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Equip Seminars

APOLOGETICS

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1 Christ and Culture

1.1 Introduction

The world is a place of great good and beauty. The music of Handel and Beethoven, the poetry of Shakespeare and John Donne, the genius of Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, the discoveries of Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein, the Taj Mahal, the Pyramids, Westminster, Notre Dame, the Sistine Chapel. Men and women working in this world, many of them Christians, have inspired, explored, discovered, invented, healed, and created.

The world is a place of deep and enduring evil. The world is the place of Auschwitz and the Gulag, global war and endemic poverty, man-made drought, starvation, environmental destruction, materialism and irresponsible luxury. Men and women working in this world have killed, wasted, ruined, exploited, enslaved, and destroyed.

Is the world basically good or basically bad? Should we as Christians rejoice in, engage with, and work to improve a world that has the potential for great good, or should we abandon, condemn, and separate ourselves from a world permeated with sin and corruption? Should we curse the darkness or praise the few candles around us? How does our citizenship in heaven affect our life on earth? Is it our obligation to abandon a sinking ship or do we try to demonstrate God's love by patching the hull? What does it mean to be a Christian in an un-Christian world? What is the relationship between Christ and culture?

Answering those questions is the goal of this course. As we will see, the answer largely depends on what part of the world we are confronted with at any given moment. The Christian's stance towards culture will be different if he lives in 1930s Germany or 1940s Russia than if he lives in 1820s Southern USA or 1700s England. It will even differ from day to day and hour to hour considering the number of cultures we now engage with through different media every day. We will find that some parts of the world deserve unqualified condemnation. Other parts merit enjoyment and praise. And so this course will seek to equip you with the tools you need to discern which is which, to interpret the cultures you live in so you understand how to relate to them.

1.2 What is culture? What is "the world"?

In this course we'll be using the words "world" and "culture" basically interchangeably. Culture is ideas and the "stuff" those ideas inspire.

The ideas can be philosophical or theological; secular or religious. That can be ideas about man, the nature of the universe, good and evil, freedom, God, politics, or any number of other things.

The "stuff" is even more varied. Typically when we think of the stuff of culture we think of classical paintings and sculpture, which is true enough. The harmony and balance of a classical Greek statue reflected the Greeks' belief that the human ideal was to live a life of balance and proportion, for example. But we can and should broaden our view of what stuff is the stuff of culture. It isn't just the stuffy old classical stuff. Cultural creations are not limited to the arts like painting, sculpture, music, and stage drama. It includes TV commercials, comic books, your grade school history textbook, movies, sitcoms, romance novels, tabloids, the evening news, the morning newspaper, your iPhone, your Facebook page, and all the pictures on your digital camera.

Culture is the sum total of all the stuff that human beings create that reflects something about what we believe. We live in a world saturated with the stuff of contemporary cultures. We encounter cultural creations everywhere and constantly.

1.3 What Does the Bible Say about the World and About Culture?

Note that God uses our cultural creations in His work, and we use it in our sin. The Tower of Babel was an entire city dedicated to man's belief that he could be like God, and has become a byword for human hubris and folly. The Tabernacle – and later the Temple – and all the intricate tools used in its service were cultural creations made according to God's specifications to worship Him in the way that He ordered. In the Temple worship we see that God can use and sanctify our work for His glory.

That should give us pause if we are tempted to view culture or the world as wholly good or wholly bad. Cultural artefacts are tools of expression: they are good or bad depending on what is being expressed. If we are expressing worship towards God, true things about His creation, or true things about our nature – that we are made in His image but fallen and sinful – then cultural creations are praiseworthy. If cultural creations express disbelief in God of false things about Him or His creation, then they are not.

And in fact, as we might expect, the Bible reflects a wide range of views towards “the world” of fallen human culture. It depends on what sort of “world” – what kind of culture – we are encountering. Let's look at a few basic orientations towards culture:

1.3.1 Christ Against Culture – Christians Should Condemn Culture

To the extent that there is sin and evil in the world around us, we as Christians must condemn it and separate ourselves from it without hesitation or qualification. The Bible makes clear that there is implacable hostility between followers of Christ and the world that rejected him. We see this message preached consistently by the Apostle John. John invokes “the world” – by which he means the entire regime of fallen and sinful humanity at enmity with God – and calls for Christians to separate themselves from it. To the extent that we face a culture that expresses hostility to God and His Gospel, the Bible calls on us to separate ourselves from it.

- The Gospel of John is filled with references to the hostility Christians will face in this world. ***“The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life...If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first...If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you...In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world...I have given them [God's] word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.”*** (John 12:25, 15:18, 15:19, 16:33, 17:14).
- John preaches the same message in his first epistle. 1 John 2:15-17, ***“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.”***
- John seems to echo this view in his record of the Apocalypse. An angel proclaims the fall of “Babylon,” which is possibly a reference to ancient Rome but also serves as the archetype of

all wicked earthly power. John writes (Revelation 18:4-5, 8) ***“Then I heard another voice from heaven say: ‘Come out of her [Babylon], my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes...Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.’”*** The call to “come out” is a call to separate from and no longer identify with a worldly regime or earthly government that has reached a certain degree of wickedness.

Throughout church history some Christians have taken this stance of opposition and condemnation towards the world and culture around them. Much of the earliest Christian church adopted this view under persecution from the Roman Empire. Monks fled the corruption and worldliness into monasteries in the Dark Ages and Middle Ages; Anabaptists during the Reformation followed suit; as did their later descendents, the Mennonites and Amish; and we saw a similar attitude among Fundamentalists last century. *We can also say that this is surely—and understandably— the view of Christians who have lived under hostile regimes in any age, such as ancient Rome or contemporary China or Central Asia.*

But equally, we can see that it is not the only way Christians should view or interact with the world. It is appropriate when faced with clear evil and wickedness; but we do not always face that. God made the world, “and he saw that it was very good.” *Although creation is fallen, it still retains a shadowy reflection of God’s goodness and glory.* Not all things in the world are wholly and entirely wicked, and Christians would be wrong to treat all things as if they were. We would be unwise to respond to our circumstances in 21st Century New Zealand in exactly the same way that Christians responded to the ancient Roman Empire. The Romans murdered Christians; New Zealanders do not.

1.3.2 Christ Above Culture / Christ and Culture in Paradox – Christians should critique culture

Some Christians recognize the truth of Christ against Culture, yet they see it is not always the only way to respond to our circumstances. It is true that this creation was originally good; that culture is inescapable; that we can use cultural creations as tools for learning about God and teaching one another. The Bible recognizes that our citizenship in heaven does not wholly preclude our earthly or worldly commitments. Heaven takes priority, but that does not mean the world always deserves reflexive condemnation. Christ is above Culture, and sometimes our commitments seem to be held in paradox.

The Bible gives support for this view.

- Creation is good. There is nothing evil or polluted about material creation. Genesis 1:31, ***“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.”*** It even reflects God’s character and glory.
- Our citizenship is in heaven, but earthly communities have a legitimate claim on our loyalty, obedience, and support too, because God has ordained that they exist and order our lives. Jesus says in Matthew 22:21, ***“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”*** Peter echoes this in 1 Peter 2:17, ***“Fear God, honor the king.”***
- The prophet Jeremiah tells us not only to obey laws, but to ***“Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper,”*** (Jeremiah 29:7). We are called to pay heed and show concern for the world we live in.

- Paul says in Romans 13:1-7, ***“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves...He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer...This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants.”***

And so we live in tension, recognizing that this world was created good; that God has blessed us with the ability to work and shape this creation in good ways; that we have legitimate obligations to this world – despite that this world is fallen and destined to perish in judgment; that our work will never “save the world,” and that at every moment we must be on guard to watch for the evil and wickedness present in the world.

1.3.3 Christ of Culture – Copy and Consume

Before we move on, I want to warn you about another view some professing Christians have taken towards culture in the past. Some Christians have reacted against the Christ against culture view by taking the opposite view. They have argued that human culture is the primary means through which God reveals Himself and the primary means through which we serve Him. They would argue that we cannot learn about God except through human cultural artifacts, like books, talking, and reading; and that we cannot serve God except through human cultural artifacts, like Godly families, societies, and nations. These Christians see no tension between Christ and the world; rather, they believe the Christian message is that God becomes wholly immanent in the world through our culture. It is therefore our duty to build an increasingly Godly culture until we have literally built heaven on earth. This view of Christ and culture usually goes together with a postmillennial eschatology—the view that Christ will return and reign after we Christians have literally built his kingdom here on earth in this age.

The Bible does not support this stance towards culture. Don Carson rightly notes that Christians who take this view of the world usually do so by distorting or ignoring large parts of the Bible. It is true that God’s creation was originally good, and indeed He does reveal Himself through all of creation; but the “Christ of culture” view overlooks the Fall. This present creation is twisted and ruined, marred by sin.

So I just want to warn you that as you think on how we as Christians relate to our surrounding culture, you may hear some argue that we should seek to shape our culture so completely that it comes to embody God’s Kingdom entirely and wholly within this world. This is an unbiblical view and we need to remind ourselves that in this fallen world that we will never attain paradise.

1.4 Application

As we’ve seen, our response towards the cultures we encounter depends on what that culture says about God and His world. This course is designed to help you interpret cultures so that you can respond appropriately.

But it would be wrong to leave it at this, as if the point of this course was simply to learn how to critique cultures rightly and have interesting things to say about books and movies. We should move beyond understanding culture and either condemning, critiquing, or praising it. We should eventually come to cultivate and create culture that glorifies God and expresses true things about His creation.

1.4.1 Christ Transforming Culture – Cultivate and Create culture

The Bible encourages us to actively participate in creating and cultivating good culture that reflects God’s glory.

- Work—the creation and cultivation of cultural goods—is part of our purpose on earth. **“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it,”** (Genesis 2:15). Before sin and the Fall, God directed that man go to work. Work is not a punishment for sin or a part of the curse—it is part of what God made us for. In our work we participate in shaping and crafting God’s good creation.
- Solomon commends work several times in Ecclesiastes. **“There is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work,”** (3:22), and **“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might,”** (9:10). **“When God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift from God,”** (5:19). Work is a gift from God, a blessing that he gives us.
- As we saw earlier, God uses cultural artifacts to teach His people and to equip them to worship Him. The tabernacle and the Temple and all the tools used in them were God-ordained cultural creations. He specifically gifted certain workmen with the wisdom and ability to create the things as God had instructed. God even says that He **“filled him [one of one of the chief craftsmen] with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability, and knowledge in all kinds of crafts,” including “artistic designs”** (Exodus 31:3). Skill in creating things to the glory of God can be one of God’s purposes for us and one of the fruits of His Spirit in our lives—a far cry from automatically condemning all culture.

The most direct way we can create culture to the glory of God is in ways that build up His people in the church. We sing hymns: God used poets and musicians to create those hymns. We read devotionals, works of theology, and encouraging biographies: God used writers, teachers, and historians to create those books.

More broadly, Christians – and non-believers -- have created works of culture that express true things about God, the nature of His creation, about human beings, and about good and evil.

What are those true things that we should seek to discern in our surrounding cultures, praise when we find them, and cultivate in our own work? Answering that question is the work of the rest of this course.

1.5 Eleven Biblical Theses on Culture

- 1) God created the world good (Gen 1:31). This means that the existence of the physical world glorifies God.
- 2) Part of God’s initial charge to humanity was to create and cultivate culture (Gen. 1:26-28; Gen. 2:15).
 - a) Genesis 2:15 says, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.”
 - b) Subduing the earth and extending the borders of the garden of Eden was the means by which humanity was to image God. Thus, creating and cultivating culture is one component, one function, of our being created in the image of God.

- c) This means that part of our ongoing responsibility as humans is to wisely cultivate and create culture that reflects God's glory.
 - d) Whether we do this through cooking and cleaning and caring for children, or through serving the government, or through creating works of art, or through preaching God's Word, or any number of ways, we are responsible to cultivate culture that glorifies God.
- 3) Because culture is an expression of human thoughts and desires, no human culture is exempt from the effects of sin (Gen 6:5, 8:21).
- a) Genesis 6:5 says, "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."
 - b) Genesis 8:21 says, "The intention of man's heart is evil from his youth."
- 4) Therefore, all cultures are corrupted by sin.
- 5) Christians are responsible for how we consume culture (Phil 4:8).
- a) In Philippians 4:8, Paul writes, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."
 - b) Granted, Paul's main point is not about watching TV, but these words certainly address any culture products we consume. And the point is that we are responsible to think about, to dwell on, to immerse ourselves in, those things that are pleasing to God.
 - c) So much culture communicates worldview.
- 6) There are some expressions of culture that Christians must abstain from and separate from (1 Jn. 2:15-17).
- a) As we read in the Gospel of John, in 1 John, and in Revelation above, in many ways, culture = the world=Sin.
 - b) We must identify those was and must not hesitate to condemn them.
 - c) Pornography. Abortion. Racism.
- 7) There are some expressions of culture that Christians should critique and engage intellectually (Acts 17:28). Paul here engaged the particular cultural artifacts of pagan poetry in order to critique the Greeks' idolatrous beliefs and point them to Christ.
- a) In Acts 17:26 and following Luke records Paul addresses the Areopagus council saying, ***"And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, 27 that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, 28 for***
- "In him we live and move and have our being';
as even some of your own poets have said,
"For we are indeed his offspring.'***
- 29 Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. 30 The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, 31 because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."***
- b) There are many forms of culture that are actually meant to be critiqued.
 - c) Some aspects of culture invite this.

- d) Particularly useful for engaging with a Christians worldview
 - e) things like the arts (music, painting, sculpture, modern art, photography), also all kinds of writing; film
- 8) Because cultural items communicate worldviews, Christians must exercise relentless discernment (1 Thess. 5:21).
- a) ***“Test everything. Hold fast to what is good.”***
- 9) The gospel relativizes all cultural distinctions that otherwise separate people (Gal. 3:28).
- a) Paul writes that in Christ, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”
 - b) This means that we have more in common with Christians in Papua New Guinea than we do with non-Christians who live across the street from us.
- 10) Unlike those who hope in man’s ability to transform this world, Christians understand that only God’s radical, re-creative act on the last day will finally transform this world (Rev. 21:5-22:1).
- a) This means that as much as we as Christians want to do good to others in this fallen world, we recognize that ultimate, final, complete transformation of society only comes when God literally re-creates a new heaven and a new earth.
 - b) Therefore we understand that sin will infect society as long as unredeemed sinners and not-yet-glorified Christians walk the earth.
 - c) Realism. Realistic expectations.
- 11) Because we are commanded to make the most of our time (Eph 5:15-16), we as Christians must be wary of becoming infatuated with this-worldly things and must devote ourselves to those things that have eternal import.
- a) Ephesians 5:15-26: ***“Look carefully then how you walk, not use unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.”***
 - b) Chiefly evangelism.
 - c) Priority of great commission over cultural mandate.
 - d) Discipleship

2 Introduction to Worldviews: Do Ideas Matter?

2.1 Course Overview – Why Study Worldviews?

This course is dedicated to studying how we think about the world, how the way we think affects how we live, how we construct a biblical worldview, and how we evaluate competing worldviews. This is a class about how our mental habits and our spiritual lives interact.

Last session we talked about the relationship between Christ and culture. We examined several ways in which Christians have oriented themselves towards culture in different times and places: as being set against culture, set above culture, born of culture, or agents transforming culture. We concluded that the right posture depends on what sort of culture we live in. Some cultures are built on ideas closer to Biblical truth than others.

So how do we tell which is which? How do we interpret the cultures we encounter in order to determine how to interact with it? To do that, we have to look closely at the philosophical and religious ideas that underpin cultural artefacts. We have to study different cultures' worldviews. In this class I'm going to use the word worldview to refer to foundational philosophical and religious beliefs about God, the nature of the world, human nature, and other important themes that form the basis for cultural creations. In other words, this will basically be a Christian philosophy class.

Why study these worldviews? To interpret the cultures we encounter and decide how we as Christians should react to them. More broadly, we could say that the thesis for the whole worldviews class is this: ***a Christian worldview enables us to look at all of life through scriptural lenses, which in turn equips us to defend the faith, evangelize wisely, critique unbiblical thought that pervades our culture, and bring God glory in all of life.***

And before we jump into the session I just want to give you a quick overview of what we'll cover today. In this session we'll look at the questions

- What is a worldview?
- Why study worldviews?
- How do we construct a biblical worldview?

And then we'll briefly outline the Christian worldview (with its premodern cousins), the modern worldview, and the postmodern worldview, which we'll continue to examine throughout the next few sessions.

So, first:

2.2 What is a Worldview?

Let's start with a definition. According to James Sire, a worldview is **"a set of presuppositions (presuppositions which may be true, partially true, or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic makeup of our world"** (James Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 16).

Everyone looks at the world through certain lenses. Even if you can't see them, like contact lenses, we all have them. If, then, the world is everything that we see, our worldview is the pair of glasses that help us make sense of the world around us.

Everyone has a worldview, though not everyone is aware of his or her worldview. Not everyone has sat down and defined exactly what they think about God, reality, knowledge, humankind, and morality. But everyone has default or automatic assumptions that inform his or her life and behavior.

If we want to be slightly more technical, we could say a worldview is a person's philosophical and theological presuppositions. Presuppositions are those beliefs we that accept without support from other beliefs or arguments or evidence. They are the things you believe at the deepest, gut level, sometimes without thought or reflection. A worldview is comprised of our presuppositions about life's most basic, fundamental issues.

In summary then, a worldview is a "set of beliefs about the most important issues in life" (Sire). What are these issues? These are issues like

1. **GOD (the study of whom is called theology):** Our idea of God is by far the most important component of our worldview. Is there a God? If so, what is he like? Is he a personal God, or an impersonal force? Does he care about us?
2. **REALITY (the study of which is called metaphysics):** Metaphysics is the study of the nature of reality. What is the universe? Who or what created it? Is it a product of conscious design or random chance? Is there meaning or purpose to it? What is its purpose?
3. **MAN (the study of which involves disciplines like anthropology, sociology, psychology):** What is the nature of man? Are we only physical bodies or bodies and spirits? Is man basically good or basically bad? Are we totally free, or mere pawns of fate, or something else altogether? What happens at death? Are there are rewards or punishments after death?
4. **MORALITY (the study of which is called ethics):** Is there such a thing as right and wrong? What or who decides which is which? Are there moral laws that govern human conduct? Are they the same for all human beings, or are they relative to certain historical periods, cultures or individuals? Do they transcend cultural, historical, or individual boundaries? Is morality discovered, fabricated, agreed on, or declared?
5. **KNOWLEDGE (the study of which is called epistemology):** What is the nature of knowledge? How do we know anything? Can we know something for certain? Can we trust our senses? How far will reason take us? Is knowledge different from faith?

A worldview, then, is a set of foundational beliefs about these issues: about God, reality, man, knowledge, and morality. From these foundational beliefs flow subsequent beliefs about more specific things, things like art, history, work, politics, family, science, and so on.

2.3 Why should we study worldviews?

Worldviews might sound like an interesting but irrelevant armchair exercise. Why is it important to study worldviews? To answer this question I'm going to refer back to the thesis I identified for this entire class: **a Christian worldview enables us to look at all of life through scriptural lenses, which in turn equips us to defend the faith, evangelize wisely, identify and reject false teaching, critique unbiblical thought that pervades our culture, and bring God glory in all of life.**

So, why do we want to study worldviews?

1. **To develop ours.** We want to study worldviews in order to expose whatever beliefs and presuppositions we hold to that are actually inconsistent with Scripture. We want to study worldviews in order to develop a more consistent and thoroughly Christian worldview for ourselves. The Bible calls us to love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, and this is one component of what it means for us to do that.
2. **To defend the faith.** Studying worldviews enables us to see the coherence of the biblical worldview and the inconsistencies of worldviews that are not based on God’s revelation. This will help us to better defend the faith against the claims of unbelievers. It will enable us to dialogue with them in a more informed way, and will help us to use God’s Word to undermine their mistaken beliefs and presuppositions.
3. **To evangelize better.** The more we understand the people we’re speaking to, the better we will be able to evangelize them. The more we can critically engage with what our non-Christian friends believe and think, the more precisely we can explain to them just what they need to repent of.
4. **To identify and reject false teaching.** Paul writes in Romans 16:17-18 “I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned...By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.” Romans 16:17-18. False teaching usually sounds very sophisticated, very educated; we must avoid being those “naïve people” who fall for it. Jesus himself tells us to be “shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16) when we go out into the world. So we need to understand how non-Christians think about the world in order to be on guard against it and to be shrewd in avoiding it. Studying worldviews helps us identify and reject false teaching.
5. **To grow in cultural discernment.** We are constantly bombarded with unbiblical ideas, whether from well-meaning friends and family, co-workers, music, movies, other media, or countless other sources. Studying worldviews will help us accept the good and sift out the bad in the constant stream of ideas we receive in our hyperconnected culture.
6. **To glorify God in all of life.** Our ideas influence what we worship, what we want, what we do, and how we do it. If we want to glorify God in all of life, one major component of that—though certainly not the only component—is intellectual. Therefore, we want to study worldviews to better glorify God in all of life: at home, at work, in relationships with Christians and non-Christians, in our hobbies, as we raise children, and more.

2.3.1 Doesn’t the Bible warn us against philosophy?

Perhaps at this point some of you are getting a little suspicious. I’m talking a lot about philosophy. Doesn’t the Bible warn us against philosophy? Doesn’t it say that we should avoid worldly wisdom and simply trust Christ? Paul writes in Colossians 2:8 “**See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.**”

So yes, Paul is warning Christians against believing false philosophy. But he is not encouraging wilful ignorance. Studying how non-Christians think about the world can be the best defence against unconsciously adopting their worldviews. The ignorant Christian is the most vulnerable to the dangers of philosophy.

2.3.2 How do we develop a Christian worldview?

There are five basic steps I would identify here:

1. **Soak your mind in Scripture.** “The unfolding of your words gives light. It imparts understanding to the simple” (Psalm 119:130). Study the Bible deeply and broadly. Get to know all of it. Meditate on it. Memorize it. When we devote ourselves to study God’s Word we begin to think God’s thoughts after him, which is the essence of a Christian worldview.
2. **Understand the whole storyline of Scripture and how we apply different parts of it to our lives today.** The technical term for this is biblical theology. Basically, Scripture presents us with one unified story of God’s redeeming work throughout history. Biblical theology is the task of putting that story together, and understanding how all of the parts contribute to the whole.

Biblical theology is important for developing a Christian worldview because it enables us to understand how different portions of Scripture—such as Old Testament law or prophecy or wisdom or psalms or the gospels or the epistles—apply to our lives as Christians.

3. **Synthesize the teaching of Scripture on individual topics.** We call this systematic theology. The main way to do this is to learn what all of Scripture says about the main topics it addresses: God, man, sin, Christ, our salvation, how to live the Christian life, the church, and so on. Books like Wayne Grudem’s Systematic theology are a valuable tool for us in this regard.

The more consistently we understand the Bible’s teaching on the main topics it addresses, the better we’ll understand how to address more peripheral issues. Moreover, we’ll learn how those main topics will bear on individual issues. For instance, man being created in God’s image means that racism is flatly contrary to Scripture.

4. **Gain, evaluate, and integrate knowledge from other sources.** In order to live in the world, we need to know how the world works. This means that as Christians, we’re always going to be gaining knowledge from sources besides the Bible, whether that is knowledge about food, engineering, politics, construction, weather, the English language, infant sleep patterns, Microsoft Word, driving regulations, and more. You get the point.

But in order to develop and apply a truly Christian worldview, we need to evaluate all information we receive from outside Scripture in order to make sure it is consistent with Scripture. For example, macroevolutionary theory flatly contradicts the Bible’s teaching that God created humankind by a distinct, sovereign act. Therefore Christians should reject it.

5. **Live it out.** A worldview is not merely an academic tool. It’s a practical road map. The Christian worldview is meant to be lived, through devotion to Christ, worship of God, studying Scripture, evangelizing non-Christians, serving the church, encouraging one another, raising our families, working unto God’s glory, and more.

2.4 The Three Worldviews

Now that we’ve discussed what a worldview is, why it is important to study them, and how we develop a Christian worldview, let’s briefly outline the three worldviews that will occupy our attention for the rest of this session. We will explore three broad worldviews:

2.4.1 The Christian Worldview (and its Premodern cousins)

While we could spend the rest of these six weeks just expounding the Christian worldview, in order to provide a brief overview I'm just going to sketch what the Christian worldview has to say about each of the five categories we looked at earlier.

1. First, **God**. The Westminster Confession says, "There is but one only, living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him; and withal, most just, and terrible in His judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty." This is just a brief summary of what the Bible teaches about God. We could go on and on.
2. Second, **Reality**. We believe that everything that exists is created by God and exists ultimately to bring him glory. We believe therefore that reality has a meaning, a purpose and a goal. We also believe that the universe, though distinct from God its creator, is not sealed off from God. Rather, Scriptures like Hebrews 1:3, Romans 11:36, and Proverbs 16:33 teach that God actively upholds the universe, that he rules over every last atom of it, and that he sovereignly ordains all that comes to pass, from the grandest moves in history to the roll of a die. The universe is not a mere collection of matter and energy. There is a supernatural order to all things that inheres in the physical universe.
3. Third, **Man**. We believe that man is created by God in order to bring God glory. We believe that man was originally created good but through Adam and Eve's rebellion the entire human race has become enslaved to sin and therefore is alienated from God and stands condemned before God. We believe that man is a willing moral agent, and is therefore accountable to God. We believe that all people will live forever, either enjoying God's presence in heaven or suffering his wrath in hell.
4. Fourth, **Knowledge**. We believe that we can have true and certain knowledge because God does, and he reveals himself to us in the sixty six books of the Bible. We believe that we can trust our senses because God created us to bring glory to him by subduing creation by means of our senses. Moreover, Scripture assumes the reliability of our senses. We believe that all people's minds have been corrupted by sin as a result of the fall, and as a result, none of us can come to a true knowledge of God but by his gracious self-disclosure in the gospel and the Scriptures, which we can understand savingly only by God graciously giving us his holy spirit. This might seem obvious, but it is important to stress the possibility of real knowledge to guard against postmodernism, and I'll discuss in a little bit.
6. Fifth, **Morality**. We believe that there is such a thing as right and wrong. Right is what conforms to God's character, which can be called truth or holiness or righteousness, and wrong is what opposes God's character, which is sin and error. We believe that there are universal, absolute, binding moral norms that have roots in God's own character and therefore apply to all people in all cultures at all times.

Notice that I've listed the Christian worldview together with "its premodern cousins." That's because while there are crucial differences between them, the Christian worldview shares much in common with certain premodern worldviews. It also was the dominant worldview from which modernism and

then postmodernism emerged, so it's appropriate to associate the Christian worldview with premodernism in certain ways. What Christianity has in common with other premodern worldviews is: 1) God exists; 2) Knowledge is possible; 3) man is a unique part of the cosmos and can have a relationship with the divine; 4) good and evil are objective and knowable.

Some examples of premodern worldviews, that is, worldviews that precede modernism and postmodernism and have features in common with Christianity might include Greek philosophers, (including Plato and Aristotle), as well as Mohammed/Islam.

Just a footnote here before we move on. In this class we're only going to focus on the Western intellectual tradition, from ancient Greece on through the present day West. This is not because other worldviews are unimportant, or even that other worldviews haven't influenced our culture. But the western thought tradition has had the most significant impact on the entire cultural tradition we in New Zealand have inherited.

Historically, premodern worldviews were the dominant worldview throughout Europe during Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Then, from the 1300s on, with the Renaissance, we begin to see the shift toward the modern worldview.

2.4.2 The Modern Worldview

The premodern worldview starts with God or with some supernatural reality, and works down to man and his world. The modern worldview starts from man, may or may not recognize God and the supernatural order, but understands God, reality, man, morality, and history as part of man's story, not God's.

There are two faces of Modernity: the Enlightenment and Romanticism. It might sound strange to lump two seemingly opposite philosophies together as representing one "modern" worldview. However, both Enlightenment and Romantic thinkers shared a fundamental assumption: **truth is to be found through man's effort, not God's revelation.** Enlightenment thinkers looked to human reason alone as our means for determining truth. Romantics looked to feeling, sentiment, or intuition. Both looked to humanity, not God, to determine their worldview.

The Enlightenment was a movement of scientists, statesmen, and businessmen. It was motivated in part by the Scientific Revolution that started with the discoveries of Copernicus, Galileo, and Isaac Newton in the 16th and 17th Centuries. Thinkers were intrigued by the achievements of reason, which it seemed to them, had proven its worth as an autonomous tool separate from the authority or guidance of revelation. Rene Descartes, a French philosopher of the 17th Century, made his name by attempting to apply scientific and mathematical methods to philosophical and religious questions. The Enlightenment reached its full flowering in Thomas Hobbes—the Enlightenment's first great political thinker—John Locke, David Hume, Voltaire, and Immanuel Kant in the later 1600s and the 1700s. Later thinkers such as Karl Marx, George Hegel, Charles Darwin in the 1800s, and Sigmund Freud in the early 20th Century, can be considered heirs of the Enlightenment who also laid the groundwork for postmodernism.

You see the Enlightenment today when you hear a scientist arguing that science has somehow disproved God, or when a political scientist insists that the application of reason to public affairs has made the religion irrelevant to our lives as citizens.

Romanticism has fewer philosophers to its name, being more a movement of literature, the arts, music, and, today, film. Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson of the 19th century would be the Romantic thinkers most familiar to western readers, but the worldview is most faithfully

reproduced in most pop music and movies today. It is the philosophy of Roxette: "Listen to your heart," and Obi-Wan Kenobi when he says, "Trust your feelings."

But before we jump into postmodernism I want to ask: how does understanding the modern worldview apply to our evangelism? When evangelizing either an heir of the Enlightenment or a Romantic, you can focus on the doctrines of sin and total depravity, emphasizing the limitations we face in finding God. Stress that the Fall effected all aspects of our humanity.

2.4.3 The Postmodern Worldview

Finally, the postmodern worldview: postmodernism denies the reality of God and the supernatural, and then goes further to deny even the possibility of human knowledge. **Thus postmodernism undercuts any firm basis for understanding God, man, morality, or history at all.**

I am using the term 'postmodern' to refer to all post-enlightenment and post-romantic philosophy, including existentialism. Postmodernism had its earliest beginnings, as we saw, in some of Kant's writings. A couple generations after Kant, the entire Enlightenment project came under withering attack by Freidrich Nietzsche in the 1880s. Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre are the founders of existentialism, which sought to locate meaning purely in arbitrary human choices. Finally, postmodernism truly came into its own in the 1960s and 1970s with Michael Foucault, Jacque Derrida, and Jean-Francois Lyotard, who undermined claims to absolute truth and stable, identifiable meanings in language.

Even if we aren't familiar with its academic exponents, we are all familiar with postmodernism because it permeates the air we breathe. "I'm happy Christianity works for you, but don't try to force it on me." "You can't claim to who God is. We can't know anything for sure." "Saying that Jesus is the only way to God makes you as intolerant as the worst racist. You can't claim to have the corner on what's true and right." Statements like these are the fruit of postmodernism's pervasive influence in our culture.

If we compare postmodernism to Christianity and modernism, we see that postmodernism is functionally atheistic. Even postmodernists who profess a belief in God or a supernatural reality either don't believe in him as an objective personal being or their "belief" simply has no impact on how they live their lives. They claim that knowledge is impossible, and because they recognize that knowledge is power, they assert that knowledge-claims are nothing but power or attempts to gain power. They see nothing distinctive about man, and do not believe in objective and absolute morality.

Again, just to briefly apply this to our evangelism: how should we evangelize postmoderns? Francis Shaeffer recommends that we help postmodernists understand the implications of their own worldview more clearly. He argues that once they understand what they say they believe, they will recognize the danger and the poverty of the life they are living and will be ready to hear the gospel. This is especially important because many of our friends will be uncritically postmodern, because they just think the way our culture directs them to.

Well, there you have it, an extremely brief overview of the history of philosophy in the Western world. We've moved from eternal, objective, knowable absolute truths to relative, unknowable, finite absurdities. And these foundational shifts have consequences.

3 Theology and Metaphysics

3.1 Review

In our first session, we saw that ideas matter because they drive what we will worship: either the God of the Bible or something else. We talked about the three major worldviews: Christian, modern, and postmodern, as well as how we develop a Christian worldview.

As a reminder, here's the thesis for our whole course: **a Christian worldview enables us to look at all of life through scriptural lenses, which in turn equips us to defend the faith, evangelize wisely, critique unbiblical thought that pervades our culture, and bring God glory in all of life.** As we work through this session we're going to refer back to this thesis to help us apply what we're studying to different areas of the Christian life.

3.1.1 Goal

Our goal is to look more closely at the three worldview positions on God and reality, theology and metaphysics, and the relationship of these two things to one another. These are the first two categories of what makes up a worldview, others being a worldview's position on Man, Morality, and Knowledge. We will have classes later this spring on those three categories.

3.1.2 Main Idea

In RC Sproul's book *Battle for Our Minds* he mentions a big, beautiful Presbyterian church in Los Angeles that was very close to the epicentre of the Northridge earthquake in 1994. The congregation was both dumbfounded and ecstatic to find the building completely intact afterwards, down to the stain-glassed windows. It seemed like a miracle that the building was still standing! Nevertheless, just to be safe, they called in the engineers to check things out. Upon investigation, they discovered that the whole building had moved off its foundation, making it unsafe and utterly useless. They had to spend millions tearing it down and rebuilding.

Our views of God and reality are the foundations of our worldview. Much like this church building in California, if the foundations are off, our whole worldview has to be torn down and rebuilt; but if it is solid, we should see be able to build a solid, useful structure on top of it.

The Main Idea for this class is:

The biblical consistency of our worldview depends on a correct view of God and his relation to the world.

We'll spend the rest of this session fleshing this idea out. We'll begin first with a few definitions.

3.1.3 Definitions

If you remember our definition of a worldview, the first two components were God and reality. These two elements deal with the topics known as theology and metaphysics.

Theology is simply the study of God. **As Christians, this is the heart of our faith: growing in the knowledge of God. Our theology is our worldview.**

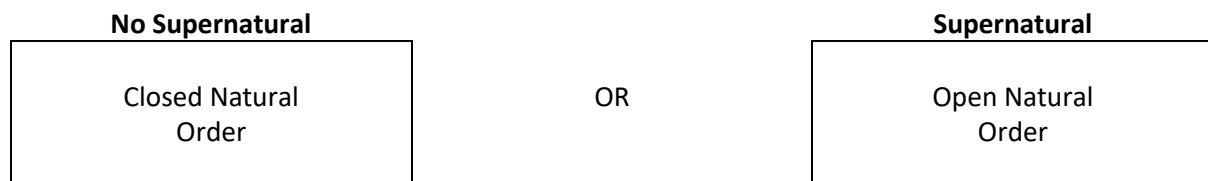
What do we mean by metaphysics? It's an everyday word for philosophers, but not really anyone else. Metaphysics is basically the study of being or reality. JP Moreland and William Lane Craig write in their book *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* that metaphysics is usually, "characterized as the philosophical study of the nature of being or reality and the ultimate categories or kinds of things that are real" (173).

Metaphysics is about the quest for ultimate truth. RC Sproul writes, “It goes beyond the physical realm that we can see and measure. Thus, metaphysics is a philosophical attempt to bring sense and coherence out of all the incongruous elements of this world” (Sproul, *Lifeyviews*, 99).

At the heart of a Christian approach to metaphysics is the question, “How does God relate to reality?”

3.1.4 Reality – Open or Closed?

The answer to this question can be illustrated with two boxes. To the questions of God and reality, we essentially have two answers: the universe is either an open or a closed system.



An open system is open to someone or something on the outside to act inside the universe.

A closed system is one that is materialistic, one in which matter is all there is. Therefore, there is no one or nothing outside that can intervene.

We see these two metaphysical views play out in the three worldview paradigms we’ve been discussing: Christian, modern, and postmodern. Let’s look at these three worldviews again to understand in more detail their relationship of God and reality. From this, we should be able to understand why this relationship is the heart and soul of worldviews: it will show whether or not the God of the Bible is the solid foundation of our worldviews, controlling everything in our lives, or not.

3.2 Christian Worldview

First we’ll examine the Christian worldview. The biblical worldview perceives all of existence from the perspective of divine creation, providence, and redemption. As Christians, our understanding of the nature of the universe, of reality, directly flows from our understanding of God. The Being of God, or the doctrine of God, defines our understanding of reality. Or to put it another way, our theology determines our metaphysics. The first facet of our theology and metaphysics we’re going to explore is what theologians call God’s transcendence and his immanence.

3.2.1 God is transcendent (above and beyond)

God’s transcendence means that he is above, beyond, and greater than this creation. God’s being and wisdom are qualitatively different and greater than ours. The difference is not one of mere quantity, as if we could someday become as great as God if we accumulated enough; rather, there is an unbridgeable gulf between God and His creation. As we read in Isaiah 55:7-9, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.’” God is above and outside of all creation, indeed of time itself. As we read in 2 Peter 3:8 “With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.”

3.2.2 God is also immanent (near at hand).

But the bible also teaches that God is immanent in the world, which means that he is near at hand. We see God’s immanence in Scripture in four ways:

1. God is immanent in his being (Acts 17:28; Ps. 139:8). David makes this point in Psalm 139 when he writes, “If I go to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.” In Acts 17:28, Paul preached this to philosophers in Athens when he said “For in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Second, we see that...
2. God is immanent in history by his providential ordering of events. From creation to the heavenly Jerusalem in Revelation, we see God’s immanence in the redemptive history of the Bible, as God actively and personally carries out His plan among His people under His rule. This is the storyline of the Bible. Ephesians 1:11 says that God works all things according to the counsel of his will.
3. God is immanent in the incarnation of Christ (John 1:14). John writes in the first chapter of his Gospel, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” The word there for dwelling literally means “tabernacled, set up his tent.” That’s an amazing claim, that in Christ God truly was with humanity, personally, face to face.
4. God is immanent by the Holy Spirit. Paul encourages the Ephesians of this spiritual blessing of the indwelling of the Spirit when he proclaims, “Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession – to the praise of his glory” (Eph. 1:13b-14). God is immanent, that is, with his people, in the person of the Holy Spirit.

What’s the bottom line? That we believe God created the universe, is distinct from the universe, is infinitely greater than the universe as its source and ruler, and that he is also present in the universe, actively rules over and superintends the universe, and that he is personally present with his people in the Holy Spirit.

Not only is God transcendent and immanent, but also as Francis Schaeffer puts it, “God is there and He is not silent.” This is the second facet of our theology and metaphysics we want to explore: that God communicates with us.

3.2.3 God reveals Himself both in Nature and Scripture.

1. **God communicates about Himself in Nature** (Ps. 19:1). David proclaims God’s revelation in nature in Psalm 19, verse 1 when he rejoices, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Ps. 19:1).” For those of you who have studied Systematic Theology, this is known as the doctrine of “general revelation”. God speaks generically to all mankind about his “eternal power and divine nature,” which, according to Romans 1:20 are evident in creation.
2. **God communicates about Himself in Scripture** (Hebrews 4:12). As for Scripture, remember the words of Hebrews: “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword...” This is the doctrine of “special revelation.” In Scripture, God speaks about His character, his covenant, and most importantly about Jesus Christ.

Reality: We Christians believe that it is meaningful to talk of a supernatural or metaphysical order, but that is not a far-off and aloof place of no relevance to us. For an obvious example, we believe that miracles, understood as God’s sovereign intervention in the normal physical laws of the universe, are possible, making Jesus’ miracles and resurrection not a difficult article of faith for us. If once you believe in an open universe, believing in a specific example of it like Jesus turning water into wine is not challenging to our intellect or our faith. For another, we believe God orders the universe even in non-miraculous ways, making daily prayer and petition to Him about our needs meaningful and useful.

3.3 The Modern Worldview

Last session we talked about the two faces of modernity: the Enlightenment and Romanticism. We said they were defined by their view of knowledge. Enlightenment thinkers believed reason alone was the valid path to knowledge; Romantics said intuition or passion was the valid path. Both believed it was through one or another aspect of our inner being that we gained knowledge, where Christians view knowledge about God as a gift received through faith.

What implications does this have for the modern view of God and reality? Like the church building that we mentioned at the beginning, in a very short time, the foundations of entire worldviews shifted. **Modernism attempted to offer all the truths, meaning, purposes, and structure Christianity offered, but grounded it not in God but in man.** These truths were to be discovered not through revelation but through reason or intuition. The theologian David Wells aptly describes the Enlightenment as a Christian heresy, and we may say the same for Romanticism.

In the biblical worldview, God is the infinite, personal, Creator and Sustainer of the cosmos. In the Modern worldview, God is “reduced;” he begins to lose his personality, and becomes more of an impersonal being, though he remains Creator and (by implication) sustainer of the cosmos. It is a short trip from there to postmodernism, in which humans become less and less concerned about the character of a clock-maker who seems very disinterested in human affairs.

A. This finds view of God finds concrete expression in Deism, the religion of the Enlightenment.

Deism was invented by Lord Herbert of Cherbury, a 17th Century British aristocrat, who wrote a book partially entitled: *On Truth, as it is distinguished from Revelation*, implying that revelation and truth are different, and incompatible, things.

Deism holds that God exists and created the world, but denies that he is actively and continually involved in the world or that He has revealed himself especially in acts of self-expression. God is the divine clockmaker, who crafted and wound up the grand clock—the universe—and now is letting it run on its own. Deists believe that God is real, but that he is far-off and aloof, irrelevant to humans. In Deism, God is wholly transcendent.

B. Romanticism is the opposite heresy: it posits an entirely immanent god called Nature, manifested in both physical nature and human nature. Nature is seen as the locus of truth and is wholly within the world—indeed, it is nothing but the world experienced as a whole. So then “god” comes to be identified completely with the world. And because the nature-god was not outside the world, but wholly within it, we come to know him by communing with Nature.

Romantics believed we should commune with both physical nature, which resulted in idolizing creation, and human nature, which resulted in their prizing of human passion and human intuition. One quick application is that we Christians should understand that we have a responsibility to care for (and enjoy!) creation, but we sometimes see people who have literally created a religion out of caring for the environment. That is one legacy of Romanticism.

Just as Enlightenment thinkers used reason to access a wholly transcendent god, Romantics used feeling or intuition to access a wholly immanent god. And here’s the practical implication of both streams of modernism: **modernists believed that mankind is *already in communion with God by virtue of his reason or intuition and therefore needs no redemption.*** This is a crucial turning point because it utterly destroys any sense of mankind’s plight in sin and need for a saviour.

3.3.1 Application

We have discussed six reasons to study worldviews: 1) to develop ours, 2) to defend the faith, 3) to evangelize better, 4) to identify and reject false teaching, 5) to grow in cultural discernment, and 6) to glorify God in all of life. I'm going to briefly examine how evaluating modernism from a Christian perspective equips us in a couple of these areas.

First, developing our own worldview: as we examine modernism, it should help us to be suspicious of materialistic tendencies. By that I don't mean that we crave material goods. But what I mean is, we often look at the world, whether from a scientific or a very practical perspective, as if God doesn't exist, or at least as if God is far removed from us, far removed from this universe, and unable to powerfully intervene in our lives.

To some extent, this could be the influence of modernist thought. If we're not functional atheists, we may at times be functional deists. If so, we will fail to have the proper hope, joy, confidence, and trust that comes from knowing a God who is both transcendent and immanent, who rules over creation, who ordains all that comes to pass, who answers prayer, who heals sickness, who raises the dead.

Second, critically examining modernism's view of God and reality helps us to identify and reject false teaching. If you have taken a class on Christianity of the Bible in a major university, I can almost guarantee you that much of what you read about Christianity was informed by modernist assumptions:

"Miracles can't happen, so we have to find other ways of explaining those portions of Scripture. If God exists, he doesn't act in history, so events like the exodus must be national myths, or explainable by scientific causes. Scientifically we know that dead men don't rise, so of course Jesus didn't rise from the grave."

For about three hundred years now such modernistic false teaching has sought to undercut the foundations of the Christian faith, and it's much of what is taken for granted in mainstream academic study of Christianity and the Bible. Needless to say, as Christians we should flatly reject all of these claims, and seeing their modernist foundations helps us to do that with clarity and confidence.

For evangelism, it might be helpful to challenge moderns on their faith in materialism. How do they know there is nothing outside the box? Have they been outside the box, observed nothingness, and returned to report on it? We have no tools, no scientific method, for observing what's outside the box, and so using only human reason we have absolutely no means of saying that there is or isn't anything there. The tools of science were designed to deal with this physical universe, and so if you recognize the actual limitations of science, science simply has no comment on whether or not there is a God or a supernatural order. The only way we would know what's outside the box is if someone or something from outside came in, and told us what was outside. Many have claimed that such an inbreaking has occurred, and those claims lay at the root of all world religions. A truly scientific approach would examine those claims seriously.

3.4 Postmodern Worldview

The Christian worldview maintains a direct relationship between God and the natural order. The brief transition, known as the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century and the Romanticism of the nineteenth, obscured both the distinction and the link between the supernatural and the natural. **Postmodernism, by contrast, simply believes the question of whether or not God exists is irrelevant. It considers the idea that God or anything supernatural interacts with the world to be laughable.**

Moreover, postmoderns believe that it is essentially impossible to define “reality” or give it any exact content.

Using our box illustration from earlier, Christians believe in an open box, moderns believe in a closed box, and postmoderns simply deny that there is a box. Or, if there is a box, we can't really know that it is there, or that it's really a box, and not something else. In any case, postmoderns say that drawing a boundary line around reality, contradicts its nature as chaotic and indefinable, a morass of particulars that cannot be generalized into a coherent whole. If you ask someone what they believe about reality and they answer “You can't really know for sure about that kind of stuff,” or “That stuff doesn't really matter,” you're talking to a postmodern.

If that simply makes no sense to you, that's okay: the closer you get to understanding postmodernism, the more you realize how truly incoherent it is. Even postmodernists themselves might agree that their worldview does not “cohere” and is thus “incoherent.” Yet when compared with the Christian worldview, a belief in no box is functionally the same as a belief in a closed box; there is no interaction between God and the world.

Let's practice discernment and pick out the false teaching in postmodernism. Let's talk about four variations of postmodern metaphysics.

- The more pessimistic (existentialist) flavours of postmodernists have concluded that since there is no box, no God, and no discernible reality, our purpose in life is to bewail the meaninglessness of human life in despair while attempting to create a shred of human dignity. Our Biblical response to existentialists is the book of Ecclesiastes. We can affirm that indeed “the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. ‘Meaningless, meaningless,’ says the Teacher, ‘Everything is meaningless,’” (12:7-8) but that we have hope, joy, and meaning in God.
- There are postmodernists who face the meaninglessness of life and decide to jest, mock, and be merry, for tomorrow we die. Their reaction to the “failed” ideologies, religions, and philosophies of ages past is to celebrate them, relive them, make fun of them, respect their strength as “strong stories” but nothing more, and blend them together in a cacophony of contrasting symbols with no actual message or point at the end of the day. Our response to postmodernists is, I think, partly to sit back and enjoy the show, because much of what they mock deserve the mockery; but we should with good humour remind them that they should not be exempt from mockery, and that they too reflect a worldview that demands scrutiny.
- More common still are those who find meaning in a meaningless universe by mounting cultural, theological, and political resistance against modernists and premodernists. These are the deconstructionists, who are intensely suspicious of anyone who claims to believe anything, know anything, or have discovered any kind of truth. They make a practice of “deconstructing” or taking apart other people's beliefs. Thus they argue that all claims to knowledge or truth are merely attempts to seize power over others, that all metanarratives are tools of oppression, and that the meaning of life consists in the endless play of one inherently meaningless system of belief against another. We might find some common ground with deconstructionists in opposing false idols.
- Others are more explicitly blasphemous. Some (Nietzsche) have famously argued that since “God is dead” and reality isn't definable, we ourselves should act like gods and treat reality like a work of art left to us to craft and mould. He argued those who can summon the greatest will to power will triumph in imposing their aesthetic on the world. This take on metaphysics

is blasphemous and recapitulates Lucifer's original sin of attempting to overthrow God and take his place (Isaiah 14:13), but in one sense it is not ambitious enough. He wants us to act like gods without believing that there are any. In contrast, the Bible says that God has "given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4) and that we are literally "sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ." (Galatians 3:26). There is a real God, and he invites his people to fellowship with him.

How did this come about? As we discussed last session, if modernism began when authority was moved from God to man, postmodernism began when man rightly began to doubt that he deserved that authority, but refused to return to God.

In modernism we find thinkers who have boundless faith in the capacity of human beings to find truth through our own reason or intuition. Postmodernists are rightly very critical of that idea, but instead of returning to faith in God's revelation, they have given up on the pursuit of truth altogether. They choose to believe either truth cannot be found or there is no truth to find.

3.4.1 Application

Before we close, I want to briefly suggest two ways our understanding of postmodernism's positions on theology and metaphysics should impact our lives as Christians. Turn over to the back of your handout to see an outline of this.

First, in our evangelism. As Christians, we take for granted that we can have true knowledge about the way things are. We take for granted that we can know God, and that the universe has a meaning and purpose because God created it and sustains it and gives it purpose. But we need to realize that our postmodern friends have grave suspicions about worldview issues that we simply take for granted. So, keeping in mind that the main work of evangelism is just preaching the gospel, I would suggest there are several practical steps we should take in order to well evangelize our postmodern friends:

1. Listen well. Learn to identify how our friends think, and why.
2. Agree with them where we can. I think it's actually a good thing for us to say, "I completely understand how apart from God and his revelation in Scripture, you would come to the conclusions that the world is meaningless and we can't know anything certain about God or reality. I don't agree with you, but I understand why you believe what you do."
3. Ask undermining questions. The claim that the universe is meaningless is actually a claim to possess Godlike knowledge of the universe. So ask your postmodern friends, "How do you know everything is meaningless?"
4. Confront their worldview with a biblical one. Teach them the kinds of things we discussed in the first part of our class today. Show them how the biblical worldview coheres.

Another way our understanding of postmodernism should impact our lives as Christians is in our efforts to glorify God in all of life. As we consider the meaninglessness and futility that postmodernism embraces, we should rejoice that because God is our creator and God is the sovereign Lord of all, everything in life actually does have meaning. In other words, the Christian worldview gives meaning to all of life, from the most spectacular events to the most mundane. As Christians we do everything in conscious awareness of the God who made us and saved us.

This means that, unlike the postmodern worldview, the Christian worldview gives us constant encouragement to do everything in a manner worthy of the Lord, because is the transcendent Lord of all who has become immanent in Christ, in the Holy Spirit who lives in us, and even in his gracious continual address to us in Scripture.

4 Intro to Apologetics

4.1 What Is Christian Apologetics?

Welcome to the first session of the Worldview and Apologetics course about apologetics. We have been exploring the biblical, modern, and post-modern worldviews and today we turn to focus on apologetics.

The purpose of this session is to explain what Christian apologetics is and communicate why Christian apologetics matters to you. I trust that today you will see that the discipline of apologetics is integral to evangelism and necessary for all Christians. I hope our time together whets your appetite for the next few sessions of material to think about how to connect the “what” of a Christian worldview with the “how” of evangelism. Hint: it’s the “why” of apologetics.

First, we should answer the question, what is apologetics. It does not refer to offering an apology or excuse. Rather, it means argumentation to give an explanation, an account, even a defence of a subject’s position or system.

In fact, the term apologetics is derived from the Classical Greek word *apologia*. To deliver an *apologia* then meant giving an explanation to reply and rebut charges, as in the famous case of Socrates’ defence.

This may sound formal or intimidating, but it should not be. We use apologetics every day in our offices, classrooms, and living rooms. Every time we offer a defence of a decision in a memo, or cite examples to contradict an assertion, or defend our position on a subject, we are engaging in apologetics.

So what is Christian apologetics? For our purposes, we will define Christian apologetics as: **the discipline of offering a defence of and case for, or offer evidence for, the veracity and reliability of the Christian faith.**

Apologetics differs from evangelism in emphasis – though the two are certainly intertwined. Evangelism explains the truth of the Gospel – who Jesus is, what sin is, and how to be saved from eternal death. Apologetics defends the truthfulness and reliability of those claims, and provides a critique against false claims. **Note that Christian apologetics is defensive** – defending the truthfulness and reliability of Scripture – **and it is offensive** – attacking the false teaching and unbiblical worldviews. By attacking we do not mean physical violence. Christians’ opponents are not other people but rather unbelief. What I mean by attack is proactive, critical engagement to deconstruct the lies that Satan would dress up as truth, and to call them for what they are: error and unbelief. A Christian apologist is one who defends the Gospel, while also critiquing unbelief.

4.2 Who Are Christians Apologetics For? Christians

Many Christians have heard of apologetics. But some Christians make the mistake of thinking apologetics is only for philosophically-minded believers or intellectual.

However, the discipline of Christian apologetics is for all Christians. All Christians should be able to articulate the Gospel, offer a defence of its reliability and veracity, and critically engage with unbelieving people around them. Let me give you 4 reasons that Christian apologetics is for you, for me, and for all Christians.

4.2.1 Christians Should Be Able To Explain Why They Have Faith in Jesus.

I Peter 3:15 gives us the defining statement: “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer (apologia) to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”

This “hope” that Peter talks about is the hope of eternal life with God, the hope of the Resurrection. Paul says in I Corinthians 15 that “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins...[and] If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.”

Why do Christians believe an ancient itinerant Jewish rabbi from Nazareth was executed and got up from the grave? The answer may be part of evangelism, but it is squarely part of a Christian apologetic.

4.2.2 Christians Should be Able to Critique Unbiblical Worldviews.

In 2 Corinthians 10 Paul writes, “For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

Note that Paul does not add qualifications. He does not say only the intellectual demolish arguments, or only the ivy-league trained challenge arguments which set themselves up against the knowledge of God. No, Paul’s instruction here is to the Corinthian church, and his clear expectation is that all Christians in the church should be able to critically engage with unbiblical truths.

In practical application, Christian, you are called to, be prepared to “wage war,” by challenging and critiquing unbiblical teachings that contradict the truth about Jesus’ person and work. This does not mean that you must have a Ph.D. or that you have to go to seminary. It does mean that if you are a Christian, you need to advance the truth of the Gospel by clearing the underbrush of lies and faulty assumptions which clutter the view of the Gospel.

4.2.3 Christians Should Use Their Minds and Intellect To the Glory of God.

Note also in 2 Corinthians 10 that Paul says Christians are to take every thought captive to Christ. In Matthew 22, Jesus said the greatest commandment is to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” Part of a Christian’s normal discipleship in following Jesus should be to “love God with their mind,” that is, using their intellect and mind in their evangelism, discipleship, and apologetics.

It may not be unusual for us to think how we can leverage the full firepower of our minds for the sake of the Gospel. But it is worth noting that historically, at least in recent decades, this is one area in which the evangelicals have failed. While there are lots of reasons for this the point for us is that being a disciple of Jesus does not mean checking your brain in at the door.

As Christians, we do not fear in pursuing the truth. In fact, one of the monikers of the Reformation – the rediscovery of the reliability and message of Scripture– was the cry that “all truth is God’s truth.” How can this be? Truth is more than a collection of ideas. Truth is a person, and his name is Jesus. Rev. 19 says Jesus is Faithful and True. Jesus says in John 14, “I am the way, the Truth, the life.”

Following Jesus does not mean turning your brain off, no. It does mean giving all of who you are – your heart, your mind, your soul – to him. Part of our stewardship as his disciples is to use our God-given abilities – our intellect, as fallen as it is – for his glory. We do not trust these faculties, but rather submit them to God and use them for the purpose of bringing him glory.

How do we bring God glory? Ultimately, the purpose of studying apologetics and worldviews is not win debates or sound intellectual, but to win hearts by defending the truth of the Gospel and challenging false ideas. The purpose of studying worldviews and apologetics is so you and I can better engage with our friends, neighbors, colleagues, classmates, and family to winsomely convey the truth and reliability of the Gospel, and defend against false teachers, incorrect assumptions, and unbelief. We want to help non-Christians question the veracity and reliability some of their beliefs and help non-Christians recognize the rationality of Christian beliefs.

4.2.4 Christians Throughout History Have Used Apologetics to the Glory of God.

Early Church

- The Book of Acts contains a description of Paul's apologetics, who "reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there" (17:17) as well as at the Areopagus (17:19ff).
- The Apostle Paul employs the term apologia in his trial speech to Festus and Agrippa when he says "I make my defense" (Acts 24-26).
- A similar term appears in Paul's Letter to the Philippians as he is "defending the gospel" (Philippians 1:7 & 16)

Church history

- Many early church fathers were noted apologists. The early church was marked by a time of distinguishing Christian doctrine from pagan belief. Some notable church fathers in the early centuries of Christianity included Justin the Martyr, Irenaus, and Tertullian. In fact, Tertullian is known for writing an "apology" for Christians living in the Roman Empire.
- The Reformation was marked by apologetic arguments of differing values, from John Calvin to Thomas Aquinas.
- In modern times notable Christian apologists have a blend of approaches to defend the faith. You will be familiar with some apologists: Ravi Zacharias, Lee Strobel, Josh McDowell, C.S. Lewis, William Lane Craig, Jack Wellman and J. P. Moreland. These apologists claim to have based their defense of Christianity on historical and archaeological evidence, theological and philosophical arguments, scientific investigation, and other disciplines.

Finally, we should briefly note three possible reasons some Christians might hide behind to not practice apologetics.

First, some Christians argue apologetics denies the role of faith because apologetics offers a way to "reason oneself" into the kingdom of heaven. This could not be further from the truth. Christian apologetics is about explaining the veracity of God's truth revealed in Christ – but it is Jesus who saves, not our reason. Mere knowledge and logic, apart from the active work of the Holy Spirit, is insufficient to save a person. Satan has mere knowledge of God – but of course that is insufficient for his own salvation (James 2:19). Saving faith in the person and work of Jesus involves not simply accepting that what the Bible says is true, nor only trusting that God exists, but actually trusting in God himself and having a relationship with him.

Second, some Christians fear what others will think of them. If you struggle with the Fear of Man, join the crowd – we all do to some extent. Fear of another's opinion often dissuades Christians from evangelism and apologetics. If you particularly struggle with fear of man, I recommend Ted Welch's book *When People Are Big, and God is Small*.

Third, as I alluded to previously, some Christians do not practice apologetics because they are intellectually lazy. However, even though our minds are fallen, we are called to love God with our

mind, to take every thought captive, and use each of our faculties for his glory. In the age of Google and Wikipedia, Amazon.com and dozens of internet sites and books with helpful, accessible material, there is no excuse for any Christian to be intellectually lazy and not pursue the discipline of Christian apologetics.

4.3 Who Are Apologetics For? Non-Christians.

Christian apologetics is not only a discipline for Christians to practice, but it is also for the clear practical and spiritual benefit of non-Christians.

4.3.1 Christian apologetics answers non-Christians' questions and removes distractions from belief.

Clearly, sometimes non-Christians ask questions to distract from the uncomfortable truth of the Gospel that they are sinful and morally bankrupt. Often, they will ask questions to change the subject, so as to try to dodge the Gospel's ramifications for their lives.

But other times non-Christians clearly have legitimate questions related to faith in Jesus that apologetics helps to answer. It can be unsettling when important questions linger unanswered. Christian apologetics involves answering questions and clearing the brush of false beliefs that obscures the solid ground of belief in Jesus. A natural part of educating and instructing non-Christians in a biblical worldview is being prepared to answer their questions.

Christians should not be surprised or threatened by this. We, after all, are preaching the Gospel – a fantastic message that we believe should fundamentally reorder all of our lives. Questions should be expected and welcome.

4.3.2 Christian apologetics, coupled with evangelism, points non-Christians to faith in Jesus.

The point of Christian apologetics is not finally to win an argument, but to articulate and defend the reliability of placing one's faith in the person and work of Jesus. Apologetics is the discipline that defends a biblical worldview, deconstructs unbelief and provides a launching pad for enthusiastic evangelism.

Consider again, Paul's example for us in Acts 17. Paul stood in the Areopagus, a public square in Athens, and engaged in apologetics – he offered an explanation of, a defense for, Christian faith. Paul used reason and cultural examples of an altar in Athens and a Greek poem. Paul explained biblical truths about God and his character and our need for his mercy. The point of all of what he was doing was to communicate so that pagans who believed in many gods would have ears to hear the good news about the One True God who became Man for us in Jesus.

Paul was serious about apologetics because he understood the stakes. Spiritually, apologetics is warfare, not a board game. The point of apologetics is to preserve another's life by helping them understand the truth, not to put points on a spiritual scoreboard.

Paul said in Ephesians 6 that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Our opponent is not non-Christians. Our opponent is unbelief and false beliefs. And at a more fundamental level, as Christians, our opponent is he who opposes God himself. False teaching and lies began in the Garden with the Father of lies himself, Satan.

In 2 Thessalonians 2, when talking about what Satan is like, Paul says "the work of Satan [is] displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved."

The discipline of apologetics is spiritual work for the good of non-Christians and the glory of God in a real and ongoing spiritual war.

4.4 What Are the Approaches of Apologetics?

Historically, Christian apologetics has fallen into one of these two camps. The first is popularly known as the evidentialist school – where the focus is on using objective evidence in apologetics. The second is the presuppositional school – where the focus is on non-Christians’ presuppositions apart from the Holy Spirit.

4.4.1 Evidentialist

The main focus of evidentialist apologetics is the idea that we can and should use objective evidences, or proofs, that God has given us in the created order, as part of our proofs and persuasion in apologetics. R.C. Sproul is a well-known evidentialist. For example, creation testifies to a Creator, and we should use that belief as part of our proof for God’s existence.

4.4.2 Presuppositional Schools of Apologetics

Presuppositionalists would stress that evidences will not convince unbelievers to follow God, because people are governed by their presuppositions which – apart from the Holy Spirit’s regenerating work – are naturally oriented against God. Therefore, they would argue, we cannot prove God or defend the Gospel using our own proofs, or evidences. Van Til, out of Westminster Seminary, is the well-known presuppositionalist.

This course blends both of these approaches. This course will argue that we should use evidences and proofs as we make the case for Christian faith AND that— no matter how good our proofs and persuasions are — no one can believe in God apart from His saving work. We have been contrasting various worldviews in recent weeks, but we are not contrasting apologetics approaches during our course. The two approaches are complementary, not contradictory.

5 The Existence of God

If Seeing is Believing, How Can You Believe in an Invisible God? – Apologetic Arguments for the Existence of God and Creation

Many people today don't believe that God exists - either conscious rejection – but, more likely – practical rejection: people live as though the “here and now” is all that matters.

If you have – or anticipate having a conversation about the existence of God or meeting someone who asks you questions about the Existence of God – the goal of this session is to give you some talking points you can use when you talk with people who don't believe in God so that you can clear up some of the roadblocks and rubble that prevent people from taking the idea of divine revelation seriously.

In this session we'll go over 6 arguments for God's existence. The goal is to demonstrate that believing in God is reasonable, consistent with reason, and is actually more rational than the alternative of believing in his nonexistence.

Think of these as basic tools in your toolbox – basic arguments you can use in speaking to others on this topic.

5.1 Six Arguments for the Existence of God

1. **Probability:** Everyday we exercise faith, and I think it's reasonable to have faith in the supernatural.
2. **Creation and Design:** Creation by an Intelligent Designer is more intellectually plausible than creation by random chance. (Teleological and Cosmological arguments).
3. **Anthropic Arguments.** Things about ourselves—conscience, capacity for good and evil, yearning for eternity, religious experiences—are best explained by the existence of God.
4. **Argument from Immaterialism.** The existence of love, beauty demonstrate that we do not live in a materialistic universe.
5. **Transcendental Argument.** Knowledge, logic, and science, etc., are only possible because God's existence is a precondition for all thinking and knowledge.
6. **Ontological argument.** God is the being greater than which cannot be conceived. The greatest being conceivable possesses the attribute of existence. Therefore, God exists.

5.2 Faith in the Supernatural is plausible – more plausible than the alternative

There is misconception that people of faith generally and Christians specifically believe in things that seem like fairy tales or fables or myths. They do not believe in things based on Facts or Evidence or Rational thinking – and thus cannot be taken seriously.

What does it mean to have faith? How do you decide what to believe in and what not to believe?

Well here is the bottom line: a) in order to live in the world, we are all required to exercise faith and b) we exercise faith every day by using the three tools of faith: reason or “science”; intuition and our experiences.

Be careful that you use all of these tools when considering questions of ultimate importance.

Many people when talking of matters of “faith” decide that the only observable, knowable, “scientific” information can be used. Well, beware that this creates an anti-supernatural bias – leading to an agenda-centric approach to evaluating “evidence” vs. an evidence-centric approach. And, it seems like religion is probably the greatest area in which people bring pre-determined agendas to the discussion.

We are not able to completely, universally, with 100% certainty prove that there either is a supernatural God or that there isn't a supernatural God. But we have to make a choice between those two options. Either way, because there is not conclusive evidence either way, both choices are an exercise in faith.

Because of the set of assumptions that we use in our Christian worldview, we believe that revelation is the final pillar of faith that Christians have. We believe in a God who wants to be known and has revealed Himself most fully in Jesus Christ. This is a logical belief.

We exercise faith everyday, and it's reasonable to have faith in the supernatural.

5.3 Creation and Design: Creation by an Intelligent Designer is more intellectually plausible than by random chance.

How did everything start? What is the origin of the Universe? There are two basic answers to this question. Either a) the universe is self-created or b) it was created by something else. The question is, which view do you have faith in? It is not a matter of science versus faith, but **faith versus faith**.

Naturalism assumes that the origins of everything began through time and chance. Very simple equation: Impersonal force (call it what you will - energy, matter, atoms, space) + time + chance = creation. Given enough time, anything can happen.

What's the probability and likelihood of this creation coming about through this equation? To quickly do this, let's set aside most of creation - the trees and mountains and sunsets.

Let's just look at the most basic building block of life: A Single strand of DNA containing 200 molecules must be in a precise order – the probability of a strand of DNA forming through mutations in the primordial soup is extremely low. If you try to work out the odds of this using excel, the application won't be able to produce a number high enough to calculate the odds of a simple strand of DNA forming through random mutations.

And that's just the simplest strand. Then you have the Cell Nucleus/ Substance/ Membrane – then you need eyes, ears, nose, different species of animals, plants, this whole world and universe around us - oh, by the way you needed an environment in the first place.

Obviously – there is a very low probability that MATTER – the Universe around was – was CREATED through random chance.

Now, just because something has a low probability doesn't mean that it couldn't happen a certain way. I'm just saying it takes faith to believe in a purely naturalistic explanation for the universe.

Evolution by Natural selection is insufficient to explain the origin, complexity and diversity of life (but it is understandable why it seems elegant and convincing if you conclude that there is no supernatural).

At a minimum – if you can believe in Creation through RANDOM CHANCE/Naturalistic Evolution – then there should also be sufficient evidence for to believe that there was an actual creator – an intelligent designer.

In the view that an Intelligence Designer created the world – we only have to make 1 assumption – that SOMEONE created the world. Now that's a big assumption, but it means we don't have to take thousands of smaller steps of faith.

The above is a starting point for an argument against a naturalistic view of the origins of mankind. There are plenty of other resources around to help clarify these cases. Check out answersingenesis.org or resources by Lew Meyer for other helps in this area.

Above all, we need to remember that we know from Scripture that “God created the heavens and the earth,” (Genesis 1:1) and that “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,” (Romans 1:20).

5.4 Anthropic Arguments.

Fundamental aspects of human nature and human experience are best explained by the existence of a God who created us this way.

There are several forms of this argument. Most often, it focuses on human conscience, religious experiences or the sense of yearning for eternity, and the human capacity for good and evil.

5.4.1 Ethics, Morality and Conscience

A world ordered by a Moral Lawgiver is more humanly satisfying and explains human life better than the alternative.

All humans have a conscience, a sense of right and wrong. Every culture in human history has upheld beliefs about right and wrong. We seem to operate as though some things are right and others are wrong. Why is this? Where did the sense of morality come from?

As before, there are basically two answers. Our sense of conscience comes from God, who created us within a moral order and equipped us to act rightly, or it came from somewhere within creation, for example or culture, our evolution, our survival instincts, etc.

There are people who seriously argue our sense of conscience comes from evolution or instinct or social constructs—in other words, this morality is not objective, external to ourselves, and that we will not be held ultimately accountable for violating it.

This theory has been taken to its logical conclusion by Princeton professor Peter Singer. He argues that ethics should be balanced by measuring "the happiness maximizing best interest of society." His conclusions lead him to believe – in theory – that's it's not only ok but preferred to commit infanticide in the case of severely handicapped babies and that selective geriatricide would save us a lot of money

on health care costs. Presumably, both of these lead to a "relative greater happiness" – an improved lot for society.

But this moral framework is emotionally dishonest. It's dishonest not because it doesn't make sense on paper - it's actually logically pretty sound based on his assumptions - but, because it doesn't work in the real world.

We live as though all life has value and meaning. Even Professor Singer in practice – can't bring himself to live out his logical theory, choosing to protect his invalid mother and provide her with medical care and dignity, because he can't emotionally live out the implications of his beliefs.

Relativistic morality will not satisfy our desire for justice and fairness and so, it should be rejected. We live as though some things are right and others are wrong. That is why we are indignant if someone takes our parking spot at Christmas. We appeal to a higher standard – a judge – a sense of fairness. If morality were socially constructed and we knew it, there would be little keeping us from violating it at will every time we saw an opportunity to pursue our short-term pleasure or gain. But in fact most people, including most Christians, don't do that.

We live as though some things are objectively right and others are wrong. The belief that morality is relative and socially constructed does not resonate with our experience. It does not adequately explain the human experience of morality.

So if we a) have a desire for justice and b) generally know the difference between what's right and what's wrong, we need to ask yourself where did this come from?

Did your mother ever tell you this: "ok – today we are going to cover 57 rules and tomorrow we'll do another 137. And we're going to cover every situation that will ever come up in your life"?

No, it didn't happen that way. It's planted on your brain. It's called "conscience."

Conscience is planted in our brain by a Lawgiver who is Morally Perfect. And, in the same way that there are laws of nature, so we believe that there are also moral laws or Absolutes and that flow from God – and that He has built into us a Standard of Right and Wrong.

We see Paul teaching this clearly in Romans 2:

"When Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, 15since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them."

Biblically, we see that our conscience is a gift given to us by God – something left by Him to reveal His Nature to Us.

5.4.2 Religious experience and yearning for eternity

Our Desire for Eternity and for Ultimate Meaning points to a Need for a Relationship with God.

Why are we humans so difficult to satisfy? It's seems like a near universal experience. The atheist Jean-Paul Sartre said that "there comes a time when one asks, even of Shakespeare, even of Beethoven, 'Is that all there is?'" Not as well versed in the classics, the Rolling Stones summarized this near universal experience slightly differently: "I tried, and I tried and I tried but I just can't get no satisfaction."

Much more profound than either of these, Solomon in Ecclesiastes evaluated human experience and this is his analysis of the world:

- There is nothing new under the sun – no new, novel ideas
- The satisfaction of work and profit is temporary: why? Because one day we will leave our work to someone else and we will be left without control of it.
- Material possessions and pleasure are unfulfilling: he refused himself no pleasures, but still found them lacking
- death comes on all of us – regardless of how good or bad we are, how smart or stupid

He concluded that this world is "meaningless, utterly meaningless, a chasing after the wind."

In conversations with others, there are two litmus tests you can use to tease out of others whether they've felt this sense of "meaninglessness."

First: you can get to the "I'm not satisfied" response by challenging people to articulate what – if they had it – would really satisfy them?

Second: Ask: "what's next" questions –

"ok – you had a great time out last night – best time ever – what's next?"

"ok – you have a fancy job – what's next?"

Ask them to take their dreams and ambitions for life to their logical end – and see if this "What's next?" will stop.

"ok – you have the huge house and the vacation house – what's next?"

The point here is that we seem to have a Desire for MORE: more beauty, more desirability, more awesomeness, and more joy.

We have this desire – why can't we fulfill it? For every other innate desire that we have, there is a real object that satisfies that desire. So when we're thirsty, drinking water satisfies us. And when we are hungry, eating food satisfies us. When we're hungry – reading a book or watching TV doesn't satisfy us: it may temporarily distract us, it may cause us to forget about our hunger for a few minutes or a few hours, but ultimately, the only thing that will truly satisfy us – that will meet the need that is making us hungry – is food.

But, there exists in us a desire which nothing in time, nothing on earth, no creature can satisfy. Therefore there must exist something more than time, earth and creatures, which can satisfy this desire. This something is what people call "God" and "life with God forever."

This, I think, is a great post-modern argument for the existence of God as it allows you to challenge people's subjectivism. Why? Because my guess is that what people are filling their lives with is either temporarily filling their need – like food does; or it is distracting them from finding a real solution – like TV.

Our DESIRE points to a supernatural world and materialism will never satisfy our desires.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

John 4:13-14 - Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

God has set eternity in the hearts of men and promises that He can fulfil our desires for eternal life.

5.4.3 Capacity for good and evil

Human nature is most consistently explained by the Christian view of man, created in God's image, but born as sinners.

Why do people live the way they do? We are a strange race, aren't we? Individually we can have such extreme thoughts of encouragement and discouragement in our minds. And, as a race, we are given to actions that we can characterize as very good or very evil.

We have no problem understanding how a mother can sacrifice her life to save her baby. Or how a firefighter can climb up a burning building. But, we are also capable of some of the greatest evil. And – different examples will come to each of our minds. Stalin – Hitler – Bosnia - Rwanda – ISIS etc...

Well, this is where Christianity makes perhaps the most unique and profound statement about the nature of God and man. Christianity states two things about mankind. First, that we are made in the image of God and second we have rebelled against Him.

This is unique because no other philosophy so logically and realistically reconciles man's capacity for great good with his tendency towards great evil.

You see, man is made in the image of God, and therefore He does reflect the Creator's goodness and His moral character. Thus, we are capable of some of the greatest good.

Christianity reconciles these two seemingly contradictory realities like this: although we are made in the image of God, we have rebelled against Him. This is what Christianity calls Sin.

Therefore, while we are saddened by evil and sin, we are not surprised by it. We understand that apart from Jesus, we are all by nature rebels against God, which means we would rather do things our way than God's way. And so when our way and God's way conflict, we are going to take our way.

But God knows and sees everything that we do; he sees our very thoughts, motivations, and dreams. And so if we ever violate God's perfect moral law, His character requires that He give out a penalty. Just like we take no satisfaction in a known, convicted criminal who bribes a judge and is unjustly let go, so we should take no satisfaction in a god who would allow our rebellion to go unpunished. We would call this god unjust.

But - and this is the big idea of Christianity – Christians believe that God both punishes sin and forgives us for it. How does this happen? How can God punish us and forgive us at the same time?

It's because of Jesus. You see Jesus came to earth and lived a perfect life. He died a death that he didn't deserve. And, he willingly died this death to pay the penalty for all of those who would turn away from their rebellion and trust in him, and live the way he created and designed for them to live. If we Trust in Jesus sacrifice for us – God punishes Jesus and Forgives Us. This is what Christians refer to as the Gospel – or the Good News.

It's a beautiful thing when you realize that not only is Christianity intellectually satisfying, but that it also restores you to the very relationship that the creator designed you to have with him.

5.5 Immaterialism.

Have you ever been in love? Have you ever been breathless by a work of art, or the beauty of a waterfall? If so, how do you account for the experience of love or beauty? What are they? Where do they come from?

The Atheistic/Naturalistic worldview has no coherent answer for this. It doesn't make sense to the raw laws of science without God as a starting point.

5.6 Transcendental Argument.

How do you know anything? How do we explain our experience of knowledge? We all feel as if we know things. We live our lives as if knowledge were possible and useful, and in fact that belief seems to be born out when we successfully act and make choices on the basis of things we think we know. If knowledge is real, where does it come from? How is it reliable?

The transcendental argument argues that God is the precondition for knowledge, logic, science, and conceptual generalizations. God made the world, He knows all the facts there are to know about it, He made us in His image with the capability to know things, and He upholds both us and the world continuously with His word. In such a universe, the possibility of knowledge is unproblematic.

5.7 Ontological Argument.

This is a tricky argument and we'll not spend a lot of time on it. We cover it because you may be asked about it in conversation with unbelievers. It goes like this:

1) God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived. 2) The greatest thing that could possibly be conceived of possesses the attribute of existence, because if it didn't, there is a thing still greater that could be conceived. 3) Therefore, God exists.

Some have argued that this is just verbal trickery; others that it is the most profound argument possible. I leave that to you. I think this works best as a "presuppositional" argument; that is, it works to help bolster Christians' faith and help them understand God better, but it is unlikely to sound persuasive to unbelievers.

5.8 Conclusion

The goal here has been to show that belief in God is a more plausible explanation of the way things are than not believing in God. Hopefully some of the barriers that stand opposed to faith have been removed. Belief in God, while certainly mystery and requiring faith, is more plausible than an atheist's or naturalist's view of the world.

6 The Problem of Evil

6.1 Introduction

If you could ask God one question, what would it be? According to a poll of American adults, most people would ask: “Why is their pain and suffering in the world?” Augustine of Hippo asked the question a similar way: “If there is a God, why is there so much evil?”

In his book reflecting on the problem of evil, C.S. Lewis summarized it this way: *“If God were good, he would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty He would be able to do what He wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore God either lacks goodness, or power, or both.’ This is the problem of pain in its simplest form.”* (The Problem of Pain)

Today, we will discuss what we philosophically call “The Problem of Evil.”

6.2 What is “The Problem of Evil”

Practically, the problem before us today typically sounds like one of these others questions:

- If there really is a good god, why is there so much evil in the world?
- Why a Hitler and the Holocaust? Stalin and Mao? A September 11th?
- I can’t possibly believe in a god who would allow __X__ to happen.
- If God can really do anything, why doesn’t he get rid of evil?
- We ask –“Why Lord?” – when our experience and our knowledge of who God is do not seem to line up
- It’s not fair that people suffer unjustly.

The famous utilitarian philosopher, John Stuart Mill, summarizes these questions in a philosophically: *“If God desires there to be evil in the world, then he is not good. If He does not desire there to be evil, yet evil exists, then He is not omnipotent. Thus, if evil exists God is either not loving or not all-powerful. Evil casts a shadow over God’s love and power. This is no small dilemma, and answers to it are exceedingly difficult.”*

What is at stake as we consider this question – at least to unbelievers – is the idea that God can not be all-powerful or that he cannot be all good. This is the problem that we will try to reconcile in this session, and we will conclude that despite evil in the world, God IS all-powerful and that He IS all good.

6.3 Common Solution: Theodicy

the•od•i•cy [thee-od-uh-see] –noun. A vindication of the divine attributes, particularly holiness and justice, in establishing or allowing the existence of physical and moral evil.

Let’s start with a brief overview of a few common solutions:

The question of the origin of evil has not been answered completely and satisfactorily by ANY system of thought. But, most systems have attempted to answer it.

6.3.1 Evil is Unreal – just an illusion

Charge: Evil is an illusion – it is not real (non-Christian and Eastern Mysticism). Since evil is just an illusion, the way to overcome it is mind over matter. (Buddhist)

Problems:

1. Breaks down and falls flat with human experience.
2. Why would God allow such illusion to overtake us?

6.3.2 Evil is just good in disguise (Taoism)

Charge: From God's perspective, all things are good, even though they may seem bad from our point of view (Romans 8:28)

Problems:

1. Romans 8:28 does not say that all things are good, it only says that all things will work for good – for a select group of people (the elect)
2. Evil out of which God brings good is real evil. From the betrayal of Judas comes the redemptive act of the cross, but that in no way minimizes the wickedness of Judas' act.
3. "Evil is good" fails because it obscures the real difference between good and evil. It is an implicit denial of the reality of evil.

6.3.3 Dualism: God vs. Satan (Star Wars, Ying & Yang)

Charge: God really wants good, but Satan thwarts his purposes and wants evil. There exist two ultimate and opposing forces which are equal in power and eternity. This view lets God off the hook by making the existence of evil eternally independent of Him.

Problems:

1. Excludes the possibility of redemption of evil: if evil is equal in power to God, God has no way to overcome it.
2. Also fails logically. God cannot be omnipotent if he is in true conflict with Satan (cannot have two absolute beings at the same time).
3. Finally, it fails Biblically. Satan is not equal in power to God; in fact, he is subject to God (Ps 115:3, 135:6; Job 1:9-12)

6.3.4 We must have evil in order to appreciate good

Charge: To appreciate health, I must first understand sickness. To appreciate righteousness, I must first understand wickedness. It appears weighty because we do experience the intensity of appreciation by way of such contrasting experiences. Example: I do appreciate health after I've just been sick.

Problems:

1. If the experience is necessary for the appreciation of good, then God would have to experience evil in order to appreciate good as well (but: I Jn 1:9/ Insert Scripture)
2. This approach really just falls back to the "evil is really good in disguise"
3. Doesn't make sense with what the Bible teaches about Heaven and Hell – Humans experience one or the other only and eternally.

6.3.5 Evil is just relative (post modern)

Charge: This is really not a theodicy as it doesn't really seek to justify God – it really just seeks to eliminate Him. There is no such thing as good or evil; only how you feel about it matters. There are only social convictions or preferences that masquerade as real values.

Problems:

1. What does it mean that it "matters" how you feel about something?
2. When we talk about what "matters," we imply good or evil, right or wrong.
3. For example, what of the teaching that terrorism, mass murder, genocide, infanticide, mass gassing of humans, and bombings are all morally neutral because they are just a matter of perspective?

6.3.6 Open Theism: ("Christian" compromise)

Charge: Attempts to explain God's Sovereignty and man's choice. God created the world but didn't know or determine all the outcomes. God does not know the future but exists in time and reality. He can "predict" the future since he knows people so intimately.

Problems:

1. What of the teaching that Jesus was God's plan from before all time?
2. What of clear teaching that God has all things in His hands?
3. This view robs God of His Glory.

The problem remains: how could evil originate with a good God who created the world?

6.4 The Biblical Conundrum

So what is the solution?

In one sense, there certainly are answers in the Bible about this, but in another sense, there is not a crisp single sentence answer that is tied up with a bow. We just do not have perfect resolution of this issue as Christians. What I can do – however – is to provide the Biblical perspective for the "Problem."

As we have talked about before, our knowledge is limited, our minds are fallen. But just because we cannot understand some real things fully, does not mean we are unable to understand those things truly. (Example: the Trinity). So, in that sense, we don't have a "solution" in the sense that we can make perfect sense of evil, suffering and pain in this world.

The complete full answer has not been revealed to us by God. So can we trust in a God who has not revealed this to us in full?

YES. Absolutely. We trust God because of what we do know and what God has revealed to us.

Imperfect Example:

A father tells his son playing in yard to drop down on all fours and crawl through mud toward him. Son wonders why and asks. Father demands obedience. Son obeys and does so. When at his father's feet, his Father shows him the deadly snake that was hanging in the tree above where the child had been standing. When in God's presence one Day, we will see things from his perspective and may understand more fully. Until then, his thoughts are not our thoughts and his ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9).

6.5 We Can Trust God As He Has Been Revealed To Us

6.5.1 God is the all-powerful governor of His Universe

Psalm 115:3 – “Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.”

Genesis 1. God spoke and the worlds were created.

Colossians 1:16-17. ***“For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”***

6.5.2 God is in control of every aspect of His creation

Ephesians 1:11 - ***“In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.”***

Psalm 33:15 – ***“The Lord looks down from heaven; he sees all the children of man; from where he sits enthroned he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth, he who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds.”***

6.5.3 God even orchestrates the sins of man to glorify himself (yet is not tainted by them)

Exodus 4:21 – ***“The LORD said to Moses, “When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you the power to do. But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.”***

Consider the actions of Pilate. The Pharisees. Judas.

6.5.4 Yet, God is never blameworthy for evil that occurs. Those who commit evil are to blame.

James 1:13-14 – ***“When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.”***

6.5.5 For God is good and holy, and he hates evil

Habakkuk 1:13 – ***“Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?”***

Revelation 4 – “Day and night [the creatures around the throne of God] never stop saying: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come”

6.5.6 God judges us. We do not judge God.

Romans 9:19-21—***“One of you will say to me: “Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?” But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?”***

Consider the example of Job (chapters 38-41). God's first question to Job puts things in perspective: ***"Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand."***

6.5.7 God will use evil for an ultimate good purpose (which we may not now fully understand): a "greater good"

Genesis 50:20 – ***"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."***

Consider the crucifixion of Jesus. The worst tragedy of human history is the brutal murder of the only perfect man to ever live. But this injustice is also the most glorious event of human history – God's sacrifice of his Son to ransom a people unto himself. Friends, if the ultimate evil can result in the ultimate good, God can use lesser evils in other places and times in history – even in our lives – for our good.

God's ultimate purpose is NOT to provide happiness for man, but rather to glorify Himself. Man's chief end is "to glorify God, and enjoy Him forever."

Scripture does sometimes show how God has used evil to advance His purposes (three examples):

1. Displaying His mercy and justice - Romans 3:26, Romans 5:8, Romans 5:20-21, Romans 9:17
2. Redemption – Christ's sufferings on our behalf.

Paul sees his sufferings for the church and the spread of the gospel as similar to Christ's sufferings. Anytime we witness and are reviled we are suffering for the glory of Christ - Christ (1 Peter 3:18), Paul (Col 1:24), Believers (2 Tim 3:12)

3. Shock value to unbelievers that can gain their attention and promote a change in heart.
 - We as humans have a tendency to forget God when things are going well. God can use pain and suffering to accomplish this. God may use pain as a megaphone to rouse a deaf world from our complacency.
 - Deuteronomy Chapter 8
 - *"I am progressing along the path of life in my ordinary contentedly fallen and godless condition...when suddenly a stab of abdominal pain that threatens serious disease...At first I am overwhelmed, and all my little happinesses look like broken toys. Then slowly and reluctantly, bit by bit, I try to bring myself into the frame of mind that I should be at all times, I remind myself that toys were never intended to possess my heart, that my true good is in another world and my only real treasure is Christ."* C.S. Lewis
4. Fatherly discipline of believers
 - Romans 5: ***"And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."***
 - Hebrews 12: 5-11:

“And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons:

***“My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline,
and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,
because the Lord disciplines those he loves,
and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”***

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

6.6 We Should Trust the God Who Has Revealed Himself

6.6.1 End Suffering

GOD WILL ONE DAY PUT AN END TO PAIN, SUFFERING & EVIL

Our hope of Heaven is captured well in Revelation 21:1-4:

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

6.6.2 Experienced Evil

Christians’ “Answer” to the Problem of Pain is Found in Jesus’ Death on the Cross

- Where is God in a world of pain and evil? His answer is the Incarnation. The Word, Jesus, became Flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus knew fatigue, hunger, sorrow, and pain. His friends aged, grew sick, and died. He was betrayed by a friend. He entered into all out human agony and bore all the pain of our sin on his very self.
- Peter Kreeft: “Many Christians try to get God off the hook for suffering. God put himself on the hook, so to speak, on the cross.”
- (Kreeft) “It’s significant that most objections to the existence of God from the problem of suffering come from outside observers who are quite comfortable, whereas those who actually suffer are – as often as not – made into stronger believers by their suffering.” Why? In large part because they follow One who was a Suffering Servant, who was despised, rejected, beaten, and killed.

- So, the answer to suffering is not an answer at all. It's the Answerer, Jesus himself.
 - It's not a bunch of words, it's the Word made flesh.
 - It's not a tightly woven philosophical argument alone, but a person. A Man of Sorrows.
- The answer to suffering is not just an abstract notion, because the problem is not abstract; it is real and personal. And in Jesus' life and death and resurrection, we find a real and personal answer. When we cry out, God, where are you? We need to look with eyes of faith to the cross.
- John Stott: "I could never myself believe in God, if it were not for the cross....in the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it?.....There is still a question mark against human suffering, but over it we boldly stamp another mark, the cross which symbolizes divine suffering."

6.6.3 Execute Justice

GOD WILL ONE DAY VINDICATE HIMSELF

- Peter Kreeft: "People aren't getting away with [evil.] Justice delayed [in God's economy] is not necessarily justice denied. There will come a day when God will settle accounts and people will be held responsible for the evil they've perpetrated and the suffering they've caused. Criticizing God for not doing it now is like reading a half a novel and criticizing the author for not resolving the plot."
- Romans 3:26
- In the Scriptures, God promises us that in the future He will be totally vindicated and we will be fully delivered from all evil.
- The wicked will no longer prosper and the righteous will no longer suffer.
- We will see the certainty of God's victory. (Ps 73, Ps 37)
- The proud will be brought low and the humble raised to greatness (Isa 40:1; Matt 25; Luke 1:51)

6.6.4 Endure

GOD WILL NEVER LET HIS CHILDREN GO

- Romans 8:28, 35-39 – ***"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."***

6.7 Conclusion

Scripture doesn't answer our inquiry with a philosophical solution to the problem of evil. We cannot finally address non-Christians and others with an answer that will put all their philosophical wonderings to sleep.

Nor, will our experience of suffering ever be removed. Jesus is the model of the Suffering Servant who triumphs over the world.

The truths that we talked about today give Christians the ONLY satisfactory answer to the Problem of Evil and they give us assurance and motivation to keep trusting and obeying God despite this problem of evil.

“...these were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us...” Hebrews 11:32-40

6.8 Appendix: Another important question

What is the origin of sin?

- I.) God created all things and they were good
- II.) God gave humans (and angels) free will
- III.) Sin is rebellion against God – responding to God’s call and promises in a sinful way
- IV.) God did not create evil but allows evil

Excellent John MacArthur article on the subject: <http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/90-235.htm>

- Summing it up, there is no external cause of sin, outside the creature.
- There's no force floating out there that God created. It is the absence of perfection. There is no deterministic cause and effect; that is to say, some fatalism. It's just choice.
- Within God's decree, he allowed for that choice, knew those choices would be made the way they were made, planned that into the decree in order to display both his grace, his wrath, and to put a final and eternal end to sin.
- And as Martin Luther said: "The devil is the Lord's devil. He functions within the sovereign purposes of God to achieve the things that are in the eternal decree of God for the salvation of sinners, the damnation of sinners and the ultimate triumphant destruction over evil."

7 The Reliability of Scripture

7.1 Introduction

Welcome to the eighth class in Worldview and Apologetics. Today we will be exploring why Christians believe the Bible is true and reliable.

Here is our outline:

- I.) Where Did the Bible Come From?
- II.) How Should Christians Use of Scripture In Christian Apologetics?
- III.) As Christian Apologists, How Do We Explain Why We Believe the Bible Is True?
 - a. The New Testament documents are Historically Reliable and Credible
 - b. Jesus' Character is shown as Trustworthy
 - c. Jesus Claims that the Old and New Testament books were the Word of God
- IV.) Rebuttals to Common "Problems" with The Bible

Unfortunately, in our next few minutes together, we will not answer all the questions you might have. I am not saying this to evade specific questions. I just want you to realize there are great answers for all your questions, but there too many specific questions and answers from each of you to be able to answer each of them satisfactorily in our time together.

Let me make you an offer. If today's Core Seminar ends and you still have a burning question, come talk to me afterward and I will help you find the answer to your question. We can email, talk on the phone or meet for coffee this week.

Others of you may not have a single question, but want to learn more. For you, I have included several good books and authors on the handout. Feel free to explore their writings online, buy their books, or download audio of their lectures and talks.

Why do Christians believe that what the Bible says is true? What makes Christians think that the Bible is true? First, let's consider where Christians believe the Bible comes from.

7.2 Where Did the Bible Come From?

The Bible Came From God, By The Holy Spirit, Through Men, To Humankind.

As Christians, we believe the Bible is God's letter to humanity collected into 66 books written by 40 divinely inspired writers over the spans of 1,500 years or more. These writers come from all walks of life (i.e., kings to fishermen). We believe the Bible is divinely inspired by God, authoritative for all of life, without error or omission, and infallible in its composition.

The 66 books of the Bible are known as the "canon" of holy scripture. The word comes from the Greek word (kanon), meaning "rule or standard," and Christians use this word to describe the Bible – the book that provides the final "rule and authority" for our faith. Early Christians did not decide what books to put into the canon. Remember, they already affirmed that the Hebrew Scriptures, or the Old Testament, was the Word of God. They just faced the question of which books should be added to this Old Testament canon.

The books that were recognized were written by either the Apostles or eyewitnesses and they were widely used in the church. So early Christians did not develop the canon like one would solicit manuscripts for a publisher – it was more like recognizing the best sellers of established, credible authors. It is remarkable, in historical terms, how early the church and Christians reached practical agreement, and how little dissension emerged. The first written document we have that lists all 27 books of the New Testament is Athanasius’s Easter Letter 39, written in 367 AD.

7.2.1 Criteria for Canonicity

There are four requirements Protestant Evangelicals point to explain which books have been included in the Old and New Testament:

1. **Apostolic Origin** — attributed to and based on the preaching/teaching of the first-generation apostles (or their close companions).
2. **Universal Acceptance** — acknowledged by all major Christian communities in the ancient world (by the end of the fourth century).
3. **Liturgical Use** — read publicly when early Christian communities gathered for the Lord's Supper (their weekly worship services).
4. **Consistent Message** — containing a theological outlook similar or complementary to other accepted Christian writings.

The fundamental factor for recognizing a book's canonicity for the New Testament was divine inspiration, and the chief test for this was apostolic authority. Apostolic authority is never detached from the authority of the Lord.

Theologian and biblical scholar B.B. Warfield said, “the canon of the New Testament was completed...when John wrote [Revelation], about A.D. 98...we must not mistake the historical evidences of the slow circulation and authentication of these books...[as] evidence of slowness of ‘canonization’ of books by the authority or the taste of the church itself.”

7.3 How Do Christians View The Use of Scripture In Christian Apologetics?

7.3.1 Christians’ Ultimate Authority Is the Word of God

As we have discussed, ultimately as Christians, we do not rely only on our reason, but on God’s revelation of himself, through the Word of Scripture (the Bible), and through the Word Made Flesh (Jesus).

Christians accept God’s revelation of himself through faith. Faith is essential. Hebrews 11:6 says that without faith it is impossible to please God. We come to God through faith in Jesus. Ephesians 2 says we are saved by grace through faith.

Christians do not put their faith in the Bible to save them, as if the Bible was God himself. But Christians put their faith in the Author of the Bible, Our Savior, Jesus – and believe the Bible to be true because it is God’s word to us.

As God’s word, the Bible is the ultimate standard of truth. When praying that the Father would sanctify the disciples in truth, Jesus said in John 17:17 that the Word is truth. As the Truth with a capital “t” the Word of God stands in judgment on every other truth claim and assertion in the universe. The Bible stands in judgment over our reason, over philosophy, over every worldview and presumption, so the attitude of the Christians towards the Bible should be one of faithful obedience.

7.3.2 Non-Christians Do Not Recognize the Authority of the Word of God

Of course however, non-believers do not at all share this viewpoint. In fact, the Bible makes it very clear that far from being neutral in their attitudes towards Scripture. Non Christians actively oppose – even hate – the truth of Scripture.

- Romans 8:7 says, “the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.”
- Non-Christians unable to submit to Scripture because they are opposed to the truth of God’s word. They are hostile to God.
- In Romans 1 we learn that “God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature— [can be] clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.” But, humankind has “neither glorified him as God nor [given] thanks to him” because “their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.”
- In John 3, Jesus said “men [love] darkness instead of light because their deeds [are] evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.”

7.3.3 But Christians Should Use Scripture as Part of Their Christian Apologetics

If our job is to present the consistent veracity and reliability of a Christian worldview, we will find it impossible to do that without drawing on the truth of the Bible because what we believe about God is based on the testimony of the Bible. As we explain our worldview, it is completely natural to open up to the scriptures to explain what we believe, and to use scripture’s own arguments for why those beliefs are valid.

I encourage you to bring scripture to bear in your discussions with non-Christians where appropriate for a few reasons.

1. Using Scripture challenges the postmodern idea that truth is relative. It rebuts the charge that a Christian’s “truth narrative” does not necessarily apply to a non-Christian friend. It also demonstrates this ancient text is relevant for life in a postmodern world, for when we appeal to God’s word as the final authority, we appeal to an absolute truth.
2. Scripture is spiritually powerful. God said in Isaiah 55, “my word goes out from my mouth and it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” Hebrews 4:12 says “the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”
3. Scripture contains in many places its own arguments for the validity of its claims. It helps to show non-Christians that we are nowhere expected to accept the claims of Christianity on what they would call “blind faith”, but on the basis of ample evidence and a coherent worldview.

7.4 As Christian Apologists, How Do We Explain Why We Believe the Bible Is True?

Before we begin, let me give you a few vocabulary words:

- *Infallibility* means that the Bible is in its entirety inspired by God
- *Inerrancy* means that the Bible contains no error

So why do Christians believe the Bible is reliable and true, that it is authoritative as God’s Word? It hinges on three characteristics:

- 1) The New Testament documents are Historically Reliable and Credible
- 2) Jesus' Character is shown as Trustworthy
- 3) Jesus Claims that the Old and New Testament books were the Word of God

7.4.1 The New Testament documents are Historically Reliable and Credible

Let's start with the first point, the historical reliability of the New Testament documents.

- The New Testament record agrees perfectly with what we know of history elsewhere. The names of emperors and governors and places and events do not disagree with other sources that we have.
- The New Testament reads as a historically reliable document. For example, the New Testament text often shows its human authors in a bad light, as a historical account would. It contains events –such as the crucifixion— that are inconvenient for those seeking to project Jesus as the son of God. And it contains odd bits of details, such as places people stood, the state of the grass on a certain day (John 6:10), etc. that have the feel consistent with eyewitness accounts.
- The New Testament has eyewitnesses of events it describes who were still alive when scholars know that the documents existed. But we do not know of anyone who disputed the factual, historic events described in the New Testament – including Jesus' death and resurrection. In fact, the disciples who wrote large chunks of the New Testament – Paul, John, Peter – gave their lives for the message of the Bible. (Sidenote: Rarely do men die for what they know to be a lie.)
- The New Testament has far more and earlier manuscripts than any other ancient text. Respected scholar F.F. Bruce said “there is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament.”

Homer:	Written 900 BC	Earliest Copy, 400 BC	Number of copies, 643
NT:	Written AD 40-100	Earliest Copy, 25 AD	Number of copies, 24,000+

If the Bible is in fact true, then we should expect it to have three characteristics:

- A. It has a coherent message – its various parts all contribute to a clearly defined message
- B. It is internally consistent (doesn't contradict itself)
- C. It is externally consistent (historically accurate)

It's worthy our taking some time to go through these three categories, because there is much that will corroborate the Bible's claims in its trustworthiness

7.4.1.1 Unity of Message

- Despite the fact that it was written by many different men over 1500 years, there isn't a single place where a Biblical author disagrees with another Biblical author. Some scholars suggest that much of its history and prophecy were written years after the events with which they claim to be contemporaries. They could claim that prophecies and histories were rewritten hundreds of years later to support a particular agenda. If that were true, however, you would expect these revisionist historians to contradict some of what had been written in or discovered about the past. But nowhere in the Bible do you find this kind of disagreement.

- The Bible is united in teaching its own authority, despite the fact that it was written by so many authors. When Moses set out writing the first book of the Bible, he was setting an enormous precedent as he claimed divine authority for his writings. Imagine the challenge it would have been to be consistent with those writings 1500 years later had the entire Bible not been authored ultimately by God.
- The unity of the Bible’s message is undeniable. You may have heard some say that the God of the OT is a God of judgment, while the God of the NT is a God of grace. To them I would point to the Bible itself. You cannot read God’s tender descriptions of his love for his people in the prophets or the Pentateuch and then read Jesus’ descriptions of judgment and maintain that opinion. As an example, consider these passages:

Deut 30:1-6	II Chronicles 30:6	Nehemiah 1:9	Zechariah 1:3
Malachi 3:7	John 8:24	James 4:8	

- The Bible all points to one man, Jesus. The same man whom the prophets foretold is the same man who revolutionized history, the God-Man, Jesus. The testimony of Scripture to Christ over so many centuries is quite remarkable. Biblical theologian John Frame says it this way:

“An incredibly rich array of symbols, types, prophecies, events, and poetic depictions converge inevitably and powerfully on Jesus Christ who, to most of the biblical writers, is to come centuries later.”

7.4.1.2 Internal Consistency

If the Bible is reliable and true, it should be internally consistent, and we should find that the Bible does not contradict itself.

You may have heard people make claims like the following:

- In the OT, populations of armies are sometimes estimated differently in different places
- One passage in Exodus says that God parted the Red Sea; another says it was a wind
- The chronological order of Jesus life is not the same in any two of the gospels
- One account of the resurrection says that the women who went to the tomb saw two angels; another says there was only one

These can be answered easily by keeping some guidelines such as the following in mind:

- Ancient histories rarely claimed exact numbers, and symbolic numbers are sometimes used in relating symbolic events. Scripture is always true, but not always precise – at least where it doesn’t claim to be
- First and second causes do not exclude one another (God parted the Red Sea with a wind)
- Don’t hold the Bible to what it doesn’t claim (only Luke claims something like chronological accuracy – in 1:3)
- Recognize that different accounts do not imply error (perhaps one woman saw two angels while the other saw just one) – remember to always read in context

We could spend weeks going through all the apparent contradictions, but there have been books written to help us out with these. A good example is Norm Geisler’s *When Critics Ask*. That said, if there were gaping contradictions that could not be easily explained or that kept me up at night, I would not be standing here in front of you today. As I’ve mentioned before, books like this in no way underpin Christian faith; conversely, it’s the experience of Christians that the further they explore God’s word and learn of him, the more they trust him. Ultimately our trust in the truthfulness and reliability of the

Bible is based in Jesus—and his view of it—rather than my ability or inability to find or explain any supposed contradictions.

7.4.1.3 External Consistency

At the end of the 19th century, it became very much in vogue to use archeological evidence to supposedly disprove the historical accounts of the Bible. This happened so much that if you examine commentaries from that era, many Christian scholars actually themselves seemed to wonder if the Bible's historical accounts could ever be proved. However, over the last hundred years, the veracity and reliability of the Bible has been vindicated again and again and again as more evidence has been brought to bear.

I do not want to spend a lot of time on this, but I do want to point you to a great resource in Josh McDowell's book, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* and *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict, or A Ready Defense*. Look at this example:

During the excavations of Jericho (1930s) [archeologist] Garstang found something so startling that a statement of what was found was prepared and signed by himself and two other members of the team. In reference to these findings Garstang says: "As to the main fact, then, there remains no doubt: the walls [of Jericho] fell outwards so completely that the attackers would be able to clamber up and over their ruins into the city." Why so unusual? Because the walls of cities do not fall outwards, they fall inwards. And yet in Joshua 6:20 we read ". . . The wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city every man straight ahead, and they took the city."

Archaeology does not prove Scriptures are the inspired, inerrant Word of God, but no archaeological discovery has disproved the historical veracity and reliability of the text of the New or Old Testament.

7.4.2 Jesus' Character is Shown To Be Trustworthy

If Christians can convince someone that the Bible is as generally reliable as other historical documents, then the next step is help them see what historical testimony says about the character of Jesus. If the Scriptures are basically unreliable, then there would be no reason to attach any significance to the Jesus of Nazareth.

The historically reliable Bible teaches a historically real Jesus. And the Bible does not teach Jesus was merely a good teacher. In the gospel accounts, Jesus makes prophecies not only of future events such as the destruction of Jerusalem, but of himself and his own work. If he was a true prophet, then all his teaching must be taken seriously.

In his famous book *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis argues Jesus was either a fraud (liar), crazy (lunatic), or God himself (Lord). He makes this statement,

"A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic--on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg--or he would be the devil of hell. You must take your choice. Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us."

This may be a familiar menu of apologetic choices for some of you, but the explanation has endured for good reason. Jesus could only have been a liar, a lunatic, or Lord. I would add a fourth however – a legend.

- Some people assert the historical Jesus never existed – that he was a legend. But there is so much historical and archeological evidence to support his existence that every reputable historian agrees he was not just a legend.
- If Jesus were a liar, why would he die for his claim, when he could easily have avoided such a cruel death with a few choice words?
- And, if he were a lunatic, how did he engage in intelligent debates with his opponents or handle the stress of his betrayal and crucifixion while continuing to show a deep love for his antagonists?
- Christ said he was Lord and God. The evidence supports that claim.

So we establish first the historical reliability of the Bible and then see that Jesus has trustworthy character. From here – we ask: what did Jesus teach about the Scriptures? Did he consider them authoritative?

7.4.3 Jesus Claims that the Old and New Testament Books were the Word of God

7.4.3.1 *Old Testament*

Jesus treated the Old Testament as God’s inspired, infallible, inerrant word. I’ll point out just a few examples.

- In some places we see Jesus claiming that the entire Old Testament is trustworthy. For example, in John 10:34, Jesus notes that Scripture cannot be broken.
- Many times, we see Jesus end his arguments by quoting from Scripture. As far as he was concerned, what scripture said was the end of the matter. In one case, Jesus even argues from the tense of a verb – that’s in Matthew 22. He clearly understand that each and every word was authoritative, not just the major themes.
- Jesus clearly assumes that what is prophesied in the Old Testament must be fulfilled, specifically concerning himself. This is particularly evident in the book of Matthew. And Jesus demands that others recognize that Scripture is fulfilled in him.
- Finally, Jesus establishes a pattern in Matthew 19 that is repeated in the rest of the gospels when he interchanges the phrases “Scripture says” with “God says.” The Old Testament for Jesus is not merely a record of the words of God; it is the word of God.

If we believe in Jesus, then we ought to treat the Old Testament as he did – as the authoritative word of God.

7.4.3.2 *New Testament*

Jesus himself laid the foundation for the New Testament. He taught that his teaching was to be viewed as the authoritative words of God.

- In John 7:16, he says, “My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me.”
- In Matthew (24:35), Mark (13:31), and Luke (21:33), Jesus is recorded as saying, “heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

- And the crowds noticed this aspect of Jesus' teaching. The first reaction we see recorded after the Sermon On the Mount is that the people were amazed because Jesus taught as one with authority. (Matt 7:29)

Jesus not only gives us reason to believe in the truth of his own words, but also in the words of his disciples. He told them that during times of persecution, "what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. (Matt 10:19-20).

- Jesus told them in John 14:26 that the Holy Spirit would bring to their remembrance all that he has taught them.
- And he told them later that the Spirit would continue to teach them with his own authority even after he had departed. (John 16:12-13)
- Finally, after his resurrection, Jesus declared that his disciples would receive power when the Holy Spirit came on them so that they might be his witnesses. (Acts 1:8)

The New Testament writers understood this authority that had been given to them, and they do not hesitate to cite it. (1 Co 2:13, Gal 1:6-12, etc.) Paul, for example, writes in I Cor 14:36 – 38:

"Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored."

There are even two places where New Testament writers cite other New Testament writings as Scripture – Paul does this with the gospel of Luke in I Ti 5:18, and Peter does this with the writings of Paul in 2 Peter 3:15-16

The church appears to have very early on accepted without question the authority of the writings of the New Testament, leaving other writings in an entirely different category. In fact, with the possible exception of 2 Peter and Jude, the New Testament canon as we have it today was universally recognized by the church by the early second century at the very latest. It wasn't for another two hundred years that an official definition of the canon was deemed necessary.

In summary, if we believe Jesus Christ to be the son of God, then we must accept his view of Scripture. And that would lead us to understand the entire Bible as not just being important, but the inerrant, infallible word of God.

7.5 Rebuttals to Common "Problems" with The Bible

While the purpose of this core seminar has been to give you a framework for the reliability of scripture, we should tackle a few common "problems" that people raise as objections to the Bible's veracity and reliability. These quick rebuttals are not full answers, but launching pads for engaging conversation.

7.5.1 The Bible is Full of Myths.

Charge: miracles, parallel accounts of the flood, and similarities with Greek gods.

Response: The Bible does not have a mythical literary style when compared with other ancient literature. Ruling our myths presupposes a naturalistic worldview. Challenge people to read the Bible!

7.5.2 The Bible Conflicts with Science.

Charge: This is perhaps one of the great challenges of the 20th century – the Scopes Monkey trial.

Response: The Bible describes nature from a phenomenological perspective – that is the world of nature is described as it appears to the naked eye. Furthermore, the scientific method is unable to examine any historical claim, since it can only comment on phenomenon which are observable and repeatable.

7.5.3 The Bible is Full of Contradictions

Charge: The Bible is full of contradictions.

Response: Like what? How do you know, have you read it? There are some divergent accounts and writers do describe similar things from different perspectives. However, under close scrutiny, these passages are complementary, not contradictory.

7.5.4 The Bible is Historically Inaccurate

Charge: When new historical information comes to light, it detracts rather than lends credibility to the Bible.

Response: Really? Like what? Actually, the Bible is one of the most historically accurate texts of antiquity.

7.6 Conclusion

As Christians, we finally surrender to the truth of God’s revelation in the Bible and in history through Jesus – not our own reason. But we should not be afraid to use the Bible as we explain our worldview to unbelievers, and argue for the veracity and reliability of faith in Jesus.

Finally, here are a few things to keep in mind:

1. If questions come up that you can’t answer, remember that there are answers to be found. It’s OK to say, “That’s a good question. Let me check on how to best answer that for you.”
2. Don’t assume that your non-Christian friend will accept the Bible as authoritative.
3. Don’t argue as if the Bible is not authoritative. As you describe your worldview, you are entitled to argue by your own rules – and that includes the authority of the Bible.
4. Open the Bible with those that you are talking with: it is the Word of God and powerful for explaining human nature and the common experience that we have.

When you read your Bible, read it with confidence. God has spoken, that He has revealed Himself to us in the Scriptures, and we read the same Bible that was handed down by the first apostles of Christ’s church.

8 Resurrection

Why do you believe a dead man walked out of a tomb?

As it relates to the Christian faith, apologetics has to do with defending, or making a case for, the truth of the Christian faith. It is rational argument for the purposes of proof and defence of Christianity, and for a critique of unbelief. It is the intersection between faith and reason. The hope is that you will leave this class bolstered in your faith and better equipped to give a reason for the hope that we have to your non-Christian family members, friends, co-workers, yourself and others.

Why do you believe that a dead man walked out of a tomb?

8.1 Intro

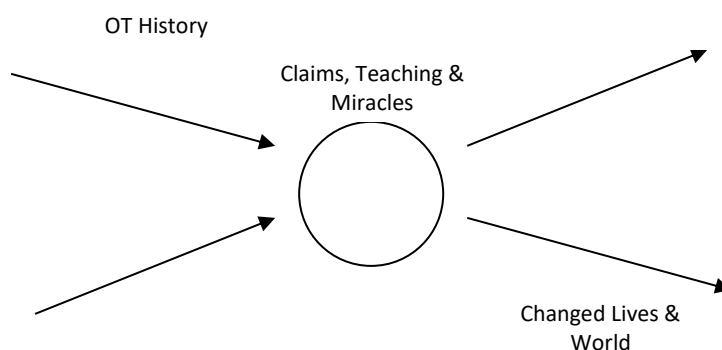
Today's class is, at the end of the day, THE fundamental question of Christianity. What someone believes about Jesus determines how they will answer so many other questions that we deal with. If Jesus truly is God incarnate, then one will also believe in God. If God could raise Jesus from the dead, then it seems like he could also ordain the contents of the Bible.

As we consider this question today, the hope is to make the argument eminently practical so that you can use it in your conversations with those who doubt their faith or with non-Christians who don't claim to have faith.

So – let me give you the eight points that we will make today re: Jesus:

- 1) Jesus is a big deal
- 2) Jesus was an historical person
- 3) Jesus is the point of the History of Israel
- 4) Jesus is spoken about by the prophets of Israel
- 5) Jesus' Claims to be Divine are corroborated by his life, teaching and miracles
- 6) Jesus' death and resurrection cannot be explained away
- 7) Jesus' disciples' lives and the world dramatically changed after his life
- 8) Jesus has changed lives throughout history and He is still changing them!

Those are the 8 arguments I'd like you to remember.



8.2 Jesus is a big deal: all of Christianity rests upon the life, death and resurrection of Christ

You all know that Christians make a big deal about Jesus. You know this from John 3:16 signs at football games; from people on the Mall who hold signs and tell of his impending return.

So - why do we Christians make such a big deal about Jesus?

It's because we believe that our fundamental problem is not lack of information. That is – we don't simply need to be pointed in the right direction to change our lives. No, what we need is a Transformation – what the Bible calls a New Life. Our fundamental problem is SIN or rebellion against God which results in us running up a serious debt to God – and because our condition is serious the treatment must also be serious.

And this is why Christians are always talking so much about Jesus. Because only Jesus can forgive our sins and cancel the debt that we owe. Only Jesus can cover our sins. Only He can wash them away and only Jesus can restore you to a relationship with God.

Theologically – these are the underpinnings of Christianity – and they rest on Christ. If this is true, it has tremendous implications for Christians.

“And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.” (I Cor. 15:12-19)

Theologically, if true, it has tremendous implications on non-Christians: “Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’” (John 14:6)

So Jesus is either alive or not. He either conquered sin or he didn't. We can either have new, transformed lives, or we are living a lie. This is how high the stakes are – for both Christians and non-Christians.

The big question is: **is it True?**

The philosopher Kierkegaard said: "the central question of humanity is whether or not Jesus rose again on Easter morning. How we understand that question determines how we will answer every other question."

Well, as we mentioned – Christians believe that Jesus is rooted in history – not philosophy or ideas – so that leads us to the second point:

8.3 Jesus was an historical person

8.3.1 What do we know about Jesus?

Imagine a Hollywood movie trailer for the historical Jesus – it would be very dramatic:

From a small minority, despised people group, in the Roman Empire came a peasant carpenter. For 3 years he was an itinerant preacher and teacher. He lived to only 33, never held elected office, had a

position of power, wrote anything down or left any heirs. This man was killed at the hands of the authorities and his few, largely uneducated, poor disciples scattered throughout Jerusalem. But, out of this has come the church today!

8.3.2 Extra-biblical References

There are approximately 20 other extra-Biblical references to the Historical Jesus. While these are worth mentioning, almost no serious scholar would deny that a Jesus of Nazareth was a real person.

Perhaps the most influential of the accounts we have is from a Jewish historian named Flavius Josephus who was born in AD 37 and became a Pharisee at age 19. In AD 66 he was the commander of the Jewish forces in Galilee. After being captured, he was attached to the Roman headquarters.

We also know that Roman historians noted on the activity of Christians. Cornelius Tacitus – a Roman historian writing about 50 years after Josephus wrote:

“Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius: but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time, broke out again, not only in Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also.”

Jesus was undeniably a historical figure.

But Christians go one step further than simply saying that Jesus was merely an historical figure: we also believe that the History of Jesus and the words of the Prophets serve as a “show and tell” – and that 4,000 years of history were to prepare us for Jesus.

8.4 Jesus is the point of the History of Israel

God started making His argument about who Jesus was at the beginning of time:

- God was working throughout the history of the Israelites to point them toward a Messiah. Their history – was His Story....
- God took elaborate lengths in the Israelites to create the ultimate analogy – a word-picture on the grandest scale. Not just a parable or an analogy – rooted HIS analogy in History – through the lives of the Israelites and their history.
- Someone is Coming -> this is Why -> this is what he will look like

Let's look at a few examples of how God worked in the people of Israel.

a) The FALL – a supernatural deliverer will come

In the Fall in Genesis 3:15 – God tells Adam and Eve to look for a deliverer, a human, supernatural messiah that Satan would wound.

b) Abraham and Isaac – God will provide the substitute

In the story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22:11-14 – when Abraham is about to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, we see more of how God will deliver his people. We see that

- No higher test of loyalty than to give up one's only son for another
- God will preserve the seed of the promise
- Substitutionary Offering is Necessary
- God provides for people's needs, and our greatest need is forgiveness

c) Egyptian captivity and Passover: God demands a sacrifice – which can only be provided by the death of a perfect lamb

In delivering the Israelites from their Egyptian captivity in Exodus 12-15, we see that:

- God demands a sacrifice
- firstborn son represents the family taking on himself the fate of the family
- Apart from sacrifice – everyone – even the chosen people – deserve death
- Only substitutionary blood can avert death
- blood must be displayed publicly

d) The Scapegoat:

In Leviticus 16, God declares that one day per year will be the Day of Atonement. And, on that day the people are reminded that:

- Sins of the people must be forgiven annually – people are always sinful
- Only a perfect sacrifice is acceptable
- Once the sacrifice has been accepted, God sends it out from the people – sin is transferred and remembered no more

e) Many others:

These – and many other narratives from their history – were to teach the Israelites:

- Nature of man's plight
- Sacrifice is needed to deal with man's sin
- Suffering must be involved
- Combination of divinity and humanity required for salvation
- Divine and self-giving

And so, God was using events to point to and to prepare the Israelites for a Messiah who would rise to deliver them.

8.5 Jesus is spoken about by the prophets of Israel

God's version of "show and tell." He showed the people His plans through their history – but He also told them what He was doing through His prophets.

God sent Prophets to explain and predict the who, what, when, where and why of Jesus.

The Bible contains over 300 prophecies that testify to and were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Let's go through a few examples.

Who: *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."* Isaiah 9:6

What: *"because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay."* Psalm 16:10 (fulfilled Acts 2:31)

Where: *"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel."* Micah 5:2 (fulfilled Matthew 2:1-2)

How: *"Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel."* Isaiah 7:14 (fulfilled in Matthew 1:18)

Isaiah 53: And, perhaps the most instrumental Prophecy is found Isaiah 53. The chapter captures so perfectly the message of Christianity. Jesus Christ is clearly the fulfilment of this amazing prophecy and it is worth writing out in full. Remember, this was written in 680 BC. This chapter is preserved on the Dead Sea scrolls which are dated before the time of Christ.

“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”

So we see that God used SHOW and TELL before Jesus lived to show His divinity and purpose for coming.

8.6 Jesus' Claims to be Divine are corroborated by his life, teaching and miracles:

Jesus Life was remarkable – and His claims were incredible.

Let me ask you a question in the words of the immortal Alanis Morissette: “What if God was one of us?” What do you think he would look like?

- wise/smart, good/help others, accommodating?, tell us what's up?, show us how we can know the father? We don't have to speculate like Alanis, we can know

8.6.1 Jesus was a WISE teacher:

Jesus is also universally respected as a great prophet and a great moral teacher by all the world's major religions. His teaching is moral truth exhibited at its purest. It is not wishy-washy idealism, but it is realistic and cogent, the product of a sane mind. Even the opponents of Christianity are quick to point out that they agree with Jesus' moral teaching.

Some examples of teachings attributed to Jesus:

- The Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have done to you. Love your neighbours as yourself.
- Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.
- Do not judge and you will not be judged. Forgive and you will be forgiven.

8.6.2 Jesus HELPED Others - Miracles

- He performed 23 healings – (man with leprosy, paralyzed man, boy with a demon, crippled woman, official's son, man born blind)
- 9 displayed command over nature (feeding of the 5,000-4,000, calming the storm, walking on the water)
- 3 bringing the dead back to life (Jairus' daughter, widow's son, Lazarus)

8.6.3 Jesus' Claims

There is a paradox about the life of Jesus, which I think you will capture if you read the Gospels carefully. For all his gentleness and meekness, he made some absolutely outrageous comments. Jesus' Claims:

He claimed to be above the law. He lived in a Jewish society where laws and rituals were strictly kept, but he just announced to everyone that he was above the laws. "No one need fast while I am here," he said one day. "You have your laws and your rituals but I just do what my Father tells me to do."

He claimed to be able to forgive sin: In Luke Chapter 5. There is a great crowd around Jesus, so some men cut a hole in the roof of the house he was in and lowered a paralytic on a mat. "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

He claimed that no one could know God except through Him. "***I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.***" (John 14:6)

He claimed that he would rise from the dead. "***The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life.***" Matthew 17:23

He claimed to be God. "***Before Abraham was born 'I am'.***" John 8:58 ('I am' was the holy name for God in Hebrew, unutterable by any man. After Jesus said this, the people tried to stone him because he clearly claimed to be God.)

"Yes, it is as you say. I am the Son of God, but I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." Mt 26:64

Ultimately, Jesus life is so remarkable and his claims so clear – that it led CS Lewis to come to his famous Trilemma conclusion. That Jesus is either a Lord, Liar or Lunatic:

"I am trying here to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic---on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg---or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make the choice. Either this man was and is the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

8.7 Jesus Death and Resurrection cannot be explained away.

They serve as God's EXCLAMATION POINT!

- God used a word picture through a nation
- God used prophets to predict
- God used Jesus life, teachings and claims
- God used raising Jesus from the dead

As if he said: Ok, here's something that is either of God or it's not.

Skeptic: "Analogies, Predictions, Teachings, Miracles, Morality – yeah, yeah, maybe other faiths have these: Rome thought itself an instrument of God; Solomon was Wise; Mother Teresa was a good, moral person. I see your Jesus and I Call."

God: “Ok, let me be really, really clear. No one can do this unless they are God.”

And Christians believe that what God accomplished in 3 short days was the final argument that Jesus was God and that Only He can make us right with God.

Let me walk you through the evidence of why 21st century, cosmopolitan, cynical, capitalist consumers can believe that a real person 2,000 years ago physically got up out of a tomb. Ultimately, I don't think this argument and the evidence will ever “convince you” to become a Christian: only the Holy Spirit revealing your sin and need for Christ can do that. However, this evidence may remove a stumbling block in your disbelief.

Summary of What happened in Jesus last days:

Garden -> Trials -> Torture -> Humiliation -> Walk to Calvary -> Crucifixion -> Death -> Darkness -> Placed in a Tomb -> Large Stone & Soldiers -> 3 Days of Silence -> Empty Tomb -> Empowered Disciples -> Changed World

Christianity exploded not because of the death of a martyr – no, it was because of the resurrection of a Saviour. This is what empowered the disciples. Christianity doesn't make sense without this.

Jesus Died and was placed in a tomb

In reading the account of Jesus Passion – His Crucifixion, we notice certain details:

- Up all night facing trials
- Whipped with long, leather, glass
- Crown of thorns on his head
- Carried the crossbar to Golgotha
- Nails placed in his hands and feet
- Spear was placed in his side

We see that Jesus was really dead

- Placed in the tomb of Josephus of Arimithae's tomb – member of the Jewish ruling council
- Large stone – some think 1-2 tons – was placed in front of the tomb
- Guards were placed in front of the tomb: 4-16 Roman detachment
- Roman seal was placed on the tomb: to confirm and warn
- Jesus was really placed dead in a sealed tomb

Yet, three days after this, the tomb was empty.

This was never refuted. The disciples were preaching in the vicinity and near the time. People could easily have walked to the tomb. Some, no doubt, did. But that the tomb was empty was never refuted. The very fact that this early proclamation of the empty tomb took place in Jerusalem is remarkable. Silence speaks loudly.

And, there are really only a few potential explanations for this.

8.7.1 Jesus swooned – he didn't really died

I think John Stott best refutes this scenario: are we to believe “that after the rigors and pains of trial, mockery, flogging and crucifixion He could survive thirty-six hours in a stone sepulchre with neither

warmth nor food nor medical care? That He could then rally sufficiently to perform the superhuman feat of shifting the boulder which secured the mouth of the tomb, and this without disturbing the Roman guard? That then, weak and sickly and hungry, He could appear to the disciples in such a way as to give them the impression that He had vanquished death? That He could go on to claim that He had died and risen, could send them into all the world and promise to be with them unto the end of time?"

8.7.2 Hallucination – all the sightings of Jesus were false

People didn't want to believe that Jesus died – and this led to hallucinations

Both the Luke and John gospels emphasize the disciples' own disbelief at the solidity of what they were seeing, the Luke author for instance, wonderingly reporting '*...they offered him a piece of fish which he took and ate before their eyes*' (Luke 24:43).

The disciple Thomas' insistence that he was not prepared to believe unless he was able to put his fingers into the wound in Jesus' side, and recorded that Thomas was specifically allowed to do this "*Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.*" Luke 24:38-39

Explaining the resurrection as a hallucination is just not plausible. Besides, once the Way got carried away, the authorities would simply have produced a body to expose the false teaching.

8.7.3 The body was stolen:

By the Roman or Jewish authorities...

In Matthew 28:11-15 we read about an idea of how the tomb was empty. It's interesting, isn't it, that this highlights the fact that the authorities could NOT produce the body. The very fact that they had to suggest that the body had been stolen shows that the tomb where Jesus was known to be lain was also known to be empty.

Again, they had little to gain from moving the Body – and, even if they had stolen it, why would they have produced it once it was advantageous to do so?

8.7.4 By the disciples...

Roman guards continually kept watch over the tomb because Jesus' claims that he would rise again from the dead were known. Their presence would have made it next to impossible for the disciples to steal the body without attracting attention. It seems unlikely that some dispirited disciples had actually overcome a Roman guard in combat, and then stolen the body.

1 Cor. 15:3-8 is particularly important because easily goes back into the first decade after Christ's death & resurrection. Paul's testimony here certainly implies his belief in the empty tomb. And the people named were alive & many could be talked to, particularly in Jerusalem. Furthermore, these witnesses had Jesus appear to them, they couldn't find him. Doesn't sound like the way they would have made it up.

The most plausible explanation for the empty tomb – was that Jesus did in fact rise from the dead.

The changes that came after Jesus Resurrection seem to confirm this explanation.

8.8 The Changed Lives of the disciples and the changed world.

8.8.1 Lives of the Disciples

The behaviour of the apostles after Jesus' death not only defies the conspiracy theory it also corroborates the Miracle Theory. The day Jesus died, they disowned and rejected him, terrified of Jewish authorities. Later, 11 out of the 12 and countless others died martyr's deaths testifying to the risen Christ. How do you explain the sudden transformation? What would these men have gained from their deception? Nothing but rejection, contempt, torture, and ultimately their deaths. The apostles were in a position to be sure of the truth, and **people don't die for a lie when they know it's a lie.**

8.8.2 The Church Grew immeasurably.

We also see that the church itself grew.

Christianity had to begin somehow, you know, and if you just read the gospels up through the crucifixion, you have a hard time explaining it.

Jesus Christ didn't die as the first martyr in a great cause, thus inflaming the masses. There were no riots, no mass marches when He was killed. His followers were comparatively few. The masses were not inflamed by the noble death of Jesus!

It was Christ's resurrection that inflamed the people, that began the explosion that is the Christian church, whose impact continues in the lives of many of us gathered here tonight. Without the Resurrection there is no Christianity!

I think the reason for this growth was recorded in Acts 5:

"Some time ago Theudas appeared claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. Therefore in the present case I advise you: Leave these men (the disciples) alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting God."

That is from the Pharisee Gamaliel as he tries to persuade the Sanhedrin to leave the disciples alone.

8.8.3 Other historical changes took place

a. The Sabbath day

The original day of worship for the Jews was switched from Saturday to Sunday. Many scholars who have looked into this suggest that actually, the most weighty argument for the resurrection is the change of day of worship from Saturday to Sunday. Religious habits are--so sociologists, anthropologists and demographers tell us--among the slowest of habits to change. So what can account for this sudden change among some first-century Jews from an observance which was so central to their faith?

b. The introduction of Communion

Had Jesus not been raised from the dead, do you think his followers would have instituted the sacrament of communion? Surely the memory of the meal which led directly to the betrayal and

crucifixion of Jesus would have been an unbearable pain. What changed the anguish of the Last Supper into a communion of joy the world over?

c. The Calendar eventually changed

The changes that occurred in the world because of the life of Jesus of Nazareth were colossal. Malcolm Muggeridge summarizes his impact:

“Behind the debris of these civilizations stands the gigantic figure of Jesus Christ, because of whom, in whom, and through whom man can ultimately find the answer for himself and for history.”

8.9 Jesus has changed lives throughout history and He is still changing them - Our Personal Testimony

But it's not just these large, worldwide changes that lead to a belief that Jesus rose from the dead, it's also the many lives of the saints throughout history who have also experienced changed lives.

- Spurgeon, sitting in the back of a chapel on a cold, wintry morning with a deacon saying: "look to Jesus. All you have to do is look to Jesus."
- CS Lewis: an Oxford professor who had serious intellectual problems that he had to work through.
- Colson: who was taken prison to learn that freedom is found in Christ

Why do you believe a dead man walked out of a tomb?

- 1) Jesus is a big deal
- 2) Jesus was an historical person
- 3) Jesus is the point of the History of Israel
- 4) Jesus is spoken about by the prophets of Israel
- 5) Jesus' Claims to be Divine are corroborated by his life, teaching and miracles
- 6) Jesus death and resurrection cannot be explained away
- 7) Jesus' disciples' lives and the world dramatically changed after his life
- 8) Jesus has changed lives throughout history and He is still changing them!

9 World Religions

9.1 I. Intro

In northwest Washington, DC there is a statue to Mahatmas Gandhi. Gandhi was a man of large ideas who has left a large legacy. He was undoubtedly a great political leader and social philosopher. Gandhi may be most remembered as the teacher of civil disobedience, or for his role in securing the independence of the modern nation of India.

What is the most important thing about Gandhi? What did Gandhi believe about life, humanity, and God?

Today in this session, we will be learning about how to engage with people from some of the world's largest religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam.

If you group together Roman Catholics, Protestants, Anglicans and Orthodox under one umbrella of "Christianity," the next three largest religions are Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam

CIA, 2007

- Christians 33.32% (of which Roman Catholics 16.99%, Protestants 5.78%, Orthodox 3.53%, Anglicans 1.25%),
- Muslims 21.01%,
- Hindus 13.26%,
- Buddhists 5.84%,
- other religions 11.78%
- non-religious 11.77%,
- Jews 0.23%,
- Sikhs 0.35%
- Baha'is 0.12%
- atheists 2.32%

According to these statistics, protestant Christians compose only about 6 percent of the world population. Is it narrow-minded and bigoted for evangelical Christians to claim Jesus is the only way? Don't all roads lead up the same mountain?

Back to Gandhi. He was a kind, moral, and very religious man. It has been reported to have said he admired Christ, but did not care much for Christians. Surely Gandhi – a great leader and historic figure – has communed with god, or at least gained his favour. Isn't the point to religion to be sincere and moral? After all, don't all religions basically teach the same thing – communion with the divine and loving cooperation on earth?

In our next few minutes together, we will not only explore the teaching of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, but we will also answer three question:

1. Don't All Religions Teach the Same Thing?
2. Is Jesus the Only Way?
3. What about Those Who Have Never Heard?

We will find that what is far more important than even the life and legacy of a great man, is what that man believes about, and how he responds to, Jesus.

Obviously, libraries are full of books on the world religions and philosophy we will be discussing in the next few minutes. So today's material is nowhere near a comprehensive view; it's just a brief Executive Summary.

There are three categories for world religions, and each of ours for today falls into one category.

9.2 Categories of Religions

9.2.1 Monotheism – Teaches There Is One God.

Monotheistic religions include Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

Christianity, Judaism, and Islam share a world view: There is One God, God Reveals Himself, and Man is Sinful. They may reach similar conclusions about morality and ethics.

But they differ dramatically on the Authority of the Bible and the Person of Jesus Christ.

9.2.2 Polytheistic – Teaches There Are Many gods

(Hinduism, Eastern Religions, New Age, Greeks & Egyptians, Platonists).

Christians and polytheists agree there is a God – and we are not him. We would also agree that humankind's thoughts and actions affect their standing with god.

But polytheists' view of authority and history are radically different, morality and ethics are somewhat all over the board, and they certainly do not recognize Jesus and the Bible.

9.2.3 Pantheism – All is god, god is in all

(Buddhism, Classical & Zen, Animism).

Christians hold few beliefs in common with pantheistic religions. Even our understanding and conception of God is not even really the same idea as theirs. The idea of Man being close to or reconciled to God is not even a category of their thought, for they effectively believe we are already god. Pantheists do generally have a concept of truth, but it is never finally knowable. They might recognize the Bible and Jesus as guides, but would say only use them if they are of pragmatic help to you.

Let's unpack one world religion in each a category with examining it from four angles:

1. Facts
2. Beliefs.
3. Agreements, Disagreements.
4. Questions.

9.3 Islam -- Means "Submission to God", and Followers are "Muslims"

9.3.1 Facts

Islam is more than a system of belief. The faith provides a social and legal system and governs things like family life, law and order, ethics, dress, and cleanliness, as well as religious ritual and observance.

There are over one billion Muslims globally, largely in the Middle East, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India.

The religion was founded around 622 AD by Mohammad, who believed he was final messenger through whom Allah revealed the faith to the world. There had been earlier messengers, among them Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus.

Mohammad began to teach in Mecca and later settled in Medina. By 632 AD – Mohammad and his followers had taken control of Mecca and most of the Arabian peninsula by jihad – or Holy War – a proselytizing religion from the beginning.

9.3.2 Beliefs

God is called "Allah" but the idea of an incarnate, personal God is blasphemous and absurd. God is all powerful, he created all things & is merciful and compassionate. God is Judge, but there is no mediator.

Man is capable of sin, but he is innately capable of pleasing God perfectly – or at least sufficiently. "Salvation" is works-based. The pleasure of Allah – are achieved by religious observance. (Five Pillars):

1. Confession "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammad is the apostle of God."
2. Prayer Ritual 5 times a day
3. Fasting during Ramadan (the 9th month)
4. Almsgiving to the poor (2.5% of savings)
5. Pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in life, a rigid moral code.

Converting to Islam requires external actions – specifically, that you repeat the confession, "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet." This is to submit to all other teachings in Islam.

9.3.3 Agreements, Disagreements.

- Is the Bible God's Word? The Muslims believe it was necessary for God to give another book, the Koran.
- What is the purpose of God's revelation? Muslims believe that Islam includes both Judaism and Christianity and say that even Abraham was a Muslim. In their mind, everything is Islam. What we need to explain to the Muslim, and it is not an easy task, is that God desired to establish a personal relationship between Himself and man.
- Did Jesus really die on the cross? Islam does not teach Jesus died on the cross. There is a verse in the Koran which says, "They killed Him not, they crucified Him not, but it was likened unto them. They killed Him not knowingly, but God raised Him and God is the most merciful of merciful." In the Muslim's mind, this verse is saying that God was so merciful He could never allow a wonderful prophet such as Jesus to be crucified by His enemies the Jews.
- What About the Trinity? Muslims often say, "You Christians believe in three different gods -- God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. That is blasphemy! One cannot believe in three different gods. "

9.3.4 Questions

1. How do you know if you are doing enough good deeds to receive salvation on the Day of Judgment?
2. If what Jesus said is true?
3. How can Christianity be part of Islam when its teachings are so different?

9.4 Hinduism (PANTHEISTIC)

9.4.1 Facts

There are about 1 billion Hindus worldwide, most of whom are in India, UK or the US. Hinduism arose 3500 years ago (1500 B.C.) after the conquering of the Indian subcontinent, but there is no clear specific founder or starting point.

Hinduism does not offer the same insistence on being the only "truth" as other religions do and there is no eternally dominant or "correct" form of Hinduism. Nor do Hindus separate religion from other aspects of life. For Hindus, Hinduism is an inextricable part of their existence, a complete approach to life that involves social class, earning a living, family, politics, diet, etc. The culture of India is largely Hindu because of this.

Hinduism is not a set of static beliefs but it continues to develop. It also explains history in circular, non-linear terms, with no starting and end point.

9.4.2 Beliefs

There is no single Hindu idea of God. There is Brahman: "The Absolute," the impersonal, all-embracing spirit, many lesser deities. You could say there is "One god, Among Many gods."

Hinduism is works-based, because behind Hindu practice is the belief all souls are eternal and accountable for their own actions. Karma is the debt of one's bad actions for which one must atone, so that every soul is trapped in a cycle of birth and then death and then rebirth. Karma is not the same thing as judgment in Christianity. It is automatic and impersonal and reoccurring (like gravity).

Every Hindu wants to escape from this cycle. The quality of the next life depends on the soul's Karma—the goodness or badness of their deeds in this life. Hindus aim to live in a way that will cause each of their lives to be better than the life before.

Their ultimate aim is escape from the cycle altogether by attaining Moksha (liberation). So when someone dies, their soul is reborn into a new body (although not necessarily a human body) – this is called Reincarnation.

9.4.3 Agreements, Disagreements

- Does History Matter? The Christian view of history is extremely different—linear vs. cycle. For Christians, History has a purpose, because it has a Beginning and End. Hinduism teaches a cycle of meaninglessness.
- What Is God Like? For Hindus, humankind is the manifestation of impersonal Brahman force, but has no individual worth. Yet Christians believe humankind is created in God's image and thus has immeasurable value to God, personally – so personally, that he would give himself to save us. Furthermore, Christians believe God is unique and apart from Creation: not simply a part of it
- What are the consequences of our actions? We agree with Hindus that there are lasting consequences for our actions. The do not believe in the idea of sin against a Holy God; only wrong acts of ignorance that can be overcome. In our apologetics, we should be clear that Christians actually believe in a "deeper" vision of sin and consequences.
- How Does One Become a Hindu or Christian? Christians actually agree with Hindus – that no one can be coerced to faith, and that "toleration and acceptance" are important values. But Hinduism replaces resurrection with reincarnation and both grace and faith with human works. For them Salvation" is cycle of birth, death, rebirth. For Christian

apologists, the challenge is to help them see salvation actually is eternity in heaven with a good personal God because of what Christ has done for us.

- Who is Jesus? Hindus believe Jesus is a divine manifestation, but not more special than others. Christians believe Jesus was God Himself and we were made to have a relationship with him.

9.4.4 Questions

1. Do you really believe all religions are equally true, even when they teach different things?
2. How do you explain human nature in a way that accounts for Mother Theresa and Adolph Hitler?
3. How do you know when you are good enough to be liberated?

9.5 Buddhism (POLYTHEISTIC)

9.5.1 Facts

There are about 500 million Buddhists worldwide, predominately in China, Tibet, and East Asia.

It is difficult to talk sensibly about Buddhism because Buddhists are dogmatic that one cannot be linguistically dogmatic about anything. But over the last 30 years Buddhism has seen growth in the West as its non-dogmatic nature, rationality, possibility of a spiritual guide, and opportunity for personal transformation have all made it attractive to post-modern society.

9.5.2 Beliefs

As a Pantheistic religion, Buddhism teaches we are all God – God is in all of us. You have probably heard this before in pop culture. Yoda to Luke Skywalker: “Use the Force Luke, the Force is all around you, in the tree, the rock, me, and you.”

Buddhism has no omnipotent, creator God who exists apart from this or any other universe. In fact, belief in a God of that kind is not part of Buddhism.

Buddhists also believe in Karma – the cause and effect that traps souls in an endless cycle of birth and rebirth. But Buddhism teaches that the illusions with which human beings comfort and delude themselves, includes the illusion of material and consistency and the reliability of the senses as a means of apprehending the outside world.

Buddhism teaches “Four Noble Truths”

1. To live is to suffer
2. Suffering is caused by desire (we allow ourselves to get attached to things)
3. One can eliminate suffering by elimination desire (to accept)
4. Desire is eliminated by following the eight-fold path

The eight-fold Path brings us to the state known as nirvana, where all action and interaction ceases. Nirvana is a state of enlightenment and the place where personality is extinguished.

9.5.3 Agreements, Disagreements

- Who is Jesus? Buddhists would say Jesus is another teacher, leading people to Enlightenment – at best another Buddha.

- What is the Problem of Man? Buddhists get the description of the problem half right. Christians agree that in this world there is suffering. We disagree with the second half of their description of the problem. We don't need to eliminate desire, but to desire the right things. The problem is we desire to rule our own lives, not submit to God's rule. They say that Desire must be eliminated. Christians say it must be transformed, so that we hunger and thirst for righteousness.
- Who Really Is God? We need to speak with Buddhists about the fact that the God of the Bible is all-powerful, immanent and knowable, and wants to be in relationship with His people. He is not a God of only of magical powers but has a personal name and personal powers he uses for our good.

9.5.4 Questions

1. Buddhism is right that there is nothing on earth that permanently exists. But what if I told you there was a world with God that would exist forever?
2. On his death bed, Buddha said: "I remind you that all things are impermanent. I advise you to take refuge in yourselves and the teachings. Everything that is born is subject to decay. There is no external Saviour, it is up to each of you to work out your own liberation." How can a Buddhist be saved from meaninglessness?
3. Denying desire denies the desire to enjoy friendship and family, work and play, recreation and exploration. Does a Buddhist not desire these things? Why is it so hard not to desire?
4. Buddhism teaches that desire is the problem. Yet all humans desire things, from early childhood. Could this desire point to something, someone we were created to desire?

9.6 Don't All Religions Teach the Same Thing?

After spending a few minutes contrasting Christianity with Islam and Hinduism and Buddhism you may find it hard to believe people still assert the major world religions teach the same thing – yet some do. This is nonsense.

First, as a matter of simple observation, different religions make very different claims, and it is impossible to see how they can all be true. In fact, the nature of a truth-claim is to say one thing is true and real and valid, while another is false. Christianity teaches Jesus is the one way and that no human gets to God but through him. Hindus and Buddhists would say all religions are equal, but deny the exclusivity of Christianity's most fundamental claim. It's nonsense to pretend they teach the same thing. There is a world of difference between the smiling Buddha and the crucified Christ.

Second, however, world religions do have some similarities on the level of morality and ethics – what it means to be good and live the good life. Yet even here you can see there is serious variance. Buddhists understand their efforts to be the most "good" when they deny pain exists, because it is a mere illusion. Yet Christians follow Jesus, a real Man, who has borne very real pain and judgment for them. Similarities in morality also dissolve upon examination. Jesus made it clear: he did not come to make bad men good, but to make dead men alive in God.

Do all religions really teach the same thing? Nobody wants to give the same respect to a religion based on human sacrifice, fear of evil spirits or mass suicide as they do to, say, Zen Buddhism. Nobody seriously suggests that Hitler's claims to divine revelation should be given equal treatment with those of Mohammed or Jesus. We are only tolerant up to a point, and rightly so. Differences make a difference.

9.7 Is Jesus the Only Way?

So, is Jesus the only way to know God, to be forgiven and saved, and to enjoy eternal life with God? Yes.

- Isaiah 45:21 : "***There is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Saviour; there is none but me.***"
- John 14:6: "***I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.***"

This is a hard truth for many of our friends. It is a hard truth for others to hear in a postmodern culture. Christian, we need to say this cogently, Biblically, and winsomely – but as Christian apologists, we must proclaim the Word of truth.

- As Romans 1:16 says: "***I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'***"

9.7.1 Arguments

As Christians, what are the charges we need to be prepared to respond to, when we say Jesus is the Only Way to GOD?

1. Claiming Jesus is the Only Way Is Arrogant

Here we should use arguments from Jesus' own words (John 14:6, John 17) and the words of the disciples (Acts 4:12, Romans 6, etc). We can use arguments regarding the validity of the New Testament manuscripts to point out the authenticity of the historical record. These are not our assertions.

Furthermore, there are numerous other religions that make exclusive truth claims. Making such a claim does not prove its veracity, but neither is such a claim limited to Christianity.

Finally, let's return to simple logic. It's not possible for all the major world religions to be valid ways to God.

2. Jesus Cannot Be the Only Way, Because Other Religions Would be False

No matter what belief system you adopt, you will be saying that your system is right and that the billions of people who don't accept it are wrong. If Islam is correct, the billions of non-Muslims are wrong; if Orthodox Judaism is correct, the billions of Gentiles are wrong. If it is correct to approve of multiple belief systems because they're all valid ways of achieving spiritual enlightenment, the billions of Christians, Jews, Muslims and others who believe in exclusive religions are intolerant and therefore wrong. You can see the logic breaks down.

3. All That Really Matters Is That People Sincerely Seek God

You may hear people say that sincerity is most important in religions, and the rest is mere detail. It is those very details that make the difference. If you were to examine a counterfeit \$50 note, it would look and feel very much like the real thing. You may even need special training to spot the differences. But it is those small but real differences that make one worth \$50 and the other worth nothing.

Furthermore, if sincerity were the test, virtually any delusion or 'sincere' mental persuasion would be legitimate.

9.8 What about Those Who Have Never Heard the Good News of Jesus?

Finally, what about those who have never heard of Jesus? Could they be saved? This is one question that comes up in apologetics, and sometimes is related to the question of whether Jesus really is the only way.

Friends may raise this question as an honest intellectual query, or they may raise it as an evasive manoeuvre in an attempt to evade the Gospel's claim on their life. It will be important for you to determine how to respond to them. They are accountable to God in heaven for what they do with Jesus.

As Jesus said in John 3, ***"God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil."***

The Bible has a lot to say about this.

(1) All humankind is already under God's judgment because all men and women are sinful, morally accountable to God, and must give an answer to him.

- Romans 1 teaches that God's infinite power and deity are evident through creation.
- Romans 2: ***"Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them. This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares."***
- Romans 3 says that ***"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"***
- Isaiah 40 says no one seeks God and Isaiah 53 says ***"we all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way..."***
- Isaiah 64:6 says our righteousness (good life) before God is as filthy rags
- Hebrews 9:27: ***"It is appointed to men once to die, and after that, the judgment."***

Humankind is condemned to God's judgment because of 4 C's:

1. witness of creation
2. the conscience within them
3. their own culpability in Adam and Eve in the Fall
4. and their commission of sin personally.

(2) Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord GOD will be saved

- II Peter 3:9: ***'He is patient ... not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.'***
- Romans 5: ***"For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."***
- Romans 10:13, Joel 2:32 ***"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."***

(3) Scripture is full of examples of men and women who trust God in faith with incomplete information, yet are saved

- God's people have relationship with him because they trust him in faith.
- As Hebrews 11 makes clear, the Old Testament saints are in relationship with God because they responded trustingly to what God had revealed of himself.
- Does that mean that Jesus was unnecessary for them? Not at all. As Hebrews 11 also makes clear, Jesus was the Promised Messiah and the Perfect Sacrifice for all God's people who would repent and believe.
- Acts 10 tells the story of Cornelius, a God-fearing centurion who God spoke through a dream, and then to Peter – who repented and believed, trusting God.
- Joshua 2 tells the story of Rahab – a pagan harlot – who trusted the God of the Israelites, and, as Hebrews 11 makes clear, it was accounted to her as faith
- 2 King 5 tells the story of a pagan elite, Naaman, whose life was spared because he trusted the God of Israel

So, what about those who have never heard?

- We know all men and women who do not know Jesus as saviour reside under God's judgment.
- But we also know that God saves those who call out to him in faith.
- God glorifies himself and accomplishes his purposes to call to himself a people from every tongue, and tribe, and nation.

If you think it is "not fair" that some will perish under God's judgment, you need to rethink your definition of "fair." Friend, we do not need a holy God to be "fair" with us. We need him to be merciful. The only thing we deserve his judgment. But he has been so kind to us in Christ.

The Bible does not answer this question directly. But why does it matter? The issue for apologetics – those of you within hearing my voice – is that you have heard the Gospel, you have given the good news of Jesus.

If you are not a Christian, you need to know you stand under God's judgment. But the good news is that God has made a way – through giving himself – to assuage his wrath against you. What will you do with this good news? What will you do with Jesus? You should not presume God's forbearance, but ask for his mercy, repent and believe.

If you think it is "not fair" that some will perish under God's judgment, you need to rethink your definition of "fair." Friend, we do not need a holy God to be "fair" with us. We need him to be merciful. The only thing we deserve his judgment. But he has been so kind to us in Christ.

Christian, you are responsible for what you do with Jesus. As Romans 10 says, "**How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?**" Are you telling your friends the good news about Jesus? Are you defending the faith and critiquing unbelief?

10 Apologetic Conversations

***** **REVIEW** *****

10.1 WHY DOES APOLOGETICS MATTER?

The discipline of Christian apologetics is for all Christians.

1. Christians Should Be Able To Explain Why They Have Faith in Jesus. 1 Peter 3:15.
2. Christians Should be Able to Critique Unbiblical Worldviews.
3. Christians Should Use Their Minds and Intellect To the Glory of God. 2 Corinthians 10 – Christians are to take every thought captive to Christ. In Matthew 22, Jesus said the greatest commandment is to **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”**
4. Christians Throughout History Have Used Apologetics to the Glory of God.

BUT.....

We do not “reason” people into the kingdom of God.

(1) Christian apologetics answers non-Christians’ questions and removes distractions from belief. Christian apologetics involves answering questions and clearing the brush of false beliefs that obscures the solid ground of belief in Jesus. A natural part of educating and instructing non-Christians in a biblical worldview is being prepared to answer their questions.

Christians should not be surprised or threatened by this. Questions should be expected and welcome.

(2) Christian apologetics, coupled with evangelism, points non-Christians to faith in Jesus. The point of Christian apologetics is not finally to win an argument, but to articulate and defend the veracity and reliability of placing one’s faith in the person and work of Jesus. Apologetics is the discipline that defends a biblical worldview, deconstructs unbelief and false belief, and provides a launching pad for enthusiastic evangelism.

Romans 1:16 **“I am not ashamed of the Gospel for it’s the power of salvation for all who believe.”** God saves through His gospel and we are His ambassadors.

10.2 IS GOD GOOD AND POWERFUL IF EVIL IS REAL?

- Evil is real.
 - God is all-good.
 - God is all-powerful.
1. **God will end suffering and pain.** (END) Our hope of Heaven. Revelation 21.
 2. **God will execute his justice.** (EXECUTE) Revelation. Psalms, prophets.
 3. **God has experienced the worst human evil on the cross.** (EXPERIENCE) He knows human pain and sorrow.
 4. **God’s ways are above ours, he is outside of time.** (ETERNAL). The “problem” of evil only exists in time, from our perspective. Human evil was born in the Garden, conquered at the Cross, and will be finally dealt with when Jesus returns.

10.3 WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER HEARD THE GOSPEL?

1. All humankind is already under God's judgment because all men and women are sinful, morally accountable to God, and must give an answer to him. (Romans 1, 2, 3. Isaiah 40, 53, 64. John 3. Acts 17. Hebrews 9)

Four C's

- creation's witness
 - conscience within
 - culpability in Adam and Eve in the Fall
 - commission of sin personally
2. Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord GOD will be saved (2 Peter 3:9. Romans 5:8. Romans 10:13, Joel 2:32.)
 3. Bible has examples of people who are saved yet have incomplete information, BUT they are saved by faith in the God of Israel who has revealed himself. (Hebrews 11. Acts 10. Joshua 2. 2 King 5.)

You are responsible for what you do with Jesus. Romans 10: ***"How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?"***

The application: in apologetics, anyone who raise this issue has heard the Gospel/is accountable to God.

10.4 HOW DO I ENGAGE A BELIEVER IN A MAJOR WORLD RELIGION?

Islam: Submission to Allah

- The Person and work of Christ; Mercy and Judgment

Hindus: One God, many gods

- Karma as "gravity" or offense against a Holy God; contrast mysticism of Hinduism w/historicity of Christ

Buddhists: Nirvana by eliminating desire

- Escape suffering by eliminating desire v. Christ defeating pain and suffering on the Cross; Assurance of the path vs. relationship with Christ

Many religions make exclusive truth claims. Making such a claim does not prove truth. But it's not possible for all the major world religions to be valid ways to God when they make contradictory claims.

10.5 WHY DO WE BELIEVE AN ANCIENT BOOK IS THE WORD OF GOD?

Christians claim the Bible is God's revelation to us over 1,500 years, in 66 books by 40 authors. Why?

10.5.1 The New Testament documents are Historically Reliable and Credible

Let's start with the first point, the historical reliability of the New Testament documents.

Homer	Written 900 BC	Earliest Copy, 400 BC	Number of copies, 643
NT	Written AD 40-100	Earliest Copy, 125 AD	Number of copies, 24,000+

- Despite the fact that it was written by many different men over 1500 years, there isn't a single place where a Biblical author disagrees with another Biblical author. This is an amazing, often overlooked fact.
- The Bible is united in teaching its own authority, despite the fact that it was written by so many authors.
- Over the last hundred years, the veracity and reliability of the Bible has been vindicated again and again and again as more evidence has been brought to bear.
- Historical finds of texts and archaeology and artefacts do not prove Scriptures are the inspired, inerrant Word of God, but no archaeological discovery has disproved the historical veracity and reliability of the text of the New or Old Testament.

10.5.2 Jesus' Character is shown to Be Trustworthy

- LEGEND? Some people assert the historical Jesus never existed. But there is so much historical and archaeological evidence to support his existence that every reputable historian agrees he was not just a legend.
- LIAR? If Jesus were a liar, why would he die for his claim, when he could easily have avoided such a cruel death with a few choice words?
- LUNATIC? And, if he were a lunatic, how did he engage in intelligent debates with his opponents or handle the stress of his betrayal and crucifixion while continuing to show a deep love for his antagonists?
- LORD. Christ said he was Lord and God. The evidence supports that claim.

10.5.3 Jesus Claims that the Old and New Testament Books were the Word of God

This material below may feel repetitive and granular for those who have been in the class throughout its duration.

Old Testament

John 10:34. Jesus even argues from the tense of a verb in Matthew 22. Jesus clearly assumes that what is prophesied in the Old Testament must be fulfilled, specifically concerning himself. Jesus establishes a pattern in Matthew 19 that is repeated in the rest of the gospels when he interchanges the phrases "Scripture says" with "God says".

New Testament

- John 7:16, Matthew (24:35), Mark (13:31), and Luke (21:33). Matt 7:29. Matt 10:19-20. John 14:26 and 16:12-13. Acts 1:8
- The New Testament writers understood authority had been given to them, and they do not hesitate to cite it. (1 Co 2:13, Gal 1:6-12, etc.)
- New Testament writers cite New Testament writings as Scripture – Paul does this with the gospel of Luke in I Tim 5:18, and Peter does this with the writings of Paul in 2 Peter 3:15-16

10.6 Miscellaneous Notes and Responses

- People commonly say that "morality is subjective" or that it is "relative." But when they speak in a moral vein—which is to say, when they pass judgment on human behaviour—they do so as moral realists. Most atheists are just as convinced as Christians that Adolf Hitler was an evil person.
- People resist moral realism because they think it leads to "intolerance." In doing so they make two fundamental mistakes. First, they fail to realize that tolerance itself is a value and that they are simply making this one value rule over all others. This is itself a form of moral realism. Second, they fail to understand that tolerance and moral realism can coincide.
- Most people want to serve God...usually in an advisory capacity.
- A god whom we could understand exhaustively, and whose revelation of himself confronted us with no mysteries whatsoever, would be a god in man's image, and therefore an imaginary god. —J. I. Packer, theologian
- Human arrogance tends to believe that if we had been in charge of creation we would have done it better. As finite human beings we should not claim to know God's will exhaustively.
- Why do bad things happen to good people? What good people are you talking about?
- Sincerity or intensity of faith does not create truth. Faith is no more valid than the object in which it is placed.
- The question must be, "What is true?" Read the original accounts and see what Jesus claimed about Himself. Not every religion can be true. Most are mutually contradictory. Either one is true and the others are false, or they are all false. Either Christ is who he said He is or He is not
- Christianity is "universal" in the sense that Jesus invites all people everywhere to receive the gift of eternal life made possible by the death on the cross.
- Since many basic tenets of different religions are contradictory, someone has to be wrong. Christianity's uniqueness arises not from the narrow-mindedness of individual Christians, but from the extraordinary claims of Jesus Christ, attested by those who were eyewitnesses of His life, death, and resurrection.