

Becoming a More Confident Christian And a More Convincing Witness

Lincoln Christian Church (5 Sessions: April-May, 2013)

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Recommended class text: Doug Powell, *Holman QuickSource Guide to Christian Apologetics*²

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Session I: "Christianity or Something Else?"

I. Introduction to the Lesson Series

A. Series overview

1. Christianity or Something Else?
2. Questions about God
3. Questions about Miracles and Jesus
4. Questions about the Bible
5. Common Questions and Criticisms

B. Questions and doubts

1. John the baptizer
 - a. John 1:19-34 "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!..." (29).
 - b. Matt 11:1-6 "... Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?..." (cf. Lk 7:18-20).
 - c. Jesus' reply (Mt 11:4-5; Lk 7:21-22).
2. Thomas
 - a. John 20:24-25 "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."
 - b. Jesus' response (Jn 20:26-29).
3. Jude 1:22 "Be merciful to those who doubt."

C. Basic objectives

1. To _____ **EXHILARATE** the faith of Christians.
2. To _____ **INSTIGATE** reflection by non-Christians (and Christians).
3. To _____ **FACILITATE** being a more effective witness.

D. Clarifications and qualifications for this class

1. Not intended for _____ **BRAINIACS**
2. Not absolute " _____ , " **PROOF** but " _____ . " **POINTERS**
3. Not just for _____ . (Note James 2:19 and Matt 4:1-3.)
INFORMATION
4. Its ultimate goal.
 - a. "To _____ **LOVE** the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength." (Mark 12:30; cf. Deut. 6:4)

¹ The class webpage will provide additional materials, including handouts with blanks filled-in, a "Question/Answer" section, and links to helpful resources. Please feel free to submit questions and check for teacher responses.

² Reading this text is highly recommended. It's relatively inexpensive (less than \$15), very informative in a wide range of topics, and attractive (with excellent page layout and many color pictures). A good but simple resource.

- b. Compare Jesus' question and Peter's "great confession" (Matt 16:15-16) with Jesus' question of Peter after His resurrection (Jn. 21:15-17).

II. Background for Apologetics

A. General **directives** for apologetics

1. 1 Peter 3:15 _____ **DEFEND** the faith. (cf. Acts 22:1; 24:10; 26:12; Phil 1:7,16).

1 Peter 3: ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." ¹⁵ But in your hearts revere 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, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. [NIV]

Phil 1:7b "... whether I [Paul] am in chains or defending [*apologia*] and confirming the gospel, all of you share the affection of Christ Jesus."

"Perhaps the main function of apologetics is to show that ... [we] have nothing whatsoever for which to apologize" (Alvin Plantinga, "Christian Life Partly Lived," in *Philosophers Who Believe*, ed. Kelly James Clark [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993], 69).

2. Col. 2:8 "Don't be taken _____ **CAPTIVE** by deceptive philosophies."
3. 2 Cor. 10:5 "We _____ **DEMOLISH** arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" (2 Corinthians 10:5).
4. 2 Timothy 2:24-25 "The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome but be kind to all . . . with gentleness _____ **CORRECTING** those who are in opposition; if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth"
5. Titus 1:9 "He [an elder] must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and _____ **REFUTE** those who oppose it."
6. Jude 3 "Contend earnestly for the faith."

B. **Practical suggestions** for apologetics

1. Be _____. **PERSONAL** The same approach is not appropriate for every person.
2. Be _____. **INQUISITIVE** It may be best to use good questions rather than worry about knowing (or not knowing) the answers. (See Mark 11:27-33)
3. Be _____. **SENSITIVE** Often it's more important how we say something than what we say.
 - a. 1 Pet. 3:15 "with gentleness and reverence"
 - b. 2 Tim. 2:24-25 "not quarrelsome but kind ... with gentleness"
 - c. Jude 22 "Have mercy on some, who are doubting"

III. The **BIG** questions (of Life, the Universe, and Everything)

- A. **Ultimate Reality** (e.g. Is there a God or some supernatural being or is it all just "matter"? What *kind* of God/god? What is the relationship between this God/god(s) and the physical world and humanity?)
- B. **Nature** (e.g. Is the universe eternal? Was it created? Did it self-generate? Is it real or illusion? Is it self-sufficient? Is it intelligently designed or is it just a very fortunate accident?)
- C. **Humanity** (e.g. Where did we come from? Why are we here? Do we have any ultimate purpose or value? How/Why? Are humans unique? Do we have genuine freedom or are our actions totally determined by physical, chemical, and social forces beyond our control?)
- D. **Knowledge** (e.g. Can we know *anything*? How much? How? Is there any *revelation* from a supernatural source? What kind? Where can we find it?)

- E. **Ethics** (e.g. Are there any universal rights/wrongs? What is the *basis* for judging right/wrong, if anything?)
- F. **Death** (e.g. What happens after death? Judgment? Reincarnation? Nothing?)
- G. **History** (e.g. Is there any overall purpose or direction? Endless cycle? Any miracles or providence? Is there evidence of any divine action in history? Is Jesus the unique Son of God?)

IV. Competing Answers (or Worldviews) in Scripture

- A. The original worldview of Adam/Eve vs. the worldview of the serpent (Gen 3).
 - 1. The serpent questioned their ETHICS (“Has God said, ‘You shall not eat ...?’”).
 - 2. The serpent questioned their view of DEATH (“You surely will not die”).
 - 3. The serpent questioned their view of KNOWLEDGE (“... you will become like God, knowing good and evil”).
 - 4. The serpent questioned their view of GOD and HUMANITY (“... you will become like God ...”).
- B. The biblical creation account vs. other creation accounts (Genesis 1-3).
- C. Moses vs. Egyptian religion (Ex. 1-4; 7-11)
 - 1. Many gods (e.g. of sun, joy, war, air, earth, water) were worshipped, including Pharaoh.
 - 2. The ten plagues involved God’s judgment on “all the gods of Egypt” (Ex. 12:12).
- D. Elijah vs. false prophets who worshipped Baal (1 Kings 18).
- E. Daniel vs. Babylonian religion (Daniel 1-4) and Persian religion (Daniel 5:30-31; 6:1-28).
- F. The apostle Paul vs. the Greek philosophies of the Epicureans and Stoics (Acts 17:16-34).
 - 1. The Epicureans had a philosophy that denied God’s existence (only “atoms” exist) and emphasized the pleasures of this physical world. They were much like today’s Atheists (see below).
 - 2. The Stoics accepted a kind of impersonal “force” that permeates the universe; *everything* is God. They were much like today’s Pantheists (see below).

V. Competing Answers in Contemporary Culture

A. **Christian Theism** (*theos* = Greek for “God”)

- 1. Acrostic summary
 - a. **C**reator **CREATOR**
 - b. **S**aving **SAVING**
 - c. **I**ncarnate **INCARNATE**
- 2. God and Nature
 - a. God is transcendent.
 - b. God is immanent.
- 3. Divine revelation
 - a. Natural revelation (Ps 19; Rom 1:18-25).
 - b. Special revelation (1 Pet 1:10-13; 2 Pet 1:16-21; 2 Tim 3:14-17).
- 4. Object illustration: _____ **CROSS**

B. **Deism** (*deus* = Latin for “God”)

- 1. Acrostic summary
 - a. **C** _____ **CREATOR**
 - b. **A** _____ **ABSENT GOD**
 - c. **N** _____ **NATURAL REVELATION ONLY**
 - d. **T** _____ **TRANSCENDENT ONLY**
- 2. Object illustration: _____ **GRANDFATHER CLOCK**

3. Implications
 - a. God is only transcendent and NOT immanent.
 - b. NO miracles or special revelation.
4. Cultural connections:
 - a. Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, Benjamin Franklin
 - b. Most American teens: “moral therapeutic deists” (Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, 2005, 2009).
5. Biblical connections: 2 Tim 3:5 “having a form of godliness but denying its power.”

C. **New Age Pantheism** (“pan” = all; “theism” = God)

1. Acrostic summary
 - a. **T** _____ TECHNIQUES
 - b. **E** _____ EVERYTHING IS GOD
 - c. **A** _____ ALTERED CONSCIOUSNESS
 - d. **R** _____ REINCARNATION
2. Object illustration: _____ YIN YANG
3. Cultural connections:
 - a. Hinduism (“atman” is one’s true identity); Taoism; some forms of Buddhism (e.g. Richard Gere, Steven Segal, Phil Jackson).
 - b. New Age (e.g. Shirley Maclaine).
 - c. Animism; Wicca.
 - d. Scientology (“thetan” is one’s true identity): John Travolta, Tom Cruise).
 - e. Deepak Chopra; Rhonda Byrne’s *The Secret*; James Twyman’s *The Moses Code*; Eckhart Tolle; *Lion King*; Yoda in *Star Wars*; Oprah.
4. Biblical connections: The serpent (Gen 3:5 “... you will be like God ...”); Stoic philosophy (Acts 17:16-33).

D. **Secular Humanism** (optimistic Naturalism or Atheism)

1. Acrostic summary
 - a. **S** _____ SCIENCE
 - b. **N** _____ NATURE ONLY
 - c. **O** _____ OPTIMISTIC
 - d. **R** _____ REASON
 - e. **E** _____ EVOLUTION
2. Cultural connections:
 - a. Charles Darwin; Carl Sagan; Richard Dawkins; Michael Shermer; Bill Maher.
 - b. Epicurean philosophers (Acts 17); Spock from *Star Trek*; *The Titanic*; *Mission Impossible*; *CSI* TV series; *Numb3rs*; Bob the Builder, “Can we fix it? Yes we can.”
3. Biblical connections: Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9); Rich man (Luke 12:15-23); 2 Tim 3:1-4,7 (“lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant ... always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth”); Romans 1:18-23 (“... they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man”)

E. **Nihilism** (*nihil* = Latin for “nothing”)

1. Acrostic summary
 - a. **N** _____ really matters. NOTHING
 - b. **A** _____ ABSURDITY of life (“I don’t care”; “I give up”)
 - c. **P** _____ PESSIMISTIC outlook.
2. Object illustration: _____ TOILET
3. Cultural connections: “Murder by Number”; “Final Destination”; “Bohemian Rhapsody”; Douglas Adams’ *Hitch Hiker* “trilogy”; John Cage; “Seinfeld”; Kurt Cobain, Samuel Beckett.

4. Biblical connections: Romans 1:28-31 (“God gave them over to a depraved mind”); Eccl 2:10-11 (“... all was vanity and striving after wind”)

F. **Existentialism** (atheistic)

1. Acrostic summary
 - a. **F** _____ FEELINGS
 - b. **A** _____ ABSURDITY OF LIFE
 - c. **D** _____ DEFINE YOURSELF TODAY
2. Object illustration: Mr. _____ POTATO HEAD
3. Cultural connections: Friedrich Nietzsche; John Paul Sartre; Albert Camus; Ferris Bueller; a lot of high school and college youth!; the character “Jack” in the movie *Titanic*; *Groundhog Day*; *Dead Poets’ Society* (*carpe deum*); Hugh Hefner.
4. Biblical connections: Phil 3:17-21 (“... their god is their stomach ... their mind is set on earthly things”); 1 Pet 4:1-5 (“... having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties ..., they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead”); 2 Tim 3:4 (“lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God”).

G. **Postmodernism**

1. Acrostic summary
 - a. **F** _____ FRAGMENTATION
 - b. **U** _____ UNCERTAINTY
 - c. **R** _____ RELATIVISM
2. Objective illustration: A _____ REMOTE CONTROL
3. Cultural connections: Madonna; *Star Trek: The Next Generation*; *The Truman Show*; *The Matrix*; *Lost*; *Inception*; Reality TV shows; Internet surfing.
4. Biblical connections: Deut 12:8 (“You are not to do as we do here today, everyone doing as they see fit” – NIV); 2 Tim 3:7-9 (“always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth”).

H. **Syncretism**: Combining various beliefs and practices with little attention to whether they are consistent or coherent.

VI. Strategic Types of Apologetics

A. **“Negative” Apologetics**: Replying to specific criticisms to show that **Christianity is NOT FALSE**.

1. E.g. The disciples of Jesus were accused of stealing Jesus’ body (Matt 28:11-15).
2. E.g. Festus accuses Paul of being insane (Acts 26:22-32).
3. E.g. The claim that Christians “all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar [the state]” (Acts 17:5-8).
4. E.g. The problem of evil. Accusation: The reality of evil is inconsistent with the reality of an existing God who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good.

B. **“Positive” Apologetics**: Attempting to show that **Christianity is TRUE**.

1. Evidences in **nature** (Ps 19:1-6; Rom 1:18-32).
2. **Miracles** (1 Kings 18; Ex 10:1-2; Jn 20:30-31; Acts 2:22-24; 1 Cor 15:1-20).
 - a. Jn 20:30-31 “... these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”
 - b. Acts 2:22-24 “... Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him”
3. **Fulfilled prophecy** (Lk 24:25-27; Acts 17:2-3; 26:22-23; Deut 18:18-22; Is 7:14; Micah 5:2; Zach 9:9; Is 53; Ps 22:1-8; 16:10).
4. **The nature and reliability of scripture**.
 - a. 2 Tim 3:14-17 “... all Scripture is inspired by God”

- b. 2 Pet 1:20-21 “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”
- c. Jn 10:34-36 “... and the Scripture cannot be broken.”
- 5. **Personal experience.**
 - a. Jn 9:25-30 “... One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see.”
 - b. Paul's testimonies to the Jews (Acts 22), to Felix (Acts 24:10-23) and to Agrippa (Acts 26).
- 6. **Social benefits** of the Christian way (Titus 3:8; Gal 6:9-10; 1 Tim 5:8).
- C. **“Neutralizing” Apologetics:** Attempting to show that **other worldviews are false, fundamentally inconsistent, or unlivable.**
 - 1. Biblical background
 - a. 2 Cor 10:5 “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God ...”
 - b. Rom 1:21 “For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”
 - c. Titus 1:9-11 “... able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.”
 - 2. General examples
 - a. E.g. Monistic worldviews: Everything is “one”; the world is “illusion”; reason and the physical senses are deceptive.
 - (1) If everything is “ONE,” how can there be an ultimate “right” or “good”?
 - (2) If everything is “ONE,” then “evil” itself cannot be justified or explained.
 - b. E.g. Naturalistic worldviews: Everything is reducible to impersonal, non-purposeful matter.
 - (1) Yet, some naturalists claim human freedom and uniqueness.
 - (2) How can reason itself be justified in a purely random or law-determined universe?
 - (3) How can this view consistently justify moral criticism or explain acts of love or altruism?
 - (4) Consistently applied, what would Naturalism lead to?

VII. What's Really at Stake?

- A. A “forced,” “momentous,” and “live” option (see William James, “The Will to Believe” [1896]).
- B. Every worldview (way of life) must address the wide range of BIG questions.
 - 1. Compare them.
 - 2. Which way of life, if any, is “best”?
- C. A matter of utmost personal, present, and permanent (eternal) significance.

**Be sure to visit the class webpage for additional resources.
Feel free to post questions and visit periodically to read teacher responses.**

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