



Basic Apologetics Course

Set III: Responding to Atheism

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 III: Responding to Atheism

Is belief in God, that Jesus is the Son of God, or the Bible the Word of God an irrational leap in the dark as many non-believers maintain? Or is there enough evidence to make faith a leap into

the direction set by the light? These lectures provide some of the classic arguments to addressing these questions.

Lecture I – Reason and Imagination: How Can You Communicate Your Faith Clearly?

Communicating our faith in today's world can be more effective if we learn to combine reason and imagination in our presentations. C.S. Lewis once argued that "Reason is the natural organ of truth, but imagination is the organ of meaning." When we communicate our faith to non-believers, we need to consider not only the clarity of our logic, but the place of imagery, symbols, metaphors or stories, to bring home our message. Lewis argued that we don't really understand anything, even a word, unless we have a picture with which we can associate it. A phrase used by another author, the "rhetoric of sensation," means that we don't understand an

idea until it has been made vivid to our senses. C.S. Lewis was a master at working in both mediums. He was able to write theology with graphic images and fiction with profound theological themes imbedded in the narrative. Many have pointed out that every major idea in Lewis's thinking was expressed in the Narnian Chronicles. This lecture allows us to learn from the master, C.S. Lewis, the importance of reason and imagination for our presentation of the faith, and thus help us become more effective in engaging with non-believers about the faith.

Study Questions

1. Why is C.S. Lewis still so well known when he thought his books would disappear from publication when he died?
2. How did imagination, reason and will work together in C.S. Lewis's conversion?
3. How do other worldviews attempt to "baptize the imagination" in order to spread their views?
4. How is the gospel the "myth become fact"?
5. How are literature and love related?
6. Why is the division between adult and children's stories problematic?
7. As we speak to people, how can the relationship between reason and imagination be helpful?

Lecture II – Faith and Reason: Can You Reason Your Way to Faith?

Os Guinness wrote that faith in Christ is much more than rational but certainly not less than rational. The relationship between reason and faith has been hotly debated in intellectual circles. Some say that reason is the only way to go because faith is utterly without reason or evidence (modernists or rationalists). Others say that we should believe solely by faith in the absence of any reasons (fideists). Still others see a compatibility between faith and reason with

different emphases on one or the other. C.S. Lewis and others have argued that there is enough evidence (reasons) available to lead to the psychological exclusion of doubt, though not the logical exclusion of dispute. He believed that the weight of evidence was for, rather than against, Christianity. This lecture explores these various views, some biblical passages on faith and evidence, and how to address various types of doubt in yourself or in others.

Study Questions

1. What does the term "apologetics" mean?
2. What is the role of apologetics in evangelism? How does it contribute to saving faith?
3. What is the central problem with modernism (or rationalism)?
4. What is the central problem of fideism?
5. How is Augustine a good example of how reason and faith work together?
6. What are a couple of sources of doubt that do not arise from rational objections?
7. What do you think of the biblical passages on faith and evidence? Can you think of others?

Lecture III – Postmodernism: Can You Really Know Anything?

The cultural change from modernism to post-modernism has been the occasion of much discussion and writing. Even though the extent of this change can be questioned, there is no doubt that there have been profound shifts. Those of a post-modern persuasion have come to question whether we can have an objective or true view of reality at all. They are suspicious of any account of

the world that would claim to be all-encompassing (or absolute or "totalizing"). Since believers maintain that the gospel is "true," what can be said to the post-modern school of thought? Since this is such a massive topic with many complexities, this lecture attempts to narrow the field by looking at some ways C.S. Lewis might agree or disagree with this philosophy.

Study Questions

1. How does postmodernism view faith and reason?
2. How can you describe postmodernism in a nutshell?
3. What are some of the secondary themes associated with this view?
4. How might C.S. Lewis agree with some of these ideas?
5. How might C.S. Lewis disagree with this approach?
6. Do you have to give up reason when talking to a postmodernist?
7. How can stories help in this debate?

Lecture IV – Relativism: Can You Have Ethics Without God?

Relativism is rampant in western culture. About two-thirds of people in the USA believe that there are no absolutes. About half of “born again” believers agree and only one-tenth of those under 20 years old believe in absolutes.

This lecture makes the case against relativism, drawing on some of the leaders of the opposition; Sartre, Wittgenstein, Russell, Derrida, and Rorty, who do a great service by showing us the logical conclusion of their views. There is also a critique of the attempt to create an ethic without God by Kant, John Rawls, and others.

Study Questions

1. What is the difference between a sinner and a hypocrite?
2. Who is the greatest critic of hypocrisy (religious or otherwise) of all time?
3. What are the consequences of denying fixed points for meaning, dignity, and morality?
4. What do leading atheists say about the consequences of their views for meaning or morality?
5. Do atheists have a basis for affirming human dignity? How can we assert the worth of humans?
6. Why will the “cultural move” never work?
7. Why do the options come down to SEZ ME, SEZ US, or SEZ God?

Lecture V – Abolition of Man: C.S. Lewis on the Consequences of Relativism

Walter Hooper once asked C.S. Lewis which of his books was the most important. Lewis named *The Abolition of Man* as that book. Lewis first gave the lectures in this book to a group of teachers that were being fed a subjectivist or relativist perspective on education. He uses as an illustration a textbook he had been sent that he dubs the Green Book. He then proceeds to critique this as a model of what he would say to this kind of approach. Along the way, he makes a number of profound observations. One such

insight is that much of modern education does not so much argue for relativism (emotivism) as it communicates it as an implicit assumption that becomes embedded in the student’s mind. *The Abolition of Man* shows the proper place of emotions, feelings, or affections in education. He points out the inconsistencies or contradictions in this relativistic approach. Lewis also warns of the inevitable consequences if these assumptions are left unchecked.

Study Questions

1. How did (atheist) Lewis’s problem of evil (with Christianity) lead to an argument for God’s existence?
2. What does it mean that “education is implication”? How do students pick up by implication the relativist perspective?
3. How does relativism trivialize emotion?
4. What is the proper place of emotion in education?
5. How do relativists contradict themselves?
6. What are the consequences of relativism according to Lewis?
7. What is the problem with “seeing through” things?

Recommended Readings:

1. *C.S. Lewis’s Case for Christ*, by Art Lindsley
2. *What’s So Great About Christianity*, by Dinesh D’Souza
3. *Truth or Consequences: The Promise & Perils of Postmodernism*, by Millard Erickson
4. *True Truth*, by Art Lindsley
5. *Abolition of Man*, by C.S. Lewis