted that in every species, the fossil record has shown us abrupt appearance followed by stasis, or stability. This is the very definition of creationism. Indeed, the evolutionary community is beginning to cease speaking of man's "family tree," and is instead speaking of the "evolutionary lawn." Man's family tree, you see, is a very barren tree indeed, with only modern man upon it. Leading anthropologist David Pilbeam has stated, "There is no clear-cut and inexorable pathway from ape to human being." Richard Leakey, a leader in the field, has admitted that, if asked to draw man's family tree, he would draw a big question mark, for the evidence is just too scanty. Contrary to Darwin's expectations, there has been no evidence that any basic category of animal has ever changed into another basic category of animal. His theory *can* be tested, and of millions of fossils, we see none of the forms necessary to establish evolution as more than speculation.

6. Punctuated Equilibrium is a cop-out for a failed theory.

The lack of hard evidence for Darwinism has led to the development of the theory of punctuated equilibrium. Punctuated equilibrium is a theory that suggests that species *do* exist in a condition of stasis. Evolution takes place in rapid spurts so quickly as to leave no evidence. This enables evolutionary science to continue without the need for empirical verification. The theory's more ardent proponents have even suggested that one species lays an egg and a radically different species hatches—the hopeful monster theory—such that missing links are not needed.

This is a convenient theory, since it would permit the fossil record to look just like creationists said it would look a century before punctuated equilibrium was first suggested! This is no longer science, but (atheistic) religion. *Science* deals with empirically verifiable facts and observations. Punctuated equilibrium was developed to justify a formerly verifiable theory after its verification failed. Punctuated equilibrium cannot verify itself—it argues from a lack of supporting data, an argument from silence.

7. Christians seek to synthesize science & Scripture (3 attempts).

- *Attempt #1: Theistic Evolution*—This view states that God is involved at every point in the evolutionary process, from non-living matter to single-celled organism to fish to lizard to monkey to man. Theistic evolutionists often believe that God made the first human beings by breathing a soul into a highly developed primate. Most theistic evolutionists also consider Adam and Eve to be mythical, which poses serious questions about the biblical foundation of their faith. Genesis presents an unbroken historical account beginning with Adam and continuing through to Joseph in Egypt. We do not "spiritualize" historical passages (see Lesson 7). The New Testament consistently regards Adam and Eve as historical figures, pointing out that Jesus descended from Adam (Luke 3:38).

The chief biblical text which—in my opinion—rules out theistic evolution is Genesis 2:7. This text states that God breathed into clay and Adam "became" a living soul (*nephesh chayah* in the Hebrew). We can miss this parallel in the translation, but the animals had already become living souls (*nephesh chayah*) in Genesis 1:20 and 1:24. The fact that the text identifies Adam as

having “become” a *nephesh chayah* means that Adam was not formed from an existing primate.

- *Attempt #2: Young Earth (Fiat) Creationism*—This view states that God created the universe and all that is in it over the space of six 24-hour days sometime between 6,000 and 10,000 years ago. God made the universe with the appearance of great age, which accounts for the appearance that the universe is 15 billion years old, and the appearance that the earth is 4 billion years old. As an apologetic strategy, the tactic is to challenge the basis of modern science, including some of the laws of physics. The layering in the fossil record is understood to have been lain down by the Noahic flood, and they point out instances in which the strata at which fossils are found occasionally conflicts with the standard dating—human fossils below dinosaurs, etc. This approach also challenges the reliability of radiometric dating. The principle architects of this apologetic approach are Henry Morris and John Whitcomb, whose 1961 *The Genesis Flood* was instrumental in re-introducing young earth creationism into the modern church. Today, Morris’ organization The Institute for Creation Research in San Diego is the center of the young earth approach. Other figures include Ken Ham and Henry Morris, Jr. Many of their scientific claims, unfortunately, have been found to be questionable by some and at times even deceptive.

- *Attempt #3: Old Earth (Progressive) Creationism*—This view states that God’s process of creating did not happen all at once. Rather, the seven days of Genesis 1 are seen as “God’s days,” not as 24-hour periods. (Augustine argues for an old earth about AD 400, observing that the sun didn’t exist to mark off days *until day four*). Over perhaps billions of years (the time determined by science, since Scripture does not tell us), God performed a series of direct creative acts, bringing about various kinds of life that prepared the earth for humanity, culminating in God’s special creation of Adam and Eve (*not* from a pre-existing animal) at God’s appointed time. In this view, the universe may be very old, but man is still very young (as fossil and molecular evidence demonstrates). Proponents of this approach include Robert Newman and his Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, Alan Hayward, Michael Behe, Philip Johnson, and Hugh Ross, whose *The Genesis Question* is an impressive attempt to synthesize recent scientific discoveries with Genesis 1-11. I’ve come to believe that this approach has much in its favor.

Does this position take Genesis 1-2 seriously? I think it does. The immediate context implies that the days of Genesis 1 are not 24-hour days, Genesis 2:4 referring to all seven days in the Hebrew as *one day*. These are anthropomorphic days (describing God’s activity in human terms). God is pictured as the Great Potter, “forming” man out of dirt, “breathing” into man. Like a potter, God is pictured as creating during the day and resting from that work during the night (between evening and morning). This appears to be the main point to the language of “days.” The Hebrew word “day” (*yom*) can mean *either* what we speak of when we use the term “day” *or* an unspecified period of time, as in Job 20:28, Ps. 20:1, Pr. 11:4; 24:10; 25:13; and Ecc. 7:14.

Remember: our literal reading of Scripture does not mean that we fail to recognize literary aspects of a passage. The literary structure of Genesis 1 may indicate that the strictly literalistic reading may not be intended, since the text has a strongly poetic quality and structure. The chapter is organized around God’s *forming* and God’s *filling* His universe, days that are parallel:



Day 3: *Land (with plants) & seas separated*

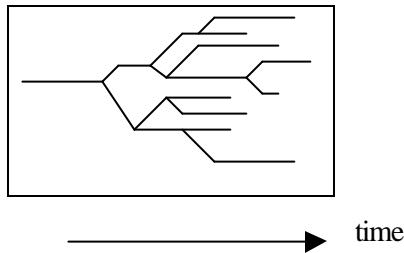


Day 6: *Animals & man*

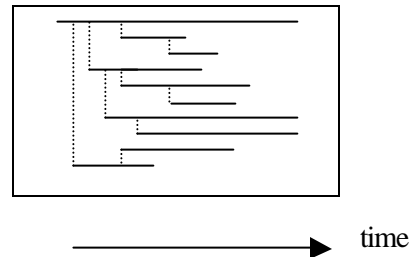
Major Evolutionary Views and the Fossil Record

Each box illustrates what pattern the perspective would expect to see in the fossil record. Each line represents a species. Notice the similarities between the 2 views on the right.

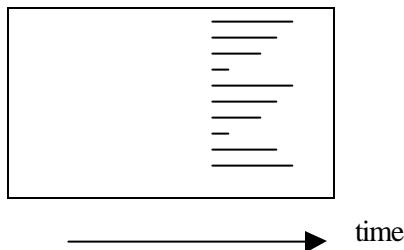
Classical Darwinism



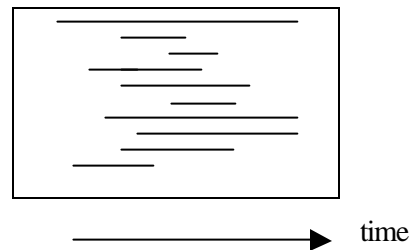
Punctuated Equilibrium



Young Earth Creationism



Old Earth Creationism



The fossil record reveals the abrupt appearance of the various species over many hundreds of millions of years, followed by their extinction. The fossil record does not reveal a *gradual* transformation of one species into another—as traditional Darwinism would postulate. Indeed, we simply cannot trace the ancestry of a species from one general type of animal to another.

But—assuming modern dating techniques have at least some level of accuracy—the fossil record does not reveal the abrupt appearance of all species at the same time, as the young earth creationist approach has proposed. Still, the appearance of any given species would appear to be abrupt, rather than gradual—data that could fit either a punctuated equilibrium evolutionary model or an old earth creationist model. Still, punctuated equilibrium, a theory developed to cover the embarrassing lack of evidence for Darwinism, has trouble on biological grounds. The total lack of fossil evidence for radical evolutionary changes would require a nearly immediate and total evolution within one generation—a process perhaps possible for some simple organisms, but far exceeding the natural limits of biological change in more highly developed organisms.

Lesson 13

Christians are hypocrites! Look at the Crusades & Inquisition!

Ever since the Roman Catholic leadership decided to kill Moslems and Jews for the glory of Rome, Christians have had to face daily reminders of the injustices perpetrated by people in the name of Christian religion. And even when these two atrocities aren't mentioned, believers nevertheless face the accusation that the church is filled with hypocrites. How can we respond?

1. Many churches *are* filled with hypocrites.

No doubt about it. I know of lots of churches filled with hypocrites. But they are generally the least *Christian* of the churches I've seen. I've never known a group of people madly in love with Jesus that was characterized by hypocrisy. Hypocrisy, like all sin, is present to some degree in everybody. But the closer people draw to Jesus, the less power hypocrisy seems to have in their lives. This isn't my argument; this is my *experience*.

2. Jesus condemned religious hypocrisy—indeed *all* human religion.

The reason churches that focus on Jesus seem to be in less bondage to the sin of hypocrisy is because Jesus—the Lord of the church—so strongly opposes hypocrisy. While Jesus welcomed those enslaved to sexual sin and greed, he reserved his harshest words for religious hypocrites. Notice his warning about the clergy of his day—the Pharisees: “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known” (Luke 12:1-2).

And Christians are commanded not only to oppose hypocrisy in their own lives, but in their churches as well. Paul bears apostolic authority from Jesus when he commands the church in Corinth to cast out of their church a hypocrite who was living in sexual sin while professing faith in Christ: “Expel the wicked man from among you” (1 Corinthians 5:13). When churches fail to expel hypocrites, Jesus closes them down. Remember—he judged the church Thyatira for tolerating the woman Jezebel (Revelation 2:20). Paul again follows Jesus in warning about “hypocritical lairs” who teach false doctrine and live unrepentant lives in 1 Timothy 4: 1-4.

3. The Church is the only institution on earth whose first requirement of its members is that they be failures.

The essence of man-made religion is its desire to establish a righteousness of its own. This self-righteousness is antithetical to biblical Christianity. Human religion does not throw itself on Jesus for mercy, but works to establish a worthy life in God's eyes. Such religion is a flight from the true God. No one can truly follow Jesus—knowing the depth and power of sin—and think himself righteous by any of his or her own actions.

A righteous standing from God, given freely to those who have no righteousness of their own—this is the promise of the gospel of Christ (Romans 3:21). When this gospel has been forgotten—as in Medieval Catholicism—self-righteousness has flared up and overflowed in violence against others—the Crusades and Inquisition being just the tip of the iceberg. Self-righteousness begins with a denial of one’s own sin and leads onward then to still greater sin. “If we claim we have not sinned, we make God out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives” (1 John 1:10).

The Christian Church is the only institution on earth whose first requirement of its members is that they be failures that have offended God and deserve his judgment. Jesus, when asked why he spent so much time with “tax collectors and sinners” stressed, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.... For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matthew 9:12-13). Is Christianity a crutch? Sure. A badly needed crutch given by God for spiritually crippled people like us—people who need to be reconciled to our Father in heaven.

4. The real mark of a Christian is uncompromising truth *plus* uncompromising love

I once spoke with a guy who was gay, who said he thought God would accept his lifestyle. A former boyfriend of his had been a pastor’s son, and this liberal pastor had told him that it was okay to be gay. I was put in the awkward position of having to explain that gay sex is *not* okay in God’s sight, that it’s not what God designed us to engage in. At the same time, though, I stressed that I was the last person in the world to judge him as a person, since I’m a sinner too and deserve God’s wrath as much as the rest of us. This had a big impact on this man, and after some thought he chose to leave the gay lifestyle—which he admitted had never truly satisfied him—and eventually he began attending an evangelical church. Our culture doesn’t understand how believers can strongly oppose someone’s sins while loving them nonetheless. But we are a people who have been separated from our sins, and so it comes (super-)naturally to us to love sinners without compromising God’s truth. It is not hypocrisy to say that sin is sin—even sins we ourselves fall into. We call sin sin, but we love all people as ourselves.

5. Christ was not a hypocrite.

Critics think they can avoid having to seriously consider the claims of Christ by simply attacking his followers instead. But the real standard for the truthfulness of Christianity is not whether there are Christians who are hypocrites, but whether Christ was a hypocrite. Christ’s influence upon human history has been overwhelmingly positive (see Lesson 8), and his life can be weighed through the historical accounts—the four gospels—that testify to his life and work.

The real question is not “Have Christians failed.” The real question is this: *What are you going to do with Jesus?* Christ’s followers aren’t the ones demanding that you follow them. Jesus is the one demanding that you follow *him*. If you evade this question, you have already decided against him—to your own peril. For the one who lived the perfect life to save us also earned the right to judge us when he returns to us in glory.

Lesson 14

Christianity is a White European religion, a product of Western Culture

A Klansman might be proud to say that Christianity is a product of white, European, Western culture. For the rest of us, though, it's a problem. Imagine yourself sipping a latte at Starbucks, and you casually mention to a friend that you're financially supporting a missionary in India. "Oh, that's horrible," your fellow coffee-lover exclaims, "The people of India have their own culture. Why do you want to push Western culture on them? Do you think we're better just because we're white European-Americans?" How do you answer?

Or let's say you're not white, but African-American. The same argument arises. An African-American friend of yours objects to your spreading Christianity within the black community in St. Louis. "You're just an agent of white racists, spreading white racist religion," he tells you, "We need to get back to a truly African religion—like Islam." Sure, you could inform your friend that Islam is not African, and that most of the slave trade was run by Arab Moslems. Also inform him that race-based black slavery is still practiced in many Moslem lands to this day. But once all that is said, how can you answer the assumption within his question?

1. Christianity is not a product of Western Culture, but a peaceful invader.

The accusation that Christianity is a product of Western civilization shows a high degree of ignorance about Western civilization. Western civilization, passing through Greece to Rome and eventually north to civilize the barbarians, was anything but Christian. Zeus and Apollo are the indigenous gods of Western culture—Yahweh has been a peaceful invader. Certainly Christianity has made a deep and positive imprint upon Western civilization (see Lesson 8). But make no doubt about it—the culture came first, Jesus started reforming it later. Christianity is *Christ*—the two cannot be distinguished. Our religion is all about Jesus. He wasn't German. He was Semitic—a Jew, a Middle Eastern carpenter.

Remember that Moses was criticized in Numbers 12:1 for marrying a black African woman (a Cushite or Ethiopian woman), likely after his first wife died. God's judgment on Miriam for her racist remark was to be stricken with a sudden and severe skin disease that turned her skin completely white. Christianity's roots are not European.

2. Jesus is extending his influence within every culture.

And Jesus told us that his kingdom (his rule, or influence) would spread throughout the globe and through every culture, like yeast through dough (Matthew 13). In the early Christian era, Egypt, North Africa and modern-day Turkey were the great centers of Christianity—not Western Europe. Indeed, one of the oldest of all Christian denominations in the world is the Ethiopian

Orthodox Church, the largest church in Ethiopia. While surrounding parts of Africa were overthrown first by Moslem armies and later by Western colonialists, Ethiopia alone successfully resisted both the Moslem and later the European armies, remaining an independent Christian state for over 16 centuries until a Marxist coup in 1974.

And the Thomas Christians in India will gladly tell you that Christianity isn't a product of Western culture. They trace the beginnings of their churches back to the apostle Thomas, who (according to early and reliable histories) traveled east to preach Jesus in India at the end of the first century, even converting one of the kings of first-century India—Gundaphoras, whom skeptics claimed was mythical until historians confirmed his existence in the past century. Christianity reached India centuries before it reached England. And the Christians in India really long for Jesus to exert his power in their land even more greatly than he has already.

3. Western Europe is one of the least Christian cultures today.

If people think that Christianity is a European thing, they'll be in for a shock when they see the numbers. With only about 2.8% of Europeans claiming to have been born again, Europe today is perhaps the least Christian of all the continents. The Scandinavian nations are the best off, with about one in ten people being evangelical. But sadly, most European states are empty spiritual shells filled with people who identify themselves loosely as "Christian" but who have no commitment to Jesus Christ, no new life in him, and little or no commitment to the church. In Greece, for example, only one in a thousand has been born again. Most nations have less than 1% Bible-believing, evangelical Christians; among them: Albania, Austria, Belgium, France, Ireland, Poland, Spain, and Yugoslavia. I remember an Irish pastor commenting on how most Europeans had been made Christians outwardly, but never inwardly. Even jolly old England fares poorly, with only 10% of adults in church services on an average Sunday—and that including dead churches as well as living ones.

4. Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the most Christian places today.

So with about 10% of planet earth claiming to have been born again, where are all the believers? *Non-Western* lands. 34% of the people of Kenya say they've been born again. One in four Ugandans has followed Jesus' call. Indeed, the East African revival has been going strong since the 1930s. The Central African Republic is about 25% evangelical, the Congo (former Zaire) about 22%. And I'm not the only American Christian to find that believers from Nigeria are a lot more serious about Jesus than we are. Remember: it was Zambia, not the United States, which formally declared itself a "Christian nation" in the 1990s. At his inauguration, their president confessed publicly a national prayer of repentance that renounced the sins of idolatry, witchcraft, occultism, injustice and corruption, pleading before Jesus Christ for forgiveness upon the nation through Jesus' blood shed on the cross. That's not Western culture and sure isn't a "white" thing!

And look elsewhere in the world. Chile, formerly the home of dead Catholicism, is now 33% evangelical. South Korea has turned its back on Buddhism to follow Jesus—there are more Presbyterians there than in the United States. Almost half of Koreans today are Christians—and they're sending about 3,000 missionaries out of Korea to the rest of the world, to pagan lands like the United States, so we can know Jesus too!

HOMEWORK

Think about these discussion questions over the next week. You may want to jot down your thoughts.

1. “Evolution is a fact.” How would you approach someone who voiced this assumption?
2. List three basic scientific problems with Darwinian evolution.
3. What is meant by the problem of transitional forms?
4. What different approaches have Christians taken to try to integrate knowledge gained through science with the biblical account of creation? Which do you find the most promising? What might be the strengths and weaknesses of each—both from a theological and from a scientific perspective?
5. A cousin of yours complains, “Christians are all hypocrites!” What points might you like to make when discussing this problem with him?
6. How would you respond to the following argument? “Christianity is a product of white racism. White people want to force their culture down the rest of the world’s throat.”

THE WISDOM OF GOD'S LAW

Lesson Fifteen

Christian Opposition to Abortion is Sexist

Lesson Sixteen

Homosexuality—George Ontko

*'Bringing the Gospel to the Lepers' Understanding
Homosexuality and helping those who struggle*

Lesson 15

Christian Opposition to Abortion is Sexist!

1. God's Law is an Apologetic

My testimony is less about seeing the beauty of the cross, and more about seeing the perfection of God's law. God tells his people that the laws he gives us will draw the admiration of the nations. He instructs us in Deuteronomy 4:6-8:

Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." ...What other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

This is the forgotten apologetic—the wisdom of God's law. How'd we forget an apologetic argument the Bible itself gives us? Maybe it's because we live in a lawless culture intoxicated by personal rights, or maybe it's because most churches (following human culture) no longer call Christians to live by God's laws. God's laws will never be popular with people who hate God, but among seekers, the perfection of God's standards is a powerful argument for the truthfulness of God and his Word.

Two areas in particular are under fire by the unbelieving right now: God's command to love the unborn, and God's call to sexual purity, especially as it pertains to homosexual sex acts. In this lesson, we look at the wisdom of God's love for the unborn. This is particularly near to my heart. God made me a pro-life activist before he made me a Christian.

I remember watching CNN in 1988, while a junior in high school. I saw coverage of Operation Rescue, a group of "born again" Christians who were sitting in front of the doors of abortion clinics praying—keeping people from obtaining abortions—until they were dragged off to prison by police. I was not a Christian, but I remember being deeply struck by the selflessness of these Christians. These were normal people—businessmen, executives, homemakers, and students. And they were giving up their freedom because they love unborn babies. I couldn't understand what could make them love something like a fetus so much. This was the beginning of my quest for God. I began looking into God's law in the Bible. I knew nothing of God's grace yet—that wouldn't come for two years. But I knew from the perfection of God's law—a law that stood in such stark contrast to American culture—that the Bible was indeed the Word of God.

Some preachers are embarrassed by God's law. They fear that if they preach the whole counsel of God, they might "drive people off." They are foolish and must repent. God's laws are a light that draws seekers to God—true seekers, that is—not the phony ones who never really want to attain the truth. God's law reveals to us God's perfection. It shows us our own personal sin. It tells us we have acted against a holy and righteous God who will not forgive, but at best will punish a substitute—Christ Jesus—in our place. "O Lord," cries David, "How I love your law."

2. It's not about sexism, but love.

I've spent lots of time around Christians, and discussed abortion with them a great deal. But I have never once heard a believer say, "You know, we need to stop abortion so we can put women in their place." When Christians oppose abortion, it's not because they oppose women. Indeed, Christians have always opposed abortion, and their rationale has been a love for the child, not some alleged hatred of women or sexual repression. God loves all people, because God loves his image, no matter how broken that image may be. To want to protect one person from another (in this case a child from a parent) is not to hate the person doing the evil. Christians want to love all life—but this does not mean we turn our back on the defenseless out of 'love' for those seeking to kill!

When we speak of abortion, of course, we're speaking of direct induced abortion: "The termination of a pregnancy by human intervention resulting in the death of the fetus, where the purpose is other than to save the life of the mother"* We aren't speaking of miscarriages, the tragic loss of an unborn baby through means beyond the parent's power. Often pro-choice activists will try to confuse people by multiplying medical jargon.

While abortion was not an issue in biblical times, and thus receives no direct mention, Scripture does concur with modern fetal research in affirming that the unborn child is from conception a human life (see Jeremiah 1:5; Psalm 22:10; Isaiah 7:14). There is Divine care for the fetus, and there is personal continuity between life inside and life outside of the womb (both are "me"—see Psalm 139:13-16). Further, Jesus began His human life when He was "conceived by the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:20).

As a human life, the unborn child is an image-bearer of God, and is therefore inherently worthy of protection (Genesis 9:6—killing an image-bearer is itself worthy of being killed). The sixth commandment ("Do not murder") calls us to value human life in the womb just as much it does human life in the front pew of a church. God loves all life and calls us to join in that love.

3. Christians have always loved the unborn in word and deed.

From their earliest days, the Christian churches have always sought to protect the lives of the helpless and unwanted. The same love that compelled Christians to risk their lives and their comfort taking in abandoned children is the same love that drove them to seek protection for the unborn. Among them:

- *Basil the Great*—In the mid-fourth century, for example, Basil (the Christian bishop of Caesarea) started the world's first non-ambulatory hospital for the poor, calling on Christians to give sacrificially to fund the ministry. He also risked his own life one night dismantling the old

* *Induced* abortion is distinguished from *spontaneous* abortion, or miscarriage. *Direct* abortion is distinguished from *indirect* abortion, abortion where the goal is to save the mother's life (the death of the fetus being necessary lest both die). Indirect abortion is rare. When the term 'abortion' is used in public debate, direct, induced abortion is usually in view. Indirect abortion, though tragic, is biblically permissible, as one human being has a moral right to defend him- or her-self from another threatening human person, even to the point of death. This is tragic because the unborn child is not *trying* to harm anyone. An analogy may be made to a man on a rooftop randomly shooting citizens. The fact that a large tumor growing on his brain is causing him to kill people makes it a tragic case, but the fact that he is a threat nevertheless legitimates violence for the sake of self-defense. The *fact*, not the *intent*, of a threat makes the self-defense argument valid—but *only* if death is likely to result from inaction.

infanticide shrine outside the city with his bare hands. He successfully lobbied the Roman government to secure legal protection for infants inside and outside the womb, and opened homes for women facing crisis pregnancies. He organized pickets of Egyptian traders who purchased aborted babies for use in cosmetics, and preached on the sanctity of every human life, calling on all people to repent of killing the unborn.

- *The Apostolic Fathers*—Basil was not the first early Christian to stand up for the value of human life. The Apostolic Fathers—the first generation of believers after the death of the last of the apostles—spoke out fervently for the dignity of every human life. As early as A.D. 120, the *Didache*, a catechism used by the early Christians, stated:

There are two ways: the way of life and the way of death, and the difference between these two ways is great. Therefore, do not murder a child by abortion or kill a newborn infant.

The *Epistle of Barnabas*, written sometime between A.D. 70 and 130, likewise included strong warnings about abortion, again approaching the topic out of love for the unborn. Recalling Jesus' instruction that every human life is your neighbor, the *Epistle* continues, "You shall love your neighbor more than your own life. You shall not slay a child by abortion. You shall not slay that which has already been generated."

- *Other Christian voices*—Athenagoras, a second century Christian apologist, while defending Christians before the emperor Marcus Aurelius, explained the high regard Christians have for all human life, born and unborn. Athenagoras stressed the love God has for the unborn child:

We say that women who induce abortions are murderers, and will have to give account of it to God. The fetus in the womb is a living being and therefore the object of God's care.

And this Christian love was extended to women as well as to children. Rather than judging pregnant women for sexual immorality, Christians in Corinth took temple prostitutes into their homes when they became pregnant. Christians in Poitiers established clinics and hostels to care for the needy. Christians opened the world's first hospitals, orphanages, almshouses, soup kitchens, and other charities. The opposition to abortion we see in these believers was not flowing from a moralistic judgmentalism, but from a sincere desire to be *for life*.

Other ancient Christian voices are not difficult to find. Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome and others all spoke out strongly in defense of the unborn. A thousand years later, Reformers like Luther and Calvin continued the Christian struggle to love the unborn, speaking and writing against abortion, and seeking to provide alternatives to women in need. In the modern era, it was Mother Theresa who said, upon winning the Nobel Peace Prize, "I believe the greatest destroyer of peace today is abortion." And it was Billy Graham who added a warning. America has killed 40 million unborn babies by abortion since 1973—over one fourth of the total children conceived, leading Graham to add, "If God doesn't judge America, he's going to have to apologize to Nazi Germany."

4. A human being is more valuable than personal comfort.

Pro-choice arguments usually try to steer away from discussion about the intrinsic value of life. Instead, they try to demonstrate that the aborted fetus' life would have been a life of poor quality. The child would have grown up in poverty. The child would have suffered from Downs Syndrome. The child would not have been equipped to contribute to society. But since when do we protect people only if they're rich, healthy and able to contribute? A quality of life ethic is truly wicked, cheapening people into what they have to offer.

The value of a human life is not based on the quality of life. Human value is an objective reality. Every living human being has an inalienable right to life, a right that is objective, self-evident, inalienable, and fundamental. The right to live is the first right in the American *Declaration of Independence*: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these is life..." *People are not valuable because they make money, have high intelligence, are independent, or contribute anything to society. People are valuable because they are people.*

5. Every abortion kills a unique living human being.

Critics of the Christian's pro-life stand often suggest that Christians oppose abortion because of some "religious" idea about life beginning at conception. But the beginnings of life are not open to debate—no serious researcher, pro-life or pro-choice—denies that abortion is taking human lives. In the 1980s, the United States Congress called 22 researchers to testify as to when human life began. To help avoid a biased sample, eleven of these researchers supported legal protection for the unborn, while eleven opposed such protections. When asked when each human life began, 21 of the 22 researchers answered, "Life begins at conception." Only one of 22 gave a different response—implantation, only a week after conception. The unborn child is:

- *Unique*—The fetus is not biologically or genetically part of the mother or father. From conception onward, the life has its own unique 23 pairs of chromosomes—half from the mother, half from the father. The fertilized ovum has 30,000 unique genes that already determine the child's sex (already a XX girl or XY boy!), hair color, race, and to some extent temperament, IQ, and future health issues.
- *Living*—the fetus is not dead tissue. "Pre-life" does not exist. The child maintains its own life functions, relying on its mother only for nourishment and shelter—as it continues to rely on its mother after birth.
- *Human*—No human embryo has ever become a chicken or a bunny.

What more must be in place for a being to be deserving of our love? The significance of the biological data is to establish the burden of proof. As far as we are able to observe, human life is a single continuum from conception to natural death. There is at no point other than conception a substantive change in the human being—there is only the development of an already existing, living human being into a more developed, existing, living, human being. If human life is held *at some point* to be inherently worthy of legal protection (inviolable), then abortion must be treated exactly like any other killing of humans, unless it can be proven that at some point after conception a non-human being becomes a human being. This cannot be done scientifically.

6. Every abortion stops a beating heart.

Abortion is fundamentally different from contraception—the prevention of new life. Abortion is the taking of existing life, what we would call murder in any other circumstance. And—with the exception of the “morning after” pill, an abortifacient that destroys the developing embryo in the first few days of life—every abortion stops a beating heart.

Development of the Human Embryo:	Day
Genetic identity	1
Nervous system	20
Regular heartbeat	24
Trunk, arms, legs	28
Brain waves	43
All organs functioning	56

The average abortion in the United States is performed at 8 weeks gestation, when the fetus even looks like a newborn, only smaller. But even the new RU-486, the infamous abortion pill, stops a beating heart. Before the mother is likely to even realize she is pregnant, the unborn child's heart is beating. And within 56 days after conception, all of the child's organs are functioning.

7. But doesn't a woman have a right to control her own body?

Many pro-choice activists admit that abortion is killing human beings. But through a complex argument, they seek to defend it nonetheless. The argument goes like this: Imagine a famous violinist has a rare condition that will cause him to die if he is not immediately hooked up to someone else's kidney. So he rushes up to you, and plugs himself into you. Do you then have a right to unhook this violinist? Yes, even though doing so will kill him. You never gave this violinist a right to derive his life from you—he is a parasite. The choice whether or not to unhook the violinist is yours.

How does the Christian respond? The pro-choice argument here is tricky, filled with legal presuppositions that the Christian can never accept. To begin with, we could note that the violinist situation is never-ending, while pregnancy is not—thus the analogy breaks down. It also breaks down in that the violinist has a criminal intent in plugging himself into you (stealing?) that the fetus does not have. One could also argue that (except in the case of rape) people do choose to bring another life into the world—when they have sexual intercourse with each other. But this argument still doesn't cover rape—and we don't want to punish the children for the sins of their fathers. A life is a life, and shedding innocent blood is wrong.

The key false supposition, as I see it, in the analogy of the famous violinist is this: that we are only obligated to love those we have chosen to love. This is the fatal flaw that invalidates the entire argument.

The lives of other people are not of value because we, as a society, have deemed them of value. Rather, we deem them of value because they *objectively are* of value. It was Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes who stated, “One man’s right to swing his arm end where another man’s face begins.” The right to life is a natural law universal to all people, whether they acknowledge it or not—a fundamental, inalienable, and self-evident right. The *fact* that the person is God’s image—not our contractual agreeing to consider him such—makes the person of highest value.

8. Every law legislates someone’s morality.

Someone will object, “But you can’t legislate morality.” This is a naive statement. Every law on the books is legislating *someone’s* morality. Why is rape illegal in the United States? Because it’s wrong. The moral standard is that rape is evil. The law thus legislates that morality by restricting the right of men to choose to rape. Libel is illegal. Why? Because it’s wrong to libel people, and so we have laws is to force people not to libel one another. When I drive, I wear my seatbelt. Why? Because some lawmaker decided that, since it’s even wrong to kill *yourself*, I should have to wear my seatbelt. And my car has an airbag. Why? Because it’s morally right to preserve life, so the law requires Honda to put in airbags. Every law on the books legislates morality. The question is this: Whose morality? I’d rather trust my fate to an impartial God who is perfectly good than to the shifting sands of lawmakers enslaved to political action committees and opinion polls. No government rules by the power of suggestion. Laws legislate morals.

Scripture teaches that the government is “God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer” (Romans 13:4, cf. 1 Peter 2:14). God is the giver of life, and He alone specifies the conditions under which human life may be taken* (Deuteronomy 32:39). Scripture is filled with condemnation toward those who make unjust laws that deprive the helpless of their rights (see Isaiah 10:1-2).

9. The rhetoric of ‘choice’ never works with victims involved.

Abortion is not a victimless crime. Indeed, the early feminists spoke out against abortion—not in favor of it—because they understood that the same ethic of violence that treated women poorly was the same violent ethic that sought to kill a child to solve a problem. The language of choice does not work where victims are involved. How’s this sound? *I think men should have the right to choose to beat their wives—it’s a family decision, not a government one. Who decides whether we expose infants—you, with the counsel of your friends, family, and clergy, or the federal bureaucracy? I’m personally opposed to date rape, but you can’t legislate morality. It’s every teenage boy’s personal decision to rape his date or not to. It’s just not a government decision.* Sound barbaric? It is. The language of choice is a slick Madison Avenue marketing ploy for baby killing. And the same Jesus who loves the little children calls us to love them too. Christians are right in demanding restored legal protection for the unborn, and one day people will realize this.

* Specifically, *self-defense*, the *death penalty* (Genesis 9:6—a covenant made with all of humanity and still in force, & Romans 13:4, “sword” being the death penalty) and *just war* (self-defense on a national scale, read the Old Testament). Personal retribution is *not* permitted by God—we may not shoot abortion doctors, even if the government fails in its responsibility to punish them.

Lesson 16

Christians are Homophobic!

Sometimes the best way to answer an argument is (1) with a counter-argument. Sometimes the best way to answer an argument is (2) by showing its falsehood by our actions. And sometimes the best way to answer an argument is (3) to say, “Well, you’re half-right” and go on from there. This lesson will be a mixture of all three.

1. We need to get our counter-arguments right.

To begin with, our speaker for this hour is George Ontko. George is a student at Covenant Theological Seminary and has worked with a Christian ministry to men and women struggling with homosexuality, a ministry called Harvest, based out of Philadelphia. He has studied the topic of homosexuality extensively and has worked with men and women—Christian and non-Christian—who have struggled in this area. He should be able to answer some of the arguments thrown at Christians with counter-arguments. When someone says, “I was born gay” or “The Bible doesn’t really condemn homosexuality,” I think you’ll be prepared to answer.

2. But our actions will speak louder than words.

But if the argument is that Christian opposition to homosexual sin is homophobic, we also need to deal with that argument in our actions. George is open about his own struggles in this area. The man who will be speaking to you tonight has struggled with homosexual sin in his own life. He thus speaks from personal experience. If homophobia is an irrational fear of people struggling with homosexuality, our welcoming George among us for this hour and learning from him should show the world that we aren’t afraid of George.

3. And we have to say the accusation is half-right.

We also have to acknowledge that Christians often have been afraid of men and women who struggle in these areas. Many Christians secretly struggle, and feel unable to turn to their fellow Christians because of fear of judgment. We have often treated this one area of sin as more serious than “our” besetting sins. But our goal isn’t to bemoan our failings, but to move on from there. Often the Christian who acknowledges he’s blown it has the most powerful testimony before the watching world.

George’s notes follow. He invites questions from the floor. He’s not embarrassed to talk about this, and hopes you won’t be either.

HOMEWORK

Think about these discussion questions over the next week. You may want to jot down your thoughts.

1. Why do you think relatively few churches stress the power of God's laws—his moral standards—to draw people to Christ?
2. A co-worker says, "I think Christians need to keep their Psalms out of my uterus. I don't agree with their religion." How might you re-frame the question in a way that will help them understand where we're coming from?
3. How would you answer a Christian who said that abortion must be okay with God since it's not mentioned in the Bible?
4. Name some early Christians who spoke out for the lives of the unborn.
5. "The children who are aborted would mostly grow up poor anyway." How do you answer this concern?
6. A friend says, "Christians' religion says unborn babies are alive—that's why they're against abortion." How would you help this friend see that it's not just our "religion" that says the fetus is alive?
7. "You can't legislate morality—it's a personal choice." Discuss.
8. How comfortable do you feel around people who struggle with homosexuality? Why do you feel that way? What examples from Jesus' ministry can you find that show us how we ought to feel and act around sinners?
9. Someone tells you, "People are born gay. It's that simple. You can't say that's wrong." How might you respond?

WITNESSING TIPS

Lesson Seventeen

Tips on witnessing to Mormons

Lesson Eighteen

Tips on witnessing to Jehovah's Witnesses

Lesson Nineteen

Tips on witnessing to Jewish People

Lesson Twenty

Tips on witnessing to New Agers

Lesson Twenty-One

Tips on witnessing to Moslems

Lesson 17

Tips on Witnessing to Mormons

1. Background

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS) traces its origin to a vision Joseph Smith received in 1820, when 14 years old. God and Jesus appeared to Joseph and told him that all denominations were wrong and Christian creeds were an abomination. Three years later the angel Moroni began to appear to Smith—four appearances over the next four years—finally giving him golden plates upon which were written the *Book of Mormon* in Reformed Egyptian (a language that never existed), which Smith translated (with no linguistic training), publishing it in 1830. When asked to show the plates, Smith claimed they had disappeared because God wanted us to live by faith, not by evidence. After Smith was killed by a mob while in jail for treason, the Mormons were led by Brigham Young, who led them west to Utah. Today the LDS is one of the fastest growing religious groups on earth, and owns a huge financial empire.

2. Scripture

The *King James Bible* (their preferred translation), the *Book of Mormon*, the *Pearl of Great Price*, *Doctrines & Covenants* and the current President of the LDS, who is a living prophet and the voice of God.

3. The Big Issues to Hit On

There are minor points on which we may not want to get sidetracked—holy Mormon underwear, magic talismans, celestial temple marriages, the degradation of women, a history of racism (Africans are black because they sided with Satan against Jesus before creation, for example). *Don't let the Mormon missionary set the agenda with phony talk about a personal relationship with God—cut immediately to the real issues.* The biggest issues are discussed below.

- Did the Church cease to exist?

The LDS—like many cults—states that the Christian Church did not exist from the first century until the 1820s. Jesus had promised his Church in Matthew 28:20, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Either Jesus was lying or the Mormon Church is lying. While there have been times when the churches were filled with corruption, God has always cared for his Church—the assembly of his people—and has always raised up men to preach the gospel and reform the Church. Jesus promised in Matthew 16:18, “I will build my Church; and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” Yet the LDS teaches that for over seventeen centuries, the gates of hell prevailed and Jesus wasn't building his Church. The foundation of Mormon teaching is false—we shouldn't believe anything else they say.

• Who is God?

Mormonism teaches that God was once a human being just like us. Through his righteous Mormon lifestyle, Jehovah earned godhood, just like we will if we're good Mormons. Every Mormon knows the saying by heart: "As man is, God once was; as God is, man may be." God is not eternal, and there was a time in which he did not exist. [In this sense, there never was a true creation of all that exists.] The Mormon God is also a flesh-and-blood creature, not a spirit (Compare John 4:24). Every Mormon needs to be challenged with God's self-revelation in the Bible, for if you have the wrong God, you're wrong forever—no matter how hard you believe.

Isaiah 43:10—"Before me no God was formed, nor will there be one after me."

Isaiah 44:8—"You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock, I know not one."

Psalms 90:2—"From everlasting to everlasting, you are God."

• Who is Jesus?

The LDS teaches that Jesus is Lucifer's brother, a created being like the Father. The Bible, by contrast, presents Jesus as creator of everything seen and unseen (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:2). The Mormon Jesus was not born of a virgin, either. Rather, the Father came to earth and had sex with Mary in Mary's bed (even though she was betrothed, making both Mary and Jehovah adulterers). By contrast, the Bible presents a holy, miraculous conception of Jesus—a conception by the Holy Spirit without sexual relations (see Matthew 1:18).

• What is salvation?

The LDS teaches a two-fold salvation, the first universalistic, the second earned by works.

1. All are resurrected, and thus all are saved in a limited sense.

2. But only righteous Mormons get to become Gods and get their own universe to rule.

This latter salvation is a salvation by works. It is earned through obedience to the commands of the Mormon Church—what they may call the "commands of the gospel" (Think about that! A gospel of law!). To receive this salvation, a life of works must be crowned by celestial marriage in a Mormon Temple. For a Mormon woman, salvation depends on her husband's remembering her name on the last day. If he calls her name, then she too is resurrected and can spend eternity as his goddess-queen populating a universe by being eternally pregnant with spirit babies. Many Mormons will be struck by clear biblical teaching on God's acceptance of us by grace alone.

• Is discernment by Bosom or is discernment by Bible?

Even if you demonstrate that Mormonism contradicts the Bible, is historically groundless, and theologically idolatrous, any Mormon will fall back on his "burning in the bosom." They will say they have prayed and asked God to show whether Mormonism is true, and they felt warmth in their bosom that confirmed it. Unfortunately, many Christians say stupid, unbiblical, heretical things like this all the time. *But I will lay it on the line as a theologian and teacher of God's Word: Not once does the Bible tell us to test a teaching by praying for a feeling.* Scripture says we test the spirits by comparing their doctrine to the rest of Scripture (the Bereans in Acts 17:11, Paul in Galatians 1:8), particularly making sure their doctrine of God is the same (Deuteronomy 13:1-5) and by looking for fulfilled predictive prophecy (Deuteronomy 18:22). Not by feelings.

Lesson 18

Tips on Witnessing to Jehovah's Witnesses

1. Background

The Watchtower Society was founded by Charles Taze Russell (1829-1916), who had left his Presbyterian background because he was unwilling to believe in the doctrine of hell. Russell then worked in Adventist circles, coming to accept the Bible's inspiration only after an Adventist persuaded him that the Bible didn't really teach eternal punishment. Russell began publishing *Zion's Watchtower* in 1874, teaching that the Kingdom of God would commence with the culmination of Christ's return (which had begun in 1874) and Armageddon in 1914. After that event failed to happen, the Society changed in doctrine to teach that Christ's return began—not ended—in 1914. The Society subsequently taught that the resurrection would take place in 1925, but dropped this teaching in 1926.

2. Scripture

The *New World Translation* (NWT) of the Bible is the only legitimate translation in their view. It was translated by the Society, and is filled with mistranslations, with words often added to change the meaning of the original Greek or Hebrew text.

3. What they Believe—The Major Issue

There are several beliefs that separate Jehovah's Witnesses from Christianity. Jehovah's Witnesses are forbidden from speaking to "opposers"—those who disagree with them and don't appear ready to convert. *If you don't want to scare them off, try asking questions that will enable them to do most of the talking, yet get them thinking.* Witnesses often don't know the Bible very well—only the Watchtower publications and their proof texts. Encourage them to read the Bible on its own authority. Also agree with them about the moral filth of our culture, and the need for righteousness and obedience to God's Word. This is our "common ground" and a good starting point. Then move to the weightier issues. Here's the biggest falsehood the Society teaches...

- Jesus is not God, but the archangel Michael. There is therefore no Trinity—only the Father is God, and the Holy Spirit is not even a person but an impersonal force.

The Big Issue Question: Do you agree this is the big issue? If you have the right Jesus, you're right for eternity, but if you have the wrong Jesus, you're wrong for eternity.

The Immanuel Question: Isn't Jesus *Immanuel* (Matthew 1:23)? Doesn't this mean "God with us"?

4. Other issues of central importance

The Watchtower Society not only denies Jesus' deity and the Trinity—both essential Christian doctrines—but also has other major errors, heresies serious enough to prevent their salvation. Among them...

- Jesus Christ did not rise bodily from the grave. Only his spirit was revived. Jesus' body remained in the grave, where it dissolved into gasses. Christ returned spiritually in 1914. He will never return physically.

Witnessing Tip: As big an issue as this is, I let it pass to focus on other issues.

- The Church Jesus founded ceased to exist in the first century and was not restored until 1874. The Watchtower Society is the only true church, and its decrees must be obeyed without question.

The Always-With-Us Question: Would this make Jesus is a liar since he promised his followers in Matthew 28:20 that he would be with us always, to the end of the age?

The YOU Question: [In any context, just so they'll learn to distinguish the two...] So, that's what the Society teaches—what do YOU yourself think?

The 'Questioning' Question: How can one institution command unquestioning obedience? Wasn't even an apostle like Peter rebuked for being wrong by Paul (Galatians 2:11)? Weren't the Bereans called noble for questioning Paul and testing what he said against their own careful reading of the Bible (Acts 17:11)? Didn't Paul command us not to accept a different gospel even if it came from an angel or from himself (Galatians 1:8)?

Witnessing Tip: Witnesses think that the opposition they face shows that they must really be right. Don't slam doors on them. Love them—this will surprise them.

- Salvation is not by faith alone, but by righteous works in addition. Only those who prove themselves worthy of salvation will be saved.

The Romans Question: Doesn't Romans 3:20 say that no one will be declared righteous by observing the law? What do you think about Romans 3:28? Could you read it for me? I understood it to say that we are justified by faith apart from the works of the law. How do you explain Romans 4:5, where God says that to the one who does not work but trusts God, his faith is credited to him as righteousness?

The 'Will-not-be-Condemed' Question: But didn't Jesus say in John 5:24, "whoever hears my word and believes the one who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life"?

The Faith & Works Question: Do you feel faith and works lead to salvation, or does faith leads to both salvation and works (faith+works = salvation or faith = salvation+works)?

The Does-God-like-You Question: So do you think God likes you? On a scale of 1 to 10, how certain are you that you will go to heaven? If you were to stand before God and he were to ask “Why should I let you into my heaven?” how would you answer? [Talk about the personal relationship you have with God through Jesus.]

- There is no hell for the unbelieving. Death is a cessation of existence, and there is no immaterial soul or spirit. [Remember: this was the issue that first drove Russell to create his own religion. Romans 1 speaks of those who create their own religion because they can't handle the supremacy of the real God. Denying hell is really a denial of the holy God. This is an idolatry issue.]

The Smoke Question: I read in Revelation 14:9-11 that the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. How do you think the smoke keeps rising if they aren't there anymore?

The Eternal Punishment Question: Doesn't Jesus say in Matthew 25:46 that their punishment is eternal, just like his followers' life is eternal?

The God's Justice Question: If God is infinitely righteous and we aren't, don't you think he would be just to punish sinners forever?

5. Issues of Secondary Importance

- Man-made commandments—Witnesses do not participate in birthdays, Christmas, Easter, national holidays, voting, military service, or blood transfusions, even if necessary to save their lives. This can mean that sick children die when we could save them. Legalistic rules are always an attempt to establish a righteousness of one's own rather than receiving Christ's righteousness as a free gift to sinners.
- Jesus did not die on a cross, but on a stake. Historically, we know this is incorrect, but it's not an important issue.
- They are zealous. Jehovah's Witnesses spend an average of 5 hours each week doing the work of the Watchtower Society. On average, they put in 3,500 hours of work for every one person baptized into the Society.

Witnessing Tip: Many Witnesses are weary and discouraged. Stress Jesus' light burden, his free grace, and the encouragement and support you have from fellow Christians who love you, do not judge you, and carry you when you cannot walk. Stress that the real Jesus is faithful to his people, and will never reject them.

Lesson 19

Tips on Witnessing to Jewish People

There are 60,000 Jews in the St. Louis area. Some are deeply religious—especially followers of Orthodox Judaism. Others are very secular, viewing their Judaism more as a cultural identity than a religious perspective. This is often the case within Reformed Judaism, which allows its members to be atheists or agnostics if they choose. Conservative Jews are somewhere in between. Messianic Jews—or “completed” Jews, as they sometimes wish to be called—are Jewish followers of Jesus, or Jewish Christians.

1. Who says which is the “true” Judaism? Which is oldest?

The most common Jewish objection to Jesus goes like this, “I’m Jewish. Jews don’t believe in Jesus.” Who says so? The rabbis? They have a vested interest in this issue—they want Jews to follow *them*. Historically, the dominant strand of Judaism is Christianity! Messianic Judaism—or Jewish Christianity—is a lot older than modern rabbinic Judaism! There were three branches of Judaism in the first century: Messianic Judaism, Priestly Judaism, and Pharisaical Judaism. Rabbinic Judaism didn’t exist; it came only after the destruction of the Temple in the year 70. Of these three ancient branches of Judaism, only Messianic Judaism remains today. The other two ceased with the destruction of the Temple.

Judaism as a theological system cannot exist without either (1) a temple with guilt offerings, or (2) a priestly Messiah who lays down his life for the transgression of the Jews. The Scripture says that there is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood. Every sin must be punished—either directly in the age to come, or vicariously through a scapegoat—a temple offering, or some other acceptable substitute. With the destruction of the Temple, only a Judaism with a Messianic sacrifice—Yeshua—can work within the covenantal Hebrew religious system.

Most Jews don’t realize how Jewish Christianity is. “Christ” is just a Greek translation of Messiah, the one promised in the Hebrew Scriptures. Christ was not Jesus’ last name. Also Jesus is just a Greek translation of Yeshua, a common Hebrew name, and the name of the Jewish carpenter-turned-prophet who claimed to be the Jewish Messiah in the first century. All of Jesus’ first followers were Jews—and observant, faithful, religious Jews at that.

And to follow Yeshua does not mean abandoning one’s Jewish heritage, but fulfilling it. There is nothing in the Christian Scripture that forbids the observance of the Passover or Hanukkah or Rosh Hashanah. Indeed, Christian worship services have traditionally been patterned after ancient synagogue worship. And today, hundreds of thousands of Jewish people are following Yeshua as Messiah. They see themselves as completing their Jewish identity and finding their God-given calling in the world. Try reading Matthew’s gospel, and ask yourself whether Yeshua is the Jewish Messiah. He upholds the Torah, observes the Law, and gives his life for the Jews.

2. Which branch of Judaism has fulfilled the *TANAK*?

The *TANAK*—what Christians call the Old Testament—promised that all the nations would come to Yahweh during the Messianic era. Billions have done so through the teachings of Yeshua, almost none through rabbinical Judaism. The Prophet Isaiah said that, during the Messianic era, all the nations would stream forward to worship Yahweh. God’s Law would go out from Zion to bring all nations to repentance (Isaiah 2:1-5). Habakkuk foresaw a day in which “The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14). Rabbinic Judaism has not done this. Yeshua has, and his influence on earth grows every year. What one figure has convinced a quarter of the earth’s population to read the Jewish Scriptures as the Word of God? Yeshua. What one figure has single-handedly convinced billions of Gentiles—*goyim*—to worship Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Yeshua.

The greatest glory of Messianic Judaism is not that it’s the oldest strain of Judaism, but that it’s persuaded billions of Gentiles to worship the God of the Jews. At times in history Christians have sinned against Jews—sometimes violently. This is tragic, and true followers of Yeshua are deeply repentant over it. But the failings of Christianity are only noticed because they’re so out of character. Just look at the impact Yeshua has had upon the world [See lesson 8]!

3. Centuries before Yeshua, Isaiah told what Messiah would be.

The Prophet Isaiah has spoken of the Messiah, the Suffering Servant. In chapter 53 of his book, Isaiah said that, rather than ushering in a victorious rule through military conquest...

The Messiah would suffer (v. 3)

The Messiah would suffer willingly (v. 7)

The Messiah would die an innocent man (v. 9)

The Messiah would die for the sins of Israel (v. 8)

The Messiah would die as a sin-bearer and bring atonement (v. 5-6, 12)

The Messiah would be resurrected (v. 10-11)

Between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place in the ancient Temple—between the room where priests ministered and the room housing the very presence of God—there was a veil. This veil ceremonially separated God from his people. God was holy, righteous, and unwilling to accept sin. Yahweh had told us long ago that he would only accept perfection (Leviticus 17). God’s people were always defiled, imperfect, and in bondage to sin. At the very moment Yeshua was crucified as a sacrifice for sin, this curtain in the Temple was torn in two, opening the way for all people—and especially the Jews—to be reconciled to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Through the Messiah’s offering of himself upon the alter of the cross, God was now willing to live with humans, with no more sacrifices needed—their guilt having been atoned in full, once for all. When the Temple was destroyed by Roman armies a few years later, the solution was not to re-invent a rabbinic Judaism without a Temple. Rather, God was ratifying the fact that the Jews no longer needed a Temple—they had Yeshua, whose perfect sacrifice made all others obsolete. Through union with Yeshua, we have new hearts and a new covenant with God, just as it was promised by the Prophets Jeremiah (31:31-34) and Ezekiel (36:25-27).

Lesson 20

Tips on Witnessing to New Agers

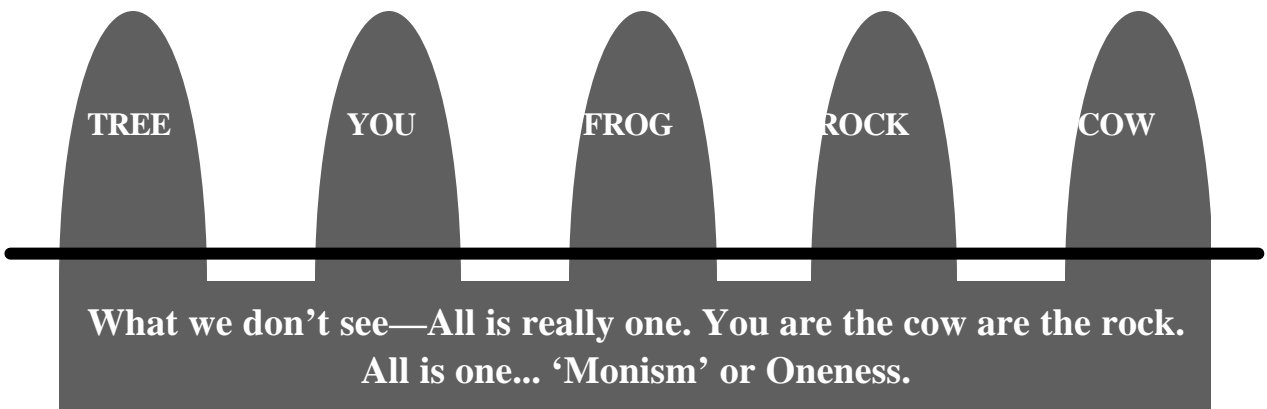
The New Age—or Conscious Living—Movement is not a tightly knit movement. Rather, it is a term we use to describe a diffuse group of Eastern religious ideas as they have been filtered through Western culture in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Few people would label themselves New Agers, and most of those who adopt one New Age viewpoint may not accept another. Thus, when we deal with the New Age, we are not always dealing with a tight religious system. We can never assume we know what a New Ager believes—we need to spend lots of time talking with people to understand exactly where they are spiritually. In the 1960s, we heard about the Age of Aquarius, usually voiced in between heroin trips. Today the New Age is much more diverse—and much more commercialized.

1. Some Common New Age Beliefs

Douglas Groothuis summarizes some common New Age perspectives in *Confronting the New Age* (InterVarsity, 1988). Among them...

- **Evolutionary Optimism**—We are preparing to enter the next great step in human evolution, a leap in consciousness into the Age of Aquarius in which we wake up to the God within us and see the establishment of a new world order. Some even say Jesus will usher in this New Age!
- **Monism**—Everything is **One**. Distinctions are just an illusion. I am just an illusion of an individual. In reality I am but an expression of the universal that is everything.

What we see—the illusion of diversity and distinction



- **Pantheism**—Everything is God. God is the universe, and the universe is God. Everything is therefore characterized by divinity, including us.
- **Transformation of Consciousness**—Through anti-intellectual, mystical activities like yoga, crystals, meditation, visualization, drugs, near death experiences, and channeling we experience the unity of all things, our true divine selves, the higher consciousness.
- **Create your own reality**—There is no objective moral law or commandments. We live according to our own standards. Since all is one, good and evil cannot be differentiated.
- **Unlimited human potential**—If you're God, you can do anything if you believe in yourself. *A Course in Miracles* can show you how to create your miracle, too.
- **Spirit Contact**—Channeling brings us into contact with other spirits that exist in the oneness that we are. Christianity, of course, calls this demonic possession.
- **Masters from Above: Angels**—Angels and extraterrestrial beings in UFOs are both manifestations of the mystical spirit realm, servants from the stars who teach us the New Age.
- **Religious Syncretism**—Then true essence of all religion is the New Age, all religions being one. "Externals" like theology might be different, but the mystical core of them all is one.

2. Some Questions for those involved in the New Age

- **Do you really believe that's true? Can you really live it?** I remember Deepak Chopra on PBS talking about how the physical body doesn't really exist—it's just an illusion. And I was amazed at the respectful, well-dressed professionals nodding in wonder at such a dumb statement. I wanted to grab them, shake them and ask, "Do you really believe that? Think about it!" I even called the station and complained that, were our children to follow Chopra's teachings, they'd be walking in front of speeding cars, thinking themselves illusions. Chopra's teachings cannot be lived out. They aren't objectively true. It's a neat idea, but it's not reality. Nothing can really fulfill us if it doesn't satisfy both the heart *and the head*.
- **Is anything Evil other than not recycling?** There is no basis, if all is one, to distinguish that which is good from that which is evil. If all is one, why is it okay to eat a head of lettuce but not a two-year old boy? Does this satisfy the will?
- **Does this satisfy your heart?** Ultimately, since the New Age isn't objectively true, it works only to cover over the longings of the heart. After a while, the hunger for a deeper experience becomes a realization that you're living a lie. Make-believe spirituality does not answer the real questions about our purpose in life. We all have a God-given need to worship, and the New Age offers no personal God. The New Age says we live for ourselves—it's all about us getting more personal spiritual power. In this sense, it's an incredibly selfish

spirituality. But if the Bible is right in saying that we exist for God, then we'll never find satisfaction in the New Age.

- The New Age isn't new. Have you seen what it's done to India? They've had it for years.

Lesson 21

Tips on Witnessing to Moslems

There are over 25,000 religious, observant Moslems in the St. Louis area. There are several mosques in the region, and anyone working in the sciences or medicine will work alongside Moslem graduate students (many of them internationals), researchers, and physicians. One billion of our fellow humans globally—about one in five—live in submission to Islam.

Islam is my favorite heresy. As false religions go, I appreciate it. Moslems don't change their theology based on public opinion polls or peer pressure, unlike many cowards within Christian churches. They teach the total sovereignty of God over all of life more clearly than many Christians. They demand all people everywhere to submit to God's law, and they put their money where their mouth is, funding Moslem missions worldwide. Many Moslems look at the immorality and compromise of "Christian" America and want nothing to do with Christianity.

1. Background

Muhammad began preaching in the seventh century, calling polytheistic Arabs to believe in only one God, or *Allah*, with Muhammad being God's greatest and final prophet. Islam means "submission" and a Moslem is "one who submits". Over 23 years, Muhammad claimed to receive revelations, recorded in the *Qur'an*. Moslems used warfare to further Islam, eventually spreading the religion throughout the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia.

2. Scripture

The *Qur'an* (or *Koran*) is the Word of God, correcting all previous Scripture. The Old Testament was the Word of God, but was corrupted by the Jews. The New Testament was the Word of God, but was corrupted by the Christians. The *Qur'an* was given to correct these books. Still, Jews and Moslems are respected as "Peoples of the Book" and cannot be forced to convert to Islam, while others may be converted through force. There were originally several contradicting and competing versions of the *Qur'an*, but all but one were ordered burned by the Caliph in the generation after Muhammad, so that there would only be one version.

3. Key questions for the Moslem

The central tenet of Islam is the *shahadah*: "I bear witness that there is no God but God and Muhammad is his prophet." By reciting this *shahadah* sincerely, anyone can become a Moslem. Moslems rarely convert to Christ, largely because few have ever been challenged to consider Jesus. Some key questions we need to ask the Moslem to get him thinking...

- **Have you considered the words of Prophet Jesus?** Islam acknowledges Jesus as a prophet of God, but one lesser than Muhammad. Rather than blasting Muhammad (something that's easy to do!), we should encourage them to read the Gospels and see what Jesus actually said. I particularly recommend John's Gospel for starters. You may offer to trade—you read the *Qur'an* if they read the Bible. Don't hide your beliefs, but be careful about directly criticizing the *Qur'an*. It will close doors rather than opening them. But by reading the Gospels, the Moslem can compare in his own heart the distant and violent God of the *Qur'an* with the humble and loving God seen in Jesus. Jesus had all power, yet used that power to disrobe himself and wash his disciples' feet. He refused to raise the sword against his enemies, though he had all power and authority over them. Jesus conquered his enemies' hearts through his love. They will read of forgiveness rather than revenge, of mercy triumphing over justice. While in the *Qur'an* they find a law book, in the Bible they will meet a Person, Jesus, God the Redeemer.

- **How will you stand before God on judgment Day?** Here our standard diagnostic questions come into play:

1. *On a scale of 1 to 10, how likely is it that you will be saved?*
2. *And if you were to die and stand before God today, and he were to ask you, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" what would you say?*

This gives you an opportunity to talk about your own assurance of salvation based on God's promise and based on Jesus' work on the cross. Talk about the Great Exchange: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus takes our guilt on the cross; we get his righteousness before God.

- **Tell me about your relationship with God.** Most Moslems have a very distant relationship to God. Talk about knowing God. Talk about your own struggles to trust God in specific situations. Be real, humble, transparent, and confident in your God. Talk about God's love, mercy and compassion—as well as his holiness, transcendence, and sovereign power. Islam teaches that the gulf between Creator and creature is so vast as to be unbridgeable. We believe that Jesus came to bridge that gulf—as God and man himself, and as the sacrifice for our guilt. Jesus is Immanuel, *God with us*. Moslems will find this blasphemous, but we need to ask them: *If God were all-powerful, wouldn't he be able to bridge the gap? Wouldn't he—and he alone—have the power to unite his deity to humanity if he wanted to do so? We cannot limit God's power. Then it's not a question of whether it could happen—it could—but of whether it did happen.* When we call Jesus God's Son, we aren't saying God has sex with Mary (though the Mormons are!). Even the *Qur'an* teaches that Jesus' birth was miraculous (*surah* 3:47).

4. You better know your theology!

Moslems are taught that the Bible was altered by the early church. (You'll want to review lesson 6). They are also taught that Christians believe in three Gods, which is false. You'll need to bone up on the Trinity. The *Qur'an* also teaches that Jesus was not really crucified—God sneaked Judas onto the cross instead. Without the cross, there is no Christianity. Our submission to God in humility comes only through Christ's humiliation as he gives himself to and for us.

HOMEWORK

Think about these discussion questions over the next week. You may want to jot down your thoughts.

1. The Christian gospel is always the same, but sharing the gospel with people can often look different. Why is this?
2. Some issues arose with more than one of the religions in these lessons. Which ones occurred more than once? Why do you think these issues keep cropping up?
3. A friend says, "I'm not Christian, I'm Jewish. Jews don't believe in Jesus." How might you construct a response?
4. Mormon missionaries show up at your door asking if they can talk to you about God's plan for your life. How would you take control of the direction of the conversation? What issues would you want to discuss?
5. Jehovah's Witnesses are very afraid of speaking to "opposers" who try to change their views. How can you get them thinking about Jesus without coming across as an enemy? List some specific questions you'd like to ask them.
6. If there were 8 verses touching on this lesson that you think would be most valuable to memorize, what would they be? Work on committing them to memory.

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