



Basic Apologetics Course

Set II: Objections to Faith

How to Use This Study Guide

While individuals can certainly learn from this course, you will get the maximum value from the Basic Apologetics Course by using the following approach:

1. Convene a group of four to six others who are interested in studying apologetics and are willing to commit themselves to meeting regularly for discussion and processing. (The small size of the group allows more time for each person to take part in the discussion.)
2. Each member of the group should commit themselves to pray regularly that God will help them to understand truth and share it with grace, love and humility.
3. In preparation for the regular meeting, everyone should complete the recommended reading for the lecture. When this is not feasible, the recommended book for the lecture should be read by at least one group member, who will share key insights with the group at discussion time.
4. When the group meets, plan for two hours in order to view the video lecture and then discuss the study questions, drawing on insights from the recommended reading. If you find that you cannot cover the material in two hours, consider scheduling a follow-on meeting to complete your processing. In some cases, it may be more practical to ask group members to view the lecture on the C.S. Lewis Institute web site prior to meeting in order to allow more time for discussion.
5. When you meet, seek to clearly understand the study material but avoid the temptation to focus exclusively on the intellectual dimension. Also seek to understand why people hold such views and look for ways to engage them with truth in a gentle, humble and respectful manner. The purpose of apologetics is not only to strengthen our own faith but also to equip us to share it winsomely with those who do not yet believe.

Introduction

Apologetics is being able to give a reasonable defense for the hope that is within you (1 Peter 3:15). The Basic Apologetics Course is designed for those who wish to be better equipped to reach non-believers by giving honest answers to honest questions with gentleness and respect. Obviously, this course cannot cover everything one may wish (or even need) to know, but it does address many of the fundamental questions one encounters today. The converging lines of evidence found in the lectures and readings demonstrate that God exists, that Jesus is the Son of God and that the Bible is the Word of God. They also counter the major oppos-

ing worldviews we face – atheism and pantheism. The cumulative weight of these reasons for belief will enable you to respond effectively to those who ask you for a reason for the hope within you and will strengthen your personal faith in the process. C.S. Lewis maintained that he believed in Jesus as he believed that the sun is risen, not because he saw it all clearly, but because by it he saw everything else. These lectures will help us see clearly as we seek to engage those around us in a confident and winsome way, understanding their worldview and seeking an opportunity to present our own views in a relevant and compelling way.

Set II: Objections to Faith

Many objections to faith, new and old, circulate in our culture. What are some of the most crucial issues to face? Was Jesus married? Are the Gnostic Gospels to be taken seriously? Was Jesus'

Deity invented? Why is there so much evil? Is Christ the only way? Is belief in God a fantasy? How can we speak about our faith in this culture? These lectures address these important questions.

Lecture I – Authority of Scripture: Can the Gospels Be Trusted?

The Scriptures in general, and the Gospels in particular, have been under a massive assault in recent years not only from atheists but from those in the liberal theological sector. Some say that much of the Gospels was invented by the early church. In the last generation the representative of this criticism was Rudolf Bultmann. In this generation critics include the Jesus Seminar (i.e., Marcus Borg, John Dominic Crossan, etc.), Bishop

Spong, and Elaine Pagels. From a more secular point of view, Bart Ehrman and Dan Brown's *DaVinci Code* have attracted a large readership. What can be said to these attacks that so permeate our culture, surfacing in editorials, TV talk shows, and blogs? Can we give a credible argument that the Gospels are historical? Yes. There is strong evidence for the reliability of the Gospels, and it is important to know it if our faith is to withstand the attacks of unbelieving scholars.

Study Questions

1. What are some of these unlikely bestsellers?
2. What is the evidence that Jesus was married and had a child?
3. Was Jesus' divinity invented at Nicea (325 AD)?
4. Does the discovery of the Gospel of Judas cause us to question what we have believed?
5. Do the Gnostic Gospels change our picture of Jesus?
6. Is the New Testament text hopelessly corrupted?
7. Was the Canon determined by the winners?

Lecture II – The Problem of Evil: How Can You Believe in God When There is So Much Evil, Pain, and Suffering in the World?

C.S. Lewis found the problem of evil a stumbling block that initially prevented him from coming to faith. The problem can be stated this way: If God is all powerful, he could eliminate evil; if God is all good, he would eliminate evil; Evil is not eliminated; therefore, there is no such God. Lewis would put this problem to Christians and was unsatisfied by their responses, until he realized a problem with his own view. As an atheist, he did not believe that there was anything really evil (only pain in a world of pain). If there was real evil, he needed a standard (infinite) by which it could be judged. Thus, by considering the nature of evil (and

good), he argued himself back to God. Every worldview must face the problem of evil. Atheism and Pantheism, for example, have a greater problem than Christianity in that they have no basis for objective evil (or good). This lecture deals with various answers to the problem of evil. Is there a contradiction at the heart of Christianity? How can free will, natural law, and soul making show us a way to answer this problem? Once we have the shape of an answer to the intellectual problem of evil, how do we deal with the emotional problem? These central issues are developed in this session.

Study Questions

1. Why does every worldview have a problem of evil?
2. Why do some worldviews have a more difficult problem than Christianity?
3. What is the deductive problem of evil?
4. How can the charge of contradiction (in the theistic set) be answered once and for all?
5. How can the inductive problem of evil (the amount of evil) be addressed?
6. How do free will, natural law, and soul making factor into this issue?
7. Once the shape of an intellectual answer is given, how can we deal with the emotional factors? How can Lewis's *A Grief Observed* be a guide?

Lecture III – Is Christ the Only Way? There Are So Many Religions; How Can You Say Which One is Right?

One of the most prominent objections to faith (some say the most prominent) is the exclusive claim that Christ is the only way to salvation. What can we say to this objection? Do we have to say that there is no truth in other religions? Are there commonalities or overlapping affirmations that Christianity makes that are held by other religious perspectives? Why is the incarnation such

a radical claim? Why is Christianity of infinite importance or of no importance? How are the historical claims that the Gospel makes related to the exclusivity of faith? Which position seems most Biblical – exclusivism, inclusivism, or pluralism? This lecture deals with these important questions.

Study Questions

1. Why can we say that all religions contain truths?
2. What is the numinous?
3. What religions exemplify the moral?
4. What faiths combine the moral and the numinous?
5. Why is the claim to incarnation so radical?
6. What is pluralism?
7. What's the difference between exclusivism and inclusivism?

Lecture IV – Understanding Atheism: Is Belief in God “Just a Crutch”?

One of the leading charges that has advanced atheism in our time is that religion (belief in God) is wish-fulfillment. Because belief in some kind of God is so pervasive, present in every age and culture, it has to be explained. Either this unanimity points to something real (a God who exists, however imperfectly understood), or it can be explained as wish-fulfillment (a fantasy created by weak people who can't face real fears and threats). The philosoph-

ical founders of modern atheism, Feuerbach, Freud, and Marx, all used a variation of this latter approach. Contemporary atheists such as Dawkins, Hitchens, and Harris, also use this psychological charge against believers. This lecture gives answers to this objection and in the end, turns the tables on this approach. It can, with real force and cogency, be argued that atheism is wish-fulfillment.

Study Questions

1. Why do atheists have to explain religion's existence?
2. Why is the charge of wish-fulfillment a logical fallacy? What does C.S. Lewis call this?
3. Does the fact that we wish for something prove its non-existence?
4. Are there some elements of Christianity that we might wish were not true?
5. How is atheism wish-fulfillment?
6. Do atheists admit that this is the case?
7. How does atheism undermine the very use of reason necessary to make their case?

Lecture V – Apologetics and the Ascension: The Where, Who, and What of Apologetics

Why do believers have such little impact on the world today? Why is there so little power in church? A central part of the answer is a failure to understand the role of the ascension in our faith. Much time in the church calendar is devoted to Christmas and Good Friday and Easter, commemorating the birth, death and resurrection of Christ but there is almost no acknowledgment of the ascension. In Luke 24, when Jesus ascended to heaven, (departed from them for an indefinite time) the disciples returned to Jerusalem “with great joy.” Why? Because Jesus had prepared them for his departure by teaching that it was to their advantage that he go

away (John 16: 7-8). His absence was better than his presence. It was to their advantage because of where he was going, who he was going to send in his place, and what he was going to do when he got there. He was going to be seated at the right hand of God to be crowned King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He was going to send the Holy Spirit who would convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. He was going to be the great High Priest continually praying for us. These truths are crucial for us to understand as we enter the marketplace. This lecture demonstrates the relationship between the ascension and apologetics.

Study Questions

1. Why is the ascension given such a little place in our faith and what are the consequences of this neglect?
2. Why is it so surprising that the disciples respond to Jesus' departure with joy?
3. What is the meaning of Paraclete (a title for the Holy Spirit)?
4. How is the Lordship of Christ important for apologetics?
5. What is the place of the Holy Spirit in evangelism (and apologetics)?
6. What difference does it make that Christ prays for us?
7. How do these truths affect us as we go out in the marketplace (work and ideas)?

Recommended Readings:

1. *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels*, by Craig A. Evans
2. *Faith and Reason*, by Ronald H. Nash
3. *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*, by Ronald H. Nash
4. *If there is a God, Why Are There Atheists?; A Surprising Look at the Psychology of Atheism*, by R.C. Sproul
Alternate: Classical Apologetics, Chapter 4, “The Biblical Evidence Confirming Natural Theology”, by R.C. Sproul
5. *God in the Dock, Chapter 10, “Christian Apologetics”*, by C.S. Lewis