

# “Room For Doubt—Reason For Hope”<sup>1</sup>

## Room For Doubt Seminar – March 8-9, 2014

### Madison Park Christian Church

Event webpage: [www.worldvieweyes.org/madisonpark.html](http://www.worldvieweyes.org/madisonpark.html)

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## Introduction

### A. Questions and doubt in our culture

1. General culture
2. Churched teens
3. The “Nones”
4. The “De-converts”

### B. Questions and doubt in scripture

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.”

## I. Background for Apologetics [“Apologetics” comes directly from a Greek word that is typically translated “defend” or “given an answer.”]

### A. General **directives** for apologetics

1. **I Peter 3:15** \_\_\_\_\_ **DEFEND** [*apologia*] the faith. (1 Peter 3:15; Acts 22:1; 24:10; 26:12; Phil 1:7,16). Cf. *dialogoi* (reasoned discussion) in Acts 17:2-3,17; 18:4,19; 19:8-9; 24:12).

1 Peter 3: <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.” <sup>15</sup> 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, <sup>16</sup> 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).

<sup>1</sup> The notebook materials provide much more than the seminar sessions have time to cover. Various resources, including handouts with answers supplied, will be made available on the event web page. Please use these materials for follow up and further self-study.

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”

#### C. **Primary objectives of apologetics**

1. **Belief** (Matt. 16:15-17; John 20:30-31; Rom. 10:9; 1 John 4:15; Heb. 11:6ab)
2. **Trust** (James 2:19; Matt. 4:1-3; Hebrews 11:1,6c)
3. **Love**
  - a. See Mark 12:30; cf. Deut. 6:4-5.
  - 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. **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 highly PROBLEMATIC, 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. 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?

### III. Christianity and Its Worldview Competitors

#### A. The big issues

1. Is there any kind of God?
2. The existence of the universe.
3. The physical conditions of the universe that allow for human existence.
4. The origin of life.
5. The capacities of human freedom, consciousness, and moral awareness.
6. The reality of the Bible and the impact of biblical history (e.g. ancient Israel, the church).

7. The question of miracles.
8. The identity of Jesus and his purported resurrection from the dead.

## B. Competing worldviews in scripture

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

## C. Competing worldviews today?

1. **NATURALISM**: No God of any sort exists. Only physical matter exists.
2. **DEISM**: God created the universe but left it alone. God does not enter time or space. Miracles not possible. Incarnation of God not possible.
3. **PANTHEISM** (and NEW AGE): God and the universe are ONE. We are part of god—we are gods. We must experience oneness with the universe/god.
4. **MONOTHEISM**: One, all-powerful God exists
  - a. **Judaism**: One personal, creator God. God revealed to and through ancient Israel. Still expecting the Messiah (the promised “anointed one” of God)
  - b. **Islam**: Allah, the one God, recited the Koran to Muhammad. Muhammad is the latest and greatest prophet. (Jesus very important as well, but neither Jesus nor Muhammad is God. Jesus was not crucified and did not die for anyone’s sins.)
  - c. **Christianity**: The prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled in Jesus who is the Messiah (Matt 16:16-17), unique Son of God (Jn 3:16), who died on the cross to make forgiveness of sin possible (Acts 2:22-24,36-38; Phil 2:5-8; Col 2:13-14).
5. **SYNCRETISM**: Accept various beliefs and practices with little concern about how, or whether, they fit together.
6. **APATHEISM**: Apathetic or indifferent about God or religion.
7. **AGNOSTICISM**: We cannot know whether God exists. We should suspend any judgment about God or commitment to God.

## D. How can we evaluate their competing claims?