



THE WELL INSTITUTE

APOLOGETICS

Lesson 1 (Worldviews & World Religions)

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APOLOGETICS INTRODUCTION

Why do we believe what we believe? How do we deal with the many questions about Jesus, God, the Christian faith, and its relevance for our daily life? What answers can we give to those who doubt, those who are seekers, skeptics, those in difficult situations, those who are hostile to Christianity and don't want to believe us at all? Are our answers convincing, or do we realize that we don't really know ourselves how to deal with certain issues? Are we shocked when people question the very foundation of our faith – or can we reach out to them and give them real answers that help them on their way to Christ? Do we just know “the basics” or can we explain why we view certain things as right or wrong? Can we participate when people discuss issues that currently move the world or do we realize that we don't know how to voice our opinion without sounding ridiculous – even to ourselves? All of these questions are valid reasons why all of us need to sharpen our minds and abilities to know the Lord in a deeper way, to know what we believe and how to explain, share, and defend it when the moment arises. In short, every Believer is called to know the Lord, what they believe He has revealed in His Word (the Bible), and how to defend it with grace and truth in His power (John 1:17).

“But sanctify [revere] Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” 1 Peter 3:15

What is Apologetics?

The term “apologetics” is derived from the Greek word *apologia*. The English equivalent of *apologia* is *defense*, or literally, 'a speech for the defense'. An *apologia* typically focuses on explaining, justifying, or making clear the grounds for some course of action, belief, or position. This study focuses on Christian apologetics, a reasoned defense of Christianity.

In other words – are we able to defend our faith? This is what apologetics is about. Q: Does anyone know what the word “apologetics” means?

The word has little to do with how we understand the word “apologize” today, although it comes from the same root. The Greek word *απολογία* means “a verbal defense”.

Q: What does that mean with respect to our Christian faith?

To best answer this question is to look how the word is used in the Bible. The word *απολογία* occurs several times in the New Testament (Acts 22:1; 25:16; 1 Corinthians

9:3; 2 Corinthians 7:11; Philippians 1;7,17; 2 Timothy 4:16, 1 Peter 3:15) and the 1 Peter 3:15 passage most clearly explains what Christian apologetics means.

Thus, in general, Christian apologetics deals with answering critics who oppose or question the existence of God, the revelation of God in Christ (i.e. Jesus as God), the reliability Bible, the plausibility of miracles, the existence of heaven or hell, and the reality of the exclusivity of salvation through saving faith in Jesus as Savior. This pursuit can include studying specific apologetic-oriented subjects such as historiography, biblical manuscript transmission, philosophy, biology, genetics, geology, mathematics, physics, evolution, theology, church history, world religions, rhetoric and logic –in order to be best prepared to discuss with experts who influence the way society thinks about these issues today. But more commonly it simply means giving an answer to a question about Jesus, about a Bible passage, or about a specific situation where faith makes a difference. You don't have to read a ton of books to be able to do that, nor do you need to have extraordinary intelligence. **But you do have to know the Word of God** – and not just superficially. Everyone can make a defense of the Christian faith (just consider what kind of people Jesus chose as Apostles), and everyone is called to do so. We are to be ready *“in season or out of season...”* to proclaim the Word and to be able to reprove, rebuke, correct and instruct using God's Word in others' lives. (2 Tim. 4:2)

Apologetics, therefore, can both be **defensive** and **offensive**. The Bible encourages both:

*“For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and **in the defense and confirmation of the gospel**, you all are partakers of grace with me”* (Philippians 1:7).

*“We are **destroying speculations** and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ”* (2. Corinthians 10:5).

You can and should be able to defend your reasons for believing in Christ. Your personal testimony is your greatest weapon of Faith to share God's story through your own story of redemption. But you should also be able to “attack” or expose false presuppositions that oppose Christianity. Of course, you need to do this with gentleness (i.e one never attacks the person, but reproofs what has been said); to do this well, one should be prayed up and well prepared beforehand. After all, you want to help people to change their views and beliefs and – if they are not Christians yet – and prayerfully to bring them to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ (Mt. 28:19-20).

There are two major ways of dealing with opposition to the Christian Faith: The first is to provide direct evidence for Christianity, evidence which supports Christianity's truth claims (i.e. for Jesus' resurrection; the ancient biblical manuscripts; fulfilled prophecies; the reality of unexplainable miracles, etc.). Second, one can deal with directly with the

presuppositions of those who oppose Christianity, since presuppositions effect how a person views evidence and reason. A good question to ask is “What is a person’s worldview?” How any person answers the **Five Basic Questions of Life** within their own worldview determines how they will view and interact with Christianity and Christians. See the study below on the five Basic Questions within a worldview

Another interesting issue is how to *deal* with the use of evidence, reasons, philosophy, etc. when talking to people who don’t believe in the Bible the same way as you do. Should one only use those criteria acceptable to unbelievers? Are Christians allowed to use the Bible as a defense of our position? Is reason alone sufficient to prove God’s existence or the truthfulness of Christianity? What part does prayer, using the Bible, and the sinful nature of an unbeliever play in making a defense of Christianity and of our witnessing to others? How do these factors interrelate to bring an unbeliever to faith? We will study this in depth!

SO, why study Apologetics?

You have come to this class, I assume, because you want to learn more about apologetics.

Q: But why, do you think, is it important to study apologetics?

There are several reasons why Believers need to learn and practice apologetics:

1. The first and most obvious is because the Word of God commands us to be ready to defend the faith (recall 1. Peter 3:15).
2. Second, studying apologetics helps us to know our faith. Sadly enough many Christians barely know the basics of their faith, let alone the deeper issues. But even many of the more experienced ones find it difficult to describe the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, His physical resurrection, or the difference between justification and sanctification without using a lot of church terminology that they cannot explain to people who are not familiar with it.
3. Third, apologetics is an attempt to keep people out of hell. As Christians, we should be motivated to present the truth of salvation in Jesus. We should not sit idly by and ignore the dilemma of the unbeliever. We need to be able to tell them that sin is real because God is real, that breaking God’s law has a consequence, but that through trusting in Christ we will be spared from the rightful judgment of God. Salvation is not found in Buddhism, Islam, relativism, or in one’s self. It is only found in Jesus Christ. That is easy to say, but we need to be able to explain it so that people can understand.
4. Fourth, we need to be able to counter the bad image that Christianity has received in the media and in our culture – particularly here in Ithaca. Many Christians come across as narrow-minded and self-righteous because they have strong opinions that they can’t justify. Others obviously don’t live according to the standards they preach. The

scandals around both the Catholic and Protestant Church have added a lot to the already existing negative opinions of Christianity. Add to that our media are already very biased against Christianity — how should people see the truth of what Christianity is really about if we aren't ready to tell them on an individual basis (without appearing narrow-minded and self-righteous ourselves)?

5. Fifth, apologetics helps us dealing with the constant threat of apostasy in the visible Christian church. How many once faithful denominations have abandoned clear scriptural teachings and conformed with the views of the world on certain issues? Only a proper understanding of apologetics helps us defend biblical truth within our churches in a way that we can reach those who are about to go astray.
6. Sixth, there are many false teachings which mimic genuine Christianity which try to influence the minds of believers and non-believers all over the world.

For instance, Mormonism teaches that God used to be a man on another world/planet who now is literally our heavenly father and that a faithful Mormon has the potential of becoming a god of their own world. Jehovah's Witnesses teach that God is not a Trinity, that Jesus is not god, that there is no hell, and that only 144,000 people will ultimately go to the final heaven. Further, Islam teaches that Jesus was not God in flesh, that He was not crucified or raised from the dead. Islam teaches that salvation is partly based on one's works and partly based on Allah's grace. It teaches that the Holy Spirit is the angel Gabriel and that Mohammed was a greater prophet than Jesus, and the final prophet of Allah. Last, Atheism is a truth claim which Atheists declare is the best philosophy in life to follow, a philosophy which denies God's existence altogether and teaches that mankind must have evolved through scientific evolution. Atheism demands that any form of exercising one's religious faith should be banned from public life and schools. We must be able to counter these teachings to prevent people from falling prey to them or having them expand in society unchecked.

7. Seventh, the rise of immorality in America is a threat not only to society but also to Christianity. Statistics show that 64% of adults and 83% of teenagers said moral truth depends on the situation that you are in. This is called Moral Relativism. An increasing number believe that the whole idea of biblical "sin" is outdated. Worse, a majority of those who believe in God in America think that being generally good is sufficient for getting into heaven. I blame the churches and America's pastors for NOT teaching the unadulterated truth of Scripture week in and week out in America's pulpits.

This is a serious issue because an immoral society cannot last long. Just look at history and think of Ancient Rome, Ancient Greece, and the ancient nations of Judah and Israel. And then consider present day. We tend to take these issues too lightly in our increasingly compromising society. But, as a consequence, things that formerly were called evil have now become acceptable and – even worse – what is truly good

and godly (like standing up against these things and falsehoods) is now being considered evil. *“Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things are worthy of death, they not only continue to do these things, but **also approve of those who practice them**”* (Romans 1:32).

God commands us: *“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things”* (Philippians 4:8).

We cannot ignore God’s Word and believe that there won’t be consequences.

8. The eighth reason we should study apologetics is that most public schools are not friendly to Christianity. The teachers of philosophy, history, science, and many others are almost obliged to take shots at Christianity, since the biblical truths contradict what nowadays *has* to be taught in school. Shall we take our children from public schools to protect them from this influence? That doesn’t solve the problem because we can’t keep them out of this world forever. **Instead, we need to prepare them to be ready and have a mature understanding of their own faith**, so that they are kept from falling away (John 17:15).

The fact is that Christianity is under attack in the world and we need to fight the good fight of the faith without shrinking back. We need apologetics to give rational, intelligent, and relevant explanations of Christian viability to the critics and the prejudiced who would seek to undermine the teachings of our Lord Jesus (keeping Ephesians 6:12 in mind which clearly states that our true opponent is not the person who stands in front of us, **but our warfare is spiritual in nature**). If there was ever a time that apologetics is needed, it is now!

The responsibility of giving a reasoned defense of Christianity is *not* the job of a select few theologians who specialize in apologetics. The Bible makes it clear that the job of defending Christianity belongs to every Christian and that all Christians should be prepared to do this at any time. Christians are commanded to be prepared to give an answer for the reason that they have hope in Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:15). Jude supports Peter’s exhortation, instructing his readers *to “contend earnestly for the faith”* (Jude 3). He was instructing them to defend Christianity against the false teachings that were arising in the church.

A Christian’s reason for their hope in Jesus should include how and why they became a Christian e.g. Paul’s account in Acts 22. It should also include their current relationship with, and experience of God; as well as a knowledge of who Jesus Christ is, and why what he did is so fundamentally important i.e. explaining the ‘Good News’ or ‘Gospel’. This apologetics study will examine only a key aspect of a Christian’s

reason for trusting (placing one's faith) in Jesus Christ. It will examine intellectual reasoning, philosophical and critical arguments, and factual evidence for Christianity.

So Why Are We to Study Apologetics?

The most important reason for any Christian to study their Faith and the defense of their Faith is out of obedience to God's will. Remember, refusal to give a reason for our Faith is akin to disobedience to God, like if we refuse to acknowledge Jesus before other men (Matthew 10:33-35). Moreover, by defending the truths of God, Christians defend God's honor and name, thereby bringing God glory. As the apostle Paul said, "whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Another practical reason for studying apologetics is to lovingly break down barriers which are preventing non-Christians from seriously considering Christianity.

People deserve to hear and understand the case for Christianity. When they raise intellectual objections, they should receive concrete, verifiable answers that support the authenticity of Christianity. We live in a world with many contradicting beliefs and claims. What do we do when these views and beliefs clash - when contradicting beliefs all declare to reflect divine truth? Which set of beliefs should someone accept? Without any clear, objective way of choosing, we might throw up our arms in despair and reject all religions, believing that there is no way to intelligently discern which, if any, is really true. Or we might arbitrarily choose one, or even sample several options to try and discover what we like best.

Many people, Christians and non-Christians alike, decide whether to believe (or not) something with their **hearts**, much more than with their heads. Even a perfect argument does not move people as much as emotion, desire and concrete experience. When it comes to convincing non-Christians about the truth of Christianity, apologetics aims at getting to the heart *through* the head. Generally, we can't believe what we know to be untrue, and we can't love what we believe to be unreal. Arguments may not bring a person to faith, but they can certainly keep a person away from faith. Christian apologetics aims to address the arguments and intellectual barriers that people may have when it comes to considering the truth of Christianity.

Many Christians are comfortable in their faith and don't feel a need to back it up with evidence. However, many do desire the affirmation of apologetics to strengthen their faith. When speaking to "doubting" Thomas, Jesus commends those who believe without 'seeing' (John 20:29), but He still provided Thomas with the evidence he desired (John 20:24-27).

Much of the world rejects Jesus Christ as God, and deny His resurrection from the grave. Conversely, Christians are confronted with secular and religious ideologies that

contradict or attempt to refute their own biblical beliefs. Thus, every Believer needs to know how to support the truth claims of Christianity for their sake and others (1 Tim. 4:16). Further, God can and does use apologetics to help believers whose faith is wavering and to ease the suffering caused by doubt. Apologetics can be especially reassuring to new believers seeking to rationally justify their step of faith. It is a wonderful and joyful experience to discover that one's faith is firmly grounded on objective truths that are confirmed by sensible, demonstrable, verifiable evidence.

Christians do not have to commit 'intellectual suicide' in order to have faith in Christ. Christianity does not require a blind trusting of something unknown or uncertain. In fact, people are to love God with their heart, soul and *minds* (Matthew 22:37). Our faith is grounded in God's reality and love; it is grounded in a real universe -His creation and the millions of lives already touched by grace (eternally changed for the better). Ours is a faith deeply grounded in truth (in Science) and that which is undeniable. The study of Apologetics, therefore, aims to demonstrate that Christianity is grounded in objective and historical fact, a reasonable evidence for one's faith.

Apologetics is able to "bring one to faith" in the same sense as a car can bring a person to the sea. The car can't swim, you have to jump in the sea in order to do that. But you can't jump in from a hundred miles inland. You need a car to first bring you to the point where you can make a leap of faith into the sea. Faith *is* a leap, but a leap into the light, not into the dark! Apologetics can reveal more clearly that light of reasonable faith.

The goal of apologetics is not victory, but **truth**. Loving Truth! It is aimed against unbelief, not unbelievers. The arguer's tone, sincerity, care, concern, listening and respect matter as much as their logic – probably more. The world was not won for Christ by arguments but by holiness: "What you are speaks so loudly, I can hardly hear what you say".

Guidelines for doing Apologetics

Let us consider a few guidelines for doing apologetics:

Although answering questions, dealing with doubts, and defending the faith strongly depends on the situation, your own personality, and the people you're dealing with, there are certain guidelines that are worth considering.

1. The most important part of defending the faith is prayer. It is the Lord who opens the heart and mind, not we (Acts 16:14). The issue is not to win an argument, but to win the person and all our well-prepared arguments and intellectual abilities cannot accomplish this if God is not in it. Ask God for guidance (John 14:14), for blessing in your understanding (James 1:5) and your speech (Colossians 4:6), and for opening the other's minds (Luke 24:45).

2. Few things are as powerful when defending the faith as being able to cite a particular verse from the Bible (Psalm 119:11; 2 Timothy 3:16). The Word of God is quick and powerful (Hebrews 4:12) and more effective than anything else. You may not always have a Bible handy, so it is worth to memorize scripture and the context in which it is written and use it.
3. Be informed about cult material, secular material, and other sources of information. It is extremely valuable to know where other people draw their opinions from and where the strengths and weaknesses of certain arguments and theories are. Of course, you cannot know everything, but you can memorize a few facts about Mormonism, or evolution, or philosophy, or whatever else may be needed. You will learn what you need as you witness.
4. Listen to what is being said to you – and respond to it. It is by listening that you will then know what to say. Listen for errors in logic, for motives, for hurts, for intent.
5. Ask questions that require the others to explain what they believe. When they have to go below the surface, they will quite often discover that their views are based on a lot of unsubstantiated assumptions instead of on solid facts.

An interesting approach is to avoid arguments is to hand out a challenge instead. If someone claims that the Bible is full of errors, pick a few key verses like Hebrews 9:27, John 3:16 and ask them to explain why they think this particular statement is wrong. How do you know what you claim? Can you be sure and why? That requires them to study the meaning of these passages and think about them more seriously. Of course, that doesn't guarantee anything, but it opens the door to talk about the deeper issues instead of resorting to common prejudices

6. Don't interrupt – this is just common courtesy. Just because you have an answer doesn't mean it must be heard right away. When interruptions become the norm, learning is thrown out the window.
7. Do not argue. Avoid anything that even sounds like you're attacking the person. Others have a right to have their beliefs – even if they are severely wrong.

For the same reason, do not ridicule the other person, even if what he says is really absurd. He won't listen to you if you don't take him seriously. How would you feel if you were ridiculed? Christians are often accused of viewing themselves as superior to others. Make sure that you never look down on other people, no matter what you believe about them, their moral standards, their views of the world etc. You are no better than they – just forgiven. (parable of the servant in debt).

8. Don't be afraid to make mistakes. One of the best ways to improve, is to discover your weaknesses, and these are only uncovered when you make mistakes. People who don't make mistakes don't grow anymore.

9. Study what you discover you don't know. Get books and read. The knowledge of others is invaluable. Write down what you learn. No matter how much or how little you know – you can always improve.
10. Don't be afraid to take a chance. This step takes real faith. All you have to do is be available, speak up, and take a chance in defending the Christian faith. Consciously depend upon the Holy Spirit. Under his guidance you will be able to reach out to others. You'll be surprised at how well you do. And when you mess up, don't worry, review guideline #8.
11. Rehearse – think of a situation, a scenario that you need to have an answer for, and develop an answer. Practice in your mind. Try and corner yourself and then get out of it. This is exactly what we want to practice in this class.
12. Finally – trust in the Lord and keep going – it works. Trust in the Lord to give you the exact words you will need in the exact moment that you are sharing, evangelizing, or defending your faith. Trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to give you the right words at just the right time (Luke 12:12). The real question is – “will you be obedient to pursue the lost and engage with those of differing faiths, religions, philosophies, and seekers?”

Common Questions and Issues

The final reason for studying apologetics is that there are just so many questions and issues where we need to find answers. There are questions that others bring to us that we can't answer; there are issues and claims that we are confronted with day by day—questions that were always on our minds because we have no satisfactory answers for them. We all know dozens of questions that need answers. Let us collect a few of them. Here are a few questions to which people want helpful answers:

1. The Bible is full of errors – how can it be inerrant with real errors?
2. The Bible contradicts itself -how can it be infallible with real contradictions?
3. The Bible is not the word of God – it was just written by some men. (“The books of Moses were invented by the priesthood in 500 BC”, “Israel was never great”, “David never existed”, “Jesus never existed”, . . .)
4. The Bible is just a book of stories, oral tradition and myths
5. The first 11 chapters of Genesis are pure fiction
 (“Creation is unscientific” or “Christianity as been proven wrong by science”)
6. Bible is not reliable (“we don't have originals”, “translations contain mistakes”, . . .)
7. Why just these 66 books? No more? No less? What if we found new books of Scripture?
8. The KJV is the only authoritative/correct Bible translation :
9. You can't take the Bible literally! (“you have to interpret it”, ...)
10. Jesus was just a prophet (, teacher, good man, . . .)
11. Jesus is not God
12. God doesn't exist
13. Satan doesn't exist – it is just an invention to scare kids

14. Christianity is hateful (towards homosexuals, other religions, women, Catholics, ...)
15. Christians are judgmental (e.g. about abortion)
16. Christianity requires people to have blind faith (shut off their brain, ...)
17. Christians forbid everything that is fun
18. Everyone will go to heaven
19. There is no such thing as hell
20. Why should I be concerned about eternal life? Once I die, I will be put in a box 6 feet under.
21. A loving God will not condemn me just because I don't believe in Jesus
22. It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you believe in God
23. You believe your way, I my way ...
24. All religions lead to God
25. There was no virgin birth ("the bible never says so in the originals")
26. God doesn't love me (because I am sick, poor,)
27. Why does God allow suffering if he loves us [more abstract]
28. There is no (physical) resurrection of the dead
29. I believe in reincarnation
30. Everyone will eventually become like God
31. The Bible doesn't mention the trinity, it has been invented afterwards
32. After salvation you don't sin anymore
33. You can't trust Paul's writing (he was prejudiced against women)
34. Isn't the Bible anti-feminist?
35. Why did Jesus have to die? Couldn't God just forgive us and forget it?
36. Why doesn't God show Himself to everyone so they will believe?
37. If creation is correct: Where did Cain find his wife?
38. Is the gift of tongues relevant today?
39. Why did God create evil (Satan) if he is all-knowing?
40. If there is a God – why is there evil in the world?
41. Why do bad things happen to good people?
42. How can you speak of biblical truths when a person hasn't accepted Christ (or is blinded already)? What or where is the baseline, or common spot to begin with?
43. Aren't most of the wars in history caused by people claiming to be Christians (for example, the crusades)?
44. Why should God pick one race, the Jews, to receive special treatment?
45. Why don't you also believe the other "gospel" of the Book of Mormon?
46. Each person finds God in his own way – why isn't one way as good as another?

When presenting the evidence is not enough . . .

In the months to come we will have addressed many of the fundamental questions that unbelievers raise about the Christian faith. We will have collected plenty of evidence for the reliability of the Bible. We will have shown that it is the most unique book ever written – unique in its continuity, circulation, translation, and survival and most unique in its teachings and influence on this world. As a historical book, it is by far the best documented one – although there are no original manuscripts, we can say that we know almost for certain what they contained. Despite hundreds of claims to the contrary, the Bible is free from errors and inconsistencies – its historical descriptions are accurate and any attempt to prove it wrong has failed. But most of all, it is full of scientific foreknowledge and predictive prophecies that clearly prove its supernatural content.

All the evidence together allows only one logical conclusion: the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God. It is true in everything it says and therefore the final authority for answering the basic questions of life and faith. Next, we will have studied the key issues of our Christian faith – our need for salvation, the person of Jesus Christ, and the resurrection. We will have shown that all human beings are sinners and need to be saved from sin and its deadly consequences. We will have reasoned that essentially there can be only one way to provide salvation: someone had to die for our sins to carry the penalty and to come back to life to demonstrate victory over death – and this someone had to be God and human at the same time. We proved that Jesus Christ as we know him from the Bible is that person. We collected evidence for the fact that he was a historical person and that he was God as well – the fulfilled prophecies about him and the miracles he performed are proof enough. Finally we proved that he really died on the cross and rose again and that we can have eternal life because of that. The evidence is plentiful. But is it enough to convince everyone to believe in Jesus Christ as their savior? Obviously not, since otherwise the whole world would believe by now.

Q: So, why do people refuse to believe if the evidence is so clear? There are many reasons why people don't believe in Jesus Christ. More and more people have been brought up in non-Christian environments – they have parents who believe only superficially or not at all, they are exposed to anti-Christian indoctrination in school, the society around them is opposed to Christianity. Ithaca is a perfect example of such an environment but by far not the only one. The problem started in Europe more than a hundred years ago and has spread all over the world ever since.

As a result, the mindset of many people has been infected with strong anti-biblical beliefs. They claim that the Christian faith is irrational and that it has been proven wrong by science. They bring up all kinds of arguments against the Bible and Christianity that have little to no substance, just because they find them easier to accept than the fact that there is a God who has the right to tell them what is right or

wrong. Bringing up evidence will hardly change their minds because they find the consequence – believing in Jesus Christ – unacceptable. More and more you also find people who simply don't care. While only a hundred years ago you had to come up with very good reasons why you didn't believe in God, in today's world it is almost viewed as the most natural thing. People don't feel obliged to justify their unbelief, because for them it is common knowledge that the material world is all there is – why investigate something that is obviously not true? There is nothing that can be gained from that.

Sadly, there are also people who had very negative experiences with church or with individual Christians. They came to church but were rejected or ignored because they didn't meet the "standards" (dress code, behavior in church,...). They felt that Christians only wanted to convert them but didn't care about them as person. Christians looked down at them with a "holier than thou" attitude. Their opinions were not tolerated at all. People Christians spoke the truth to them, but but they did not do so in love (Ephesians 4:15). And all too often the actions of Christians do not match what they say. Too many Christians come across as pushy, cold, narrow-minded, or even as hypocrites – because that is exactly what they are. As a result, people disregard the Christian message, because their own experience proves to them that it cannot be true.

Whatever the cause, in the end it boils down to one and the same reason. People don't believe in Jesus Christ because they don't want to believe. Deep down in their heart they say there is no God (Psalm 14:1) – at least not as the Bible describes him. This conviction may be masked extremely well, but if we take all the excuses away, we end up at the presupposition that God does not exist or that God, even if he were to exist, does not intervene in the natural order of the universe. And it is this presupposition that they must become fully aware of before they are ready to consider the evidence to the contrary (1. Corinthians 2:14).

What is a presupposition?

A presupposition is something assumed in advance, something that we take as a given and do not question. To a certain degree, presuppositions are inevitable, since we cannot reason without having a starting point. There are certain principles that we simply have to assume, since otherwise all reasoning would be pointless. For instance, we have to assume that contradictory statements cannot be simultaneously true – since otherwise everything would be true.

However, there are also presuppositions that are nothing but prejudices. The environment we live in makes us believe that certain assumptions are "facts of nature" but they are actually in conflict with reality. A very common example is the assumption that certain types of people are inferior to us because of race, national origin, wealth, intelligence, beauty, etc. Presuppositions that fall into this category keep a person from living in reality.

Therefore, we must be constantly and consciously be aware of our presuppositions. We ask ourselves if our assumptions about the world are supported by evidence and allow our- selves to be corrected if they are in conflict with the evidence that we see. This becomes more and more difficult the older we get – after all, these assumptions have carried us through life for a long period of time. But if we we are not willing to correct presuppositions that are in conflict with evidence, we only prove that we are stubborn, because we try to make reality match our presuppositions instead of the other way around. With such people you can. Unfortunately, it has become increasingly popular to make truth subjective and to allow for contradictions. It is almost impossible to discuss anything on this basis.

No matter how much evidence you bring to them, they will not change their mind (for example, Mormons and Jehovah's witnesses are strongly indoctrinated – they come to convert you, not to listen to counterarguments). Even if you prove to them that their presuppositions are unsound, they insist on keeping them. For them, the only thing you can do is pray and demonstrate your faith by the way you live (James 2:18b).

Dealing with Presuppositions

Knowing a person's presuppositions is extremely important when discussing issues of faith and God. If a person is open, it is sufficient to let the evidence and the Word of God speak for itself (Hebrews 4:12). But in many cases, we have to realize that a person is not open to that, because the idea that there is a God who is actively involved in the world is so foreign to them, that they will not accept any evidence for that fact. It simply cannot be, so the evidence must be wrong. Miracles don't happen, because the supernatural does not exist – that is one of their basic axioms.

Q: How do we deal with such people?

We have to address their presuppositions first. Before we can discuss the Biblical facts, we need to discuss their world view and seek to change the very foundation of how a person perceives facts. Have them define their views first and approach them on this basis – then they are much more ready to follow your argument because you present to them what they need most. Here is an example of how this works:

Allen: I am an atheist and evolutionist. Prove to me there is a God.

Paul: I do not think I can with your presuppositions.

Allen: Why not?

Paul: Because your presuppositions will not allow you to examine without bias the evidence that I present to you for God's existence.

Allen: That is because there is no evidence for God's existence.

Paul: See? You just confirmed what I was stating.

Allen: How so?

Paul: You are convinced that there is no God, therefore, no matter what I might present to you, you must interpret it in a manner consistent with your presupposition; namely, that there is no God. If I had a video tape of God coming down from heaven, you'd say

it was a special effect. If I had a thousand eye-witnesses saying they saw Him, you'd say it was mass-hysteria. Even if I DID have incontrovertible evidence, your presupposition would force you to interpret the facts consistently with your presupposition and you would not be able to see the proof.

Allen: I see your point, but I am open to being persuaded, if you can.

Paul: Then, I must ask you, what kind of evidence would you accept that would prove God's existence?

Once people are aware that they actually have presuppositions that may prevent them from accepting the truth, they are more open to what you will tell them – provided you do it on their terms. This, of course, requires you to be very flexible in your discussion, because you can't just pull out a tract or follow some standard approach. Instead you have to present your case, listen to their counterarguments, explain to them why these counterarguments don't work (similarly to the way we refuted claims about errors in the Bible or arguments against the resurrection) and take it from there. Eventually, most of the issues that we addressed before will come up and need to be discussed, but you have to wait until they are open to follow your line of thought.

Jesus' discussion with the woman at the well in John 4:7–26 is an example of this form of reasoning. He engages the woman in a discussion and makes her reveal more and more of the way she thinks – until she is ready to hear the full truth. In Acts 17:22–33 we see how Paul addresses the people in Athens on the basis of their superstitions. There is no guarantee that you will lead people to Christ this way. But at least you catch their attention and place a seed that later may grow.

Make them aware of what is at stake

People who believe that there is no God are not easily convinced that they are wrong, even if they sincerely listen to all your arguments. After all, giving up presuppositions that one has held for years is not easy. Your evidence may not change their convictions, but it may shake their foundations – making them less sure that their presuppositions are actually correct and showing them that faith in Christ is more rational than they believed.

At this point you may want to give them a challenge to think about. Make them aware that their assumption that the Bible is wrong is on very shaky ground. Make them aware of what is at stake.

“Whoever believes in him is not condemned but whoever does not believe in him stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son” (John 3:18).

Make them aware that they have no evidence for the claim that this statement is not true and ask them to weigh the consequences. What do they risk if they are wrong – what do they gain if they are right?

Q: So what can they win or lose if one does not believe in Jesus Christ?

– If they are right, then their world ends after your death and they gain nothing. – If they are wrong, they will suffer eternal condemnation and lose everything.

Q: What if they do believe in Jesus Christ?

– If they are right, they will receive eternal life after death and win everything.
– If they are wrong, then their world ends after their death and they lose nothing.

Weighing risks against possible outcomes is a very rational approach to making decisions that can have significant consequences (businesses, politicians, and the military use mathematical game theory for this purpose). Impossible risks with unbearable consequences can only be taken, if one is sure that one cannot lose. Of course, it is not fear that should lead them to accept a God that they don't believe in. But all these considerations may make them more open to look more closely at the evidence and what the Word of God claims. And once they are more open to Biblical truths, there is a chance that they will be convinced by it (Isaiah 55:10) and accept Christ into their heart.

WORLDVIEWS

Establishing a Worldview: The FIVE BASIC QUESTIONS IN LIFE

A “Worldview” is any person’s (from any culture in the world) conception of their life and the world around them. It is the sum of a person’s personal and familial experience, values, attitudes, expectations, stories, education (formal or informal) which informs that person’s every thought, feeling, and action. A person’s worldview is the basic foundation and building block of their very existence and experience as a human being in this world – clarifying for them what to believe and reject. One’s worldview encompasses their religion (or non-belief system), their ethics, philosophy, morality, scientific persuasion, socialability, intellect, and perspective on all areas of life. In short, someone’s worldview helps them examine and answer all the big (important) questions of life. For example, the **FIVE BASIC QUESTIONS OF LIFE:**

WORLDVIEWS:

Common global worldviews are the following:

- Deism:** Some type of god exists, but it is not a personal nor miraculous god.
- Pantheism:** God exists in the form of nature and the world around us.
- Panentheism:** God is *within* everything and everyone.
- Atheism:** There is no god, no divine being or substance exists in the universe.
- Agnosticism:** Knowledge of god is unknowable; one cannot know if god exists.
- Polytheism:** There are multiple gods within the universe and beyond.
- Theism:** There is just one God, an all-supreme, sovereign Being.

(Within *Theism*, there are three competing truth claims: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam)

So just how does one identify the basic beliefs of an individual at the worldview level? It is actually not nearly as difficult as it might appear on the surface. While the whole concept of worldview may seem a bit philosophical and esoteric, getting down to specifics is actually quite practical and reasonable. The purpose of evaluating worldviews is to intentionally analyze and examine the trustworthiness (credibility/reliability) of someone's basic building block of belief. Is a person's belief system grounded on reality (truth) or just conjecture (speculation/false suppositions).

Here is where Jesus reminds a wise person to "build their house upon the rock" rather than upon shifting sands (Matthew 7:24-27). Is my worldview (and YOUR worldview credible, reliable, trustworthy as THE foundation belief system by which all your questions and answers will be sifted??? In other words, have you believed a lie? Are you living and experiencing this world through a false lens (a deceptive and untrue perspective) which colors your every experience and interaction with the known

world?? This is the right question everyone should be asking for themselves. How do I know what I believe to be true is actually TRUE???

Apologists offer the “**3-4-5 method**” of analyzing the credibility and trustworthiness of worldviews, a method of critically scrutinizing one’s belief system.

First, there are (3) **three TESTS** that a worldview must pass. In order for any worldview to be credible/trustworthy (i.e. actually TRUE), it must be without fail:

1. Logically Consistent – Its teachings cannot be self-contradictory.
2. Empirically Adequate – Its teachings must match what is observable in reality.
3. Existentially Relevant – Its teachings must speak directly to how one actually lives

Second, each worldview must address the following (4) **four** ultimate questions:

1. **Origin** – Where do the universe and human beings come from?
2. **Meaning** – What is the meaning or purpose of life?
3. **Morality** – How do we know what is right and what is wrong, good or bad?
4. **Destiny** – What happens to us after we die?

Third, there are (5) **five** academic disciplines that must be employed to adequately study a worldview:

1. *Theology* – the study of God
2. *Metaphysics* – the study of what is ultimately real
3. *Epistemology* – the study of how we can know things
4. *Ethics* – the study of moral right and wrong
5. *Anthropology* – the study of what and who humans are

Thus, in order to evaluate any worldview, this critical analyzation and “3-4-5” methodology can be applied to demonstrate the **veracity** (truthfulness) or **falsity** (fallacy/deceitfulness) of the worldview in question. It is imperative that all worldviews are examined and analyzed to determine the accuracy and reliability of that belief system as something actual (real), affirmable, and undeniable = i.e. TRUE, whereas all worldviews which are false will be found to be either unaffirmable (non-actual) and/or self-defeating, internally inconsistent and (self-contradictory) = FALSE.

What is your worldview? What is your basic belief system? What do you believe about reality? Are you ready to put your own worldview to the test??

FIVE BASIC QUESTIONS OF LIFE:

Every worldview answers these five basic questions to life and purpose:

Worldview: (Who, What, When, Where, Why & How)

1. Who (what) am I? = (Question of **Identity**)
2. Where did I come from? = (Question of **Origin**)
3. Why am I here?/ Why do I exist? What is my purpose in life? =(Question of **Meaning**)
4. How should I live my life? [What is good/bad-right/wrong]? =(Question of **Morality**)
5. What happens, where will I go when I die? = (Question of **Destiny**)

Depending upon where you are born, to which parents you are born, in which culture you are raised, in which language you speak, what capacities and deficiencies you encounter, your life experience, your education, and your daily interactions with people, your environment, and the world – all of these factors will help answer these five basic questions of life which in turn become (*de facto*) the basis of one's Worldview and with which will establish their belief system (and/or religious beliefs and actions).

Evaluating Worldviews

There are several different approaches that various philosophers have identified to better understand and evaluate a particular worldview. That being said, they all ultimately address the same issues.

1. What is the Nature of Ultimate Reality?

This first worldview question relates to the very nature of reality in its entirety. The main focus of the issues it raises involve whether or not there is such a thing as the supernatural. If there is, what is it like? It deals with such questions as:

- Is there a God or not? If there is, what is that he like? If there is no God, what is the origin of material reality?
- Are there multiple gods? If so, what are they like?
- Is there a personal element to ultimate reality? If not, what is the nature of impersonal reality?

2. What is the nature of material reality?

There have been those who have questioned whether or not the material world we live in really exists, and have posited that it is an illusion in one form or another. However, since it is the physical world that we live our lives in, most people assume that it actually does exist. That being said, not everyone agrees as to the nature of the material world. In fact, every worldview has a different perspective about it. Different worldview possibilities include:

- It is the material world created or uncreated?
- It is orderly or chaotic?
- It is subjective or objective?
- It is personal or impersonal?
- It is eternal or temporal?

3. What is a human being?

The nature of worldview is such that it might seem strange to many people to even ask a question like this. We all have an underlying presupposition about what a human being is and we simply assume that everyone else understands it in the same way we do. That is simply not the case. Different worldviews hold entirely different understandings about it. And the reason it is important is because different understandings result in different ways of valuing and treating other people.

Some of the different possible answers posited by various worldviews concerning the nature of a human being include:

- A highly evolved biological machine.
- A god or potential god. A form of energy which shifts forms through successive existences.
- A person made in the image of God.

4. What happens to a person at death?

Every worldview has its doctrine related to the afterlife. While the practical implications of this may not, at first glance, seem to be that profound, those implications actually run very deep. For instance, if a person believes there is no after life, why is there any reason to refuse oneself anything in this life. Or if a person believes that they will get 72 virgins if they die as a martyr, why not go for it. Here are some of the answers that various worldviews give concerning life after death.

- People cease to exist.
- Individuals are transformed to a higher state.
- People reincarnate into another life on earth.
- People depart to a shadowy existence on “the other side.”
- Individuals enter into the spiritual realm (heaven, hell, or other place) based on how life was lived on earth.
- People enter directly into heaven.

5. Why is it possible to know anything at all?

It is interesting to think that different people might actually have a different way of conceiving of human rationality. After all, we all have to use it even to discuss the topic of knowledge. In spite of that, the different worldviews actually do have different ways of understanding it – from considering it to be an illusion to thinking of it as an objective reality and places in between. These are some of the ways that various worldviews deal with the issue of knowledge.

- Consciousness and rationality developed through a long process of evolution.
- There is no “reason” that human beings are able to have knowledge. That is just the nature of our existence.
- Knowledge is an illusion.
- Humans are made in the image of God who, himself, has knowledge.

6. How do we know what is right and wrong?

As we look around the world at the differences in various cultures, one of the things that jumps out quickly is that there are certain moral principles that are almost universal. Questions related to honesty and integrity, sexual issues, how we should treat other people and so on are integral parts of virtually every society. Even when individuals or societies don't seem to follow the principles, they will still tell you that they exist. The search to identify what is right and wrong and to give reasons for why morality should be dealt with certain ways is an integral part of every worldview. Here are some of the ways that various worldviews deal with this issue.

- Right and wrong are strictly products of human choice.
- Right and wrong are determined by what feels good.
- A sense of right and wrong was an evolutionary development as a survival mechanism for the species.
- Right and wrong are learned by experience as we learn what pleases the gods.
- We are made in the image of God whose character is good and who has revealed what is right.

7. What is the meaning of human history?

Some may wonder why the issue of time is included in the questions about worldview. Actually, the focus is more on the issue of meaning than it is on time. It is just that the meaning is set in the context of time. The search for meaning may be the most profound issue that human beings deal with in life. It is so profound that some people even choose to end their lives because they cannot manage to find a reason to continue on. Different worldviews have different ways of addressing this question. Some of the various worldviews deal with this by asserting:

- There is no innate meaning to human history. Meaning is what humans make it to be.
- Time is an illusion.
- Meaning involves realizing the purpose of the gods.
- Meaning results from discovering and fulfilling the purpose of God.

A Christian Worldview

The foundation of the Christian worldview is the conviction that *in Christ* are “hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). In other words, Jesus has the best information about everything. To live out a Christian worldview is to “think Christianly” about all of life. Here’s how I have tried to flesh out this conviction: Christianity actually rises to the level of being true or false (and there are good reasons to believe it’s actually true). And if Christianity is true, then it speaks to all of life; it makes a comprehensive claim on reality. “If Christianity should happen to be true – that is to say, if its God is the real God of the universe,” said G.K. Chesterton, “then defending it may mean talking about anything and everything. Things can be irrelevant to the proposition that Christianity is false, but nothing can be irrelevant to the proposition that Christianity is true.”

In light of that, I teach with the following core commitments. First, Christianity is a knowledge tradition, which means that truths about God, history, the spiritual life, and morality can *actually be known*, not merely believed (cf. Col. 1:9-10 and Luke 1:1-4). Second, I assume (and argue for) the existence of objective truth. That is, truth is *discovered*; not created by an individual or culture. These two commitments will give students the confidence to cut through the mindless sound bites and slogans so common in our culture today.

Teaching from a Christian worldview requires that we ask and answer four vital questions:

- 1.) What do Christians believe about this? (Understanding / Content)
- 2.) Why do Christians believe this? (Reasons / Evidence)
- 3.) Why does this matter to my life? (Integration / Ownership)
- 4.) As an everyday ambassador, how can I help others connect with this important truth? (Embodiment / Connection)

Applying these same four main Worldview questions of Life have profoundly different answers if one seeks truth where it can be found -in the Bible.

1. Who am I? An intended creation, lovingly, fearfully and wonderfully made. (Ps. 139)
2. Where do I come from? Created by God from the dust of the ground (Genesis 1)
3. What is my purpose? To glorify God and enjoy Him forever! (1 Cor. 10:31 / Ro. 11:36)
4. What happens when I die? Heaven—if I accept Christ as Savior. Hell—if I reject Christ as Savior (Romans 10:9)