

Apologetics and Public Theology

DESCRIPTION

This course explores the questions, doubts and thinking of contemporary culture, in order to enable you to reasonably defend the Christian faith in your evangelism.

OBJECTIVES

As a result of the student's successful participation in this discipline, s/he will:

- Cognitive* Be able to understand modern secular culture and its worldview;
Be able to understand and critique the arguments used against Christianity, in order to show the superiority of the Christian worldview.
- Behavioural* Be able to articulate clear answers to the major apologetic questions and doubts
Be able to engage with contemporary people and build bridges for the gospel through worldview evangelism.
- Affective* Have a deeper confidence in the truth of Christianity and less fear about answering hard questions in evangelism.

TEXT BOOKS

- Required Reading* Michael Ots *What Kind of God?* (2008)
- Recommended Reading* John Blanchard *Does God Believe in Atheists?* (2011)
Amy-Orr Ewing *But Is It Real?* (2008)
Amy-Orr Ewing *Why Trust the Bible?* (2005)
Timothy Keller *The Reason for God* (2008)
Peter Kreeft & Ronald Tacelli *The Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (1993)
John Lennox *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* (2007)
John Lennox *Gunning for God: Why the New Atheists Are Missing the Target* (2011)
Lee Strobel *The Case for Christ* (1998)
Lee Strobel *The Case for Faith* (1998)

REQUIREMENTS

SCHEDULE

Week 1	Introduction: Developing a Christian Worldview in a Post-Christian World
Week 2	Questions about Postmodernism and Secularism
Week 3	Questions about Belief in God's Existence
Week 4	Questions about Suffering and Evil
Week 5	Questions about God's Goodness: Hell, the Canaanites, the Crusades and Hypocrisy
Week 6	Questions about Science, Creation, and Evolution
Week 7	Questions about the Historical Jesus, Miracles, and the Resurrection
Week 8	Questions about the Bible and Truth
Week 9	Questions about Pluralism, Other Religions and Religious Conflicts
Week 10	Questions about Morality and Sexual Restrictiveness
Week 11	Workshop: Practically Using Apologetics in Evangelism and Preaching

POLICIES

This module description was prepared with best intentions to present a clear set of expectations and to allow you to budget your study, preparation and ministry time appropriately. However, the lecturer reserves the right to make changes to the content and schedule as and when necessary, in which case you will be notified through the normal channels.

Lecture 1:

DEVELOPING A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW IN A POST-CHRISTIAN WORLD

(1) INTRODUCTION TO APOLOGETICS

- (1.1) The Definition of Apologetics:
- (1.2) The Function Of Apologetics in Evangelism:
- (1.3) Different Methods of Apologetics:

(2) WHAT IS A WORLDVIEW?

- (2.1) The Definition of a Worldview
- (2.2) The Conflicting Basic Beliefs of Different Worldviews

(3) UNDERSTANDING THE SECULAR WORLDVIEW

- (3.1) What is Postmodernism?
- (3.2) Relating to Postmodern People Through Stories
- (3.3) Reaching Postmodern People Through a Better Story

(4) DEVELOPING THE CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

- (4.1) What is the Christian Worldview?
- (4.2) The Necessity of 'Worldview Evangelism' Today

APPENDIX: CHART TO EXPLORE ALTERNATIVE WORLDVIEWS

(1) INTRODUCTION TO APOLOGETICS

(1.1) The Definition of Apologetics:

Our concept of apologetics comes from the Greek word used in 1 Peter 3:14-15: '**Apologia**' – which literally means to speak in defence, or to vindicate a position (not to say sorry for believing something that others do not like).

It is a Biblical word, used 17 times but most importantly in this verse: *"But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect"*. The use of this word comes in a context describing Christians living on the outskirts of a non-Christian culture which is opposed to their beliefs. But the non-Christians in that society are asking questions, since the Christians live such radically different lives (in terms of moral practice, community justice and religious grace as citizens of the kingdom of the heaven) – they are asking for a **reason why** Christians are so different.

From this I would like to draw a warning to hang over this course: Peter presumes that people are *asking questions* because of how we live. We must be very careful that we are not simply learning intellectually how to answer questions which no one is asking us, because our lives do not witness to the reality that God has broken into our world in the gospel of Jesus Christ and transformed our lives.

(1.2) The Function Of Apologetics in Evangelism:

Evangelism is us answering the "What Question" – what the story of the gospel is. Apologetics follows it by answering the "Why Question" – why should someone believe the story of the gospel. You cannot answer the Why by simply going back to the What (i.e. "The Bible says you're a sinner and if you want to go to heaven you must believe and repent...let me prove to you why you must repent by showing you that you are a sinner: Que the Good Person Test..."). Instead you need to be able to give people a reason to believe that what the Bible says is TRUE!

Thus, Apologetics is not an end in itself – we're not out to simply "win" arguments with unbelievers and prove ourselves to be "right"! The end is proclaiming the gospel to someone in a convincing way to help them believe in Jesus Christ. Apologetics is the way of removing obstacles to belief, by giving the person the answers to their doubts. However, ultimately apologetics does not save, only Jesus does. We must always be seeking to bring people to Jesus and the foot of the Cross – **apologetics is a tool, evangelism is the task.**

(Illustration: Goal of gardening is a beautiful flower display...not simply the spade!)

Kenneth Boa¹ helpfully summarises the four complimentary functions of the tool of apologetics:

1. "The first function may be called vindication or proof, and involves marshaling philosophical arguments as well as scientific and historical evidences for the Christian faith.
2. The second function is defense. This function is closest to the NT and early Christian use of the word *apologia*, defending Christianity against the plethora of attacks made against it
3. The third function is refutation of opposing beliefs. This function focuses on answering the arguments non-Christians give in support of their own beliefs.
4. The fourth function is persuasion. By this we do not mean merely convincing people that Christianity is true, but persuading them to apply its truth to their life."

¹ Kenneth Boa in *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* at page xxv.

(1.3) Different Methods of Apologetics:

Traditionally there are three methodological approaches to apologetics.

We will pursue a course that combines elements of all these methods, believing that they provide us with tools which we can use as part of our holistic evangelistic efforts and can be blessed by the work of the Holy Spirit at work in the unbeliever's heart and mind.

(1) Classical: This traditional method works from reason and arguments about evil, the world, human experience, creation, etc. to demonstrate the logical nature of belief in God.

(2) Evidential: This works by giving the positive evidence to build up a compelling case for believing in Christianity (e.g. the historicity of the resurrection, the reliability of the Bible, etc.). It is hopeful that the unbelieving person is not prejudiced, but can start from a shared neutral ground of objectivity and has the ability to recognise the truth when presented with enough facts pointing towards it (also as the Holy Spirit is at work).

(3) Presuppositional: This starts off presupposing that there is no such thing as a neutral ground for reasoning or belief apart from belief in God and the Bible. It is not opposed to using evidence, but disagrees with using evidence to appeal to the unbeliever's neutral reasoning capacity to understand the case for belief in God. Instead, it agrees with Romans 1:18-24 in stating that unbelievers suppress the truth in unrighteousness and ignore the true implications of the facts. Essentially this method emphasises the noetic effects of sin on the human mind. So, it seeks to bring to light and confront the unbeliever with the problems in their own thinking - showing that it is self-contradictory and inconsistent; while also pointing the unbeliever to their innate knowledge of God from creation and conscience (cf. Romans 1-2 and Psalm 19). Thus it starts by assuming the validity of the Biblical worldview and truth of Scripture as true means to understand the world, and then points to pieces of evidence which supports this assumption. This might seem like a circular argument, but there are no neutral or presuppositionally-free basic beliefs for the believer or unbeliever - this cannot be helped and that the same criticism can be made of the rationalist who believes they can reason neutrally: they begin by rejecting the truth of God and reaches the same conclusion consistent with that way of reasoning. **The key question is which way of reasoning about basic beliefs is true and is superior to all others.** As Van Til has said:

"The Christian apologist must place himself upon the position of his opponent, assuming the correctness of his method merely for argument's sake, in order to show him that on such a position the "facts" are not facts and the "laws" are not laws. He must also ask the non-Christian to place himself upon the Christian position for argument's sake in order that he may be shown that only upon such a basis do "facts" and "laws" appear intelligible" (Van Til, Defense, 100-101).

Tim Keller² has a fresh take on modern apologetic methods used in today's secular world:

(1) Constructive Apologetics: This seeks to prove that people should believe because of the weight of evidence supporting Christianity (hard-constructive approach); or simply to show that Christianity makes more sense out of the world and our common experience than any other alternative story (soft-constructive approach).

(2) Deconstructive Apologetics: This seeks to break down the objections that people have to Christianity and invite them into the Christian community to learn more through relationships about the living reality of the gospel.

(3) Narrative Apologetics: This seeks to show people that the gospel has the power to change lives by telling the gospel in a way that shows it meets their greatest hopes and deals with their greatest fears.

² Timothy Keller: "How The Gospel Changes Our Apologetics"

(2) WHAT IS A WORLDVIEW?

Illustration: *if you go to the cinema today you'll probably have to choose between seeing a normal film or paying a bit extra for a 3D film and a pair of black plastic glasses. If you go into the 3D film and do not put your glasses on then you'll see many things and probably be able to work out what's going on, but you'll be only seeing it blurred and not as the film-maker intended it. However, when you put on your 3D glasses you'll find that you see in incredible detail the action of the film and be able to appreciate it as the film-maker intended you to. You can try wearing other types of glasses, but only the 3d glasses will let you truly see the film as the author intended it.*

(2.1) The Definition of a Worldview:

What glasses are you wearing to see the world? We all wear a set of "Worldview Glasses" to make sense of the world.

A definition of a worldview is: *"The grid through which we see the world"* (Francis Schaeffer); *"the sum total of our beliefs about the world, the big picture that directs our daily decisions and actions"* (Nancy Pearcey). Michael Horton helpfully describes worldviews as:

*"Some things make sense, and others don't, because of the tradition that has shaped us. We don't just have a belief here and a belief there; our convictions are part of a web. **Every worldview arises from a narrative—a story about who we are, how we got here, the meaning of history and our own lives, expectations for the future.** From this narrative arise certain convictions (doctrines and ethical beliefs) that make that story significant for us. No longer merely assenting to external facts, **we begin to indwell that story; it becomes ours as we respond to it and then live out its implications.**"*

It forms the window through which we see the answers to life's fundamental questions:

- Where does the world come from?
- What is the purpose of life?
- What is true and false?
- What is right and wrong?
- What happens after death?

Our worldview is significant because how we think determines how we act and behave in this life. For example, if you think that you get to decide what is right and wrong, because life is an accidental consequence of a meaningless and purposeless cosmic explosion;; and no consequences after death....then that's how we end up with the worldview of the Nazis who felt able to perpetrate the Holocaust, because they did not believe they would ever have to give an answer for their actions and believed they could decide what was right and wrong based on their understanding of the 'survival of the fittest'.

(2.2) The Conflicting Basic Beliefs of Different Worldviews:

All of us have a worldview because we all look at the world with presuppositions (or assumptions) about what it is truly like. **These presuppositions are basic beliefs (or faith)!**

As Christians we begin with God to understand the existence and meaning of everything. However, the prevailing western worldview today is Secularism and it begins with the presupposition of the non-existence of God. This is why Christians and Secularists will always clash – they are beginning from completely opposite places in how they understand the world (*Almost like how someone who had only ever lived in and experienced the Artic Circle would think the world was just a frozen and cold tundra; while someone who had only ever lived in and experienced the Bahamas would think the world was a tropical paradise*).

This table shows these different presuppositions or basic beliefs in the five key areas of life:-

	<u>Secularism</u>	<u>Christianity</u>
<i>View of God</i>	Atheism	Theism
<i>View of Man</i>	Evolved	Special Creation
<i>View of Truth</i>	Culturally Relative	Absolute Truth
<i>View of Knowledge</i>	Scientific Materialism and Naturalism	Science (General) and the Bible (Special Revelation)
<i>View of Ethics</i>	Cultural Relative	Absolute Morality

Knowing this should change how both Believers and Unbelievers discuss their differences. Both sides need to be open about the fact that they both have basic beliefs or faith to explain the world. **It is wrong for the Unbeliever to act superior in their understanding against those who have religious faith, since they themselves have their own faith system of irreligious beliefs.** Because everyone starts with some kind of (religious or irreligious) faith, the key thing is which is true, which has the best reasons supporting it? So, as Christians we must look for the reasons behind our faith; but the secularist must look at the type of faith that is implicit in their reasoning too and be able to defend their basic beliefs (which are not superior simply because they are not religious). As Tim Keller states: *“All doubts, however sceptical and cynical they may seem, are really a set of alternative beliefs [...] every doubt, therefore, is based on a leap of faith”*.

(3) UNDERSTANDING THE SECULAR WORLDVIEW

(3.1) What is Postmodernism?:

As we turn to consider the Secular worldview, we must look at its dominant philosophy: Postmodernism. It is a distinct 21st century approach to the study of Epistemology (the study of how we can know anything truly) – **it is the first time in human history people have said that we cannot know anything to be true!**

One of the central tenants of Postmodernism is summed up by writer Jean-Francois Lyotard as: “an incredulity for metanarratives” – that is a rejection of the existence of a grand story that makes true sense of all things in life for all people. Postmodernism says that things just happen and just are, but there is no greater story or purpose that can be extracted from them - it argues that all attempts to find one are simply man-made opinions, with people are entitled to hold as true for themselves, but cannot say are true for anyone else. **This is summed up in the phrase: “That’s true for you, but not for me”.** If you try to impose your truth on others it is seen as taking control or exercising power over them, depriving them of their freedom. This was a backlash against and rejection of the Modernist (18th/19th century) story of Progress, which believed that Man was constantly improving himself and going to create utopia – a dream dashed to pieces by two world wars and the Cold War (it is no accident that many of these writers were Europeans who experienced these horrors).

(3.2) Relating to Postmodern People Through Stories:

While sceptical about meta-narratives/grand-stories, the postmodern person is someone who is very interested in stories of people and will be glad to hear your story, so long as you don’t claim that your story is also true for everyone else. They will be tolerant to hear of the meaning, hope and peace you’ve found in Christ, but not if you claim that everyone else must also believe in Christ to be saved.

This interest in stories is because we all instinctively know we are part of a greater story, rather than our lives being a succession of ultimately meaningless choices. Our choices in how we spend our time, what jobs we do, how we do our jobs, what friends we choose to make, and how we cope with suffering, are all determined by the story (or worldview) we are living in and living out! **We sense there is meaning to life and a grander purpose for history. We live in a world filled with easily disposable things, but we don’t want our lives to be easily disposed of and forgotten – we want them to count!** We need a story to give some kind of meaning and coherence to our lives...but Postmoderns have had to make up their own stories because they have rejected the Storywriter for all history. This is convenient as they do not have to worry about what God intended for His story of their lives, but instead can do their own thing.

(3.3) Reaching Postmodern People Through a Better Story:

The things that people spend their time, talents, money, and resources on are the cultural objects of worship in our day – they show us what story people are living and seeking to save themselves with. The things that worry people and keep them awake at night are also indicators of what people are worshipping today, and looking to for their salvation. Biblically all people have a sense of God and sin, that is why all people are worshippers and all people are seeking a saviour (either in themselves or in something else). They have a sense of **“eternity put into man’s heart” (Ecclesiastes 3:11)**. Our job in evangelism and apologetics is to see these things and use them as the way into discussing the problems of their worldview and the superiority of the Christian worldview with its story of salvation in the gospel story of Jesus Christ!

Some of the common stories in our culture today, and their failure to truly satisfy or save:

- **The Success story:** if you work hard then no matter who you are or where you come from, you can have success in life by working and earning your way to the top. You are the author of your own destiny.

- The economic collapse has shown that it is futile to build your life on the dream of material success, because treasures on earth are vulnerable to being lost and destroyed. Instead we should seek the treasures of heaven which do not fade away. (cf. **Matthew 6:19-21; Ecclesiastes 2:18-26**)
- **The Celebrity story:** if you are loved and admired by the masses who follow your every move, listen to your opinions, and want to be like you, then your life will be significant and worth living.
 - The emptiness of celebrity is described by Russell Brand as your dream of salvation but that it turns out to be “ashes in your mouth”. The many celebrities who have committed suicide or died from alcohol or drug misuse demonstrates that they have not found the happiness they were in search of. The fact is that the great people of previous generations have been long forgotten by the masses and the same will be true of our generation too (cf. **Ecclesiastes 1:1-3, 10-11**).
- **The Hedonistic story:** if you can just find happiness and pleasure in life, through recreation, holidays, friends, activities and sex (Very powerful motive in our culture!) then you will be fulfilled and experience heaven in this life. If we just have a good time and make the most of our time in life then that's what matters, even if my computer games and soap operas make no other contribution to society.
 - The passing nature of all pleasures, entertainment and enjoyments in life, combined with the many trials and difficulties of life show that this does not satisfy (cf. **Ecclesiastes 2:1-11**)
- **The Consumerist story:** if we just had more things, the latest gadgets, the best clothes, then that will complete our identity
 - The fact that when we long for something, when we acquire it we quickly lose interest in it and long for something else, shows that things cannot satisfy us. We will always want more and what we have will never be enough. We also cannot take our things with us so they can give us no ultimate meaning for anything beyond this life (cf. **Ecclesiastes 2:4-8; 3:19-22**)
- **The Beauty story:** if I just looked prettier and more beautiful, then more people would love me (and give me my self-worth)
 - However, the fact is that all of us are in the process of slowly ageing and dying. We cannot hold the march of age towards death, although we can try to deny it to ourselves and hide it from others. Whatever beauty we have now it will fade away, whatever strength or fitness it does not last long after you stop putting in the disciplined effort to keep it. (cf. **Ecclesiastes 9:1-6; 12:1-8**)
- **The Environmental and Justice story:** if I just make the world a better place and save the planet then I'm making myself a better person and making a significant difference that will continue to count since my own life does not. If I'm a good person who gives to charity then I'm atoning for my own selfishness and misdeeds by helping those in need.
 - However, there is basis for justice without belief in a God of justice. While we can try to make the world a better place, it is a task greater than any of us, and human selfishness is such that not everyone will co-operate and injustice is the natural impulse of the human heart. And no matter what good we do to atone for our sense of guilt, for some reason our conscience continues to plague us and we feel insecure and fear the idea of judgement by God (cf. **Ecclesiastes 4:1-3**).
- **The Power story:** If I'm important and powerful then I can control people and find my identity in being better than others, and my life will count because I'll be remembered as someone great.

- However, the reality is that none of these things give true pleasure and they only demonstrate a deep insecurity and unhappiness with the self. They will be forgotten and will not be satisfied (cf. Ecclesiastes 6).

As the Preacher told us in Ecclesiastes, to seek to find a story that makes sense of our own lives in anything but a relationship with God is **“vanity of vanities... like chasing after the wind”**. But the Christian worldview and story of Jesus Christ provides the answer people are desperately searching for!

(4) DEVELOPING THE CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

(4.1) What is the Christian Worldview?:

The Christian worldview is the biblical story of God's redemptive actions in and purposes for human history – that makes it a **true story** that has already really happened and will really be completed!

There is a Biblical basis for developing a Christian worldview: **“Do not be conformed to the likeness of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:2).** Paul calls us not to be conformed to the world's way of thinking, but to be transformed by the renewal of our minds, so that we can understand God's will for our lives and understand the world from a Christian perspective (or worldview) – the way God intends it to be understood!

As John Stott explains such a worldview “teaches major truths about God, human beings and society which give direction to our Christian thinking”³. The Christian Worldview is really learning to think about the world according to the only true story that makes sense of it: the story of the Bible. That story alone makes true and satisfying sense of our world and our lives and our destinies, and is something we can consistently live by!

It consists of four easy to remember parts:-

- (a) Creation (A Good World):** God is the creator of all things and He made them good. Both material and spiritual realities matter to Him, as He made us to first love and relate to Him and thereafter to each other and the world. He gave mankind a mandate to work in the world to cultivate it, develop cultures and families, and harness its resources to develop civilizations. Mankind would be accountable to God as His delegated rulers over the earth. So creation means that all of life comes under God's jurisdiction – not just private morality and religion – *“there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'”* (Abraham Kuyper).
- (b) Fall (A Broken World):** Mankind is responsible for the entrance of evil into the world through freely choosing to rebel against God's authority and to seek to rule themselves and the world without reference to God (indeed in direct disobedience to Him). God gave us freedom so we could genuinely choose to love and obey Him, but we instead loved ourselves and sought to be greater than God. Consequently, all things are touched by and under the subjugation of sin, which produces decay, destruction and death. **We are alienated** (i) **from a right relationship with God** (we worship other things and love other people rather than God), (ii) **with self** (we seek to find meaning in things and idols rather than in God's love), (iii) **with others in society**, (iv) and **with the creation** itself (which is subject to a curse as a reminder of the judgement upon us for our sin).
- (c) Redemption (A Rescued World):** Christ has come to rescue mankind and all creation from the effects of the Fall and from the judgement of eternal death and separation from Him in Hell which we all face when we give account for what we have done in this life. His substitutionary death on the Cross in our place has satisfied God's just penalty for our sins; He absorbed God's wrath to remove it from us; and He give us the gift of forgiveness of sins and restoration into a living relationship with God forever. This redemption also begins to work in our lives now to transform (i) **our self-identity** (which is found in Christ's love for us rather than in anything we can do or construct ourselves); (ii) our relationships **with others** (so we can love them like Jesus has loved us, and serve them in our work in His name); (iii) and **with the world** itself (which we see as God's property to treat with respect as good stewards, because we love and respect Him as owner).

³ John Stott: *Issues Facing Christians Today* at p.64.

(d) Renewal (A Healed World): Christ will come again to renew the whole of this creation, to purify it from the presence sin, to remove from it the powerful bondage under the curse of sin. Just as He rose again from the dead with a new eternal and incorruptible body, so all believers and all creation will experience a similar resurrection to new everlasting life. Heaven, the city of New Jerusalem, will descend so that God's eternal kingdom will unite heaven and earth (both the material and spiritual realms) and God will dwell in the midst of His redeemed people. **This is our great hope and confident expectation as Christians, because of the glorious life, work, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in history!**

The Christian worldview explains our deepest needs; it answers our greatest hopes; and it fulfils our strongest dreams and desires. It better accounts for all our life experiences and this world's circumstances than any other story. And it is true because it comes out of God's real interventions in human history.

(4.2) The Necessity of 'Worldview Evangelism' Today:

Our culture today is not only dominated by a secular worldview, but it is also Biblically illiterate (compared with only a generation or two ago). Thus it has little way to understand the gospel without first us establishing the foundations for rightly understanding the Christian worldview in which the gospel comes. **It's true to tell someone: "Jesus died for your sins?" but that really means nothing to a person unless you first: establish for them who they are, how they have fallen into sin, how Jesus has provided a solution to our problem of sin and who He is, and what that means for their future!** They need given the background of a Christian worldview in order to understand the gospel. (This however is not to minimise the vital and irreplaceable work of the Holy Spirit in convicting, regenerating and enabling a sinner to repent and believe the gospel! It just happens that God often chooses to work through us to help a person reach that stage where the Spirit can convict their hearts and minds.)

This is very Biblical in itself. To understand this, it's very helpful to compare Paul's methods in **Acts 17** in Thessalonica and Athens.

- In the Jewish Synagogue in Thessalonica (where the people had a Biblical worldview and good Biblical literacy) it simply says: "He reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying: 'This Jesus, who I proclaim to you, is the Christ'." (v.2b-3).
- In the pagan Areopagus (a place of philosophical and religious thinking) of Athens it was a much more complicated affair. He had to go all the way back to creation and from there establish a Biblical worldview for the people to eventually be told that Jesus died for sins, rose again from the dead and is coming again to judge the world, but has provided a way for people to be saved if they will repent and believe.

Paul's method of worldview evangelism to these people in Athens is more appropriate to reaching similar people in our modern day post-Christian culture which has for the most part moved beyond a Christian worldview and Bible literacy or vocabulary. We will do a study of this passage and its practical implications for our worldview evangelism at the end of this course.

START HERE



Lecture 2:

QUESTIONS ABOUT POSTMODERNISM AND SECULARISM

(1) INTRODUCTION

(2) TRACING THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE SECULAR WORLDVIEW

(2.1) Pre-Modernity (16th-17th Centuries)

(2.2) Modernity (18th-19th Centuries)

- (a) The Enlightenment
- (b) The Romantic Movement

(2.3) Post-Modernity (20th-21st Centuries)

- (a) Postmodernism
- (b) Nihilism and Existentialism

(2.4) New Atheism (21st Century)

QUESTIONS ABOUT POSTMODERNISM AND SECULARISM

(1) INTRODUCTION

The history of the last 400 years helps explain why our culture thinks the way it does today and what it believes in Secular worldview. This is sometimes called the *Zeitgeist* – the spirit of our age - the way people think about the world and our culture. Our culture's values, hopes, dreams, fears, literature, music, films some way flow out of the secular worldview. We have been influenced with its ideas as Christians and we must know how to help other people to question the things that they have simply accepted to be true without question.

Also we must be aware that the way Christians went about doing apologetics a few decades ago was in response to the spirit of the Modern Age with its specific frame of reference and questions. However, today the spirit of Post-modernity has rebelled against Modernism to produce its own questions and distinct beliefs. So if we simply deploy the arguments and answers of the past to people today, we should not be surprised that they are not interested – they are not asking the same questions!

Our grandparents' generation asked: "Is it true?"

Our parents' generation asked: "Does it work?"

Our young peoples' generation is asking: "How does it make me feel?"

These three generations co-exist today so we need to know who we're talking to and what is going on in their minds if we are to engage with them relevantly. People need to be helped to see that truth matters to them and that Christianity is the truth, however, it will take some time to get them to that place!

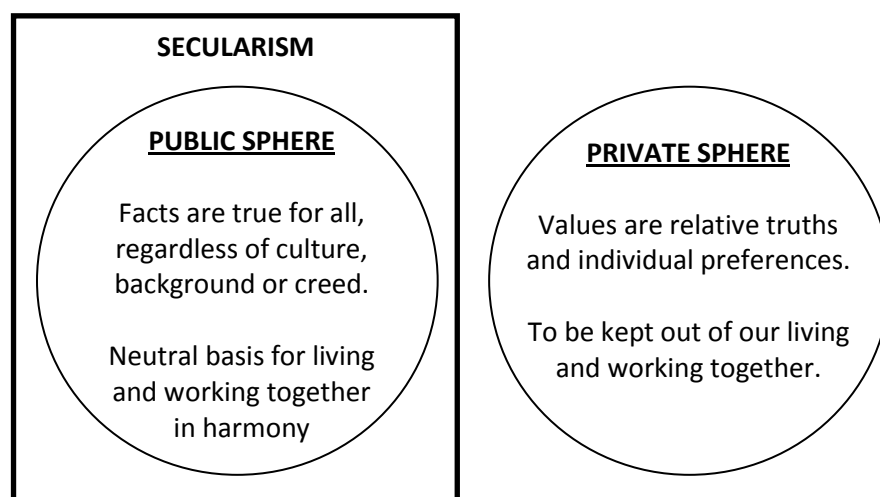
If we are to appropriately interact and connect with our world today, then we must understand all that has contributed to making it the way it is.

(2) TRACING THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE SECULAR WORLDVIEW

We live today in a Post-Christian world which has accepted the ideas of Secularism. It is “post-” because the church is no longer a significant influence on our cities and individual communities. People today are Biblically illiterate, uninfluenced by Christian moral standards, and ignorant of the truths that their parents and grandparents would have known by the cultural place of the church and Sunday School in the past. The Christian Worldview is foreign and alien to those who have been raised outside of the Church and unquestioningly assuming the validity of the Secular Worldview.

Secularism is the outgrowth of living in a society that has changed with mass immigration, the growth of pluralism and multiculturalism (with different cultures coming with their own values, traditions and religions), and the development of technology allowing greater travel and exposure to other cultural ideas. How can we all live together if we are all so different? One solution has been Secularism.

Secularism is built on dividing our shared space in *society* into the **Public/Private Spheres** (see the works of John Rawls) and when dealing with *ideas* creating a **Fact/Value Dichotomy** (see the works of Nancy Pearcey and Chuck Colson). Facts are “publicly verifiable truths” (i.e. can be tested and observed to be true by everyone e.g. the rules of mathematics, the laws of physics, etc.); while Values are dismissed as simply culturally conditioned thinking or private preferences (i.e. religion, morality, social etiquette). Secularism essentially says that you can believe in whatever values you want personally/privately, but you cannot bring those values into the public realm of making decisions that affect everyone in society. It also says you should not impose your private value beliefs on others or make truth claims that challenge others’ equally valid beliefs. **Essentially secularism has privatised and marginalised religious thought to make it irrelevant to how we do public life in society together!** *For example, regarding Homosexual Marriage, secularists say that we cannot impose our traditional conservative Judeo-Christian morality on those who wish to be married but have a different understanding of it. Unless it can be shown as a fact that homosexual marriages do not work or are positively damaging to society, then the private religiously-based values of others should not be able to stop society recognising homosexual marriage.*



The huge problem is that secularism is not itself neutral - it suggests that it's possible to be publicly neutral in terms of values and build a neutral. **However, Secularism is subtle in creating a society with values based on its own humanistic/atheistic worldview while at the same time saying that values from a religious worldview should be kept out of the public square.** It is not fair to say that just because someone's values are based in religion that they are any less valid than another person's values which they have formed themselves by their rejection of religion. **Religious voices should not be heard any louder or their values given more weight than any other opinion in a liberal secular democracy,**

but that does not mean they should be excluded from consideration altogether! What matters is which values are true, because what is true will correspond best with reality to produce the best public society!

There is a long history spanning the last 400 years behind this privatisation of Christian beliefs and truth, and the rise of secularism in the public realm. We will try to trace the history through four periods which have all contributed to making up our culture's secular worldview today and its understanding of Truth.

- Pre-Modernity (Renaissance and Dawning of Rationalism era)
- Modernity (Enlightenment and Romantic era)
- Post-modernity (Secularism and the 20th century)
- New Atheism today (Post-9/11)

(2.1) Pre-Modernity:- (16th-17th Centuries)

(Truth is found in God's revelation – Truth is for all of life)

Generally prior to the 16th and 17th centuries people submitted to the authority of the Church, which had become synonymous with the ruling state. The Church was the authoritative voice of truth for people to understand the world and to base their own lives. There was a general belief in certainty: God had spoken truly in the Bible and we could know what He said truly. Whatever humans could know was a sub-set of all that God knew and had revealed to us – our reasoning and understanding was made possible by God. God also made it possible for us to experience and study the world through science and our senses. **The key was that God was the reference point for truth that made knowledge, discovery and reasoning possible!**

However, following the Reformation's challenge against the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and their interpretation of Scriptural truth came a greater sense of **individuality** (freedom to interpret Scripture for yourself and the world) and **freedom from religious authority** (e.g. in the sciences and humanities which no longer had to prove their value to the church for legitimacy). During the Renaissance (the 'rebirth') there was a revival in interest in ancient Greek philosophy and literature (a movement called Humanism, which is fitting as it was an era in which there was a renewed confidence in man and humanity's ability to better itself). Alongside this, there arose a general feeling of Scepticism as the old-belief systems were challenged and people grew in their confidence of science's ability to answer questions and provide knowledge of reality apart from God's revelation.

Rene Descartes (1596-1650), was an intellectual who desired to stop religion and science parting company. He desired to find a common unquestionable, neutral ground for both believers and sceptics to start from in order to rationally discover the truth about the world. To find this, he literally tried to doubt EVERYTHING to see what would remain as an unquestionable common starting point...scarcely he found that he could doubt the existence or truth of every single one of his formerly held beliefs. In 1620 he discovered that the only thing he could not doubt was that his mind existed in order to be doing the doubting. He himself must exist as thinking and doubting human-being: "*Cogito ergo sum*" (I think therefore I am). From this starting point he produced a rational system that logically proved the existence of God and everything else in reality.

However, this was a dramatic shift. Descartes equated clear human reasoning about something with making it true. *However it is possible to have reasoned and clear thoughts about many things (e.g. the Loch Ness Monster) but that is no guarantee that it truly exists in reality.* **He made human reason the ultimate reference point for our understanding of ourselves and reality, rather than God.** Instead, the existence and reality of God became a product of our human reasoning.

Rational human beings ("I"!), not God, were the reference point for truth and understanding of the world. So began Modernity, the Age of Rationalism.

(2.2) Modernity:- (18th-19th Centuries)

(a) The Enlightenment: (*Truth is found in man's mind and must be testable*)

The Enlightenment is simply "The Age of Reason" in the 18th century. It had great confidence in humanity:-

- Man's rational ability to make sense of the world through empirical science without the need of God or the old belief-systems.
 - 'Empiricism' is the idea that objective truth (truth that is true for everyone, everywhere) can only be discovered through human reason, observation with human senses, and the scientific method. Everything else claimed as truth is only subjective individual opinion because you cannot prove it empirically (e.g. beauty, values, purpose, meaning, spirituality, etc.).
- Man's inherent goodness and consequent autonomy to better himself and progressively create a utopian society. Man's problem was a lack of education, rather than sin.
 - The old Christian worldview (or story) was rejected, to instead create a new hopeful story of human progress and betterment. They wanted to keep the form of the Story (by talking about the hope of progress) that gave people meaning in life with a truth to live according to, but they rejected having a Storytelling God: they thought they could make a better world but did not need God to do that.

Religious belief also changed as many moved from Theistic belief in a personal God, to a Deistic belief in an impersonal, disinterested and distant God (*who created the clockwork and wound up the mechanism of the closed-universe, but then left it to run on its own devices and internal mechanisms*), and then finally to a Materialistic/Naturalistic belief in no God, since evolution and other natural mechanisms were believed to explain the existence of life without needing supernatural belief in God.

Some Modernist figures and ideas to be familiar with:

(1) *Immanuel Kant* (1724-1804) – ironically whose name means "God is with us" – did more than most to say that knowledge and truth about God is unknowable to us. He claimed to be a Christian and was trying to save Christian faith from the unrelenting attack of the Empiricists and Scientists. But by pushing faith out of the real world of reason, he was to create the idea that science is about facts and religion is about speculation and blind-faith. He said that there were two realms with an impenetrable wall between them:

- The phenomenal world: the material world we have empirical knowledge of through experience.
- The noumenal world: the metaphysical world of God and values that cannot be tested.

We cannot use our empirical senses or methods to find out anything about God behind this wall, nor can we rationally prove His existence. Rather for pragmatic reasons of being able to make moral decisions we need to assume the existence of God in that world in order to live morally in this material world.

(2) *Denis Diderot* (1713-1784) - The first Encyclopaedia was put together by Diderot. He arranged all the entries of human knowledge into alphabetical order as a statement that all things exist independently of each other and there is no meaningful connection, because belief in God was not recognised as the organising mind behind creation. Everything in the material and natural world just was, and science could not give any better reason than it just "is".

(3) *Charles Darwin* (1809-1882) – Darwin presented a naturalistic explanation for the universe and life, so that there was no need for God. There was no supernatural to be known or reasoned about. Instead everything could be traced to natural causes and the mechanism of evolution.

(4) *David Hume* (1711-1776) - Hume was the founder of the Scepticism movement. He built on what Descartes had said and showed its great weakness. If truth begins with “I think therefore I am”, then all knowledge ends up being subjective opinion (rather than objectively true for all people), because people think differently “I think I am differently from what you think I am”. Therefore, Hume argued there is no way to know what is really true! However, you may notice that Hume is being inconsistent by making a claim to really know the truth – “we cannot really know anything is true” – that we all should agree with... Scepticism refutes itself in the claims it makes.

(b) The Romantic Movement: (*Truth is found in man's feelings and experiences*)

Towards the end of the 18th Century, the prevailing ideas of the Enlightenment with its emphasis on human reason and empirical facts, came under challenge for being too mechanical and cerebral – what about beauty, creativity, morality and aesthetics? Instead a new movement emphasised that humans discovering truth through their feelings, emotions and experiences. Their love of imagination and mystery was great for the arts and literature and culture, but they also applied it to theology.

(1) *Friedrich Schleiermacher* (1768-1834) was the founder of liberal theology in the church and it arose out of his desire to unite theology and romanticism – to make man's experience the centre for interpreting the Bible, according to how it made him feel and helped him discover more about himself. Rather than theology being the study about what God has revealed about Himself, it became a study of how man was sought to realise himself by believing in God. He believed that mankind had an instinctive longing for and dependence on something greater than himself, an infinite being, God. Religion and theology is all about this man-centred longing for an experiential relationship with the infinite mystery of God – thus why he disliked formal religion in the church. Indeed, this opens the door to allow for all religious experiences and faiths to be good and true, since they are all genuine expressions and experiences coming out of man's longing for the infinite.

(2) *Ludwig Feuerbach* (1804-1872) further developed this way of thinking about theology as emanating from man to argue that “man creates God” – God and religion is just a projection of what man wants (Similar to Freud's understanding of religion as a psychological crutch). God does not have to actually exist in reality. Added to this he assumed Darwin's naturalist understanding to say that nature is the only true reality and man is no different to any other natural part of the world – thus the phrase “man is what he eats”. If nature is the ultimate reality then God cannot exist and is just a human idea.

(2.3) Post-Modernity:- (20th-21st Centuries)

(a) Postmodernism: (*Objective Truth cannot be proven to exist; all truths are subjective and culturally relative*)

Post-Modernism immediately rejects the basic idea of objective truth, and is a reaction against the confidence of the Modernist approach to rationalism and truth. Throughout the Modern period people still believed in some kind of man-centred objective truth: discovered through reasoning or feeling. However, rightly Post-Modernism is sceptical of man's ability to be objective and discover truth uninfluenced by his own worldview biases (from his social background, family upbringing, experiences, cultural heritage, and religious beliefs). It is good to question the Modernist's high view of man's reasoning ability and moral goodness – it was not Biblical!

However, postmodernism takes this too far by saying that we cannot know any objective truth because we are inherently subjective and conditioned by our worldview. It assumes that the only way to know anything as true is if we are omniscient (knowing all things and possibilities fully to make an unbiased and fully informed judgement) - this overlooks the fact that I can know some things TRULY, even without being omniscient or completely unbiased. *As John Lennox argues, it is possible to know truly with confidence the faithfulness of wife based on her character, past behaviour and other evidences, even if we cannot be absolutely certain that it is true without being omniscient knowing the future.*

There are three components of post-modern thought:-

- **Relativism:** we cannot say something is absolutely right or wrong, since all values are the subjective perspective of each person in their culture: **“that’s true for you but not for me”**. This is self-contradictory because the statement “there are no absolutes” is itself an absolute statement!
- **Pluralism:** we cannot know for sure what the truth is, let alone say there is an exclusive source of truth so must accept all beliefs as being equally valid. Illustrations of all religions being different paths leading up a mountain to the same summit; or each religion is a blind man feeling different parts of the same elephant not seeing the whole elephant and thinking they understand the truth about the elephant from their limited perspective).
- **Tolerance:** we must accept all views and ideas without criticism since we cannot know that we have any more truth than anyone else. However, it itself promotes the greatest intolerance because it refuses to accept those who hold a belief in absolute truth! Carson notes that true tolerance always meant accepting the *person* even though you were critical of their *ideas*.

So to the Postmodern person there is no single over-arching true story to make sense of the world and there is no ultimate meaning – all truth and meaning is socially constructed. Jean-Francois Lyotard explained Post-modernism as “incredulity for metanarratives” – attacking the idea that there is a true story that makes sense of all life in the world. They particularly ridiculed the Modernist story of Human Progress. Instead, they believed that all stories or worldviews are equally valid (relativism) and are validated by the community which lives according to them. Therefore it does not matter if they are objectively true – it is sufficient to respect and be tolerant of them because people consider them to be subjectively true. The only way to challenge another person or culture’s story is to seek to impose a metanarrative on them, which would be rejected as an attempt to control others and to brainwash them. It should be noted that the claim that there is no over-arching story is itself an over-arching idea!

Yet the early Postmodern writer Douglas Coupland wrote about “Generation X”, those who were looking for a story to make sense of their existence because they instinctively know that there must be some meaning to life. They live in a casually disposable world, but they do not want their lives to be like that – they look for some existential significance and meaning, they want something greater than the meaninglessness that postmodernism results in. They see materialism and consumerism as a way of making their lives valuable before death and activism as a way to live a worthwhile life that helps other people. *[David Wells has commented that it is not by reading postmodern thinkers that the culture has embraced the principles of Postmodernism; rather it is through its exposure to and acceptance of Materialism. There is no such thing as ‘truth’ in a materialistic mind-set, since it is an abstract idea and value. This leads to each person seeking to create their own meaning and make the most value out of their lives by what they can accumulate and accomplish for themselves.]* They are looking for significance and a grand story to live according to – however, for many people they have never considered Christianity to be the answer for what they are looking for.

Only the Christian worldview can give the coherence and significance and answers to life that postmodern people are instinctively searching for.

(b) Nihilism and Existentialism: (There is no truth; but we must make our own to remain sane)

Connected with Postmodernism are the beliefs of Nihilism and Existentialism. Postmodernism says we cannot know objective truth - all truth is relative for humans since we are conditioned by our subjectivity and cannot discover anything objectively. However, Nihilism takes this to its logical conclusion saying that there is no objective truth and no ultimate meaning to anything. In fact, it sees any idea of truth as being about trying to gain power over people by controlling them and so is sceptical of any traditional authorities that sought to impose truth on people.

Nietzsche, following the thoughts of Feuerbach, declared that Modernism had killed the mythological idea of God. Without God all ideas of purpose, meaning, morality, ethics were revealed as man-made ideas to try to avoid despair and anarchy. He argued that in their place mankind should seek to become ubermenschen (overmen) who refused to submit to any traditional authority or tradition. To do this, humanity should form its own value-system which eliminated weakness with inherent human strength – ideas that were influential on Nazism. **Without God there can be no good or evil and everything is permitted!** Just like the man in Nietzsche's work 'the madman' who ran around announcing: "God is dead and we have killed him", the Nihilism (or meaninglessness) created by this way of thinking is simply not something you can live for consistently without going mad, as even Nietzsche did himself.

There was an 'existential angst' and inner turmoil that arose from this feeling of meaninglessness (because we instinctively need meaning and purpose, since we live in a universe created by God who provided that meaning and purpose). Thus, Existentialism came along as a way for mankind to construct its own meaning and values by their actions. The atheistic existentialists like Heidegger emphasised the unique fact that human beings are aware of their existence so they have freedom to bring into being whatever potential they desire for themselves. "To be authentic he must create his own existence and essence and can do so freely without any fear of future judgement" (Blanchard p.130). Kierkegaard was a theistic existentialist who said we can only find meaning by making a 'leap of faith' across the divide between man and God (thus all faith was blind and irrational – although beneficial to satisfying our existential angst for meaning and significant in life).

Sartre, the media mogul and playwright popularised these views also took this line of thinking and discovered that it only resulted in bleakness for humans because there is nothing for man to depend on in or outside of himself: "It is only a short step from there to believing that the whole of life is irrational, meaningless and absurd" (Blanchard p.133). Shortly before death he seemed to retract his atheistic beliefs by saying: "I do not feel that I am the product of chance, a speck of dust in the universe, but someone who was expected, prepared, prefigured. In short, a being whom only a Creator could put here; and this idea of a creating hand refers to God" (p.134-135). There is hope for existentialists as their thinking cannot change the inner turmoil that says that they cannot live consistently with their belief system that rejects belief in the reality of God.

(2.4) New Atheism:- (21st Century)

Following the September 11st Terrorist Attacks in 2001 a new form of militant atheism was born. They reacted against what they saw as the danger fundamental religious belief to modern, secular society. They were not content with simply tolerating and marginalising private religious belief; rather they sought to expose it as delusion and destroy belief in the supernatural. The New Atheists are not like postmodernists, they believe in objective truth that is accessible to us. It is not to be found in God, but rather in science – science takes the place of God in their worldview. They believe that given enough time science will be able to answer all questions, and that already a scientific naturalistic worldview accounts for all human existence and meaning. Amazingly they are people of great faith in their unscientific beliefs and their scientism is itself an atheistic religion.

They are strong proponents of naturalism and evolution – refusing to admit that evolution is a theory, rather stating that it is an unquestionable fact proven by science. They see the universe as a closed system which has developed life and complexity by chance and natural selection. However, they admit it is not possible to live consistently with evolution's principle "survival of the fittest" and the meaninglessness of matter – since that would be a bleak existence in a cruel society. Rather they say that humans have beaten slavery to evolution by the evolution of the highly-complex human brain, which allows us to communicate, think and reason to build society together and form our own destiny, apart from the blind evolutionary desires of our genes.

Much of their confidence, arrogance and rudeness stems from the fact that deep down they struggle with the niggling doubt and possibility that they are wrong and God does exist – a God whom they do not want to exist as they do not want to have to submit their lives to His law or be held accountable by Him. They fit the picture of those who **“suppress the truth in unrighteousness”** (Romans 1) **“because they love their deeds of darkness more than the light”** (John 1).

Lecture 3:

QUESTIONS ABOUT BELIEF IN GOD'S EXISTENCE

(1) INTRODUCTION:

(2) THE CASE FOR BELIEF:

(2.1) Confidence for Beliefs Generally

(2.2) Confidence for Believing in God

(3) THE CASE FOR BELIEF IN GOD

(3.1) Biblical Arguments for God's Existence:

(3.2) Classical Arguments for God's Existence:

(3.3) Modern Arguments for God's Existence:

(A) *Cosmological Argument*

(B) *Teleological Argument*

(C) *Anthropological Argument*

(D) *Ontological Argument*

(5) *Moral Argument*

QUESTIONS ABOUT BELIEF IN GOD'S EXISTENCE

(1) INTRODUCTION:

If you were asked "WHY do you believe God exists", what would you answer?

The apostle John's stated purpose for writing His gospel and recording in it seven great signs of Jesus' power was: **"These things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).** He was giving people evidence and reasons to believe in God, rather than encouraging blind faith!

Today's New Atheists call belief in God a delusion based on blind-faith. A delusion is an idea that is contrary to reason and lacking intelligent reasons. But there are good reasonable, intelligent and logical arguments for the existence of God! In 1980 Time Magazine published an article entitled: *"Modernizing the Case for God"* and it commented that for a century atheism was popular because the brightest minds were atheists, but today some of the brightest minds are committed theists who deploy their intelligence in defence of their beliefs. There is an increasingly well respected and scholarly community of Christians in all walks of life who are speaking up for their reasonable faith in the existence of God.

I want you to be able to join them, so that in whatever work you do and social circles you frequent you will be able to give a compelling and reasonable answer when someone asks you why you believe God exists!

(2) THE CASE FOR BELIEF:

(2.1) Confidence for Beliefs Generally

People have various reasons for what they choose to believe in:

- their five senses,
- their self-awareness (I think therefore I am),
- their memory, their reasoning ability,
- the trustworthy testimony of what others say,
- and particularly today what they FEEL is right!

If you were to go out into the High Street today and ask people how they decide what to do and what they believe is right, then you'll find many commenting **"I do what feels right"**. However, their feelings can and do change depending on our circumstances— so feelings are a poor basis for belief. *Murder might feel wrong if it has been committed against someone you loved, but could the murderer argue that it is truly morally ok to murder when you're feeling angry? How can we know what is true based on our feelings?*

What is really needed to ground beliefs is Truth, which is outside ourselves and tells us about reality. Where can we find such Truth; in fact can we find it at all? **Jesus says He is the "truth" ('aletheia' – the truth revealed and made known!) and that His truth sets us free to live life well. We do not have to find it because He has come to bring the Truth to us.**

(2.2) Confidence for Believing in God

You will struggle to ever come up with a single argument that unbeatably and unquestionably proves 100% that God exists. However, that is not normally a problem for any kind of true belief. *For example, imagine you are in a court room (like the ones you've no doubt watched on television or on the cinema screen). When the prosecution counsel is making their case to convict a criminal, they do not have to prove that their client 100% did not do the crime (which is hard except in rare circumstances). Instead they only need to prove innocence beyond a reasonable doubt. You do not need to know something 100% certainly in order to believe it is true...you can have good reasons for believing something is true in spite of the remaining possibility of it being wrong.* The point is that someone somewhere will always be able to find some reason for doubt or some kind of conspiracy theory (*just type into the internet "JFK assassination", "Illuminati", "David Icke – Lizard people rule the world", "9/11", etc. to see this phenomena*). However, just because there can be some doubt does not mean that what you believe is not true. Human beings rarely can be certain because we are not omniscient knowing all things and all possibilities.

e.g. Indeed I cannot even prove with 100% that you all exist and this world exists – I could be plugged into the Matrix. I cannot prove that anything has happened in my life as I might have been brainwashed, and all the pictures and videos of me doctored by computer generated images. To demand 100% certainty and no possibility of doubt is completely unworkable for anything and not demanded for anything else either!

Instead, there is a cumulative case of many evidences and arguments that taken together prove beyond a reasonable doubt that God in fact exists!

Nonetheless, **people do not need all their questions answered or their doubts removed** before they can meet with God, be forgiven of their sins and become a Christian. They just need to have simple weak belief in the truth about Jesus as God's Son in the Bible – that weak belief can be made stronger later. They just need to come to Jesus with weak faith like the man seeking a miracle for his son believing against all the odds and doubts in his mind that Jesus could truly help: **"Lord, I believe, help my unbelief"**. To understand this better, Alex McLellan has a very helpful concept: **The Belief Scale:**



There are three stages in a person's progress towards belief in God's existence:

- Believe it's not true;
- Without belief - suspension of judgement until there is further evidence or doubts answered
- Believe it's true (even though not all doubts or questions answered);

Apologetics is about helping people who find themselves somewhere on this scale to move along the Belief Scale by dealing with their objections to belief, giving them reasons to believe and persuading them to take the step of believing belief in God is true. Also it shows how after that initial step of belief that they can continue to grow stronger in their beliefs about God, as their faith is one seeking understanding and not blind-faith.

Therefore, think of these arguments we're looking at as tools to help someone move past a barrier to belief and give them more confidence to take a step of faith in belief in a God whose likely existence is reasonable and beyond a reasonable doubt.

(3) THE CASE FOR BELIEF IN GOD

(3.1) Biblical Arguments for God's Existence:

We do not see arguments for the existence of God spelt out in the Bible. The problem in the Bible times was not the question "DID God exist?" but rather "WHICH God existed?" The Psalms and Proverbs say a few times "**The fool has said in his heart: there is no God**". The early church were busy proving that Jesus was God, the one true God –rather than arguing for the existence of any God or spiritual realm.

Remember how we started: How do we know God exists? Well we don't have to depend on our being clever, or good enough, or searching hard enough – God has taken the initiative to communicate with us and reveal Himself to us! He has communicated with us in clear ways: in powerful and personal acts in human history. We often categorise these things into:

- **General Revelation:** God communicates His existence and power in having made the world and everything in it (**Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:19-20**); He also communicates His moral standards by our conscience (**Romans 1:32; 2:14-15**).
- **Special Revelation:** God communicates about Himself, His ways and His desires for us in His revealed Written Word (the Bible) and His Living Word (His Son, Jesus Christ) (**John 1:1-5,14; Hebrews 1:1-2; Acts 17:25-27**).

Most of the following arguments are based on logical and rational observations arising from God's general revelation to mankind. Therefore they could be seen as arguments for theism in general – being used by apologists of other religions! Consequently, what makes a distinctive case for believing in the Christian God is God's special revelation in the Bible and of His Son, Jesus Christ. Particularly it is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus that acts as a key acid-test and evidence that God exists by this impossible historical event that can only be explained by the fact that Jesus was telling the truth in claiming to be God – and because Jesus had such a high view of Scripture (not the smallest part would be forgotten until it was all fulfilled – Matthew 5:18) we can likewise have we can likewise take trust in all of it to tell us truly about God too! However do not react against this by dismissing the value of these arguments from general revelation!

(3.2) Classical Arguments for God's Existence:

The 13th and 14th centuries were a time of great learning and new intellectual thinking. There was a church movement called Scholasticism in university education which wanted to develop logic and reason to combine with their theological systems. This produced minds like Thomas Aquinas who is famous for his *Summa Theologica* (which still is the theological-bible for the Roman Catholic Church). Importantly for us, Aquinas also considered the relationship between faith and reason – he developed a system of apologetics because he wanted to think through the faith in a rational way – as faith was not contrary to reason or delusional! Aquinas came up with five classic arguments for the existence of God which have been influential ever since⁴.

Aquinas's Five Arguments for God's Existence:

- (1) From Motion:** motion cannot start by itself but needs to be made to move by something itself already in motion - *Snooker-ball illustration: unless the snooker-cue strikes the white ball giving it the energy of momentum to travel to hit another ball, no ball on the table will begin to move of itself*). However, you still have to explain why the first thing is moving – you can't just say it was already moving, which is an infinite regress (or a viscous cycle, where the proposed solution simply reintroduces the opening problem). So at the start there needs to be Prime Mover (God),

⁴ He saw logic and reason in the natural world pointing clearly in God's direction; because strictly speaking he understood the spiritual realm of faith to be separate from the natural scientific realm which could point us towards these truths.

which was unmoved initially and which chose to move itself in order to give motion to everything else, or else nothing would have ever have begun to move.

(2) From Causality: all events must have a cause (*anything that begins must have a beginning!*), which cannot be explained by infinite regress; so there must be an uncaused First Cause (God). *Dominos illustration: you cannot simply have an infinitely long chain of dominos in a row which have always been falling over. You must start with one domino being pushed over by someone - the First Cause.*

- Many have attacked this asking: “Who caused the First Cause” (**Who made God?**), but that’s a category error as the First Cause is in the category of uncaused things (God necessarily exists in eternity outside of any time and as spirit without material properties), and it created the universe with its system of cause and effect.

(3) From Possibility: Things can only exist for two reasons: necessarily self-exist, or derivatively exist. The existence of things is derivative since they need a maker (*as they do not make or assemble themselves out of their raw materials e.g. the toys in your Christmas stocking were made somewhere....allegedly in the North Pole by Elves*) and their existence is only a possibility since the maker could have chosen not to make them. But for anything to have begun to exist derivatively there must have first been a maker whose existence was necessarily self-existence – that is God who is self-existent.

(4) From Imperfection: we understand that some things are not right or perfect in the world, but this requires we have an absolute standard of perfection. This Absolute Standard is God who is perfect in all His being and actions. *Illustration: you can only tell that a line I’ve draw is crooked and that my circle is not perfect, because there’s a straight line and a perfect circle you can compare it against!*

(5) From Design: there is design, order and purpose in the natural world, which cannot simply be due to impersonal random chance but rather requires an Intelligent Designer, God. *Illustration: the classic example is of someone walking along the seashore and discovering a watch in the sand, which when they open it up displays some incredible design in its inner mechanisms – it did not magically arise out of the sea and sand, rather it had a designer, a watchmaker!*

(3.3) Modern Arguments for God’s Existence:

Let’s now take a look at the five major arguments commonly used today which build the case for the existence of God:-

(A) Cosmological Argument: (The existence of anything necessitates the existence of God)

Key question: Why does something (the cosmos) exist rather than nothing? **Anything that exists requires an explanation for its existence.** There are only two options that explain existence: it exists either from **necessity** because of its nature (it necessarily exists because of what it is), or it exists **derivatively** because of another cause (a creator made it).

Some atheistic scientists with a naturalistic worldview argue that the universe must necessarily exist saying that if it did not then nothing else would have ever existed...but this wrongly assumes that nothing exists outside of the material universe that could create it – it is a faith claim! However, when the universe did not exist, God did exist and it was His will that brought it into existence.

In 2010 Stephen Hawking, released a new book which was widely reported in the press because he changed his mind to say that there no longer any possibility that God created the universe. Now he says that the universe began to exist necessarily because of its own laws of physics – apparently these laws

are so compelling mathematically that the universe had to necessarily begin to exist. But this overlooks something so important: laws require a law-giver. The laws are just a mechanism by which the universe works, but they did not make themselves because all mechanisms require a maker!

A variation on this argument is called the **Kalam Argument**: if anything begins to exist that beginning must have an explanation. Scientific observation today agrees with this. It is accepted that the universe had a beginning (*ironically it was theists who observed and put forward the Big Bang Model – they were opposed by atheists who understood the major implications this theory would have on their belief system!*). That beginning needs a cause. Also according to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, the universe is winding down, losing energy and heat, becoming less ordered, and tending towards becoming a cold and lifeless state. That requires the beginning to have happened a finite time ago, rather than the universe having always existed infinitely or else it would have already reached that state.

(B) Teleological Argument: (The universe's design and order necessitates the God's existence)

The universe is a very ordered and intricately designed machine – this argument is particularly favoured by the Intelligent Design Movement today. This looks at both biology and cosmology.

Looking at the cosmos, it is precisely designed so it exists rather than collapses and life can exist.

- The original balance between matter and anti-matter allowed a physical universe existed (*think Star Trek and the warp core that powers the ships by mixing an equal amount of matter and anti-matter which annihilate each-other completely to producing massive amounts of energy*). It was balanced so that there is more matter than anti-matter, so that when the two combined in the beginning that they did not completely annihilate themselves and leave nothing behind!
- There are also mathematical constants that are precisely tuned to ensure it exists and does not collapse and that it is tuned for life. *Some people illustrate this by getting you to imagine we send an astronaut to Mars, who finds there a dome which is habitable for human life. Inside he discovers on the wall a control panel with several dials, labelled with the fundamental constants – each dial having millions of possible settings and all of them together having an unimaginable number of combinations (only one precise combination of those dials will allow life to exist). They have all been set precisely to allow life to develop – that's no accident.* We take it for granted but the existence of life in the universe so improbable it is almost impossible and requires a Designer.

Sometimes people talk of the **Anthropic Principle**: it looks like the universe has been configured just for us, human beings, to exist and survive in it.

- Our planet is in a Goldilocks zone so that it is close enough to the sun to be kept warm so life can exist, but far enough away that it is not burnt up.
- Also life on earth is protected from killer asteroids and comets by Jupiter's gravity and the asteroid belt.
- It has even been suggested that our solar system has been placed in the outer rim of one of the galaxy's spirals (away from the brightness and dust closer to the core) to give it one of the best vantage points as a stellar gallery so we can look up and see so many wonders in astronomy that testify to God's creative genius and beauty.

Also looking at the biology briefly, we truly are fearfully and wonderfully made as the Psalmist remarks in **Psalms 139**. Scientists and doctors are continually being confounded the deeper we look through the lens of the microscope. Indeed when we look inside cells they are incredible micro-machines and complex factories. Furthermore, there is more complex intelligent coded information in each of your strands of DNA in your cells than in the combined 30 volumes of the Encyclopaedia Britannica!

How can such complex design and order be explained? There are only two options:-

- chance (odds so mathematically small it requires a great blind leap of faith to believe)
- design by an intelligent creator

(C) Anthropological Argument: (Man's attributes lead us towards God's existence)

Carl Sagan, developer of the famous series "Cosmos" said that we are the products of ancient reactions within the stars in night-sky. Are we simply stardust and a soup of chemicals? Is that all what human beings are? John Blanchard gives us an insight into what the human soup looks like: *"the average human body consists of enough fat for seven bars of soap, enough iron to make one medium sized nail, enough sugar to sweeten seven cups of tea, enough lime to whitewash one chicken coop, enough phosphorus to tip 2,200 matches, enough magnesium to provide one dose of salts, enough potash to explode one toy cannon and enough sulphur to rid one dog of fleas"*⁵. We all know from our experience of life that this soup of chemicals does not account for all that it means to be human.

We are self-conscious and self-aware in a way that nothing else in creation is – not even the most advanced computer is aware of its own existence or has freedom of thought in the way we do! It is hopeless reductionistic to suggest we are simply atoms who share significant numbers of genes with other animals. No matter how many genes we share with apes or even a banana there's a huge amount that separates us from all else in creation! Just to list a few: *Self-awareness; propositional language; complex reasoning; mathematical skills; cultural and scientific advances; appreciation for aesthetics; not governed by instinct; unique family relationships and with opposite sex; a moral dimension; and crucially a spiritual dimension!*⁶

Other faculties in man lead us towards reasonable belief in God's existence:-

- Our spiritual longings: wherever you go into the world, into the most primitive tribe you'll find they have spiritual beliefs and practise religion. The fact is that mankind has a desire for some relationship with God. As Augustine said: "our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you". C.S. Lewis would add to this that we only have a natural desire (e.g. hunger) because there exists in reality something that fulfils that desire (i.e. there is a thing called food that meets our hunger – likewise there is a God who fulfils our spiritual longings.
- Our sense of meaning and purpose in life (a naturalistic worldview offers no meaning or purpose – we are merely atoms who have the privilege of a short life on this earth before leaving it into nothingness). This is such an important part of our existence because people who lack purpose and hope find there is no real reason to keeping living. Without ultimate meaning from God, life is just bare existence - "eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die".
- The fact we have personality requires a personal creator; there is also the fact we value beauty, aesthetics, creativity, etc. The Bible makes sense of this by telling us that we were made in the Image of God which has communicated to us these attributes of God which He Himself possesses and enjoys.

(D) Ontological Argument: (The very idea of God requires the existence of God):

Of all the arguments this one tries to argue for God's existence by abstract reason alone. If you do not follow or understand this, then don't worry. I do not recommend using this one with people and it's been heavily criticised and revised since Anselm developed it in the 13th century.

This states that the very idea of God requires that God exists, since God must be the maximally greatest being in every respect and characteristic. Maximal greatness requires Him not to just be an abstract idea but also to exist in the real world – such a maximally great being must have characteristic of

⁵ John Blanchard: Does God Believe in Atheists (p.312)

⁶ Blanchard list of distinctives: p.324-330

existence because it is greater to exist than not to. (You should be aware that Immanuel Kant particularly attacked this premise that assumes that maximal greatness requires existence). *Anselm illustrated this by talking about a framed picture of a tree – what is greater, the mere idea of a beautiful tree, or the fact that the tree exists in the real world? He said it was greater that the tree really exists.*

Apologist Alvin Plantinga has put forward a modified but complex version of this logical argument. Logically if something is possibly true then it is necessarily a possibility in all possible worlds, which leads it to be necessarily true since it is a fact in all worlds. So because it is possible God exists, then all universes must have that possibility, and that necessary possibility in our minds requires that such a great God exists in all worlds.

(5) Moral Argument: (Our understanding of morality requires God to exist as the standard)

Often people claim to not believe in God because of all the evil things that go on in the world that He does not stop, which they believe is evidence He isn't there at all. However, this way of thinking is actually a good reason to believe that God exists. That was C.S. Lewis' experience: *"My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line"*⁷. You see, if God does not exist there is no standard to justify moral values (good and bad) or explain our sense of moral duties (to help those in danger and rescue the weak or vulnerable from suffering or harm). There are some things that are objectively morally true for all people everywhere (rather than relative to your opinions or cultural context) – we know that's true instinctively! For example: there is no country where we think it is morally justifiable for the government to be allowed to persecute the weak and where murder is a good thing. So because those absolute values do exist, God must exist as the objective standard for those real values.

The New Atheists wants to have their cake and eat it by keeping real standards of moral values/duties without God, but it just doesn't work. Dawkins even comments that the universe is just matter and has no real meaning of good or evil: *"The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference."*⁸.

⁷ C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity* p.5

⁸ Richard Dawkins: *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life* (1995)

Lecture 4:

QUESTIONS ABOUT EVIL AND SUFFERING

(1) INTRODUCTION

(2) UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING AND EVIL:

- (2.1) The Philosophical Nature of the Problem
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- (5.3) The Bible Affirms God Cares About Justice and Our Sufferings

QUESTIONS ABOUT EVIL AND SUFFERING

(1) INTRODUCTION

*What has been the worst thing that has ever happened to you? In your opinion what is the most evil atrocity in history or that you've read about in the news? **If God exists, why did God not stop it?***

We live in a world in which we are regularly presented with events of horrific suffering and can remember terrible evils perpetrated throughout history, e.g. the Holocaust, Stalin's pogroms, the Cambodian Killing Fields of Pol Pot, the 9/11 Terrorist Attacks. Don't forget about natural disasters (earthquakes, the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami; incurable diseases); or manmade disasters (Chernobyl, Fukushima Nuclear Plant, the sinking of the Titanic).

It's a sobering fact but the human race dying at rate of over 250000 a day and death is the inevitable end of all people! Dr. R.D. Laing once sadly commented: *"Life is a sexually transmitted disease with a 100% mortality rate"*.

Why do such bad things happen? Why do good people suffer while the wicked seem to prosper in the world? Where is our good God in all of this?

How we begin to deal truly with these facts and questions as Christians is what we're going to be looking at today!

We should begin by remembering that this is a question that has been asked in the Bible too! Many people in Scripture have struggled with the problem of suffering and evil:

- Asaph in **Psalms 73** asks the question: "Why do the righteous suffer and evil doers experience pleasure without suffering the consequences of their injustices?"
- **Job** through his book struggles to understand why such terrible loss and suffering has been inflicted upon him by God when he has been a righteous man all his life.
- **Habakkuk** cries out to God asking how He can allow the wicked people in Israel to get away with their sins; and then is even more confused at how God can use an evil nation, Babylon, to punish the people of Israel for their sins.

(2) UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING AND EVIL:

(2.1) The Philosophical Nature of the Problem

The problem of God's existence being consistent with the existence of evil and suffering in the world is often expressed in a very logical pattern:

1. God exists
2. God is perfectly good and all-powerful
3. Since God is perfectly good He must hate evil; and because He is all powerful He must be able to prevent suffering.
4. But evil and suffering exist
5. Since evil and suffering do exist, either God does not exist; or if He does exist He is not good or is not all-powerful.

Throughout history people have attempted explanations to resolve this problem by writing 'Theodicies', which are an attempt to defend God in the face of evil and sometimes try to get Him off the hook.

There have been some very bad solutions which often mean robbing God of His great attributes.

- For example, in the book *"When Bad Things Happen to Good People"* Rabbi Harold Kushner suggests that the reason for evil and suffering in the world is that God is good but simply not all powerful. He would like to stop it but simply cannot, so He can't be to blame for the rampage of evil in the world!
- Another solution was to say that God is so transcendent that He is above all moral laws, so God is not concerned with solely doing good or evil - He can do anything He wants and He simply arbitrarily sets a standard of morality for his creations. However, the Bible teaches that the moral law is reflection of His essential good moral character! God is fundamentally good and He hates all evil!⁹

These solutions are unbiblical. We will need to do better than this.

(2.2) The Pastoral Nature of the Problem

The challenge of this philosophical question concerning suffering is seen as one of the hardest to genuinely answer by many Christians. However, it is not simply a philosophical question that needs a philosophical answer - **usually it is asked by someone who feels wronged or abandoned by God!** The fact is that most people who ask this question do so because they have experienced the pain of loss in a broken world, or suffered evil because of their own wrongful actions or the wrongful actions of others.

Therefore, we must be careful in how we answer people, because this is an intensely practical pastoral issue dealing with broken people in a broken world. Illustrating this fact, it's fascinating to read C.S. Lewis's book *"The Problem of Pain"*, which looks at this problem from a philosophical perspective; and then compare it with his later book *"A Grief Observed"* which are his diary entries after his wife died of cancer. The latter book gives a very different perspective on how he works through His understanding of pain and suffering in the midst of the agony of loss. Both books reach the same conclusion about God, but the second shows a deeper appreciation of the realities of pain and grief in this broken world.

We can deal with the philosophical problem of evil, relatively quite easily in an intellectual capacity. However, for the real emotional problem of evil we need to be people who offer time, love, tenderness and care to bring people to Jesus and the God who enters into our suffering to rescue us and comfort us in all our troubles: **"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God"** (2 Corinthians 1:3-4); **"Surely he [Jesus] has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows"** (Isaiah 53:4).

⁹ For more, see: John Blanchard: Does God Believe in Atheists at p.515.

(2.3) The Accusatory Nature of the Problem

Also, the question contains an accusation – it is alleging that God has acted wrongfully in allowing evil and suffering in a person's life. The person making it assumes: *"there can be no good reason I can think of for a good God to allow suffering, therefore either God does not exist or He is not good"*. It arrogantly assumes that if humans cannot work out a reason for suffering then there can't be one at all. It places too much confidence in human reason to because we are not omniscient or wise enough like God to know for a fact that there cannot be good enough moral reasons to justify our pain in this life! *For example, suffering does not necessarily lead to unbelief in God, as people react differently to suffering. For some Jews the Holocaust destroyed their faith, while for others it was a crucial time for the development of their faith in God – like Corrie Ten Boom.*

Furthermore, John Blanchard has discovered that up until The Enlightenment this argument of suffering was not used as a challenge against God's existence¹⁰. Rather it was only as mankind in the Age of Rationalism insisted on its independent rational abilities to understand God and the world that this accusation grew stronger. However, it is much humbler to accept the fact that our finite minds are unable to resolve the huge issue of how God's attributes of goodness and omnipotence can co-exist with evil and suffering.

¹⁰ Blanchard p.500.

(3) THE PHILOSOPHICAL ANSWER TO THE PROBLEM:

(3.1) Answers Induced From the Problem

The fact that we instinctively understand that some things that are good or evil suggests that there must be a higher standard outside of ourselves which we are appealing to for just. We feel the pain of suffering and complain that it is unjust, wrong or evil, because we sense there is a standard of perfect justice and goodness which these experiences of suffering do not conform to.

To use the reality of suffering to deny existence of God, presupposes the categories and objective moral law which cannot exist without God existing as the standard to measure everything else by – *“the question of suffering assumes the reality of the God it is trying to disprove”*¹¹. (Amy Orr-Ewing). Put more simply by C.S. Lewis who had disbelieved in God due to suffering, later realised that this concept of unfairness of suffering showed that God actually existed: *“My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line”*¹².

Secularism and its naturalistic worldview would have us believe that we live in a justice-less universe of death and violence (“the survival of the fittest”). Yet we believe in justice and we are angry at pain and suffering, instead of just accepting it as the way things are, according to this worldview. This inherent sense in all people can only be explained by the existence of a Good God who did not make things to be this way, and we still long for that better and perfect world.

(3.2) Answers Deduced From the Problem

While it may seem that it is improbable that evil would exist in the world if God truly existed, William Lane-Craig¹³ suggests that it's not as improbable as we might imagine if God has reasons for allowing it. He shares three reasons why God allows suffering:

- (ii) **The chief purpose of life is not our happiness, but our knowing God in a saving relationship** - maybe God has allowed natural and moral evils in the world in order to draw the maximum number of free-willing people to himself. C.S. Lewis once commented: *“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world”*. To this William Lane-Craig would make the point that such coming to know of God is an “incommensurable good” (a good that cannot be measured or matched by anything else), so that in itself justifies whatever necessary to lead us to it! *“The person who knows God, no matter what he suffers, no matter how awful his pain, can still truly say: God is good to me! Simply by virtue of the fact that he knows God, an incommensurable good”*¹⁴.
- (iii) **Mankind is in state of rebellion against God's originally good order and His purpose for the world, so this world does not reflect the original design and order of our good God.** We can see this world as a car wreck – we can still see what it was meant to be but it is broken by a disaster. Since we are in rebellion, God can discipline and correct our sinful character through our sufferings here, as not all suffering is punitive but can also be corrective (cf. Romans 5:3-5: **“we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us”**.)
- (iv) **God's purposes for our lives are not restricted to this earthly life but goes into eternity,** so temporary pain can be endured here while looking ahead to eternal comfort. The Apostles

¹¹ Amy-Orr Ewing: But Is It Real? at p.65.

¹² C.S. Lewis: Mere Christianity at p.5.

¹³ William Lane-Craig

¹⁴ William Lane-Craig p.100.

suffered greatly and bore it because it was worth it: **“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal”** 2 Cor 4:16-18 and 1 Peter 1:3-5). *Our sufferings in this life are just like a feather on one side of the scales, while on the other side is the eternal enjoyment of heaven as a large weight that completely outweighs the other feather of pain.* We lack this eternal perspective today which contributes to why evil seems such a big argument against God.

(4) ALTERNATIVE WORLDVIEWS ANSWERS' TO THE PROBLEM:

It is a fair thing to turn the question around and pose it to the questioner! How do they account for the problem of evil and suffering? It is a hard question that challenges any and all beliefs systems. It is unfair to accuse the Christian of failing to have a good enough answer for it while themselves also not having an answer that can bear the weight of the problem or be lived with consistently. Amy Orr-Ewing perceptively comments that every worldview has to explain the existence of evil. In her opinion the key question is *"which worldview adequately faces it and has the resources to handle it?"*¹⁵ In fact, the Christian worldview provides the best answer.

(4.1) Secular/Naturalism Worldview:

This worldview must logically deny the existence of evil as there can be no moral absolutes, like good or evil, in godless natural universe - all values and moral judgements are just opinions. Richard Dawkins was interviewed by the Daily Telegraph in 1992; when asked about a dying child: *"why is this child dying, what has it done to deserve it? The answer is there's no reason why"* – for the naturalist they have no answers, that's just the way things are.

Furthermore, the theoretical processes of evolution require a long cycle of death and mutations to produce life in a world where life is a competition: "the survival of the fittest". Suffering, pain and death are just the way things are in the type of world in which we live, which has no meaning and no purpose. There is nothing really to complain about, other than that they inconvenience our short and meaningless lives. However, we intuitively know that our suffering is unfair and not the way things were meant to be.

(4.2) Eastern Worldviews:

In Eastern Religions like Hinduism and Buddhism, they understand suffering to simply be an illusion. The purpose of life is to follow paths that allow you to have your individual-self absorbed into the pantheistic spirit of the universe by realising that pain and suffering are not a reality but the manifestation of our individual desires. It is helpful to read Ravi Zacharias' books on this because He is a convert from Eastern Religion and understands their worldview better than any other apologist I have come across.

(4.3) Islamic Worldview:

The term "Islam" literally means 'submission' to the fatalistic sovereignty of Allah. His goal is to have his followers surrender to his will and to force all other peoples to do likewise. He wills both good and evil to exist, which is why he created the devil. In so doing, Allah does what he pleases and is beyond having good or evil ascribed to him. There is no guarantee of justice in how Allah will judge at the end of time and no assurance for even faithful Muslims that they will be granted salvation in paradise. The Muslim must simply submit to Allah's decrees of evil in their lives and continue to worship him in vain hope to be good enough to merit eternal sensual paradise. For more on Islam, spend some time on:

www.bethinking.org/islam

¹⁵ Amy-Orr Ewing p.65ff.

(5) THE BIBLICAL ANSWER TO THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND SUFFERING

(5.1) The Bible Affirms God's Goodness and Holy Purity

As we come to look at the Biblical answer, we need to first affirm what the Bible tells us about God's goodness and holiness (separateness from evil):

- "He is the Rock, His works are perfect, and all His ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He" (Deuteronomy 32:4)
- "It is unthinkable that God would do wrong, that the Almighty would pervert justice." (Job 34:12)
- "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate evil" (Habakkuk 1:13)
- God does not tempt anyone with evil (James 1:13)
- "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5)

Augustine was the first to say that God did not create evil because God is entirely good in His being and all that He does He can only do good. So God did not create evil, because evil is not actually a substance in itself, rather it is a corruption of the good or a parasite that lives off the good. Just as darkness is the absence of light, so evil is the absence of the life-giving goodness of God which results in moral decay and death.

(5.2) The Bible Affirms Human Moral Responsibility for Evil

(a) The Free Will Defence:

Often in apologetics you'll come across what is called "**The Free Will Defence**" which asserts that God created human beings with free will. Free will is necessary for us to be able to express genuine love and gives meaningfulness to our decisions in life. If we were all robots pre-programmed to love God and obey Him then that would not be genuine or pleasing to God! So we needed to be able to choose to love God and be able to do the opposite as well. Indeed, John Lennox makes interesting comment that the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was placed in the Garden of Eden so that Adam and Eve could develop a relationship of trusting God's good judgement, and would always have a meaningful option to choose to love and obey God¹⁶ - it was part of God's gift of meaningfulness to human existence. **It is logically not possible for God to create a world in which we had free will, but were unable to have a real choice to love Him or to rebel against Him.**

Along with free will, God created all human beings with ability to judge between right and wrong by writing His moral law on their hearts and giving them a conscience to guide, restrain and convict (Romans 2:14-15). This means that human beings are responsible for their actions, whether good or evil. God rightly holds human beings responsible for exercising their free will to rebel against Him. Part of the punishment He rightly inflicts is death – since "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 3:23). Other sufferings like poverty and human acts of evils show that the selfishness and sin of individuals affects others in the whole human community. Natural disasters and diseases reflect the fact that just as all of creation was under mankind's rule, that due to sin everything under mankind's rule was corrupted by their rebellion and now works against them. **So suffering and evil came about through the free choice of God's created beings – we bear responsibility for the moral evils in the world, rather than God.**

(b) The Qualification of God's Sovereignty to the Free Will Defence:

The Free Will Defence is very helpful, however it is not the whole story! When you study the scriptures you'll find that free will is not best understood as the absolute freedom to do anything ("free agency"). Rather it is "voluntarism", which means people can choose to do what they want to do. This is a significant distinction because this gives the proper weight to the sovereignty of God, which must be

¹⁶ John Lennox 152

balanced with free will. Furthermore, it accounts for the fact that humans do not experience the freedom of the will; because their wills are now in bondage to sin, which means their sinful desires lead them into ever more harmful moral, physical and spiritual corruption and degeneration!

Very few apologists get this balance right, or even acknowledge it. John Blanchard is one of the few to do so and he draws heavily on the work of D.A. Carson on the philosophical-theological subject of **Compatibilism**¹⁷. Namely which says God's absolute sovereignty and human responsibility/voluntary-will are both equally true in Scripture and are fully compatible. Like the weights machine, we have to pull the two handles (doctrines) together and hold them in tension. It's hard work intellectually and practically but the Bible drives us to do this. Think about a few other examples:

- God is three persons yet one God...TENSION!
- Jesus is fully God and fully man...TENSION!
- The Bible is God's Word and Man's Document...TENSION!

A useful **illustration** from C.H. Spurgeon is of two tracks on a railway line (I paraphrase):



If you stood on the railway line looking at the line as it goes towards the horizon, then you'll see two parallel tracks which you know will never meet in this world. Each track represents divine sovereignty and human responsibility, respectively. However, as you look to the horizon and imagine beyond the horizon, in the heavenly world, it looks like the two tracks will converge and meet in the mind of God. While in this life we have to live in tension of two parallel and never meeting truths, we can be confident that they both make sense compatibly and are united in God. We must trust Him!

When it comes to good and evil, this means that God's sovereignty has an asymmetrical relationship with good and evil. He stands behind good in such a way that He always morally accountable/responsible for it (as the first cause); but evil in such a way that it is in no way accountable to Him but to the free willing agents who perpetrate it as second causes. See this represented as a diagram below:



The sovereignty of God means that God has an unexplained higher purpose in allowing suffering and evil: For example, **Job was never told why he suffered so much**. It's fascinating when you study the book that you find its structured as a chiasm (a Hebrew device where the main emphasis comes in the middle of the text). At the centre of this wisdom book in chapter 28, is a poem that states that human

¹⁷ See: D.A. Carson: *How Long, O Lord?* at Ch.11-12

wisdom is unable to comprehend why all things are the way they are because God alone possesses that wisdom, so we must choose to trust and fear Him. This fits with how God eventually answers Job by simply explaining for four chapters who He is and how He should be trusted (**Job 38-41**)¹⁸.

The solution is not as simple as: God doesn't exist or God isn't good; rather **God exists and is good but has a sovereign good purpose in allowing evil. Indeed, He is able to "bring complex good out of simple evils"**¹⁹. There are two key Biblical examples of this in action:

(i) **Joseph:** We see a great injustice in Joseph's story of his betrayal by his jealous brothers and sale into slavery in Egypt. When the family is all brought back together and their father dies, the brothers fear that Joseph will use this withdrawal of their father's protection to get revenge on them. However, to their surprise Joseph assures them: **"As for you, you meant evil against me, But God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive as they are today"** (**Genesis 50:20**). God was sovereign over their evil actions and He used it to bring about great good, but was not morally responsible for what they willingly did in their jealousy!

(ii) **The Cross:** There can be no greater injustice in human history than for a perfect man who was guilty of no wrong to be put to death after a gross miscarriage of justice. The murder of Jesus was pure evil. The Bible states that Christ died according to the sovereign plan of God (**"This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men"** **Acts 2:23**) but yet they also attribute His death as being morally responsible to His enemies. Yet it was through this act of evil, that the greatest rescue in human history was accomplished as Jesus paid the penalty for our sins and secured our salvation!

(5.3) The Bible Affirms God Cares About Justice and Our Sufferings

In Lamentations, the prophet Jeremiah weeps over the just judgement of God delivered against Israel for its sins. But at the very centre of the book God expresses His care for even those who are suffering the consequences of their sins: **"Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail"** (**Lamentations 3:22**).

Lee Strobel comments that if God cares for the birds of the air (Matthew 6:26), then how much more must He be pained by all the harm done to all of creation and to us by sin²⁰. God's caring about our sin and His answer to suffering was ultimately demonstrated when He chose to enter into it. He could have left us to suffer the consequences of our sinful choices without help or hope. But the gospel tells us that God's Son, Jesus Christ came into the world to identify with us in our sufferings and to save us from suffering - not just temporal physical suffering, but also eternal suffering which is the due penalty for sin! As Tim Keller comments: *"Christianity alone among the world religions claims that God became uniquely and fully human in Jesus Christ and therefore knows first-hand despair, rejection, loneliness, poverty, bereavement, torture and imprisonment"*²¹. **The key for dealing with suffering is not to give people an ANSWER, but bring them to the ANSWERER, Jesus - who is a person not philosophy!** As the scriptures say: **"for god so loved the world that He gave us His Son"** and **"God demonstrates His love to us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us"** (John 3:16; Romans 5:8).

That's the good news, but the answer also involves bad news too. Many Atheists claim they want justice now for all the unfair sufferings in the world - but really should not because then they would be

¹⁸ This insight is owed to David Dorsey: *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament*.

¹⁹ Amy-Orr Ewing at p.76

²⁰ Strobel: *Case for Faith* at p.45

²¹ Keller at p.30.

judged themselves because we are the ones in the dock facing sentence for the evil in the world which we all have contributed to. *G.K. Chesterton once responded to a newspaper article entitled "What's Wrong with the World" simply with these words: "Dear Sir, I am, Yours Sincerely, G.K. Chesterton".* God is patient wanting people to repent (2 Peter 3:9). God is just and must punish sin – either the eternal Son of God Jesus pays for our sins on the Cross, or those who do not trust in Christ will pay for their sins eternally in Hell. Hell is the place where ultimate justice will be seen to be done perfectly against those evil doers who got away with their evil acts in this life. People might get away with their sins and evil and infliction of suffering on others here in this life but won't forever.

Finally, there is the hope of heaven which will heal all our wounds from our experiences of suffering and evil in this life. Keller comments that our suffering is not in vain as our future home in heaven is not just a consolation but a restoration to the purest life that we always wanted to enjoy²². Additionally, C.S. Lewis once commented: *"They say of some temporal suffering, 'No future bliss can make up for it,' not knowing that Heaven once attained will work backwards and turn even that agony into a glory"*²³. **"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).** When we experience Heaven we will not be so troubled by our suffering in this life any longer!

²² Keller at p.32.

²³ C.S. Lewis: The Great Divorce at p.69.

Lecture 5:

QUESTIONS ABOUT GOD'S GOODNESS: HELL, THE CANAANITES, THE CRUSADES AND CHRISTIAN HYPOCRISY

(1) INTRODUCTION: GOD'S GOODNESS ON TRIAL

(2) ACCUSATIONS ABOUT HELL

- (2.1) Why is Hell Such a Problem Today?
- (2.2) Answers to the Problem of Hell

(3) ACCUSATIONS ABOUT THE CANAANITES

- (3.1) Resolving the Apparent Contradiction of God's Wrath and Love
- (3.2) Understanding and Answering the Problem

(4) ACCUSATIONS ABOUT CHRISTIAN HYPOCRISY AND THE CRUSADES

- (4.1) The Misunderstanding of the Gospel and Religion
- (4.2) The Misunderstanding of the Church and Jesus

QUESTIONS ABOUT GOD'S GOODNESS: HELL, THE CANAANITES, THE CRUSADES AND CHRISTIAN HYPOCRISY

(1) INTRODUCTION: GOD'S GOODNESS ON TRIAL



"I am not interested in Christianity. The God of the Bible is an evil despot who demands to be worshipped or else will torture you in Hell"

It is becoming increasingly common to hear people object that the Christian teaching about God's goodness and love in the gospel is inconsistent with the Bible's teaching about Hell, God's commands in the OT to kill the Canaanites, and with the behaviour of God's people in the Church.

Ironically these accusations are inconsistent with the assumptions postmodern people otherwise make about morality. Normally, they will tell you that they do not believe in absolute morality – that things can be said to be right or wrong for all people, in all places and at all times. Yet they will insist that God's actions are absolutely immoral and wrong – their argument is inconsistent with their worldview.

But we still have to demonstrate that God's actions are consistent with His absolute moral purity and holiness, because these are important questions. They are also good opportunities to explain the true nature of the Gospel and the offer of God's love in Christ!

For each of these accusations against God, the best thing to do is to show the questioner the truth about God's character/actions and to show them the truth about the expression of God's love in the gospel of Jesus Christ. These accusations all arise from misunderstandings of God, sin and the gospel – so our job is to correct them and present them with Christ.

(2) ACCUSATIONS ABOUT HELL



(2.1) Why is Hell Such a Problem Today?:

“How could a good and loving God send anyone to Hell?” This questions the justice of God in eternally punishing people for their sins.

Hell is a direct affront to the secular worldview. You will remember that this worldview believes in **individualism** (the right of the individual person to determine their own destiny without interference or restriction from others) and **relativism** (there are no absolutes of right or wrong, just an abundance of choices relative to each other, but without any absolute standard to be judged against). So to suggest that we will have to give an account to God for our individual life-choices, according to His absolute standard of justice which our lives will be judged against, is completely opposite to what people want to believe today. Essentially we do not want to be told what to do by anyone or held accountable for what we choose to do with our lives. Human opposition to Hell is very convenient for sinners!

What the modern worldview fails to understand is the severity of sin and the justness of God which sin offends.

(2.2) Answers to the Problem of Hell:

To sensitively talk with people, it is always important that as we address this question that we remember that Hell is not for ‘other people’ who are ‘out there in the world’. Hell was the place we were justly destined to – it is the place we have been ‘saved’ from. We are Hell deserving sinners who have been forgiven and rescued by the saving work of Jesus Christ – we cannot judge anyone else, only help them by bringing them the good news that **“whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16b)**.

(1) God does not delight in sending anyone to Hell:

We read that God does not delight in the death of the wicked (**Ezekiel 18:23; 33:11**) and that He is slow to judgement desiring that the wicked repent so they might be saved (**2 Peter 3:9**). That great longing is the reason for His sending Jesus into the world to die on the Cross for our sins. The only way that anyone can go to Hell today is literally to trample over the free gift that Jesus offers and purchased at great cost on the Cross.

(2) Eternity in Hell is the Proportionate Punishment for Sinning against the Eternal God:

Firstly, the measure of wrongfulness of our actions is linked to the nature of the person we are wronging. For example, it is arguably not a great wrong to crush the head of a spider but a great evil to crush the head of a young baby. The nature of the Being that is wronged affects the severity of the offence. Given the eternal and glorious nature of God, to wrong Him in sin is a great evil that merits an eternal sentence. If someone retorts that our sins are not really that bad against God,

then they need to understand that sin is not some mild inconvenience to God or harmless, but rather it is a wholesale rejection of God as the giver of life and an unjustifiable rebellion against His benevolent government. It is treason of the highest order, which carries the weight of eternal punishment for sinning against the eternally good God.

However, that is not to say that Hell will be the same experience of severity for all judged there. Jesus talks about how it will be more bearable for cities like Sodom and Gomorrah in the OT than for cities in the NT that rejected Him personally (**Matthew 10:15 and Luke 10:12**). God will justly punish people for their sin with some people experiencing greater judgement for greater sin – thus it is not a “one size fits all” blanket punishment, which people often assume when they begin to say that they don’t deserve to be punished as much as Hitler. Rather God will deal with each individual’s case fairly and proportionately, ensuring there are no miscarriages of justice (**Revelation 20:13-15**) – and that there are no unduly lenient sentences either!

Secondly, it has been suggested that the nature of Hell is eternal because those in Hell never cease their rebellion and repent. Instead, people continue to degenerate into sin and degrade themselves in their hatred against God and the wickedness of their sin. This view says that God simply confirms people in their decision to reject and hate Him – since for such people Heaven would seem like Hell because they hate the one that Heaven revolves around and is committed to worshipping. (Tim Keller and C.S. Lewis prefer this view, but I am not convinced it does justice to God’s infliction of punishment on sin).

It is also worth considering the fact that we are not impartial and objective in our opinions about judgement. Of course we do not want to suffer such punishment and it’s in our interests to not want to experience it. So we can come up with all kinds of objections and accusations against God. However, there comes the point when we must accept the fact that God’s ways are higher than ours, that His justice is inscrutable by us, and trust that **“the judge of all the earth will do only what is right and just” (Genesis 18:25).**

(3) Consequences in Hell Make our Life Choices Meaningful and Show That God is Interested in Us:

While it is uncomfortable for us to live our lives in the shadow of the Day when we will have to give an account to God for our choices, the very fact that there is a Day of Judgement gives meaning to our choices and shows God cares about us. It would be an unloving God who did not care about what we chose to do with ourselves and did not care about the choices of others which have hurt us. *One day the bankers who got rich at the expense of families and small businesses will have to give an account for their practises.* So judgement shows that God cares and is interested in us. It gives true meaning to our freedom of choice in life by holding us responsible and accountable for the consequences of our choices. Since our lives are made up with a succession of choices, if they had no value or meaning to God, then ultimately life would be a meaningless charade.

(4) Hell Will Be Ultimate Justice for All the Wrongs in History:

All of us instinctively want justice. God would not be good or loving if He allowed sin and evil to continue to reign unchallenged and unpunished. If God did not punish those who have raped, murdered, corrupted, etc. so many vulnerable and needy people in this world then He could not be good. We all instinctively respond to hurts and pains in our lives with a cry for justice, because **we want all wrongs to be righted and for evil to be punished...we just don’t want to be on the wrong side of justice when we’re the ones to be punished for our evil acts against others.** We are very selfish in our attitude towards justice and evil. However, in Hell God will punish all who have escaped justice in this life and see that perfect justice is done. Keller points out that cultures which have experienced war crimes and genocide are grateful for the day of judgement which will right all the wrongs that so many war criminals have escaped justice for in this life.

(5) Judgement in Hell Enables Jesus' Teaching of Love and Peace Today:

Our culture likes the teachings of Jesus about loving enemies and turning the other cheek when we are wronged rather than retaliating. Yet those teachings are built on the fact that we are not to seek vengeance for ourselves but leave the final judgement to God (**Romans 12:19: "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord."**), who alone can dispense true justice.

(3) ACCUSATIONS ABOUT THE CANAANITES

(3.1) Resolving the Apparent Contradiction of God's Wrath and Love

It is common for people to join with the heretic Marcion in believing that the God of the OT is different to the God of the NT. They believe that a God who commands the slaughter of the Canaanites cannot possibly be the same as the God in the NT who lovingly sends His Son to rescue mankind. This is not simply an apologetic question that troubles non-Christians, because it also troubles many lovely and committed Christians who wonder how God could command that and what implications it has for us today.

Yet there is no contradiction between the OT and NT. God's wrath is the form His love takes when it is abused and rejected unjustifiably by sinners, who owe God their allegiance and love for being given the gift of life. The OT demonstrates the justice and wrath of God which will punish sin, and gives us precious understanding of the great price paid by Jesus on the Cross when He fully absorbed God's wrath at sin to save us. But this also warns of the great need people have to believe in Christ to be saved from this wrath which is to come.

(3.2) Understanding and Answering the Problem:

(1) Historical Descriptions, Not Modern Prescriptions:

These texts are descriptive historical-narratives, therefore, they are not teaching directly applicable principles for today that we are to seek to follow. This is the account of how God established the nation of Israel, His theocracy, in the land of Canaan for specific purposes under the Old Covenant. Instead, Jesus' kingdom is not one that belongs to this world, or comes by force like the kingdoms of this world, or is restricted to one people group or one geographical location like Canaan.

(2) God's Just Judgement, Not Human Genocide:

This was not an act of genocide or racial war of the Jews against the Canaanites. This was an act of judgement by God perpetrated through the instrument of the Israelites. God is the creator of all people and nations, so He has the right as the owner of all life to dispense justice to it, including the punishment of death – He cannot commit murder as God the creator.

(3) God's Just Judgement After Much Gracious Patience:

God told Abraham that He would only remove the Canaanites from the Promised Land when their wickedness had reached its fullness (**Genesis 15:16**). God in fact gave them almost 500 years of patience and opportunity to repent of their sins (**2 Peter 3:9**), but instead this people grew ever more wicked. As Romans 1 describes, they knew from creation and conscience that God existed and that they had offended His laws, but they rejected that knowledge to continue indulging in their sins. If God did not judge the evil of the Canaanites then He could not be just or loving.

(4) The Good Consequences of Removing the Canaanite Cancer:

Many archaeologists have observed that the Canaanites were a terribly immoral and evil people, who indulged in copious child sacrifices and other terrible acts as part of their religious beliefs. So God knew that His people could not remain pure and devoted in worship to Him around such wickedness as it would only spread and corrupt the good nation – just like a cancerous tumour will spread, killing good tissue and resulting in the whole death of the body. While it might be an invasive procedure, it is necessary and beneficial. The purpose of Israel being in the land was so that they might represent God to the nations and draw them to God to be saved – so there was the greater purpose in God's grace being accomplished through His judgement on the Canaanites and keeping His people pure from corruption and defilement.

(5) The Full Story of the Realities of War:

It is increasingly noted by Biblical scholars that the accounts of conquest used language, such as “utterly destroy”, simply to refer to a decisive victory. This might explain why the same cities and peoples that Joshua “utterly destroyed” continued to cause problems for Israel for centuries afterwards - since they were simply decisively defeated in battle and not exterminated. Also, it is quite likely that as news of the unstoppable Israelite conquest spread throughout Canaan that many people left the land, leaving only the stubbornly unrepentant and unafraid of God’s judgement. This would reduce the casualties of war too. It is also important to realise that the rules of warfare when engaging with nations and cities outside of the Promised Land were very different – with Israel having to give an opportunity for women and children to leave, as well as other ethical protections. These laws for warfare were more ethical and just than those of other nations.

(6) The Salvation of God Accomplished through Judgement:

It was recently a major issue of discussion about the claim that the wiping out of the children of the Canaanites was itself an act of mercy by God. (This arose when Richard Dawkins rejected William Lane Craig’s invitation to a debate on the grounds of past articles suggesting this perspective). Their deaths would prevent children being brought into a world for exploitation, sacrifice and sinful corruption by the outrageous sins of their parents. It is a fact that sin makes us less human and has a degenerative effect in our lives, so what faced these children in life was worse than death (R.A. Torrey). Thus, to spare the children of this could be construed as an act of mercy – although this was specifically ordered by God and is not of transferable application to other situations today. Also, if it is believed that young children who die prior to an ‘age of accountability’ are objects of God’s forgiveness and grace, then their lives would be ended in this evil world and they would enjoy the blessings of Heaven instead.

Often New Atheists refer to texts that suggest that God said the Israelites were able to keep young virgins alive in the conquest (Deuteronomy 20:10-15; Numbers 31:21-35), suggesting this was for nefarious purposes: *“But to any fair-minded man who reads the actual Scripture account there is not the slightest intimation that the virgins were preserved for the use suggested. The whole context of the passage in Numbers 31, which is the one most frequently cited in this connection by unbelievers, is a solemn warning against immorality of this kind. Far from being a suggestion that God countenances acts of this character, it shows how sternly God dealt with this impurity. In Numbers 25:1–9 we are told how the men of Israel did give themselves up to impurity with the daughters of Moab, but how in consequence the anger of the Lord was kindled against them, and how God visited their impurity with the sternest judgment. In the very chapter in question every woman who had been guilty of impurity was slain (Numbers 31:17). In actual fact, it is suggested, at least by verse 18, that it was only the female children who could be spared. It was certainly an act of mercy on God’s part to deliver these “women children” from their evil surroundings and hand them over to Israel for training where they would be brought in contact with a pure religion and trained up to become pure women. According to the record, far from being handed over to the Israelites for immoral purposes, they were entrusted to them for the highest purposes.”²⁴*

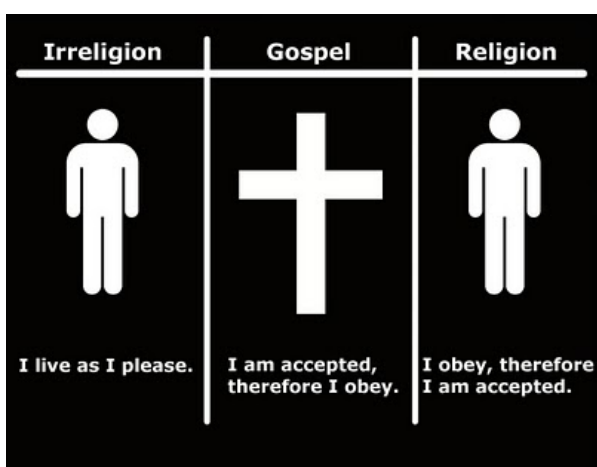
²⁴ Torrey, R. (1998). *Difficulties in the Bible : Alleged errors and contradictions*. Willow Grove: Woodlawn Electronic Publishing.

(4) ACCUSATIONS ABOUT CHRISTIAN HYPOCRISY AND THE CRUSADES

The famous Indian peace activist Ghandi is reported as saying: “I like your Christ, but not your Christians”. This leads to the common objection that people are not interested in Jesus because Christians are all “hypocrites”.

In our modern world there is more shallowness and inauthenticity than ever before – we are obsessed with changing our appearance (hiding behind makeup), with idolising the computer manipulated images in magazines, with pretending to be better than we really are in our social groups and in our internet relationships, with texting rather than talking, with being strong even though we’re feeling weak and needy, etc. People are in search of religion that is authentic, community-orientated and whose followers show integrity. Why is that it so many have had such a bad experience that has made them despair of finding it in the Church?

(4.1) The Misunderstanding of the Gospel and Religion:



So many people have the view of Christianity that it is a religion for self-made people who are justified on the basis of their moral efforts and spiritual endeavours. Therefore they see the message of the gospel as being about self-righteousness, rather than Christ’s righteousness given to those who cannot help themselves morally or spiritually apart from His grace. **So when they see our failures and our inability to live up to the standards of God enshrined in the Bible they assume we are hypocrites – people who claim to be good enough for God, but who in reality do not.** But instead our failures show that we cannot be good enough for God and that we are completely dependent on the grace of God in the gospel.

In a sense, the church and the Christian people in it are best seen as a hospital full of sick people who have come to be made well again by the Great Physician, Jesus Christ. Just as you would expect to see people in all kinds of health in a hospital ward, likewise in the church you see people of all degrees of moral and spiritual integrity. However, we have come to Him because we have recognised our desperate need and personal inability.

One of the best ways to apologetically deal with this objection is to build a loving and genuine relationship with this person. Let them see the love and beauty of Christ in you and your actions; tell them about your failures and about the sufficiency of Christ’s grace in the gospel; help them to see that it’s not about us making ourselves loveable to God but rather receiving humbly the incredible gift of love from Him to undeserving sinners like us.

1 Peter 4 warns us that if we suffer when we’ve been in the wrong then it does us no good and does no credit to our witness for Christ in the hostile world we live in. So instead, as we go through this world

we must strive as much as we are able to live at peace and in integrity with all men and before God. Our integrity is pleasing to God now we are His possession. Also if we are to be His living letters to the lost (cf. **2 Corinthians 3:3**), we must shine as light in the darkness and behave as salt in the decay (**Matthew 5:13-16**). Our Godly lives depending on Christ can be the best apologetic to our generation that seeks authenticity and integrity in religion.

(4.2) The Misunderstanding of the Church and Jesus:



It is a misunderstanding to associate everything done by the church and in the name of Jesus with what is authentically Christian. There are many very dark and sad actions of the Church in the past which were motivated by greed, pride, politics and power rather out of loving obedience to Christ. At times this is understandable because the Church had deviated so far from Biblical teaching and standards, relying more on the traditions of men, but this cannot exhaust all the terrible mistakes of the Church. Instead, we must distinguish between things that have been done in the name of Christ, and the things Jesus commanded and expects of His followers. As Michael Ots explains, we must ask: **“was violence the natural outworking of their beliefs” – or were these people and incidents simply bad representations of true belief?** (p.63). These actions just further demonstrate the depravity of the human heart and the inability of outward religion to do anything to curb our sinful tendencies. Instead we need a radical reformation and regeneration through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is best to bring people to see who Jesus was and what He taught in order to deal with this objection. In answer to Christendom’s wars against the Muslims to retake the Holy Land the answer must be that Christ’s kingdom is not of this world and so does not come with force, like the kingdoms of men seek to establish themselves. Therefore, the Church should not seek to be taking control of the state and to gather for itself power, which has always corrupted it and damaged its witness for Christ. In answer to the terrible oppression and conflicts fought by the church, **the answer is to look at Jesus who cared for the vulnerable, was on the side of the oppressed and who taught peace, love and forgiveness towards His enemies – commanding the same of all who followed Him.**

Lecture 6:

QUESTIONS ABOUT SCIENCE, CREATION AND EVOLUTION

(1) INTRODUCTION

(1.1) The Marriage of Christianity and Creationism

(2) WHAT ARE THE LIMITS OF SCIENCE?

(2.1) Understanding the Limits of Science

(2.2) The Necessity of God for Science

(3) EXPOSING THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

(3.1) What is Real Science and Philosophical Opinion?

(3.2) What are the Philosophical Assumptions in Science Today?

(1) Naturalism

(2) Uniformitarianism

(4) THE COMPATIBILITY OF SCIENCE AND THE BIBLE:

(4.1) Matters of Significant Biblical and Scientific Agreement:

(1) The Universe had a Beginning (The Cosmological and Kalam Arguments)

(2) There is Order and Design in the Universe (Teleological Argument and Anthropic Principle)

(3) There is Intelligent Information in Every Cell (Information Theory)

(4) The improbability of complex life arising from non-living materials (Law of Biogenesis)

(5) EVOLUTIONARY WORLDVIEW VS. BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW:

(5.1) Defining the Theory of Evolution:

(5.2) Reasonably Doubting The Theory of Evolution:

(1) Macro-evolution has never been observed as a scientific fact

(2) Macro-evolution cannot explain the irreducibly complex mechanisms in the body

(3) Macro-Evolution's theorised mutations are negative changes and there is not enough time for them to occur

(4) Macro-Evolution is not supported in the fossil record

(5.3) Should Christians Believe in the Theory of Evolution?

APPENDIX: THE CASE FOR THE LITERAL GENESIS ACCOUNT

QUESTIONS ABOUT SCIENCE, CREATION AND EVOLUTION

(1) INTRODUCTION

Is it really true that the Bible and Science are not compatible, and that science has disproved God?

In 1633, the eminent scientist Galileo – whose accomplishments included the invention of the telescope – was put on trial by the fearsome Roman Catholic Inquisition. He was charged with heresy and called to recant his scientific theory of heliocentrism (which states that the earth orbits the sun; not the sun around the earth). In recent years this has been presented as a story of the supposed conflict between religion and science – with Galileo portrayed as the victim of the evils of religious faith in the Bible. However, what this story really illustrates is that Christianity cannot become dependent on secular philosophy or prevailing scientific ideas of the day.

In fact, the Roman Catholic Church of Galileo's day actually was defending the scientific position of the day, held by the scientists and philosophers. The scientists and establishment in the universities had rejected Galileo's work first, because they were committed to an Aristotelian understanding of the universe which required the earth to be at the centre of everything – their philosophy was read back into the Bible!. However, it is interesting to notice that in Protestant countries at the same time there was no problem considering and accepting Galileo's idea, because they gave room for individuals to interpret things for themselves and challenge ideas which had imposed onto the Bible – for the Bible does not teach that the sun revolves around the earth.

So scientific reason and faith in the Bible are not mutually exclusive nor necessarily in conflict! There are many committed Christian Scientists today who are well respected in their fields of study, such as Francis Collins, Director of Human Genome Project. Indeed, the whole history of science is filled with Christians who developed the whole study of science to discover how God had ordered the universe.

There have been many confident declarations in the last few centuries that the idea of God has been put to death by science (For example, Nietzsche, Voltaire and Freud to name only some). Yet science cannot and will never be able to prove or disprove the existence of God – such questions go beyond its bounds. In reality the conflict is a “War of the Worldviews” (John Lennox) – the real battle is not between science vs faith, but theism vs naturalism – **Biblical/Creationist Worldview** vs.

Secularist/Evolutionist Worldview.

(1.1) The Marriage of Christianity and Creationism:

Most importantly, the Bible opens with these words: **“In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth” (Genesis 1:1).** The New Testament tells us that Jesus is the active divine agent in creation: **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:1-3)** **“[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:15-17).** This affirms that God created everything, that Christ was His agent for creating all things “good”, and that Christ sustains the order of the universe. These are crucial foundational principles for the Christian Worldview and for our understanding of science.

Therefore anyone who is a follower of Christ is called by the Bible's authority to be a Creationist – that is the starting point for the whole Biblical and Christian worldview, if you deny it then you lose everything else too!²⁵

(2) WHAT ARE THE LIMITS OF SCIENCE?

(2.1) Understanding the Limits of Science:

It may surprise you to learn that there is no single accepted definition of science²⁶. Some results of science carry more weight than others – for example, results from testing by observation and repeatable experiments are better, than untestable theories about how something happened in the distant past without any direct observation of it.

Science has contributed to the technological development of the modern world (as human beings have used their God given minds to explore the world He has made and use their creative talents to harness it: space exploration, health care developments, personal convenience in the home and workplace, etc.). **But it does have limitations - it cannot answer the WHY questions – only the WHAT.** *For example, science can tell us the constituents of my wife's amazing cake that she makes me on my birthday, but it cannot tell us why she made it! But we can find out if we go and ask her - likewise we can hear from God in the Bible why He made things and how they were meant to work.* In fact when you think about it, science cannot answer the simplest questions that come out of a child's mouth, so let's not over-exaggerate its ability to solve all of our life's mysteries and ultimate questions!

In spite of these limitations to science, some prominent scientists continue to suggest that science has explained everything and left no room for God to exist any longer. Most recently it was renowned physicist Stephen Hawking, whose latest book *"The Grand Design"* declared that the existence of the universe and everything in it could be accounted for completely by the laws of physics. However, as Oxford Mathematician John Lennox has pointed out that is a category mistake – it mistakes the "mechanisms by which the universe works with its cause"²⁷ (as mechanisms need a maker; laws need a law-giver). Hawking confuses **Personal Agency** with **Physical Laws** – laws explain how something works (they are mathematical equations) but they cannot explain why it exists or who made it.

(2.2) The Necessity of God for Science:

Far from God being unnecessary for science or even disproven by science – science itself fundamentally needs God! That is not just because science has limits to the questions it can answer, so that we need to imagine God to fill those gaps – a God of the Gaps, is not the God of the Bible! Rather God is the ground for all explanation – as Lennox sums up: **"God explains why science explains"**²⁸.

Scientific method and theory proceeds on the basic presumption of the rational intelligibility of the universe. But of course, an intelligently constructed and intelligible universe necessitates an intelligent agency as its explanation for existence! The first scientists were theists who believed there was an order to be discovered in the universe, because it had been designed by God; and that it was upheld by natural laws sustained by God, the intelligent law-giver.

Thus without God there is no rational basis for science or for truth. This raises an interesting point that many Creationists use to turn the tables on atheistic evolutionists, If our minds developed out of an undirected evolutionary process, then how can we be sure we can trust them? After all evolution is all about survival rather than truth, so the mind serves evolution, rather than truth.

²⁵ This being said within that camp there are different schools of thought on the age of the earth and debate over whether God used evolution as a mechanism in creation – we'll look at this later.

²⁶ Lennox p.31.

²⁷ Lennox Undertaker p.44

²⁸ Lennox Undertaker p.47

(3) EXPOSING THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

(3.1) What is Real Science and Philosophical Opinion?

“Creationism is not scientific, it’s religion...”

The Philosophy of Science seeks to study the hidden assumptions that dramatically affect how science interprets evidence in the world found in the laboratory. It distinguishes between “science and non-science” (Karl Popper). There is much that masquerades under the banner of “science”, but is actually assumption and philosophical opinion.

We should be open to understanding the data findings that the scientific method makes, but should be critical of some of the interpretations of that data (which is why all scientific establishments and publications have peer review). So scientific theories are not neutral facts – they come out of a charged worldview (or paradigm). Thomas Kuhn defined a paradigm as: “logically consistent portraits of the world”. **A Paradigm is the set grid (or worldview) that all later data is filtered through to make sense out of it.** *A good illustration of this takes me back to my childhood when I loved to muck around with play dough – I remember having a toy that you could put the play dough into and squeeze it out again through a cutter with different shaped holes. The play dough here can be taken to represent the raw data of science, while the cutter with its different shaped holes demonstrates that the same raw evidence can come out differently if it goes through different interpretative paradigms.* That’s why Creationists and Evolutionists look at the same data about the world but saying totally different things about it!

This is not as foreign a concept as you might think because we see this in theology too. If you are a Calvinist when you come up against texts that emphasis your responsibility to persevere in the faith to be saved, like in Hebrews, then you interpret them according to your paradigm/grid of Calvinism; while an Arminian will come at them differently. You’re observing the same text but interpreting it without based on your theological system.

John Lennox is very helpful when he states: “What no scientist can avoid is having his or her own philosophical commitments. Those commitments, as we have just said, are not likely to figure very largely at all, when we are studying **how things work**, but they may well play a much more dominant role when we are studying **how things came to exist in the first place**”²⁹.

Paradigms are not infallible and the resulting scientific theories can change! Scientists have been wrong before about the type of paradigms they have used to understand the universe – for example the paradigm shift that Einstein caused resulted in science moving from the theory of Newtonian Physics to the Theory of General Relativity. When the existing paradigm is proven to be unable to account for a lot of newly discovered data then it needs to change, or “shift”. A Paradigm shifts changes the way you look and think about everything as there’s a new grid to filter all the data through!

(3.2) What are the Philosophical Assumptions in Science Today?

Today two major philosophical commitments influence the accepted scientific³⁰. Both militate against a theistic and Biblical understanding of the world - unsurprisingly both were developed by militant atheists determined to push God and the Bible out of science and life:

(1) Naturalism:

This philosophy believes there is nothing beyond the natural elements and laws – supernatural explanations for the universe are not admitted into consideration because they run contrary to the assumption that the universe’s mechanisms are closed to any external agency (i.e. God).

²⁹ Lennox Undertaker p.37

³⁰ Very helpful book for the non-scientist on these is John MacArthur: Battle for the Beginning

This philosophy of naturalism depends wholly on the theorised mechanism of evolution to have any rational coherence and intellectual respectability. Evolution is a philosophical necessity for their naturalists and their worldview, thus why they so vigorously argue for it³¹.

(2) Uniformitarianism:

James Hutton and Charles Lyell (who were significant influences on Darwin) asserted that we can rightly understand what has happened in the past by looking at similar conditions today. They assumed that the universe is a closed naturalistic system and so things have always operated in the same way without changing. This study is particularly important in the field of geology as it looks at fossils, rock layers and influences our dating the age of the earth. They conclude that the lengthy time involved in making fossils and forming sedimentary layers in rocks today, must have been the same in the past – thus the theories about the old age of the earth. This old age understanding is essential for evolutionary thinking, which requires vast long ages to provide the time to allow the theorised gradual evolution of species.

However, a Biblical understanding of ancient history is contrary to theories of uniformity. Instead there was the Creation event itself in a short period of time, and if God made the universe with an appearance of age (as He almost certainly did with Adam and Eve) then that would prevent us truly discovering the age of the earth. Also the a global cataclysm of the Flood described in “Catastrophe Theory” resulted in fossils, vast rock layers, and mineral deposits all forming in a very short period of time - rather than millions of years like it would naturally take.

The danger of these philosophical opinions and paradigms is that anything that runs contrary to them or does not fit with them is ignored. Creationists and those of the Intelligent Design Movement argue that this is exactly what is happening in the scientific establishment today.

³¹ Lennox Undertaker p.97

(4) THE COMPATIBILITY OF SCIENCE AND THE BIBLE:

So far we have established the true nature of the conflict between science and the Bible is truly a battle of an atheistic philosophy against a theistic worldview. We have also seen that science has not and cannot disprove the existence of God; rather science operates by implicit faith in Him as the creator. Ultimately God says to the arrogant presumption of atheistic science today: **“Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?” (Job 38:4)**

Now we will turn to consider examples of how science and Christianity are compatible. While current scientific theories conflict with the Biblical account of creation – Francis Schaeffer was right when he entitled one of his books **“No Final Conflict” - when all things are known truly and perfectly then we will see that science and the Biblical account agree completely!** That’s a faith presumption on my part – but it’s also a faith presumption of the atheist to say that will never happen, as they cannot know that!

(4.1) Matters of Significant Biblical and Scientific Agreement:

(1) The Universe had a Beginning (The Cosmological and Kalam Arguments):

Anything that begins to exist must have an explanation. Science today agree with the Bible that the universe had a definite beginning - which it calls “The Big Bang”. Interestingly the Big Bang theory was developed by a theist, who was initially opposed by atheists because of its potential for proving the Creationist worldview: “science itself has shown that the hypothesis of creation is testable”³²!

(2) There is Order and Design in the Universe (Teleological Argument and Anthropic Principle):

Dyson wrote *“the universe must in some sense have known we were coming”* given the fine tuning of the fundamental forces, constants and materials in the universe for life. Hugh Ross illustrates the probability of this fine tuning for life happening by chance as: *“cover America with coins in a column reaching to the moon (380000km) then do the same for a billion other continents of the same size. Paint one coin red and put it somewhere in the billion piles. Blindfold a person and ask them to pick it up”*

Given this huge improbability, we need to ask why universe seems like it was designed for us. There can only be two answers: (a) God designed it that way, or (b) as Richard Dawkins argues we live in one of the billions of universes in a theoretical multiverse which is one of the few that could support life. However, Richard Swinburne insightfully comments: *“to postulate a trillion-trillion other universes rather than one God in order to explain the orderliness of our universe seems the height of irrationality”*³³.

(3) There is Intelligent Information in Every Cell (Information Theory):

There is a vast library of complex, coded, intelligent information in each of our living cells that informs our whole development and bodily operations. Lennox comments: *“life is not example of self-organisation. Life is in fact specified i.e. genetically directed, organisation. Living things are instructed by the genetic software encoded in their DNA”*. Such intelligent encoding requires an intelligent source. After all: *“ink and paper are carriers of the message, but the message certainly does not arise automatically from them...the building does not emerge from the bricks nor the writing from the paper and ink without the injection of both energy and intelligent activity,”*³⁴ so it is just false to reduce everything to purely unguided naturalistic causes. The Bible tells us that God has the intelligence to do this very task.

(4) The improbability of complex life arising from non-living materials (Law of Biogenesis):

Francis Crick determined the probability of a single DNA sequence being made up by proteins being formed by unguided natural processes over vast ages at 10^{260} – anything over 10^{15} is considered virtually impossible mathematically. That is just one DNA sequence and a living cell is filled with miles of these. It takes impossible faith to believe that life arose from unguided natural causes.

³² Lennox: Gunning p.67. Also see (Lennox ch.1 Gunning and ch.4 Undertaker)

³³ Quoted by Lennox: Undertaker at p.73

³⁴ Lennox Undertaker p.125, p.54.

(5) EVOLUTIONARY WORLDVIEW VS. BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW:

(5.1) Defining the Theory of Evolution:

“Evolution” is spoken about today on television, in newspapers, and taught in schools as seemingly being an unassailable fact. However, that is very misleading – especially without defining what is meant by the term itself.

Evolution as understood according to the Traditional Darwinian Model has been abandoned as flawed. Today evolutionists are Neo-Darwinists, who now say that evolutionary change occurred in and between species over a long time through a series of mutations in reproductive cells DNA of common ancestors (we share a common ancestor who is also related to the ape family allegedly).

Darwin’s theory of evolution occurring through natural selection and adaptation to surroundings does not in fact change genes or DNA in reproductive cells, so it could not be passed on to offspring. Indeed, Natural selection can select or remove traits in a species, but it cannot produce new characteristics as there are limits to the extent of changes (dogs cannot be bred to grow wings to fly).

Many biology students tell me that they have to believe in evolution because it is core to their discipline and they observe it taking place. What they mean by evolution is: **“micro-evolution”** which can be observed in terms of natural selection and adaptation. But never has Neo-Darwinism’s **“macro-evolution”** (or “inter-speciation”) been observed and nor is there compelling evidence of transitional fossil forms between these different species to support the macro-evolutionary theory. **Macro-evolution (the All-Encompassing Theory of Evolution) is philosophical idea and scientific theory, not scientific fact.** Therefore some Christian scientists today might believe in scientifically observable and testable micro-evolution but they do not have to hold to philosophical (and unbiblical) macro-evolution!

This all being said, John Lennox concludes that at very best the theory of evolution is a biological mechanism for the development of life, and theists believe in a God who creates mechanisms. Evolutionary theory cannot displace God’s agency as the creator, rather it requires it: **“Indeed a self-winding watch is more sophisticated than an ordinary watch and therefore arguably involves more intelligence in its design”³⁵**

(5.2) Reasonably Doubting The Theory of Evolution:

There is a growing case for having reasonable doubt about the science behind the theory of macro-evolution.

(1) Macro-evolution has never been observed as a scientific fact:

It is speculation, a theory and ultimately for New Atheists an article of faith. Darwin accuses Christians of imagining a God because of their wishful thinking, but likewise he could be accused of imagining the non-existence of God because he wishfully hopes there is no personal God who makes demands on his life. Evolution conveniently serves his wishful thinking to provide an intellectually fulfilling way to be an atheist who does not want God to exist.

Evolutionists often counter the processes happened so slowly over such a long time that we wouldn’t expect to be recorded evidence in things like the fossil record, but that’s a very damaging concession, because it is an admission of blind faith in what they have not seen or can adduce evidence for! Also even on an Old Age view of the Earth there has not enough time to allow for this process to have had any wild possibility of success³⁶.

³⁵ P.88 and ch.6.

³⁶ Lennox Undertaker p.109

(2) Macro-evolution cannot explain the irreducibly complex mechanisms in the body:

The more we look into the complex functions of the human body and cells, we find that the mechanisms are irreducibly complex – they are like incredibly intricately designed factories with many different parts all doing a single task which need the presence of every other part in order to work at all. That means that there are some organs which could not function without the presence of other organs or enzymes being already present. Michael Behe points out that this irreducible complexity destroys Neo-Darwinian theory³⁷. Indeed, even Darwin admitted this would be fatal if it were ever discovered because it conclusively points to intelligent design of the cell.

(3) Macro-Evolution's theorised mutations are negative changes and there is not enough time for them:

For Neo-Darwinian evolution to work it requires a huge number of small random mutations to occur to actually change a species over an unimaginably long time. This is not very likely and impossible virtually in the time available under even given an old view of the earth's age. Compounding this problem, the vast majority of mutations that take place are deleterious and lose information³⁸ (rather than gaining new information and developing new features), and indeed are harmful causing cancers and death.

(4) Macro-Evolution is not supported in the fossil record:

Dr. Carl Werner over 13 years travelled 160,000 over 3 continents to conduct an experiment to test the validity of evolution's hypothesis: *"over time animals and plants have changed, so we should not find modern animals and plants alongside dinosaurs in the fossil record"*. That would be evidence against the central proposition of evolution. During his experiment he became a Christian by the evidence he discovered. He discovered that every major vertebrate, invertebrate and plant species group today can be found almost identically with only slight variation in the fossil record. The only really remarkable change between the fossil record and today is the fact that there have been extinctions (i.e. of the dinosaurs!). Instead his findings show there is reasonable of evolution's central premise.

Therefore, as an apologist, your job is to remove evolution as being an objection to Christian belief.

(5.3) Should Christians Believe in the Theory of Evolution?

Evolution was developed by a worldview that rejects God. Christians should be extremely careful about choosing to side with that worldview and with its doubtful mechanism as the explanation for our origins. The Christian worldview better explains life and the world, and provides the basis for science altogether!

Furthermore, as Christians we submit to the Bible's authority for all of our life, belief and practice. God's truth is true for all of life. As I study the Bible I do not believe it is possible to be consistent in understanding how God could describe the world and life as "It was very good", if he had used an evolutionary mechanism (requiring mutation, death, and violence). Nor can I understand how evolution by mutation can work prior to the Fall which introduced death, decay and disorder into creation (cf. Romans 5:12). Furthermore, if all things were created in, through and for Christ, then serious questions about Christ's goodness are raised by believing in Him creating and using evolution!

Most significantly, scientific theories and paradigms have been wrong before and often need to change. We should be careful not to begin basing our understanding of the Bible on the shifting sand of scientific theories. That's really what the story of Galileo teaches. **Rather God's Word is unchanging, has been proven trustworthy for 4000 years of human history and is authoritative, because He alone was there and knows how He created everything. This is why we must submit to the Bible's authority on the question of origins. I submit that the evolution does not fit with the Biblical account.** That is why I

³⁷ Lennox 119

³⁸ Lennox: Undertaker at p.107

must let the Bible have the last word on this. Let's let science do the catching up, because in the end there will be no final conflict!

APPENDIX: THE CASE FOR A LITERAL GENESIS ACCOUNT

Essay by David J. Nixon (March 2011: Faith Mission Bible College)

“Show (i) Why we can be confident in the accuracy and reliability of Genesis 1-11, and (ii) the implications of our view of that section of scripture for our attitude to the rest of the Bible”.

Introduction

The opening eleven chapters of Genesis are the foundation for the whole Biblical worldview. They explain the origins of the universe as the creative work of God; the special creation of mankind and development of civilization; as well as the corruption of all these things by sin. Additionally, these chapters are important for all Biblical doctrines, as Ham has argued: “Genesis 1-11 is the history that is foundational to the rest of the Bible, and thus all Christian doctrine”³⁹. Consequently, it is important that Christians have confidence in their accuracy and reliability to have a consistent confidence in the rest of the Bible. This essay will show that these chapters deserve such confidence and demonstrate their integral place for a proper view of the rest of the Bible.

(1) Evidence supporting the accuracy and reliability:

(a) Internal Evidences of Genesis 1-11

Firstly, there are a number of features in these chapters which testify to its accuracy and reliability as a historical account.

Logically, creation requires a creator; and physics indicates that the creation of time is inseparable from the creation of matter, so this creator must be timeless. Corresponding with these principles, the first words in the Bible assert that God, who was pre-existing, created all things at the beginning of time⁴⁰. Thus the Bible offers the only credible explanation for the existence of all things.

This summary statement in Genesis then is elaborated upon in a description of God's six days of active creative work⁴¹. Against those who argue that this cannot be a reliable or accurate account of six days of creation, it must be argued that God alone was the agent and witness to creation so His communication of how He did it should be taken as accurate and reliable⁴² – for God cannot lie⁴³. The Biblical explanation for the beginning of the cosmos conflicts against the *current* scientific models of cosmology. However, these models have been produced by an evolutionary worldview which assumes both naturalism and uniformitarianism to be true⁴⁴. Both these assumptions deny God as the creator

³⁹ Ham, K. *Genesis – Foundational To All Doctrine* (Online) <http://blogs.answersingenesis.org/blogs/ken-ham/2008/01/23/genesis-foundational-to-all-doctrine/>

⁴⁰ Genesis 1:1.

⁴¹ Genesis 1.

⁴² For a clear defence of the accuracy and reliability of a literal 6 day understanding of the Genesis creation week see: Reymond, R.L. *Contending For The Faith* Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005 at p.46. Also for a statement of the text's most likely favouring literal interpretation, but a failure to fully embrace that finding of young-earth Creationism, see: Grudem, W. *Systematic Theology* Leicester, England: IVP 1993.

⁴³ Titus 1:2, Hebrews 6:18, Psalm 12:6-7.

⁴⁴ *Naturalism* asserts that there can be no explanation for creation beyond the natural elements, so there is no room for a supernatural deity; while *uniformitarianism* asserts that we can understand the past based on the assumption that the universe is a closed system and things have always operated in the same way. This assumption was put forward to counteract 'Flood Catastrophe theory' in geology and lead to the understanding of the Earth having millions of years of evolutionary development preserved in sediment.

and the time scales in Genesis⁴⁵. Such attacks on Biblical creationism began during the Enlightenment, when atheism and materialism were the main ideas intellectually. However, the fine-tuning of the universe and existence of anything (out of nothing) implies the need for an intelligent creator and so the Bible's account makes fuller sense of these facts⁴⁶ than these godless ideas ever can. Therefore, it self-authenticates itself as being a reliable account of our origins.

Next, the genre of the literature also is evidence for its reliability and accuracy. Liberal critics would assert that Genesis 1-11 is written in a mythological style, so it is merely etiological - a specific culture's explanation of their origins. Against this argument it must be noted that Genesis 1-11 is not written in the style of poetry or fiction, rather it is as a historical narrative with a theological perspective⁴⁷. Indeed, Reymond argues that the contentious issue of whether the creation account is a literal six day historical account is resolved by the stylistic use of Hebrew words and writing rules which can only describe consecutive historical events being narrated, rather than poetry or fiction⁴⁸.

Also, there are many features that enhance its credibility as a historical narrative. The accounts in Genesis 1-11 are structured by the use of a generational formula which introduces the genealogy leading up to the next person focused on in the text. These genealogies recount in lengthy detail families and nations⁴⁹, as well as their exact life spans. There is also the precise dating of the Flood in the life of Noah and the account dating all the major events according to calendar days and months⁵⁰. This is evidence of the author's intent in writing a historical narrative, since such features would not appear in myth or poetry. Additionally, there are the precise measurements for the Ark recorded and all that was to go into it⁵¹. This seems like an excessive amount of detail if it was only a mythological account. Furthermore, there are extensive descriptions of geographical details⁵² throughout, which show it is not mythical but is grounded in real places. Therefore, as Leupold concludes, there is an: "utter dissimilarity of the Genesis record and the legends of the nations"⁵³.

Finally, there is a structural pattern of God performing judgement and then demonstrating grace throughout the early chapters, which results in there being no gap between chapters 11-12 since the judgement at Babel is followed by God's grace in calling Abraham. As Reymond has commented: "Apparently, Moses was unaware of the break between Genesis 1-11 and Genesis 12-50 brought about by the alleged shift in literary genre between the two sections"⁵⁴.

(b) External Evidences

Secondly, there are external evidences that support the reliability and accuracy of Genesis 1-11.

It is truly significant that Jesus and other New Testament writers refer to its contents as being real historical events and characters⁵⁵. These writers are believed to provide reliable and accurate testimony

⁴⁵ MacArthur, J. *The Battle For The Beginning* USA: Nelson, 2001 at p.11ff

⁴⁶ Thompson argues that Science has not and cannot discredit Genesis by scientific method: Thompson, B. *Genesis 1 through 11 - Mythical or Historical?* (Online) <http://www.apologeticspress.org/article/451>.

⁴⁷ The fact that it has a theological perspective does not detract from its reliability, because all historiography necessarily has a perspective. It is unjustified to judge a theological perspective as more unreliable than any other.

⁴⁸ Reymond, R.L. *Contending For The Faith* Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005 at p.34.

⁴⁹ Genesis 4:17-5:31; 6:9; 10:1-32.

⁵⁰ Genesis 7:11-24; 8:1-6; 13; 11:10-32.

⁵¹ Genesis 6:14-21.

⁵² Genesis 2:8-14; 4:16; the descriptions of the locations of the descendent nations from Noah in ch.10; 11:2.

⁵³ Leupold, H.C. *Exposition of Genesis* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1942 at p.11.

⁵⁴ Reymond, R.L. *Contending For The Faith* Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005 at p.35. Further to this Morris comments: "Genesis 1-11 is certainly recorded as serious and sober history, and it leads directly and naturally into Genesis 12 and the rest of Genesis" in Morris, H. *The Biblical Basis for Modern Science* 1984 at p. 116.

⁵⁵ A cursory study of the scriptures revealed just this small selection of references in the New Testament to Genesis 1-11 accounts: John 1:1-3 (creation); John 5:46-47 ; John 8:44 (Satan as the serpent); Matthew 19:4-6 (creation of male and female); Matthew 23:35 (Abel); Matthew 24:37-39 (Noah and the Flood); Mark 10:6-9 (institution of marriage); Mark 13:19

by Christians for the gospel, so by implication their testimony to the accuracy of Genesis 1-11 strengthens its case. Indeed, if the divinely inspired nature of scripture⁵⁶ is taken seriously, then this revelation must be accurate and reliable because it has come authoritatively from God.

Next, extra-biblical sources corroborate the Genesis account. The Sumerian King List compiled in 2100BC supports the long life spans recorded prior to the Flood, as it records that kings reigned for a prolonged time before the Flood and shorter thereafter⁵⁷. So while such details might seem unreal to the modern reader, there is corroboration for it. Additionally, there are the universal flood myths found in every culture's ancient literature, which points to the global catastrophic event as described in Genesis. The Biblical account describes how all cultures descended from Noah's family who survived the Flood, which would explain why all their earliest accounts contain this common feature.

Therefore, this evidence external to the text of Genesis 1-11 serves to support its as an accurate and reliable account of the beginnings of all things.

(2) Implications for the rest of Scripture

Establishing that Genesis 1-11 is accurate and reliable is essential for a right understanding of all the rest of the Bible and essential Christian doctrines that builds upon it.

(a) Implications for doctrine of Scripture:

Firstly, if the opening is not reliable or accurate, then when does the Bible become accurate and reliable? If Genesis 1-11 is not accurate, then it is a myth masquerading as a factual explanation which really means "the myth is a lie"⁵⁸. It would not be unjustified to then infer that a book that begins with a lie will continue being a lie, as Morris has observed: "If these first eleven chapters are not historical, then our entire Biblical foundation has been removed"⁵⁹. Morris studied⁶⁰ every book of the Bible looking for references back to the foundational section of Genesis. This study concluded that all of the Bible refers back to and depends upon Genesis 1-11, so that it would be arbitrary to not treat it all in the same way. As a result, the view taken on this portion of scripture will have large implications for our attitude toward the rest of the Bible.

(b) Implications for doctrine of Man:

Secondly, the doctrine of man teaches how man was made in the image of God and relations with the rest of creation. Thompson notes Darwin had to first of all abandon his historical understanding of Genesis 1-11 in order to be committed to the theory of evolution⁶¹. This alternative theory of man's origin destroys the image of the glory of God in specially making man to rule over the rest of creation. Consequently this destroys the Bible's teaching on the complimentary roles of men and women and the special institution of marriage. Furthermore, the New Testament's teaching on male headship, church leadership and the place of marriage⁶² depends on the historical understanding of the special creation of man in Genesis.

(creation); Luke 3:34-38 (Adam and Noah and Shem genealogy to Jesus); Luke 11:51 (Abel); Acts 14:15 (creation); Acts 17:24 (creation); Romans 1:20 (creation); Romans 5:12 (sin's beginning); Romans 5:14-19 (Adam, sin and death); Romans 8:20-22 (creation cursed); 1 Corinthians 11:3 (headship linked to creation); 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 (death came by Adam); 1 Corinthians 15:45 (Adam as historical living person); 1 Corinthians 15:47 (special creation of mankind); 2 Corinthians 11:3 (serpent's deception); Hebrews 4:4-10 (6 day creation and 7th day rest); Hebrews 11:4 (Abel); Hebrews 11:5 (Enoch); Hebrews 11:7 (Noah); James 3:9 (man in the image of God); Jude 11 (Cain); Revelation 20:2 (Satan the serpent).

⁵⁶ 1 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21.

⁵⁷ *ESV Study Bible* (Online): <http://www.esvonline.org/search/genesis+5/> See notes on Genesis 5.

⁵⁸ Engelsma, D.J. *Genesis 1-11: Myth or History?* (Online) <http://www.mountainretreat.org/apologetics/genesis111.html>.

⁵⁹ Morris, H. *The Biblical Basis for Modern Science* 1984 p. 116.

⁶⁰ Morris, H. *Biblical Creationism* Green Forest, Arizona: Master Books, 2000.

⁶¹ Thompson, B. *Genesis 1 through 11 - Mythical or Historical?* (Online) <http://www.apologeticspress.org/article/451>.

⁶² Headship: 1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:23. Male leadership: Titus 1:6; 1 Timothy 2:11-15; 1 Timothy 3:1-6. Marriage: Mark 10:5-9.

(c) Implications for doctrines concerning Christ:

Thirdly, there are implications for the doctrine of Christ and his atoning work that arise from Genesis 1-11. Most importantly there is the account of the Fall in Genesis 3 which explains the origin of sin, death and all suffering in the world. If these chapters are not historically true then there is no explanation for sin or death that does not negatively impact upon Christ. Jesus is the Last Adam⁶³, who has succeeded where Adam failed and brought life where Adam brought death. However, if there is no historical Adam then there is no explanation for the work of Jesus. Instead, it suggests that death and sin have always existed as part of the created universe, which itself was created by, through and for Christ⁶⁴ and is declared by God to be 'very good'. So the character and work of Jesus is distorted by failing to treat Genesis 1-11 as a historical account of the Fall.

Conclusion

So, in conclusion, the evidence in the text of Genesis 1-11, beyond the text in the rest of the Bible and extra-biblically accumulates into a strong case for the accuracy and reliability of Genesis as a historical account of the beginnings of all things. Despite the attacks of liberal scholars and godless naturalists, the Biblical account is the only explanation that can account for our origins. Having this confidence in the opening section of the Bible, we can consistently have confidence in the rest of its teachings, which make sense of the meaning of life and understand the work of Christ to save us from the Fall. While it is unpopular to defend these opening chapters, the alternative requires sacrificing the reliability of the rest of scripture which is unconscionable.

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⁶³ 1 Corinthians 15:45-47.

⁶⁴ Hebrews 1:2; Colossians 1:15-16; John 1:3.

Lecture 7:

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE HISTORICAL JESUS, MIRACLES AND THE RESURRECTION

(1) INTRODUCTION

(2) THE HISTORICAL REALITY OF JESUS:

- (2.1) Extra-Biblical Evidence for the Historical Jesus
- (2.2) Internal Biblical Evidence for the Divinity of Jesus
 - (1) The Divine Claims of Jesus
 - (2) The Divine Acts of Jesus
 - (3) The Divine Prophetic Fulfilments of Jesus

(3) THE HISTORICAL REALITY OF MIRACLES:

- (3.1) The Anti-Miraculous Worldview
- (3.2) Answering the Objections to Miracles

(4) THE HISTORICAL REALITY OF THE RESURRECTION:

- (4.1) The Apologetic and Evangelistic Importance of the Resurrection
- (4.2) Historical Principles Supporting the Resurrection
- (4.3) Historical Evidence Supporting the Resurrection
- (4.4) Unsatisfying Alternative Theories

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE HISTORICAL JESUS, MIRACLES AND THE RESURRECTION

(1) INTRODUCTION:

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?”

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” (Mark 8:27-29)

Who do people say Jesus is today?

Many people do think Jesus is important in some way but they do not know what to really make of Him. Peter Kreeft summarises the need for people to seriously consider the incredible impact this man Jesus Christ has made on the world and whole of human history:

“A person who made more of an impact on others, on history, than any other man who ever lived. Yet he never entered politics, never fought a battle, and never wrote a book. He lived in a backwater nation, never went more than one hundred miles of his home, and was executed by crucifixion as a dangerous criminal. His moral teachings were not completely new. Nearly every piece of advice he gave us about how to live can be found in his own Jewish tradition, as well as in the philosophies of others. What caused his unparalleled impact?”⁶⁵

The Resurrection of Jesus is the key acid-test and evidence that God exists. The Resurrection is a historical event that is naturally impossible – it can only be explained by the fact that Jesus was telling the truth in claiming to be God.

However, not everyone would agree. Many people doubt that the Historical Jesus ever existed; or if He did exist doubt that He ever performed miracles or claimed to be God. Many have bought into the “DaVinci Code” conspiracy theory that the church invented the deity of Jesus hundreds of years later as a way of claiming power and authority over peoples’ lives. Also others do not take seriously the historicity of the fact that Jesus Christ rose again from the dead, which would be sure evidence of His divinity and claim on their lives. This is largely because their worldview does not accept the existence of miracles and considers them as simple fairy tales and myth.

We need to help people with these doubts move along the Belief Scale to have confidence in the gospel and persuading them to accept it through trusting faith in Christ.

⁶⁵ (Peter Kreeft, Why I am a Christian at p.227)

(2) THE HISTORICAL REALITY OF JESUS:

There are still some people who doubt that Jesus was a real person in history. They claim that outside the Bible he is never mentioned and argue it is ridiculous to suppose that someone who truly was God would make no mark on history outside the Bible. Even if we give no special weight to the internal evidence of the Bible and the Church, the fact is that the testimony of the Bible comes from eyewitnesses - whose claims have to be examined fairly like any other non-Christian eyewitness to events.

An interesting fact is that, Tiberius Caesar, the Roman emperor when Jesus was alive, has only 10 sources in 150 years of death; while Jesus in the same time has 42 separate sources. There are 9 non-Christian sources for both⁶⁶, so it's a tie in terms of historical evidence for their existence! One of them most people would say definitely existed, so why not Jesus too – to deny that Jesus exists is unfair and demonstrates prejudice against believing in Him.

(2.1) Extra-Biblical Evidence for the Historical Jesus:

The following extracts which speak about Jesus are taken from commentators and critics of Christianity. They show that the truth of the Bible's account of a Jewish man referred to as Christ performed miracles that no one could explain, that He was executed by the Romans under Pilate's governorship, and that He was believed to have risen to life again.

(a) Josephus (Jewish historian for the Romans)

"James, the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ" (Antiquities 20.9)

"Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats...he was the Christ...he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand wonderful things concerning him" (Antiquities 18.3). This quote was almost certainly modified by later Christians as Josephus was a committed Jew who never became a Christian. However, most of the rest of the quote is reliable. Arab translations untouched by Christians yield "he was perhaps the messiah" (Habermas p.194)

(b) Tacitus (AD.50-120 – Roman Historian)

"...called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome..." (Annals 15.44)

(c) Suetonius (Roman historian, secretary to emperor with access to official records)

"Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [Emperor Claudius] expelled them from the city" (Claudius, 25)

"After the great fire at Rome...punishments were also inflicted on the Christians, a sect professing a new and mischievous religious belief" (Nero, 16)

(d) Thallus (circa 52AD)

Only copy found in Julius Africanus, who records Thallus speaking about the time of Jesus' crucifixion: *"On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. This darkness Thallus, in the third book of his History, calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun" [which is naturally impossible to occur during the full moon at the time of Passover]*

⁶⁶ (Habermas and Licona p.128)

(e) Lucian (a satirist)

“The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day — the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account... You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them; and then it was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws”

(f) Pliny the Younger (Roman Government administrator in Asia Minor who wrote to emperor for advice in dealing with the Christians)

“They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god...”

(g) Gnostic Writings – This cult produced a lot of writings which seek to add chapters to the life of Jesus, describing Him as a teacher of ‘secret knowledge’ (the distinct characteristic of this cult). However, they demonstrate that Jesus was a genuine person, and they were seeking to use Him to piggy-back their own teachings and ideas to get legitimacy for their movement. It would be foolish to try to get legitimacy through a fictional person.

(h) Jewish Talmud – The Jewish Rabbis pronounce many curses on Jesus and any who claim that He was the Son of God. This demonstrates that He truly did exist and was really rejected for His claims to be God’s Son and the promised Messiah of Israel.

(i) Writings and letters of dozens of early church fathers and writers in the first 300 years of the church: Many of these fathers knew the disciples, who had been the eyewitnesses to Jesus’ life and ministry, as well as others who had seen the reality of Jesus. They were writing and preaching about a real person, rather than making it up and they saw the genuine belief of the disciples in watching them be martyred for their faith.

(j) Oral traditions in form of sermon summaries and Creeds in the early church, the earliest Apostles Creed stating *“I believe in God the Father, Almighty maker of heaven and earth, and Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and buried, He descended to the dead. On the third day He rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father...”*. It was clearly a belief among Christians from the earliest times that Jesus was a historical person who really made these claims of deity.

(2.2) Internal Biblical Evidence for the Divinity of Jesus

So it is a historical fact that Jesus lived and died – and at least was believed by some to have risen again. But there are many different understandings of WHO the historical Jesus was. Was he a simply a good man who taught about morality, was he a visionary teacher, was he a religious rebel, or was He divine?

(1) The Divine Claims of Jesus:

The only way to know for sure WHO Jesus was is to look at Jesus’ own understanding about Himself. C.S. Lewis coined “the Trilemma”: Jesus could only have been a Liar, a Lunatic, or Lord based on His claims about His identity. This means we cannot just accept him as a moral teacher, who we can treat neutrally and be indifferent about. We have to judge him based on the truth of the claims He made: He claimed to be God and if that was not true then He was not a good teacher – He was either a lunatic (deluded about the truth) or a liar (deliberate perverter of the truth).

The claims He made about Himself were incredible:

- **To be able to forgive sin**, which God alone could do as the one sin is against (Luke 5:20-21)
- **To be sinless** (John 8:28-29; 46-47)
- **To have existed with God before creation** (John 1:1-3; 8:58)
- **To have shared glory with God in heaven before His birth** (John 17:5)
- **To be life itself** (John 14:6)
- **To be the only way to God** (Matthew 11:27; John 14:6)
- **To be life itself and the one who can raise the dead** (John 6:47; John 11:25)
- **To be the bread and water of life that satisfies our deepest longings** (John 6:35)
- **To be God Himself** (Mark 14:61-62: "I am..." cf. Exodus 3:14)
- **To be the central subject of the whole Bible** (John 5:46)
- **To be able to die and rise again** (John 10:17; Luke 18:31-33)
- **To be the divine Son of Man in the Old Testament who would return to judge the world** (Matthew 24:27-30; 25:31-32)
- **He received worship** (John 20:28)

Jesus could only have been one of the following:-

- (a) Legend (he did not make claims)**
- (b) Lunatic (if claims were delusional and false)**
- (c) Liar (if claims are false)**
- (d) Lord (if claims are true)**

It is vital that people see that they look at Jesus Himself, what He said and did, if they are going to make an accurate judgement of Him. There are no other options aside from these four based on the evidence that is available, and it is so compelling that the only true option is to believe that Jesus is Lord because His claims were true.

(2) The Divine Acts of Jesus:

Indeed He did not just talk as if He was God, but He also did things that only God could do in the form of miracles, healings, resurrections from the dead, prophecies, and ultimately His own resurrection from the dead as He had predicted.

(3) The Divine Prophetic Fulfillments of Jesus:

Studying His Prophetic fulfilments is also very interesting: Jesus was the only person whose whole life biography was written hundreds of years prior to his birth in the form of 200 individual prophecies. To fulfil each and every of the 200 prophecies exactly was incredible (especially as involved things out of His control e.g. parents lineage, birthplace, circumstances of His death, peoples' reactions to His ministry, etc.).

Specific prophecies were made about Jesus, being written down at least 400 years prior to His birth:

- He will be the child of Eve, the descendant of Abraham and of David (Psalm 132:11; Jeremiah 23 and 33)
- His birth to a virgin (Isaiah 7:14)
- His birth in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2)
- His being paid tribute by great kings from afar after His birth (Psalm 72:10-11)
- His being the Son of God (Psalm 2:7)
- His riding into Jerusalem on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9)
- His rejection by the leaders of the Temple (Psalm 118)
- His betrayal by Judas and being sold for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12-13)
- His silence at His trial before His accusers (Isaiah 53:7)
- His death by crucifixion by being pierced through His hands and feet but without a bone being broken, and being killed alongside criminals (Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22)

- His resurrection from the dead (Psalm 16:10-11)

For example (Case study on the book of Daniel 9): written around 500 BC this book contains prophecies regarding the political and military history of the Middle East for centuries. It predicts specific leaders, the rise and fall of specific empires (for example describes the rise of Alexander the Great, his early death and the division of his empire between his 4 generals), and most importantly it lays out the timetable for God's plan in the world. This timetable culminates in the death of Jesus Christ in 33AD. The prophecy predicts there will be 483 years after King Artaxerxes issues a particular decree to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, which at the time of writing were in ruins, until Jesus died on the Cross. You can do a calendar calculation that predicts to the VERY DAY the historically verified event of Jesus' death on the Cross, before the Jewish Passover. How could Daniel have prophesied that unless God had told him and Jesus was truly the promised Messiah?

(3) THE HISTORICAL REALITY OF MIRACLES:

(3.1) The Anti-Miraculous Worldview:

When you take people into the gospel accounts of Jesus' life and ministry then you will notice they begin to struggle as they read all the accounts of miracles. To the modern and post-modern mind these things are simply mythical and impossible – this is because we live and breathe in a culture saturated by the naturalistic worldview, which states that there is no supernatural, only natural laws can explain all things.

It is said by writers like David Hume that miracles cannot happen because they breach the natural laws of the universe. However, this is a circular argument that begins by presupposing that there is nothing beyond the natural universe, so there cannot be miracles: "Miracles do not happen because they cannot happen naturally". He said that there was no evidence in history for them existing and sought to show that any supposed miracles were no such thing – but because of this predisposition to not believe in miracles he would of course seek to dismiss any accounts of them, having already decided in advance that they must be false. Indeed, Hume was implicitly making the arrogant claim to have omniscient knowledge to be able to say that there had been no observation of miracles in the past – he could never know that without omniscience!

Therefore it is the worldview that rejects belief in God or the possibility of God intervening to perform miracles that renders people today unreceptive to miracles. But when challenged to really think about their starting point, they will then need to consider at face value the historical accounts which show that miracles have happened in history: God became a man, He did incredible things that astounded thousands of people, and that He died and rose again. The purpose of these miracles was both to reflect what God had done in the Old Creation but more importantly to point ahead to what was to come as God did His work of New Creation. Particularly in John's Gospel miracles are used to get our attention, to validate the identity and teaching of Jesus, and to show that in Him a new creation is possible.

(3.2) Answering the Objections to Miracles:

(1) God is the Author of Natural Laws and is Not Bound by Them:

We must agree that within the natural world miracles are improbable. They do break the laws of nature – but that's the crucial definition of a miracle and the means for identifying it by virtue of the fact it goes against the natural. We do not believe that natural processes account for miracles (since that would mean the laws break themselves), rather we believe that another agency is responsible for them. That agency is the same agency that authored the natural laws – therefore being above them, rather than subject to them. If this agency, God, could make the universe and its laws, then it is a much simpler thing for Him to intervene and create an exception to those laws by performing a miracle at the time of His own choosing.

(2) Naturalists Cannot Trust Their Own Minds:

The naturalistic and materialistic mind set which militates against miracles creates a **fatal inconsistency** within itself. **If all our thoughts are simply material processes within our material minds, then there is no such thing as truth and no way to judge whether our thoughts are trustworthy.** Thus any statement we make from our minds on miracles is open to the possibility of being untrustworthy and the whole process makes self-refuting as there is no way to tell it corresponds to reality. Naturalism is poisonous to the whole task of reasoning, so it is a bad starting place to reason about the reality or unreality of miracles!

(3) People in the Bible Were Not Stupid or Unscientific

Thirdly, C.S. Lewis argues that it is **simple “chronological snobbery” to allege that in the past people were uneducated and unscientific, so they believed in miracles not knowing any better.** However, people in the Bible who experienced miracles did not react as if they were normal occurrences within nature – rather they saw them as out of the normal and unnatural. That is why Joseph wanted to divorce Mary – virgins do not get pregnant and such miracles are not part of nature!

(4) THE HISTORICAL REALITY OF THE RESURRECTION:

(4.1) The Apologetic and Evangelistic Importance of the Resurrection:

The Resurrection is the Acid-Test of Christianity. It makes Christianity unique among religions as it is a historical and publicly verifiable truth which demonstrates the truth of Christian beliefs.

Perhaps you have heard the story of Frank Morison. He was a legal practitioner who set out to disprove Christianity by taking the Apostle Paul at his words: **“if Christ is not risen then your faith is in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:17)**. However, throughout the course of his research into disproving the resurrection he was so overwhelmed by the strength of the evidence that he was compelled to become a Christian, because it really was true: Jesus was God’s Son who died and rose again.

The importance of the Resurrection is that it was predicted by Jesus, and is something naturally impossible for ordinary human beings. Thus if the resurrection really happened as an event in history, then it demonstrates that Jesus was God and that (arguing from the greater to the lesser) all the rest of what He taught is necessarily true too.

The naturalistic worldview is primarily what lies behind doubts about the resurrection. G.K. Chesterton comments *“the man of the nineteenth century did not disbelieve in the resurrection because his liberal Christianity allowed him to doubt it. He disbelieved in it because his very strict materialism did not allow him to believe it”* (Orthodoxy p.193). We agree that solely by natural processes resurrection is improbable - but we don’t believe Jesus resurrected naturally, rather supernaturally! Furthermore, the sudden birth, massive growth of the early church (amidst persecution from both Jews and Romans), and self-sacrifice of the martyrs must be accounted for. A greater miracle is required to explain this, than to simply accept miracle of resurrection.

(4.2) Historical Principles Supporting the Resurrection:

Licona notes five general historical principles that show the historical value of the evidence for the resurrection:

- (a) Multiple independent witnesses who were converted through their experience** (2 women, 12 disciples, 500 at one occasion, James [unbelieving brother] Paul [unbelieving persecutor], Stephen)
- (b) Evidence from enemies** (The Jews and Romans alleged his body was stolen to explain the tomb being empty after Easter Sunday, because they needed some explanation)
- (c) Embarrassing admissions in the Biblical accounts** (The first people to witness the resurrection were two women, whose were seen as unreliable witnesses and were barred from giving evidence in court: “but let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex” [Josephus, Antiquities 4.8.15]. Also the fact that it is recorded that the apostles did not initially believe that Jesus had risen again would not have been recorded by them later unless they were reporting the facts)
- (d) Eyewitness testimony** (First-hand testimony from the disciples; Second-hand testimony from early church fathers who knew disciples and hear directly from them the gospel)
- (e) Early recording of the testimonies, near in time to the events, prevents exaggeration and legend development** (NT documents, oral testimony and creeds were written within lifetime of opponents, participants and witnesses to the events who could have challenged any exaggerations or lies introduced into the accounts of Jesus)

(4.3) Historical Evidence Supporting the Resurrection:

Habermas suggests there are five pieces of verifiable historical evidence that all Christian and non-Christian historians have to agree on. Any theory explaining Jesus' resurrection must account, at bare minimum, for these five pieces of evidence. Alternative theories that deny the resurrection all fail to properly account for these minimum pieces of evidence!

- (1) Jesus died by crucifixion,
- (2) Jesus' disciples believed Jesus had rose again and appeared to them (they were transformed in character and boldness; they claimed it in their preaching; they suffered and were martyred for their beliefs),
- (3) Saul of Tarsus (an opponent) was converted suddenly after some experience on the road to Damascus and was martyred for his new beliefs,
- (4) James, the brother of Jesus (an unbeliever originally) was converted suddenly and later was martyred for what he believed,
- (5) The empty tomb (Christianity could not start in Jerusalem if this was not true; enemies attested to it; and the embarrassing fact of women witnesses was admitted)

There are more historical pieces of evidence than this, but this minimal facts approach is what everyone can agree on! This does not require absolute certainty, which is only possible in rare circumstances, rather professional historians talk about the strength of probability and plausibility. The evidence when taken together only point conclusively towards the **strong probability and plausibility** of the resurrection.

William Lane-Craig also makes an important point when he points out that the Jewish worldview did not have any concept of a resurrection from the dead prior to the Final Judgement. That explains why the disciples could not understand Jesus' predictions of His own death and resurrection – they did not have the worldview resources to understand this idea! **Thus, they could not have made it up or imagined it within their worldview.**

(4.4) Unsatisfying Alternative Theories

(a) Legend:

The Resurrection cannot be a legendary development (*like a game of Chinese Whispers where the story gets added to and corrupted over time*), as the original disciples were the ones who taught these facts - which were also attested to by other witnesses - and they recorded it within short period of time of the events itself to prevent such developments occurring. So within 20 years it was an early Christian creed to recite **1 Corinthians 15:3-8** regarding the resurrection.

(b) Fraud theories:

Suggests the disciples or someone else stole the body. However not the empty tomb that convinced anyone than Peter, rather it was Jesus' appearances to friends and foes! Also everyone else lacked the motive to steal the body and then would have had opportunity to use it later to disprove the disciples claims, but they never did. Nor would the disciples have become martyrs for something they knew was a fraudulent lie.

(c) Wrong tomb:

This suggests that overwhelmed by grief, or because it was in early the morning, the women went to the wrong tomb and saw it empty. However, the Biblical account shows that the women spent a long time observing where Jesus was laid. This account fails to account for the fact that no one could produce the

body from the 'right tomb' and that the Roman guards had to be bribed to remain silent about what really happened. Again, the key for the disciples was not the empty tomb but the risen Jesus appearing to them.

(d) Apparent death:

This suggests that Jesus only fainted on the Cross and was revived in the cool air of the tomb. This ignores the fact that the Roman soldiers were trained executioners whose own lives depended on the criminals dying and not escaping. Furthermore, a post-crucifixion Jesus would have been exhausted and extremely weak from blood loss – not appearing as a victor over death – so He could not have convinced anyone of His bodily resurrection after the horrors of crucifixion which would have torn His body open and left Him vulnerable to terrible infection and agony.

(e) Psychological Deception:

This suggests that the disciples were so desperate in their grief and disappointment at their expectations of Jesus being the Messiah that they hallucinated. However, Hallucinations and delusions in the midst of grief are private experiences, not shared by large groups of people (like the 500 people at one time in 1 Corinthians 15:6); they do not explain the fact of the empty tomb; they do not explain how the enemy Paul, who hated Jesus and church, was converted; and the type of people involved were all so very different and experienced them in different circumstances, places and from different backgrounds over 40 days to simply put down to hallucination. Also the bodily appearances of Jesus which were physically touchable cannot be explained by mental vision or hallucination!

(f) Copying the myths of other mystery religions theory:

This last theory is becoming more popular today and might cast some doubts into your mind since it is unlikely that you have ever studied the ancient pagan religions. It says in essence that other religions talked about a crucified saviour, who was God's Son, who made atonement for sin, who then rose again and ascended into heaven. They say that the Christians stole these ideas from pre-existing pagan religions and that they show that all these events are simply mythical fabrications. The best resource which has studied and compared all the pagan religious stories with the Christian one is found here: <http://www.philvaz.com/apologetics/JesusEvidenceCrucifiedSaviors.htm>. This study has demonstrated conclusively that all of the other religious stories are extremely vague and do not bear any significant resemblance to the Biblical account. It is also believed that some borrowed from the Christian account as they evolved in the early AD's.

Lecture 8:

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BIBLE AND TRUTH

(1) INTRODUCTION

(2) THE HISTORICAL RELIABILITY OF THE BIBLE

(2.1) Why Historical Reliability Matters

(2.2) Not an Ordinary Human Book

- (a) Wouldn't write if they could
- (b) Couldn't write if they would

(2.3) Evidence of Manuscript Reliability and Accurate Transmission

- (1) Manuscript Evidence That the Bible Has Not Changed
- (2) The Text Was Written Near In Time to the Events and Open to Scrutiny of Jesus' Contemporaries
- (3) Strict Rules for Copying and Commitment to Preserving the Original Text

(2.4) The Canon of the Bible

- (1) The True History of the Canon
- (2) The Other Writings Not Included Were Frauds
- (3) The Sovereignty of God and the Canon

(2.5) The Bible and Myths

- (1) Background to Bultmann and Demythologising the Bible
- (2) Answering the Myth Question with C.S. Lewis

(2.6) History and the Truthfulness of the Bible's Text

- (1) Jesus Believed the Bible Was True
- (2) The Bible is Old But Still Relevant and True
- (3) Archaeology Confirms the Bible's Records as Factual
- (4) We can know about the past recorded in the Bible with certainty
- (5) We can still understand the message of the Bible, in our different culture and time

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BIBLE AND TRUTH

(1) INTRODUCTION

The recent film, The Book of Eli, chronicles the journey of a man on a pilgrimage to protect a book and bring it across a devastated post-apocalyptic world to a place where it will be kept safe. This book is the Bible which is revealed to have been the cause of a global apocalypse as different religions warred over the truth claims of religion. When he arrives, the safe place is discovered to be a library and they place the Bible on a shelf with other religious books of other faiths, brought by other people who felt compelled to go on a journey of faith to keep their holy books safe too. This was a statement about the Bible being just another book among many in the library, and just another of the religious books which have caused conflict in human history. This is a film that reveals some of our culture's feelings towards the Bible today!

As evangelicals one of the distinctive beliefs we have regards the infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible. However, this is something that non-Christians do not agree with, and in our cultural today there is not the same respect for the Bible. **People are resistant to allowing the Bible to have authority or power over them and tell them what they should do with their lives.** Indeed, with the spread of multiculturalism and with greater access to knowledge and education, people are more interested in other world religion's holy books and the secular ideas of philosophers and gurus, than in the Bible. Thus the Bible is considered merely one book among many, and as "A way" but not "THE Way". It is considered to be a book of literature which has been influential on us culturally (e.g. there would never have been Shakespeare in the same way without the King James Version of the Bible), but not to present to us relevant truth some 2000 years later.

We need to see whether there is a strong case to be made in favour of our belief in God's Word as being reliable and the truth. We cannot use simple circular arguments: *The Bible is reliable as God's Word because it claims that is what it is.* However, there will always be a degree of circularity when we make a claim about foundational truths in a worldview. So we will have to add into that circular argument other evidences that demonstrate that this foundational claim is very credible and true based on internal and external evidences.

Ultimately the best way to argue for the Bible is to argue:

- (1) It presents us with reliable information about history (give the evidence below)
- (2) It presents us with the claims about Jesus and His deity (which we can test historically)
- (3) It presents us with Jesus' view of Scripture (which we should accept if the other things He said can be proven to be true and reliable)

So if Jesus was truly God and His claims are credible, then we should logically also accept His view of Scripture as God's infallible and inerrant Word.

(2) THE HISTORICAL RELIABILITY OF THE BIBLE:

(2.1) Why Historical Reliability Matters:

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a message to proclaim about things that God has done in history. None of us were alive or witnesses to it directly, therefore we need reliable witnesses to authenticate and make the message trustworthy – thus need to be able to trust the reliability of the Biblical accounts which are our primary means for receiving and trusting the gospel message!

It may seem boring, but having confidence in these historical facts can change your witness for Christ forever and help you when people challenge you with their accusations and own theories on the matter.

(2.2) Not an Ordinary Human Book

"The Bible is not a book that men could write if they would, or would write if they could" (L.S. Chafer)

(a) Wouldn't write if they could:

- The Bible isn't very complimentary about the human condition as says that contrary to what we think we are all guilty of offending God's righteousness by our sin and that we face His judgement unless we repent. Most humans have confidence in themselves to save themselves or to find salvation in things of this world, but the Bible is clear about man's helplessness to save itself apart from the intervention of God in the gospel.
- The Bible's greatest heroes have their greatest sins laid bare across its pages: Moses (murderer), David (murderous adulterer), Solomon (wisest man was a rich, glutton, lustful man and finally an idolator). These men who were well respected by those who followed and recorded their lives would have been tempted to airbrush the truth, but the Bible sought to preserve authentically and truly the realities of sin in these men's lives.
- The Bible sets out divine commandments that go against our natural disposition because God is Holy while we are sinners in rebellion against His standards. It has been commented that in ancient times if the "prophet" of a religion was a pervert then unsurprisingly the "god" they taught about was too (i.e. the god reflected the character and disposition of the person, showing they were just making up a god in their own image). God is so very unlike us in His holiness and demands that He could not have been made up by us.

(b) Couldn't write if they would:

- The Bible was written over 1400 years by around 40 different people from all walks of life (kings, priests, farmers, shepherds, etc.). Yet the book reads as a cohesive whole story which would make you think that there was only one ultimate author.
- At points there were different prophets in various parts of the country of Israel writing down God's Words but without any contact with each other, yet they were all consistently speaking the same message claiming it was coming from God.
- Such a large and diverse book, yet does not have any contradictions within it and 'difficult' texts to explain are well known to Biblical scholars – they are not covered up or manipulated – who have good explanations for dealing with them.

(2.3) Evidence of Manuscript Reliability and Accurate Transmission

People often allege: The Bible has been changed! However, the overwhelming evidence is against this.

(1) Manuscript Evidence That the Bible Has Not Changed

For example, after the discovery at the Qumran caves of the Dead Sea Scrolls we had the oldest copies of the Old Testament available for the first time dating to 100BC, which is a millennia before the previous copies we had in the Hebrew Masoretic Text. A comparison showed that there were only 5% minor stylistic variations in terms of spelling and conjunctions and one or two words which do not change any sense of any passage! There are textual variations but they are mostly to do with single letters or grammar, and not one affects any doctrine! They are also documented and noted publicly. The Bible is surprisingly free from problems. Norman Geisler says “only about 1/8th of all the variants had any weight as most of them are merely mechanical matters such as spelling or style. Of the whole, then, only about one sixtieth rise above ‘trivialities’”

24,000 ancient copies of parts of the NT, and 86,000 references in early church writings allowing near to 100% reconstruction of the original text (except for 20 verses), to confirm its accuracy today. We only have 634 copies of Homer’s Iliad and the 10 copies of Plato’s works date to 1400 years after it was written. John Warwick Montgomery is quoted as saying: *“to be sceptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity, for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament”*. Even if we were to lose every single copy of the Bible today, we would be able to reconstruct 98% of the text based on the prolific quotations from the Bible made by the Early Church Fathers in the first two hundred years after Jesus’ life – and the 2% missing would not be significant for any of the central claims and teachings of Christianity.

(2) The Text Was Written Near In Time to the Events and Open to Scrutiny of Jesus’ Contemporaries:

Significantly, all of the New Testament writings about Jesus were written down within less than a generation of His life, death and resurrection. For example, Mark’s gospel was almost certainly written first within 20-30 years of Jesus’ life. We do not have copies of Plato’s writings which are even from the same century as he lived in, yet we consider them reliable. This is significant because it leaves very little time for the formation of legends around Jesus. Instead it means that the writers would have been people who really were witnesses of Jesus’ life and ministry. And it also means that the accounts would have been subject to the scrutiny of other contemporary witnesses of Jesus’ ministry, who would have been able to challenge and refute any lies or exaggerations which the gospel writers introduced. However, even though the documents were written at a time when Christianity was an oppressed minority within the Roman Empire, the early disciples were never credibly accused of having fabricated lies about historical events, and instead they died standing up for the truthfulness of what they recorded in the Bible.

(3) Strict Rules for Copying and Commitment to Preserving the Original Text:

the very process of transmitting the Biblical text to later generations demonstrated respect for the integrity of the text. F.F. Bruce noted that the transmitted texts were strictly monitored with the number of times a letter was used in a book counted, the middle letter of books, and other detailed calculations to monitor quality control! Such was the dedication of the scribes who copied the Scripture, believing it to be the very Word of God, that they would not dare alter it and they could not bear the thought of allowing errors to creep into the text. Certainly, their belief in the Bible does not make it God’s Word but it does mean that we can have confidence that the text we have today is a reliable copy of the original.

(2.4) The Canon of the Bible

There is often a claim made that the early church did not believe that Jesus was truly the Son of God up until the Council of Nicea in 325AD, which it is alleged decided on the Canon of Scripture. The story goes that they chose which books to include which supported their aim of making Jesus out to be a divine saviour, while rejecting those which did not support their agenda. This was all a part of creating an official religion of the Empire under the new Emperor Constantine. So they say that Christianity is based on a lie that the Church fabricated in order to get power and privilege within the Roman Empire.

(1) The True History of the Canon:

However, this is merely a pseudo-history idea. By the end of the 1st century and into the early 2nd century there were already lists of the books that the Church considered to be genuine and authoritative in teaching about Jesus – this list was the New Testament of our day too. There were some books in the Canon that had question marks around them, regarding who the author was and whether it was truly inspired, but this was a subject of debate that was made out in the open and is well recorded. It was not some back room conspiracy. The first serious challenge to the Canon came under the heretic Marcion who believed that the God of the OT could not be the same as the God of love of the NT, so he created his own Canon and his own revised versions of the Gospels. His popularity meant that the Church had to respond to affirm its commitment to the original Canon of Scripture, which it did in 393AD at the Synod of Hippo Regius and affirmed in 397 and 419 at the Councils of Carthage. These gatherings of the Church did not give the books of the Bible their authority as the Word of God, instead these simply recognised what the Church had long recognised: that these were the books that God inspired the apostles and some close associates to write down under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

(2) The Other Writings Not Included Were Frauds:

The early church were aware of other books and letters that had circulated, for example there were letters of Paul that are not part of the Canon. There were also many letters and books written by Jewish mystics and Gnostic cult followers who latched onto the credibility of the names of Jesus and the apostles, but these were well known to the Church which did not entertain them as ever being divinely inspired. The fact that they were written well after the other books of the Canon helped to ensure there was little confusion. These books also were filled with self-contradictions and inconsistencies with the rest of the Bible; and they also were clearly written from in the same mind set and vein of teaching of these other groups.

(3) The Sovereignty of God and the Canon:

A key argument not often considered is the fact that if God truly exists and is sovereign, then He can be depended upon to sovereignly over-see the production, transmission and purity of the collection of Books that He has inspired to communicate His truth to mankind. The Canon of Scripture ultimately depends on this fact about God, and faith that we have everything that He wants us to have to know about Him and the way of salvation.

(2.5) The Bible and Myths

(1) Background to Bultmann and Demythologising the Bible:

In the late 19th and early 20th century, liberal scholars who practised the discipline of Higher Criticism took upon themselves the task of finding out the true message of the Bible, which they believed was buried under a lot of myths, legends, miracles, and supernatural speculation that was not true. Rudolf Bultmann was influential in leading this work of “Demythologising” the Bible to find the kernel of truth that it contained. However, this group of scholars came to the Bible with an agenda (out of their Modernistic Worldview) which rejected belief in the supernatural and the impossibility of miracles. They literally tore apart the Bible by refusing to open their minds to the possibility that it was reporting accurately the supernatural breaking into our world. They assumed that if elements of the Bible could be found in parallel fictional mythical accounts then the Bible must have borrowed those ideas.

(2) Answering the Myth Question with C.S. Lewis:

However, the Bible is not simply a collection of ancient myths and legends. The greatest work on this subject done in the last century was by C.S. Lewis, a man who spent his academic life reading myths, legends and stories. He commented that as he read the Bible, particularly the life of Jesus, and compared it with his studies: *“I was by now too experienced in literary critic to regard the Gospels as myths. They had not the mythical taste”* (Surprised by Joy at p.236).

He was converted himself when his friend J.R.R. Tolkien – a fellow lover of stories and myths – challenged him to consider why it was that human beings like stories and why our stories often have the same elements. He suggested that God had designed the world and the human mind in such a way that it is not surprising that the same stories and themes of salvation, triumph of good over evil, love and hope keep coming up in different forms throughout human history. Tolkien suggested that myths were humanity’s longing for a true story where these themes actually happened, ending this world’s experience of fear, darkness, evil and despair. So Lewis was challenged to consider whether any of the ‘myths’ were truer than others by having a factual basis in history – and was given the Bible to read on that basis. In the Bible he found a historically reliable and factual account of a story about Jesus in which we find the answers to our greatest dreams and fears. We find the decisive victory of good over evil; the hope of life after death; the source of love and acceptance; and meaning for our lives. Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus recorded in the Bible and played out in history, we find true fulfilment of our longing for meaning in all the myths and stories of the human imagination.

So the Bible is not a myth, rather all myths are the evidence of humanity’s longing for a story that is only truly fulfilled in the Bible. The Bible’s story is not too good to be true, since it is a historically reliable account of what our good God has said and done in human history, to allow us to enjoy Him forever after our lives in this world have ended.

(2.6) History and the Truthfulness of the Bible's Text

Just because manuscripts are reliable and have been accurately transmitted to us does not make the essential message they contain true. Can we confirm the truthfulness of the Bible?

(1) Jesus Believed the Bible Was True:

The best way to establish the truth of the Scripture is to look to Jesus, who had a very high view of Scripture – He claimed that all scripture points to Him (John 5:38), so He and His claim to deity is the key to unlock whether the Bible is God's Word and true! Therefore in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus we have a historical means for assessing the truth of the claims of the Bible by looking at whether what Jesus said about it and Himself were true. **So based on the reality of His resurrection we have a legitimate basis to say that the Bible is absolute truth for all people at all times and places.**

(2) The Bible is Old But Still Relevant and True:

Today it is popular for people to consider 'new' things to be better than 'old' ideas – in the past cultures did not believe in the value of 'new' things, so our chronological snobbery is not a fact we need to subscribe to. There is a constant drive to be new, original, and to keep up with the latest trends. However, there is a problem with this and it's what C.S. Lewis called: **"Chronological Snobbery"**. It assumes arrogantly that what is old is not valuable for us today, and assumes that what we have today is better by virtue of chronological than what has gone before. When this is applied to the truthfulness of the Bible, this is why people say: *"How can a book that is thousands of years old still have a message that is relevant to me today?"* **It's age does not necessarily affect its relevance and truthfulness to us today.** It is important to consider old ideas and ask: When did this become outdated and why? Was this conclusively disproved? **The fact is that no one has ever been able to conclusively disprove the claims of the Bible and of Jesus.**

And the fact is that the matters of the Bible are still very relevant to us today, since all human beings are seeking to find the answers of meaning to life, why do we die, what lies beyond death, is there a God, does God care about us, is there a plan for our lives, where we can find love and acceptance, is there hope? The answers that the Bible gives have not become outdated or disproved, instead they are true claims that are earthed by historical events that demonstrate their truth. God has broken into our world in the past, He has communicated with us, and He still is speaking to us today through that Book He gave us: The Bible. We should not discount it just because it is old.

(3) Archaeology Confirms the Bible's Records as Factual:

The records of people, places, battles, events in the Bible provide us information that we still have not been able to find evidence for in the world. But every time new discoveries are made in excavations it is being discovered that what the Bible said is true and accurate. There are many hundreds of confirmations of Biblical accounts now in evidence through archaeology – even popular claims that King David did not exist have been disproved by continued discoveries. It has been noted that the New Testament writer, Luke, was a superb historian of his day through his detailed and careful records of things. Why did he and others take such care to record history if they were simply making up stories and legends? A sceptic could say to get credibility, but **why by sceptical and discount the Biblical evidence when it has proven to be trustworthy in so many respects about the ancient world?** Surely its contents and message should be given some fair consideration given its proven trustworthiness and reliably?!

(4) We can know about the past recorded in the Bible with certainty:

However, in spite of all this evidence our culture is fast moving away from any kind of Certainty – whether it be about the truthfulness of texts (**Post-Constructionism**) or even history itself (**Historical Relativism**). There are those who argue that it is impossible to truly have access to what happened in the past, because we only have the records of the victor or those who were writing with an agenda – so history is never about truth but is about power. For example, there are those who now are seriously

questioning the reality of the Holocaust – which was something anticipated at the time and why they brought in video cameras to record for the future the reality of the Concentration Camps.

This is a great way to attempt to avoid following the convincing evidence and testimony about Jesus' life, death and resurrection, by saying it is simply impossible to know. **However, it also is a system of thought that it is impossible to live by, because it not only means that we cannot have access to ancient history but also that we cannot have access to recent history in any true or meaningful way.** *For example, it is possible that your holiday pictures from last year were all photoshopped, that you were brain-washed to develop false memories, that people who saw you on holiday were bribed and coerced into lying, etc...it becomes impossible to know anything about the past.*

The fact is that we know some things happened in the recent past, because we do have access to history with some degree of certainty. We can assess the truthfulness and reality of things that happened in the past by what Amy-Orr Ewing calls **"converging lines of evidence"** (p.36) e.g. through pictures, writings, diaries, newspapers, eyewitnesses, etc. who all speak to the same truth which helps us build up a picture of what has happened. When it comes to the Bible we have many converging lines of evidence that point to the reality of the resurrection and truthfulness of what the Bible teaches about Jesus.

(5) We can still understand the message of the Bible, in our different culture and time:

Finally, connected with this idea of Historical Relativism is the work of the Post-Constructionists – particularly Jacques Derrida. He denied that language has any fixed or universal meaning in reality. This was because he denied that there was any God who served as the ultimate word or meaning as the foundation for all other meaningful language across all cultures and contexts. **Therefore, he taught the Bible could not speak to us today as we have no way to know what it was saying and is saying to us since it was written in a different culture and time.** But this reasoning also means that all communication is impossible and is meaningless. This is a radically incoherent idea taken to this logical end, so instead Amy-Orr Ewing states that we must believe that "some meaning is possible, that communication can occur" (25). She encourages postmodern people to carefully examine the texts carefully to see if they make sense within themselves and if they make sense of the external world. She believes this will show them that the Bible has a "ring of truth" and is both "compelling and truthful".

Lecture 9:

QUESTIONS ABOUT PLURALISM, OTHER RELIGIONS AND RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS

(1) INTRODUCTION

(1.1) The Cultural Factors in the Development of Pluralism

(1.2) The Common Illustrations of Pluralism

(1) No Religion Has the Whole Truth:

(2) All Religions Are Different Roads That Ultimately Lead to the Same End:

(2) CHRISTIAN EXCLUSIVITY AND THE ANSWER TO PLURALISM

(3) THE INCOMPATIBLE BELIEFS OF WORLD RELIGIONS AND CULTS

(3.1) Christianity:

(3.2) Roman Catholicism:

(3.3) Islam:

(3.4) Hinduism:

(3.5) Buddhism:

(3.6) Jehovah's Witnesses:

(3.7) Mormonism (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints)

(4) DOES RELIGION JUST CAUSE CONFLICT?

QUESTIONS ABOUT PLURALISM, OTHER RELIGIONS AND RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS

(1) INTRODUCTION

(1.1) The Cultural Factors in the Development of Pluralism

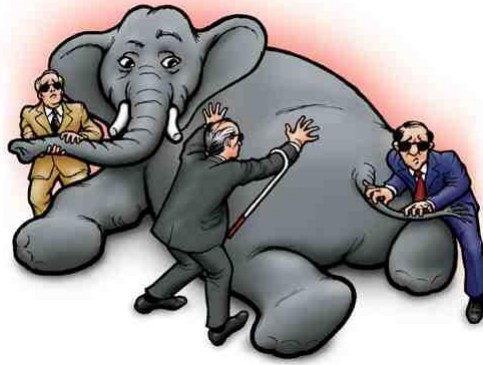
Britain in the 21st century is very different to only a few generations ago. In the past Cultural Imperialism believed that Western culture and ideas were superior to all others, especially those in the east. Other races and cultures were forced to adopt 'White' values and become more British. Even missionary endeavours became distracted from proclaiming the gospel, with trying to westernise the 'natives'. However all this has changed as the mood of postmodernism has set in across the Western world.

Mass immigration coupled with the vast increase in global travel and communication of information over the internet has opened up our minds to whole different cultures, traditions and ideas that we would not normally encounter. We increasingly are realising that our way of thinking about the world and doing things is only one of many. *For example, for a Westerner to take a short cut on a journey seems like a wise and time-efficient idea (because we are very focused on tasks) but for a Chinese person that is an insult because it suggests that you do not want to spend the extra time developing the relationship on the journey, as that is more important to them.*

As modern culture becomes more sophisticated and technology invades more of our lives, there is a certain mystique around seeking more simple ways of life, and more spiritual paths through eastern practises of Yoga and Meditation. Interestingly, the prediction that as culture and technology develops that we'll become less religious has been proven as false! Man is inherently religious, children are born religious and with a desire for God. *South Korea went from 1% to 40% Christian in decades even as it exploded in technological and social advancements, similarly in China which has more Christians than the entire Western world today.*

Also in our towns and cities people from all different countries and cultures are living in close proximity to one another. In Edinburgh, you only have to walk down the High Street to see or hear people who are Polish, Hindu, Muslim, Chinese, Japanese, African, American, etc. Each of these different people have their own values, traditions, ideas and religious backgrounds – so how can we all live together without fighting? The solution has been to emphasise Tolerance. This word should mean that each of us respect each other, regardless of our different claims of absolute truth. However, this word now means that we must forget about anything being true for all people, and we must all accept each other on the basis that what they believe as just as true for them as what we believe for ourselves. All truth is relative – this version of tolerance is very intolerant of those who believe in absolute/exclusive truth. This results in Religious Pluralism, which says that all spiritual paths and religious beliefs can co-exist as they are equally valid ways of living a good and peaceful spiritual life.

(1.2) The Common Illustrations of Pluralism



(1) No Religion Has the Whole Truth:

Firstly, imagine an elephant in a room. Surrounding this elephant are a number of blind men who are all trying to work out what the thing in front of them is. One person is examining the tail thinking: "This is a snake", while another is examining the leg thinks to himself "This is a tree"...etc. The purpose of this illustration is to say that each religion is simply tapping into a different part of the same God, but none of them can see the whole picture, they only can detect part of the whole.

This sounds like a humble statement from someone who says that we simply cannot know the whole truth, so we cannot be dogmatic about religion as we could all be tapping into the same spiritual being and that each religion only has part of the whole. However, it is also subtly arrogant because this is a claim to absolute knowledge (the Pluralist agnostic claims to be the one man who can see the whole picture to know absolutely that we cannot absolutely know the truth).



(2) All Religions Are Different Roads That Ultimately Lead to the Same End:

Secondly, it is often said that each religion is a different path up the same mountain and which eventually leads to the same summit. They say we all just need to respect one another's faith journey and not worry about imposing our beliefs on others or seeking conversions, since they'll be alright in the end. However, this ignores the fact that all the different religions have such radically different perspectives on things that they cannot even agree that they're climbing a mountain. Their beliefs and practices are so diverse that some do not even believe in the same kind of personal God. Some believe that they approach God by their good works while others believe it requires child sacrifices. It is hopelessly reductionistic and naïve to simply say they are all the same – indeed it's arrogant because it says to religious people that the Pluralist knows more about their religion than they do! Also, just because there are lots of different religions and worldviews does not mean that they all have to be correct or that Pluralism is correct – some of them could be genuinely mistaken, as even Pluralists have limits (they will condemn a religion which believes in child sacrifice for example). Given these fundamental differences between religions, the key question is: which of these belief systems are true?

(3) You Only Believe In Your God Because Of Where You Were Born:

Finally, Christians are often attacked now by Cultural Relativists and Pluralists saying: “If you were born in Pakistan you would be a Muslim”. This is an attempt to suggest that we really cannot know what the truth is about religion, because our cultural and historical background is what determines what religion we adopt. However, the Pluralist does not realise that they themselves would not be a Pluralist if they had been born in a different culture and different time – their beliefs are culturally conditioned also and need to be critically questioned. Their reasons for believing in cultural relativism and pluralism need to be examined just as much as the Christian’s reasons for believing need to be examined! It is also worth considering that people within different cultures and worldviews can and do see that there are alternatives and that some of them are better, so that they convert. So simply growing up in a particular context does not change the fact that some religions are better than others and that people can see that.

(2) CHRISTIAN EXCLUSIVITY AND THE ANSWER TO PLURALISM

It is becoming common for Christians to be accused of being intolerant because of their belief that there is only one way to Heaven through Jesus Christ. It is true that the gospel is exclusive and a “narrow road”. It admits nothing other than whole-hearted devotion to and trust in Jesus as the way of salvation: **“I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6); “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).** Christians are not Universalists or Inclusivists who believe that everyone will be saved - **it would have been a mistake on God’s part for Jesus’ to die on the Cross if indeed there was any other way to get to heaven** – to suggest this we have to arrogant and say we know better than God! Instead, we believe that Jesus’ death was sufficient for the sins of everyone in the whole world, but it is only efficient for those who actively choose to believe in Him, accepting the gift of salvation – that is why we are engaged in evangelism!

However, it is not intolerant or unloving to share the Gospel with people who believe something different. *If your friend was dying from a cancerous tumour that only one medication could help cure, then it would not be unloving or intolerant to encourage them to take it – even if they felt that a traditional herbal medicine would be sufficient. If your friend was walking the wrong way then it would not be fair to stand back to let them continue to make the mistake, but the loving thing would be to point them in the right direction.* We are all in the position of going the wrong way and of slowly dying due to our problem of sin.

Today these **other religions are telling people different things TO DO in order to be saved, while Jesus makes clear that it is not what we do that matters for salvation, rather it is WHO WE ARE.** He said that the only way to see life in heaven is to be “born again” – to be made new in our innermost being. That is something that no philosophy, or religious practice or moral deeds can produce – these things cannot penetrate to deal with our deepest self and need. It requires a work of God to take place in our lives to do this, and the only person who can do this work is Jesus Christ. **The only reason Jesus is exclusive is because He’s the only one with the ability to help cure our problem of sin.** He has a proven ability to deal with it by His death on the Cross for sin and resurrection to His showing that we could have new life through Him. Indeed, Jesus claims that He is the best way, better than every other attempted way, and so Christians are offering to people knowledge that will enrich them and make their lives better. They can hardly be criticised for sharing such GOOD NEWS with others. **Furthermore, it could be said that the gospel is not exclusive in the first place, because it is a freely made offer of salvation made inclusively to all people - it is open to “whosoever will believe”.**

This is not arrogant or a claim of power over others, since Christians do not believe they have been good enough to deserve this truth or clever enough to work it out for themselves – they are not saying to others: “We’re better and cleverer than you; while you’re wrong for believing what you do”. *Instead as Christians we are simply beggars telling other beggars where they can get some bread.* God has shown

His kindness and goodness to us by showing us the way to be saved (through His Word and His Son), in spite of our failures to be good enough. So this allows us no room for feelings of arrogance or superiority, instead we must lovingly hold out the good news that we have found to be true.

(3) THE INCOMPATIBLE BELIEFS OF WORLD RELIGIONS AND CULTS

It is helpful to have a basic understanding of the irreconcilable differences between the beliefs of the different major world religions. This is good to know when you engage with them, but also to use as evidence when you are discussing with someone the question: “Well aren’t all religions teaching the same thing?” You will see that they all have extremely different views about God, Jesus, Salvation. This section will briefly survey: Christianity, Roman Catholicism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormonism. One of the best books on this subject covering all these religions and cults is *“Strongholds Shaken: A Biblical Examination of Religious Cults and World Faiths”* by David Legge.

(3.1) Christianity:

Development:

- The Church was founded by Jesus Christ. He claimed to be the Son of God, and the expected Messiah of the Jewish people who fulfilled all the promises predicted in their Old Testament. He appointed apostles, who He trained for 3 years and who would then be the first missionaries to tell the world of the good news that God had provided a way for us all to be saved from our sins. They were the ones who wrote the New Testament scriptures which describe the life and work of Jesus; and the implications of Jesus’ life for our lives and for our theology (building on what the Bible already contained in the Old Testament).
- Despite Jesus being hated and executed by the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, in that same city only a few weeks later the followers of Christ (later given the derogatory name: Christians) numbered several thousand, because the people who had hated Him saw Him die and then rise again as He had predicted and as the Bible had predicted many hundreds of years previously. The church would go on to include tens of thousands of non-Jewish people within a few years and stretch all around the known world thanks to the church’s missionary endeavours and the sacrifice of many who died for their faith, because they knew they were telling people the truth.

View on the Bible:

- The Bible is God’s Word that was written down through men – when the Bible speaks, God speaks! It is one cohesive story written over 1500 years and by 50 people from all ages, backgrounds and walks of life that speaks about Jesus Christ as God’s plan to save mankind after its sinful rebellion. It gives us everything we need to know to be saved from death to go to heaven, and to live our lives in a way that pleases God today.
- The Bible, while made up of many genres of literature, is to be understood literally – that is to say that we are to let the original author’s meaning be what we take and understand from it as we would in any other form of communication. There is no hidden meaning or code! At the same time let’s define ‘literal’: we are to respect figures of speech (metaphor, simile, imagery), grammatical constructions, literature types (distinguishing between poetic sections and historical narrative sections), etc. like we would any other type of writing. God had a message to give us, He determined the message, and we have to let Him communicate that to us in His Word – rather than read in our own meaning and ideas.

View on God:

- God is the creator and designer of all things in the universe. He created a good world with no corruption or death in it. But mankind sinned, and turned its back on God in rebellion. This resulted in us being cut off from the life we were meant to enjoy in relationship with God and introduced death, discord and destruction into God’s creation. The Bible explains how God has worked and promises to work in human history to restore the world to its original state while saving sinners from the consequences of their rebellion.
- God is loving and just. He always has been loving because He exists as three persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) in one substance of God (‘the Godhead’). Thus assures us of the genuineness of

God's loving character, because He has always existed as love within Himself, before creating us to love us. He is just because He punishes wrongdoing and evil (we all have a sense of justice and right/wrong that comes from God); but He is also loving and gracious, that He has sought through the gospel to save us from our sin while justly punishing it through the death of His Son.

View on Jesus:

- Jesus is God's Son, who has always existed in relationship with God the Father as part of the Trinity.
- God's plan of salvation, needed a perfect man to die in the place of sinful mankind, taking the punishment they deserved for their sinful rebellion against Him. The only perfect man who ever lived as Jesus, who was God's Son come in flesh willing to die in love for us to save us.
- Jesus is the only person whose whole life biography was written hundreds of years in advance and recorded in the Old Testament part of the Bible.
- Jesus died on the Cross bearing the sins of the whole world (which He alone could do because He had never sinned Himself and also because He was God so could deal with everyone's sins). This was the ultimate act of sacrificial love, made only more incredible by the fact He was dying for His enemies.
- Jesus rose again on the third day showing He was God and demonstrating that sins could be forgiven and people could live forever after death.

View on Salvation:

- Salvation is the forgiveness of our sins and God giving us the gift of eternal life in heaven with Himself
- Salvation comes by accepting the offer of forgiveness – it is accepting a gift (grace). Salvation is not an automatic thing because Jesus has died and rose again, if people do not accept the gift of salvation then they are not saved and will face the judgement of God at their sins. Only in Jesus are we safe from judgement.
- We accept the gift by placing our trust (faith) in Jesus as the Son of God, believing that He died in our place taking our punishment, so that we now can be made right with God legally and have a living relationship with Him in our daily lives, knowing that because Jesus rose again we too will rise again after we die as He promised into eternal life in heaven.
- Christians now seek to share the message of Jesus with people in missions and evangelism. We also seek to live according to the Bible, because we know that is God's manual for how humans were meant to work originally and that is the way best for us and most pleasing to God. We do this not as a way of earning favour with God, but as a way of expressing our thanks to God for what He has already completely done for us in Jesus and because we love Him and want to please Him. Essentially we are not saved BY good works, but saved FOR good works.
- Christians also seek to reflect the loving and just character of God to the world in looking after the weak, vulnerable, oppressed and neglected. Jesus in His life showed us God cared about this practical ministry as He also preached to them about their eternal needs to be right with God.

(3.2) Roman Catholicism:

Development:

- One of Jesus' disciples, Peter, was the first to grasp the identity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. When he confessed his faith in Jesus, Jesus declared: "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will establish my church". The Apostle Peter would go on to be one of the founders of the church in Rome in the 1st century. The Catholic Church believes that this makes Peter the first Pope and God's representative on Earth. However, Jesus' words are actually a very clever play on words. Peter's name is "petra" (a small stone disconnected from the earth), while the rock Jesus refers to is "petros" (a solid stone firmly and unmovingly embedded into the ground) – Jesus says it is upon Peter's confession of faith in Jesus as God's Son that the church will be built and grow, as others make that same confession. The Church is not meant to be a powerful institution that rules over lives, but bearers of a powerful message that changes lives and invites people in to hear that message about God.
- Following Emperor Constantine in 324AD making the Christian faith the state religion, backed with all the benefits of state favour, the pagan sects throughout Europe were forced to convert. Most did so formally and enjoyed the benefits of the state – but they never did choose to accept Jesus and the Bible's teaching as their own. Instead they brought their own ideas, rituals and idols into the church. Church history shows how the pure faith recorded and practised in the Bible began to lose its way. The Bishop of Rome gradually gained more political power over other bishops in Europe to take control and establish the Papacy, which claimed a link with Peter the founder of the Roman church and his authority to be God's representative on Earth to build the church and advance new teachings that tried to please the pagans and the Bible's teaching (it did neither well!).
- With the Bible only in Latin at this time the common people depended on the local priest to read and explain the Bible to them, while it remained closed to them. Over time alterations to the original Bible's teaching accumulated through church traditions and rituals which grew more authoritative than the Bible's actual teaching, with no one able to check what the church taught against the original true message. Particularly the church's teaching that salvation was by works and rituals and prayers to Saints and Mary – rather than by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ.
- With the development of the printing press; publishing of Erasmus' text of the Bible in the original languages following discoveries in the 14th/15th century; translation of the Bible into the common tongues of the people; and exposure of the corruption in the church, there was a move for change and reform. The Reformation was born by the Protestants who protested against the state of the Catholic Church. They studied the text of the Bible for themselves and rediscovered the original true message recorded there in of salvation being a gift from God to be received by faith and the Bible being the sole authority for life and belief. They were forced out of the church and many thousands were murdered in an attempt to suppress this.

View on the Bible:

- The teaching of the Bible is interpreted and determined by the church and its traditions. The Bible and the Church are equal in authority. That is why people gather intently to hear what the Pope has to say and pronounces, since it is like God is speaking authoritatively today something new.

View on God:

- Largely would agree with Christians on the nature of God

View on Jesus:

- Much of the church's teaching on the life of Jesus would be the same, but there are perversions from the truth in significant ways:
 - Jesus is seen as not the sole mediator between God and Mankind. Rather Mary is seen as being with Jesus in heaven and is the kinder, more loving one who speaks on our behalf to Jesus. Likewise praying to Saints works on the same basis that they speak to Jesus on our

behalf and win Him over – as if He is some hardened and unloving person that needs to be convinced by others to do good for us.

- Jesus' death for our sins was not once and final on the Cross. Rather every Mass is another sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, thus why the church believes in the bread and wine of communion Jesus' body and blood is actually manifested by transubstantiation. We also need to contribute to our own salvation by our own works.

View on Salvation:

- Catholics agree that all people are born with a disposition to sin and rebel against God (original sin). But the church teaches that the baptism of infants administers saving grace to the child to remove original sin from them. However, they admit that even after this the child goes on to sin, so they believe that there needs to be a continual adding of grace into the life through the practice of the Sacraments and also through be re-forgiven by confession and penance to a priest, who forgives sin (rather than Jesus).
- Rather than it being salvation by grace (i.e. being a gift), salvation is something that must be earned by works.
- Also the church teaches that after death everyone must go to Purgatory, a place where the dead have to atone for their own sins until they are fit to go to Heaven. This contradicts the clear teaching of the Bible that Jesus has accomplished in full, once and forever, everything necessary for us to be forgiven of our sins and to go to heaven to be with God immediately on death, awaiting the resurrection from the dead into a New Heaven and Earth restored to perfection.

(3.3) Islam:

Development:

- Mohammed was born in 570AD to a wealthy family in Mecca, the chief city in the Arabian Peninsula and the centre for worshipping the polytheistic pagan idols in the black box, the Qabar. Mohammed regularly went to a desert cave to pray and meditate, and on one visit he claimed the angel Gabriel appeared to him (and would do so over a period of 23 years) commanding him to write down the recitation (or Quran) of God's Words. Mohammed was at first fearful that he had met the devil and a great evil in the cave, but later came to believe this was truly a new revelation of God being given to him. His new monotheistic religion was opposed by the rulers of Mecca, so he was exiled to Medina until later he was able to lead the conquest of Mecca.
- It was only after his death that Islam became a radical expansionist religion seeking to convert all the peoples of the world (da'wah), bring them into the community of faith and impose upon them Islamic Shar'ia Law. Its core doctrinal statement is: "There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet"

View on the Bible:

- The Bible is respected as a Holy Book by the Islamic faith, but is believed to have been corrupted over time so that the true faith has been lost and needed to be restored by the final revelation of God in the Quran, through the prophet Mohammed. The Muslim believes in four Holy Books: the Pentateuch (the Torah), the Psalms (the Zabur), a version of the life and ministry of Jesus (the Injil), and finally the Quran.
- It is interesting to point out to Muslims that Mohammed is very favourable to the teachings of the Bible and tells his followers in the Quran to pay attention to them carefully – the ideas about the corruption of the Bible came much later.
- The Quran itself was compiled as a collection of Suras taken from the recitation of Gabriel, but it is not in any chronological or logical order. It is supplemented by the sayings and teachings of Mohammed which were compiled over the decades after his death, called the Hadith. The documentary evidence for the reliability of the Quran is very sketchy because an official version was compiled after which all other conflicting versions were burned.
- In the Islamic religion the divine Logos is not Jesus Christ, but the Quran itself. That is why it is so offensive to mistreat the Quran – it is like a direct assault on Jesus, from a Christian perspective. They also hold the Bible in high esteem and criticise Christians who do not take good care of their Bibles, so it is important to always have a clean and in good condition Bible when speaking with a Muslim.

View on God:

- Although it is controversial to point this out, Allah was the Arabian moon god in the polytheistic pagan religions, married to the sun god. The name predates Islam by centuries, rather than being a new revelation in the 6th century AD.
- Allah is a strictly monotheistic god, who is completely transcendent and sovereign. In heaven the Muslim does not expect to see Allah or be able to have a relationship with him, because he is too transcendent to have anything to do with created beings in that personal way. His absolute sovereignty means that the Muslim needs to adopt a fatalistic outlook on life of submission (literal meaning of Islam) to the sovereign unchangeable will of God. This also means that Allah is not a God of love nor of justice – he simply does what he pleases (in contrast to the Christian God who is a God of love in His very essence by the fact that He exists as a plurality of relationship within Himself with the other members of the Godhead)
- The Muslim struggles to understand the Christian belief in one God in three persons (the Trinity). They often will argue that 1+1+1=3 not 1. However, they need to be brought to understand that Christians believe that God is one ontological being, but in three distinct persons. This is not a

contradiction; it is simply a conundrum that we as humans cannot get our minds around since He is God!

View on Jesus:

- Jesus is respected as prophet of God in the Quran and he stands alongside another 28 prophets mentioned (most of them Biblical characters). However, Jesus is inferior to Mohammed who is the greatest prophet and the last word from Allah to mankind.
- Jesus is explicitly said not to be the Son of God (a term offensive to Muslims who understand it literally meaning that Allah had sex with the virgin Mary – without understanding that He is begotten in a way different to human beings, since He is the externally pre-existent one who proceeds from the Father). Muslims believe in the statement: “God has not begotten a son”. They say he was simply a man who in fact told people he was not divine. Muslims believe that Christians commit an unforgiveable sin by attributing deity to Jesus.
- The Quran states that Jesus did not die on the Cross but instead only appeared to Cross – with people disagreeing over whether Allah took him up off the Cross or replaced him at the last minute with Judas Iscariot.

View on Salvation:

- Muslims do not believe that mankind needs the grace of God for salvation or external work of a Saviour, because they do not believe in original sin. Instead Adam is said to have left a bad example which humans can choose to follow or seek to obey Allah to earn their salvation – man can redeem himself. Part of that process of earning salvation involves following the Five Pillars of Islam: Reciting the Shahada creedal statement every day, Fasting during the month of Ramadan, Praying five times towards Mecca each day (combined with ritual washings of the body and confession of sins to purify the soul), Giving alms to the poor, and making a Pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime (if able bodied and financially capable).
- There is no guarantee or assurance of heaven for any Muslim, but for those who in Allah’s will have more good rather than bad in their lives, they will be admitted to heaven – a place of eternal sensual pleasure and paradise. It is believed by radical Muslims that the only way to ensure entrance into heaven is to die as a martyr killing the enemies of Allah.

(3.4) Hinduism:

Development:

- Hinduism developed indigenously in India through a process of gradual evolution over 4000 years and was named after its adherents in the Indus Valley (by the Muslims in the 13th Century AD). It is not just a religion but a whole culture and is one of the oldest religions in the world with 700 million followers today. It has become embraced in the West through the cultural revolution of the mid-20th century and the embracing of eastern thought by The Hippies, celebrity endorsements of rock stars, and also by the infiltration of New Age movements into culture.

View on the Bible:

- Hindus do not recognise the Bible as a holy book.
- Their own holy books are a collection of hymns and prayers called the Vedas (Wisdom/Knowledge) which are believed to bring people to God(s). These Vedics containing Vedas are contained in several volumes, the most important of which is the equivalent to the Bible in the Hindu faith: The Bhag-a-vad Gita. These hymns are recited as part of Transcendental Meditation which seeks to empty the mind of all thoughts and of the whole person in seeking to connect with the universal spirit of Brahma.

View on God:

- Hinduism is a polytheistic religion that believes in thousands (possibly millions) of gods, but it is also pantheistic in believing that God is a universal spirit that is in all things and all people binding all of nature together. This universal spirit is an impersonal god.
- The three major deities worshipped in Hinduism are: Brahma (believed to be the creative force behind the universe), Shiva (believed to be the destroyer) and Vishnu (believed to be the preserver) – while Vishnu has a number of incarnations/avatars that are usually in the form of animals (rather than humans). These animal incarnations of Vishnu are worshipped and revered by Hindus e.g. cows are believed to be one incarnation so are allowed to roam free and eat from any market stall they please in towns.

View on Jesus:

- Hinduism as a culture is very accepting of other religions so long as they are willing to surrender any claims to absolute truth and instead simply accept that their deity is one of the great pantheon of gods worshipped by the Hindus. So Jesus would be seen as an incarnation of Vishnu, but just one of the many gods to be worshipped, who then returned to be a part of the universal spirit of Brahma.

View on Salvation:

- There is no concept of sin in Hinduism – it is an illusion. Rather the problem with man is his ignorance to the fact that god is in him and everything is god, so he is actually divine himself.
- Salvation (moksha - to break the cycle of life, death and reincarnation) is accomplished through the practise of the Four Yoga Paths which emphasises obeying your duties according to your caste, asceticism, knowledge and meditation. The aim of salvation is to enter into the personally non-existent state of nirvana, which is complete union with and assumption into the impersonal force of Brahma.
- Only certain types of people are able to attain this salvation, however, as if you are in a low caste in the Indian social system then you are not considered to be human, so there is no hope or help made available to them. Being born into a lower caste is seen as a punishment (or bad karma) for things done in a past life. So there is no solution for some kinds of bad karma and this is the great fear of people in the lowest castes.

(3.5) Buddhism:

Development:

- This is a breakaway group from Hinduism that began in the 6th century BC under the leadership of its prophet: Siddhartha Gautama (The Buddha – “Enlightened One”). He grew up in a palace isolated from all pain and suffering in the outside world, but one day he ventured outside to see the ravages of old age, sickness and death as the common fate for all mankind. However he also saw a religious monk who despite being poor was joyful and inwardly happy, which Buddha decided must be the right path in life. He became a monk and claimed to discover new revelation under a Fig Tree (“The Tree of Wisdom”) about the nature of suffering and salvation from it.

View on God:

- There is no God in Buddhism and questions about God are seen as a distraction from our present problems and need to escape our desires.

View on Jesus:

- There is no place for Jesus as the Son of God in Buddhism. If he is anyone, it is simply as another enlightened teacher. But it is the way of Buddha which is the focus of attention. Much of the teaching of Jesus goes completely against Buddhism.

View on Salvation:

- He taught that all suffering was because of material things and desires for pleasure. He taught the Four Noble Truths which teaches that the origin of suffering is our desires and that when we cease to desire we will cease to suffer – since suffering is really an illusion caused by our desires. The road to stop our desires is called the Eightfold Path which is focused on doing, thinking and being everything right. This leads to the state of Nirvana, through practises of meditation and yoga, and through attaining enough karma (or good merit).
- If in one lifetime you do not acquire enough karma to enter nirvana, then they believe in continual reincarnation under the soul enters into the state of nirvana. People who have done good and acquired karma in the past are happy people in life, while those who unhappy or suffering are suffering the consequences of bad karma. The focus is completely on our own actions and is a religion focused on ourselves saving ourselves.
- However, the Bible clearly teaches that our desires cannot be eliminated because our hearts are sinful and that our own efforts cannot change our hearts. Instead we need to be born-again by God’s divine work in our lives to save us. It is also clear that we cannot save ourselves by meditation or attaining good karma, but instead depend completely on the finished work of Jesus on the Cross to be saved. Our sufferings in the world are caused by our sinful rebellion against God and the curse on creation, but the solution is not to empty ourselves of desire, but rather to find peace with God and enter into His New Creation where there will be no more pain, suffering or death.

(3.6) Jehovah's Witnesses:

Development:

- Founded by Charles Taze Russell as Zion's Watchtower Tract Society in 1884 after he wrote "Studies in Scripture". He grew up in mainstream Christian churches but rejected them and their teachings from the Bible, preferring to use the Bible to advance his own thoughts from the study. This was primarily advanced through a magazine and Bible study groups using Russell's notes and books to 'unlock' the Bible.
- Joseph Franklin Rutherford in 1931 claimed to have a vision from God, where Jehovah spoke to him and called for the organisation's name to be changed to "Jehovah's Witnesses". He assumed total control of the organisation and turned it into the form it is today.

View on the Bible:

- They have produced own version of the Bible in 1961 called the New World Translation. It is not truly another Bible translation, since none of the 'translators' had any knowledge of the original Bible languages to be able to translate from them. Rather large portions of the original Bible text have been altered to reflect the teaching of the Watchtower Society and Russell.
- Russell's book 'Studies in Scripture' along with the 'Watchtower Magazine' are the main texts for the Jehovah's Witnesses. These other sources would be revered on the same level of their NWT Bible, if not above.
- Also they believe that prophets still speak authoritatively today and give messages from God to the church which all must obey. However, of all the many prophecies recorded given over the lifetime of this movement, embarrassingly none have ever come true or happened. The excuse normally given is that they have happened 'spiritually' – the most famous example being when Jesus returned to earth and brought His kingdom in 1914, spiritually supposedly after nothing happened and many followers had sold everything they had in preparation for the Second Coming.

View on God:

- Deny that God exists as three persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) in one substance of God – a community loving relationship within Himself. (Normally termed: "The Trinity")
- They say since the Bible does not use the term "Trinity" it is wrong and instead emphasise the oneness of God. The Bible does indeed make clear that God is one, but also within that Godhead there is distinction of persons. This is a conundrum but not a contradiction – God is beyond our comprehension!

View on Jesus:

- Deny that Jesus is God the Son and that He has always existed in equal relationship with God the Father. Rather believe that Jesus is a created being, the Archangel Michael who appeared as a man on earth. This makes Jesus a lesser creature of God, not God Himself.
- Jesus did not truly die and rise again from the dead, rather it was a spiritual resurrection.

View on Salvation:

- Jesus' death for us was not sufficient to save us or allow us entry to heaven – instead Jehovah's Witnesses must accumulate good works and merit with God through missionary work, studying the Watchtower magazine, etc.

(3.7) Mormonism (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints)

Development:

- Its founder Joseph Smith lived in the 19th century. He grew up disillusioned by Christianity but was from a Christian background. He was confused by all the different denominations, so one day prayed to God asking which church he should join – only apparently to be told not to join any of them since all had become apostate for more than a millennium. In this meeting with God, he claimed that he learned that God the Father and Jesus were separate beings.
- At the age of 17 in 1823 he claimed to receive another vision from the angel Moroni who commissioned him to restore the true gospel and church by translating the Book of Mormon which was buried near his home. He found in the ground a book made up on bound golden plates, which he claimed was written in 'Reformed Egyptian' and which could only be read through a pair of spectacles he was given, which were the Urim and Thummim. These golden tablets were subsequently taken away and never seen again. Archaeologists have subsequently proven that the documents Smith claimed to translate was actually the Egyptian Book of the Dead and that the Book of Mormon was certainly not a translation of this document.
- Due to the practise of polygamy by Smith's followers, they were persecuted and driven to the desolate region of Utah and Salt Lake city to found a colony to live in. Later in life, Smith also claimed that John the Baptist appeared to him to confer on him the Aaronic Priesthood and later the Three Apostles (Peter, James and John) also appeared to confer on him the Melchizadeck Priesthood.

View on the Bible:

- The Book of Mormon is subtitled: "Another Testament About Jesus Christ". It alleges to describe a North American race called the Jaredites, Lamanites and Nephites (there is absolutely no archaeological evidence of any such peoples). They were the descendants of the Jewish people at the Tower of Babel, and apparently were the fore-fathers of the Native Americans (a claim that has been completely disproven scientifically by gene analysis). Smith alleged that after Jesus' resurrection He came to North America to preach the gospel and establish a church there among these people. This church and its scriptures were not corrupted like what happened to the early church across the Atlantic.
- Along with the Bible, Mormons believe in the Book of Mormon and the Pearl of Great Price as being their sacred scriptures and the full revelation of God through their prophet Joseph Smith.

View on God:

- The Mormon worldview is essentially materialistic. The Mormon God is Elohim. He is an exalted man who lives on a planet called Kolob and rules this planet. While Elohim is the supreme God of earth and we are all Elohim's children, there are many other gods who rule over other planets. Elohim spends eternally copulating with and procreating with other goddesses to have spirit children.
- All human beings have the opportunity to become exalted men like Elohim ("As God once was, man is; and as God is, man may become") and go on to rule their own planet with their offspring from eternal procreation with goddesses (the emphasis on marriage and the family in Mormonism, believing in eternal and celestial marriage, means that after this life the husband and wife will go to have their own planet and populate it for eternity as gods).

View on Jesus:

- Jesus is the son of Elohim and the brother of Lucifer – Jesus' earthly body came about through Elohim travelling to earth to procreate with the virgin Mary. So Jesus is not truly God and divine in the Christian understanding of that concept. Elohim and one of his goddess wives apparently came to earth to birth the human race, and a divine council was called to decide what would be the fate of the inhabitants of the planet who were sent there to be mortals and learn the difference between good and evil. Lucifer presented his plan to become the saviour of the world, so he would take all

the glory, but instead Elohim chose Jesus' plan to become the saviour. Lucifer angrily led a rebellion of a 1/3 of the spirits. Those spirits that fought against Lucifer would be born into Mormon families as white people; while those who sat on the fence would be cursed to be born as black people.

- The Mormon Jesus was said to have three wives: Mary, Martha and Mary Magdalene and have many children. He did not die on the Cross for our sins.
- When Jesus returns He will judge the world alongside Elohim and Joseph Smith.

View on Salvation:

- The Mormons use very similar language to Christians but what they mean by their language is completely different. They believe that salvation is accomplished by works and through the rites of baptism and observance of Temple rituals. They also believe that the lost can be redeemed after death by others being baptised for the dead on their behalf (a practise that has caused great controversy when they have baptised Holocaust victims and made them into Muslims posthumously).
- Salvation and glorification for the Mormon ultimately means to become exalted human beings and rule our own planets having children for eternity.

(4) DOES RELIGION JUST CAUSE CONFLICT?

The evidence from history is that religion does cause wars and conflicts between peoples – although at the same time atheism in the last century was responsible for the deaths of many hundreds of millions of people. The problem is not necessarily religions or worldviews, but people themselves!

However, specifically looking at religion, it does result in conflict. Tim Keller suggests that it commonly develops like this:

1. A religious group of people think they have the truth and are living a good life
2. This religious group separates itself from others who do not have the same truth (so they are not compromised in their beliefs) and so they are not corrupted in their pure lifestyles
3. Overtime this religious group of people think they are superior to others and caricature what they think the others around them believe (since they don't know them and don't have meaningful relationships of love and friendship with them)
4. This leads to oppression and seeking to control and have power over outsiders to the religion; which will result in open conflict as both sides fight for dominance and survival.

The fact that religion causes conflict is because religions are followed by people who are sinfully selfish and who seek to be better than everyone else. Religion is a problem, but the Bible's solution is not to give us another religion but to share with us the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Jesus has done all the work necessary to save us which we could not attain by our moral or spiritual efforts, and He has communicated to us God's truth which we could not have worked out on our own. We have absolutely nothing to boast about as Christians, and that grace of God should make us generous, kind and loving to others – even our enemies, remembering that we were formerly God's enemies before Jesus saved us!

Rather than cause conflict, Jesus came to end the greatest conflict in human history. It was not caused by religion, but rather by mankind's rebellion against God. Jesus came to bring "on earth peace to men among whom God's favour rests" (**Luke 2:14**) and to reconcile us to God (**Ephesians 2:1-10**), with whom we have declared war and fought against (both actively by disobeying His laws and passively by simply living in the world He has made without thought of thanking Him or living with any reference to Him). Our rebellion against God has also resulted in our inability to be at peace with our neighbours, but Jesus came to make us right with God (vertically) and right with each other (horizontally). That is why He Himself preached that His followers should be peaceful people (**Matthew 5:9**), who love their enemies (**Matthew 5:43-48**), who do not seek revenge or repay people with evil (**Matthew 5:38-42**), and should do good to all people (**Luke 10:25-37; Galatians 6:10**). Jesus Himself did not come to lead revolution or to cause conflict, but devoted Himself to caring for people and for helping those who were physically, emotionally and above all spiritually needy.

If we simply listened to Jesus to be reconciled to God and lived as He taught us, then the world would be a better place filled with less conflict and sin than it is now. The solution to the world's conflicts is not to get rid of Jesus and His religion of Christianity, but rather to embrace Him and become a Christian!

Lecture 10:

QUESTIONS ABOUT MORALITY AND SEXUAL RESTRICTIVENESS

(1) INTRODUCTION TO MORALITY

- (1.1) Defining Morality
- (1.2) The Inescapability of Morality
- (1.3) The Controversy of Public Morality

(2) THE NECESSITY OF GOD FOR MORALITY

- (2.1) God as the Necessary Basis for Morality
 - (a) Man's Fallen Nature Needs God:
 - (b) Man's Fallen System of Government Needs God
 - (c) Our Instinctive Knowledge of and Longing for Absolute Morality
 - (d) God's Character and the Nature of Absolute Morality
- (2.2) God's Ten Commandments as the Basis for Christian Ethics
- (2.3) The Secular Basis for Ethics
- (2.4) Inconsistency of the New Atheist Position on Morality:
 - (a) Finding a Basis in Nature
 - (b) Finding an Explanation for Altruism

(3) THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION AND THE DECLINE OF ABSOLUTE MORALITY

(4) OTHER MATTERS OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS

QUESTIONS ABOUT MORALITY AND SEXUAL RESTRICTIVENESS

(1) INTRODUCTION TO MORALITY

(1.1) Defining Morality

Morality is the code by which we judge and determine what is good and bad, right and wrong. In practise there are two different approaches to morality:

- **Descriptive:** Morality is a way of describing the social and ethical code of a particular community who have subscribed to understanding the world and competing values in a particular accepted way. However, if you are not a member of that community then this morality has no implications for you – it sees morality as essentially culturally relative without over-arching implications for all people, since each culture and individual decides what they consider to be moral and what is not. **Thus morality is a standard that originates from within man – this is the secular approach popularised in the last two centuries by secularists.**
- **Normative:** Morality is a way of describing the social and ethical code that is universally governing for all people, who are capable of understanding and conforming their conduct to it. It is seen as the rational code that all rational people should subscribe to, rather than as something that different individuals in different communities can pick and choose from for themselves. **Thus morality is a standard that is outside of man – this is the theistic approach.**

(1.2) The Inescapability of Morality:

Scenarios of difficult moral decisions:

- *A mother gives birth to two babies, but they are conjoined twins. Each of them shares the same heart and lungs. If left alone then the children will die as the heart and lungs are not able to keep them both alive. If separated then the doctors will have to decide which child will live and which will die, based upon their judgement of which is more likely to survive longest. Should they perform the surgery killing one child or not intervene and allow both to die? Can it ever be right to take action that takes a life?*
- *The sacrifice of the few to save the many: Four men survive the sinking of their ship and drift in a lifeboat on the open sea for two weeks awaiting rescue. They have long since run out of food. One person is weaker than the others, so they decide to kill him, eat him in order that the three of them might survive and have a better chance of being rescued.*
- *A train is hurtling along a track towards 10 workmen ahead, while you have the chance to change over the rails so the train goes onto another line where a pregnant woman is standing. Is it justifiable to do something to save the many at the cost of the few?*
- *Is it right to allow the torture of a bomber's wife in front of him to make him divulge the location of the bombs before it's too late and thousands of people are killed?*

We agonise over these decisions because we sense that there must be a RIGHT answer, a BEST way to do things...if we didn't believe that then we would just do whatever we felt like at the moment and what was most convenient to us. The sense that there is an absolute standard of right and wrong, along with the sense that we will be held accountable to it is something that all human beings instinctively feel. This is what the Bible talks about in Romans 2:13-15 – the law of God written on our hearts and conscience.

(1.3) The Controversy of Public Morality:

It's common to hear people argue today: "You cannot legislate morality" – they are saying that because of our multi-cultural society today (different groups having different positions on moral issues) that the government cannot impose one standard of morality on all the people. However, that is wrong because all legislation is inherently making moral judgements about what is good for society and what values we should obey. Legislation enshrines for a society what we the people and our elected representatives place value upon and the moral judgements we make about competing values. *For example, we have legislated about speed limits and speed cameras, because we have judged that the value of our freedom to drive needs to be balanced against the value of human life which is put in jeopardy by excessive speed when driving.* We cannot help legislate morality because we are all moral beings with calculations about what things are valuable in life and go towards making the best life.

On issues like speeding we might all agree, but on other issues like Abortion, Euthanasia, Sexuality, and opening up Marriage to homosexual partners, the battle lines between the competing moral positions heat up! **Thus, since all public discourse is essentially about morality – rather than a neutral affair – it is wrong to say that Christians should not be able to bring their moral convictions into the public square, because everyone comes into the public square with their moral convictions about what is the good life just with different reasons.** It is really a rejection of the Christian's reasons for their moral beliefs (absolute/normative moral beliefs binding on all people because they come from God), rather than that the secular person's non-religious beliefs are neutral (their own belief system is far from neutral by rejecting God through whom comes absolute morality!).

So as we realise the true reason for the modern conflict over moral issues in the public square, it becomes obvious that Christians can and should be involved in the public discussion. Indeed we can help them to see that our moral beliefs make better sense of the world (as they resonate with their inherent moral conscience) and produce a better way of life than theirs.

(2) THE NECESSITY OF GOD FOR MORALITY

It is common today to hear the New Atheists argue that belief in God was necessary in the past to prevent mankind wiping itself out, but now in our more enlightened era we no longer need this primitive idea. We can be good without God...or so they claim. **Do we need God to be good?**

(2.1) God as the Necessary Basis for Morality

(a) Man's Fallen Nature Needs God:

Some people suggest that with all our advancements and developments in culture and civilization that we no longer need the primitive idea of God to be moral people. However, for a start the idea of progress is really misplaced according to the Bible. In Daniel chapter two, King Nebuchadnezzar has a vision from God in which he saw a great statue that was in the image of a great man. The statue represents all the great empires of world history that would reign over the nation of Israel until the end of time. *"This image, then, is a picture of world history. The materials in it decrease in weight (from gold to clay) so that the statue is top-heavy and easily pushed over. Men and women think that human civilization is so strong and enduring; really it is resting on brittle feet of clay. Note too that the value decreases: from gold to silver to bronze to iron to clay. Is mankind getting "better and better" as time goes on? No! Human civilization is actually getting cheaper and weaker. There is also a decrease in beauty and glory (gold is certainly more beautiful than iron mixed with clay); and there is a decrease in strength (from gold to clay) as we approach the end of human history"*⁶⁷. The only hope for the nations of the world is the coming kingdom of Christ. Mankind cannot solve its own problems of its own making.

This has been proven to be correct because no matter how much we have advanced in the last two hundred years, the same vices and social problems persist. Technology and education has advanced our society but has not changed the essential nature of man, with even the most impressive men being capable of great evils and the basest immoral acts. It seems that no matter what progress we make societally that man only continues to degenerate further.

(b) Man's Fallen System of Government Needs God

Secondly, look at the horrors atheistic regimes inflicted on the world in 20th century at the cost of countless hundreds of millions of lives in Europe, Russia, Cambodia to name but a few – we do need God! Dostoyevsky warned: **"Without God anything is permissible"** and he was right, because without God morality is relative and not absolute. We each have competing conceptions of what is good and right, and are without a standard to judge which of us is right – *"who's to say that killing someone because they really annoy you isn't good? In my culture we do that!"* Such thinking is not as ridiculous as it sounds, because this is the worldview that birthed the Holocaust and the murder of 6 million people.

Nihilism (the idea that there is no real meaning or purpose to life) is only logical and consistent outcome – indeed, Nietzsche pointed out that in the absence of God we must become gods ourselves to replace the law-giver that we have killed and to create our own meaning of morality to survive without destroying each other. However, this just leads to oppression and corruption, since man will legislate according to his own selfish desires at the expense of the voiceless and vulnerable, when given the power and opportunity. This is the testimony of the 20th century!

(c) Our Instinctive Knowledge of and Longing for Absolute Morality

Each of us has convictions that some things are not just wrong for me, but wrong for everyone – absolutely regardless of what the state or anyone else says (moral absolutes). When someone wrongs or hurts us, we want justice because we sense that the standard of morality has been breached and that

⁶⁷ Warren Wiersbe

in response there should be justice. We do not console ourselves by saying: 'Well they thought that was ok so it doesn't matter' – rather we demand absolute justice because we instinctively believe in absolute morality. When we look around the world at poverty, corruption and injustice, so many social-liberals want to right these wrongs. But at the same time they lack the worldview resources to be consistent in their desires, because they are instinctively applying moral-absolutes to the world (what is wrong here is wrong there) despite believing in moral-relativism (what is right here cannot be imposed or apply to a different culture who think differently).

This instinctive knowledge is consistent with how the Bible tells us we were each made moral being in God's image, all morality resides in God and how He made the universe consistent with His own moral character. For example: *Aren't there people and things going on in the world that we say we want to stop e.g. the killings in Syria under Assad or Libya under Gaddafi? The claim that it's wrong to impose our moral views on others, just doesn't work in practice! We believe people are doing wrong and we intervene, because we all believe there's a moral standard that people should be governed by regardless of their personal opinions or preferences. Gaddafi preferred to kill the insurgents and live in privilege...but what he did was wrong so the world community had to intervene. Hitler hated the Jews but we shouldn't have let it happen just because he thought he was right and doing something good! Even if Hitler had won the war then what he wanted to do would not have been made right simply because his opinion was in power.*

(d) God's Character and the Nature of Absolute Morality

So what is morally right conforms to the moral standard found in God Himself. That standard is an inherent part of God's character. What is good reflects the goodness of God's character, while what is bad is a corruption or deviation from that character. Therefore, what is good is good not because God said it was good, but because God is good and what He has said is an expression of His goodness. *For example, it is wrong to murder not simply because God said it is wrong, but because murder contradicts the sovereign life-giving character of God – thus God could not have said it was good to murder, because that would have conflicted with His own character.*

(2.2) God's Ten Commandments as the Basis for Christian Ethics:

The Ten Commandments are at the core of Christian ethics. Jesus affirmed these moral provisions as enduring principles governing human life and summed them up in the Great Commandment: **"To love God with all your being and to love your neighbour as yourself"**. Jesus affirms here that there are Two Tables to the Commandments. Four commandments are towards God and six are towards our fellow-man.

The universal nature of this standard (being witnessed to by the human conscience) has been confirmed by anthropologists who study different cultures all around the world. They have found that these essential moral principles are found in all peoples around the world, although their exact working out differs. *So in some cultures it might be seen as morally justifiable to steal from an enemy or outsider to the tribe – but never is it seen to be good to steal from just anyone. Likewise, all cultures have some longing for God and for connecting with something outside of themselves; as well as the sense of fear and guilt before God which they try to placate and atone for.* The same goes for the other provisions of the Ten Commandments, showing that this is a universal moral law that forms the basis for all human moral reasoning.

One of the reasons that many Westerners argue so vehemently against God and traditional morality is because they want to be able to do their own thing, without any consequences or accountability. A moral code binding on all people, means that there will be a moral judge who one day sees whether people have lived up to the standard – something which we all fall far short of. Their spiritual and moral beliefs are self-serving and convenient for them as sinners.

The implications of the Ten Commandments and Christian morality for our culture are immense. *In history it was Christians who established hospitals, who rescued children from infanticide, who ran orphanages and adoption agencies, who fought for better working conditions for the poor working classes, who cared for the wounded on the battle fields, who established hospices for the dying to end their lives in comfort and care, who made education open to all people, etc.* Christianity and Judeo-Christian ethics are seen by the secular philosopher Jürgen Habermas to be key contributors to the development of Democracy and Human Rights.

It also makes a significant contribution into major contemporary discussions:

- **Sanctity of life:** life is a basic good that God has given to us as a sacred gift. Life is not the greatest good that we should idolise and hold onto at any cost (Vitalism); but as a basic good it should be preserved until God causes circumstances to be such that this life comes to an end or that it is not appropriate to continue artificially prolonging life. Given this nature it is wrong to take a life or to interfere in such a way to deprive a human being of life. Indeed, it devalues all human life if we begin to decide who lives and dies.
- **Human dignity:** to be human means to be made in the image of God, to be the height of God's creation, and to be entrusted with responsibilities for developing the world. This means that all people are equal and worthy of respect and honour, regardless of their social class, cultural upbringing or ethnic identity – or increasingly upon their physical/mental functioning ability (e.g. the disabled, the deformed, the dying, special-needs). We all come from the one human family and fore-parents. When we oppress or discriminate against one human being then we actually undermine the dignity of all human beings, becoming less than what God intended for us.

(2.3) The Secular Basis for Ethics:

In ethics today there are primarily three competing approaches to deciding moral issues:

- **Deontological Ethics (Good means/actions):** This emphasises the individual's moral duty to act in a good and moral way to bring about a good outcome. This means that if an unjust act brings about a favourable outcome, then it is still immoral (*e.g. to feed the poor by stealing from the rich is immoral because it breaches the moral duty not to steal; to prematurely end someone's suffering from a degenerative illness is immoral because it breaches the moral duty not to kill*). This form of ethics was traditionally rooted in the belief in God (DEO-ontological) and the absolute moral duties He imposed upon men to act morally.
- **Consequentialist/Utilitarian Ethics (Good ends):** *"The ends justify the means" or "the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few"* summarise this view of ethics. It places emphasis not on the morality of an individual's actions but rather on the moral outcome. So something is morally good if it results in the greatest good for the greatest number of people, or simply in a favourable outcome. However, it can be dangerous because it can lead to using people as a means to an end without properly respecting them (*e.g. compulsorily taking a person's vital organs to save the lives of 10 patients needing transplants*).
- **Virtue Ethics (Good Motives/Character):** a right action is one which a virtuous character and moral thinking person would do intuitively. It doesn't consider what sort of actions are morally right and wrong, but rather focuses on the character of the decision maker and their subjective judgements about what is right or wrong (*i.e. a murderer is lacking compassion, a characteristic which a moral person embodies, so what they do is wrong*). It implicitly believes that if we train people in how to be virtuous in their character and behaviour then they will intuitively do the right thing in difficult situations.

True Christian ethical decision making that seeks to please God will pursue:

- **Good actions/means (Exodus 20:12-15)**

- **Good ends (1 Corinthians 10:31; 14:26)**
- **Good motives (Exodus 20:17; Matthew 5:28)**

(2.4) Inconsistency of the New Atheist Position on Morality:

So the answer is yes, we do need God, but that is not to say that an atheist cannot be a good or moral person; rather they are simply lacking a consistent foundation on which to base their moral ethics and social conscience. John Lennox comments that the New Atheists want to be moral without God, but they lack the true intellectual foundation to make this work⁶⁸! The New Atheists want to have their cake and eat it by having moral values/duties without God, but it just doesn't work.

The New Atheists struggle to find a consistent basis for morality is manifold:

(a) Finding a Basis in Nature:

They cannot base morality ('ought') on nature ('is') because there is no route from biology to ethics – you cannot get an Ought from Is. A lot of secular reasoning about ethics today tells us that what is good or wrong is decided by the SITUATION (situation and virtue ethics), or the CONSEQUENCES (consequentialism and utilitarianism ethics). But how do we know the maximising of well-being is moral – science cannot tell us that? Dawkins says morality is just in our genes to further our reproduction. And if morality is just in our genes, how can we ever hold anyone responsible for their programming that they did not influence?⁶⁹ Additionally life has no ultimate meaning or value in nature alone, it is existence that came about by chance.

(b) Finding an Explanation for Altruism:

Evolution cannot explain altruism – our instinctive moral duty we sense to support the weak and vulnerable – it goes against the evolutionary ideal of the survival of the fittest (with its corollary: the perishing of the weak). How does conflict between self-preservation and moral urge to rescue someone in need get resolved? The thing telling you that you ought to help cannot be an instinct as instinct also tells you not to do it to protect self. Keller demonstrates the incredulity of the Dawkins for arguing altruism can be explained by naturalism and genes:

“an individual's self-sacrificing, altruistic behaviour towards his or her blood kin might result in a greater survival rate for the individual's family or extended clan, and therefore result in a greater number of descendants with that person's genetic material. For evolutionary purposes...the opposite response – hostility to all people outside one's group – should be just as widely considered moral and right behaviour. Yet today we believe that sacrificing time, money, emotion and even life – especially for someone 'not of our kind' or tribe is right. If we see a total stranger fall in the river we jump in after him, or feel guilty for not doing so”⁷⁰.

⁶⁸ John Lennox at p.

⁶⁹ John Lennox is extremely helpful on this whole subject in chapter

⁷⁰ Tim Keller at 148.

(3) THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION AND THE DECLINE OF ABSOLUTE MORALITY

In our culture it is convenient that at the same time as people were attacking the notion of absolute morality as belonging to a bygone age and being an instrument of asserting power over people; that there was also a greater sense of sexual freedom and practise of sexual promiscuity, in contrast to traditional values and conservative sexual ethics. *We now are reaping the harvest of that Sexual Revolution in the form of broken homes, the widespread of sexually transmitted diseases, the growth in sex trafficking for prostitution, the spread of AIDS, the increase in teenage pregnancies, the over-sexualisation of young children (1 in 3 children under the age of 10 in the UK having watched pornography on the internet), the explicit nature of many television shows, films, books, and the use of sex in advertising. We cannot avoid being bombarded with sexual messages by our culture today.*

One of the great opportunities for apologetics in today's over sexualised culture is to give a reason for our practise of sexual abstinence outside of monogamous marriage between a man and a woman.

This is so radically counter-cultural that it elicits both scorn and incredible interest – you may be surprised also by the respect that people will show towards you for your principled stance on this issue.

Some things to consider when you are asked about sex and sexuality:

- **God created sex as a good thing:** God is the creator of the world and all things in it, saying that in its unfallen state that they were “very good”. So, God created sex, and designed our bodies in such a way that it would be a good and pleasurable experience. Indeed, there is a whole book of the Bible that talks about it taking place within the context of marriage (The Song of Solomon); and the Bible affirms that it is good for people to marry and regular enjoy sex in that context to avoid lust and temptation (See 1 Corinthians 7).
- **Our culture's obsession with sex is a misdirected desire for God:** Our culture's obsession with sex is because it is seeking joy and ecstasy, but even sex fails to fulfil our deepest desire for joy. God is a good God who has given us good things to enjoy in life: sex, food, playing, working, etc. - these are only secondary goods, while knowing God Himself is the primary good. We can only find our deepest longings fulfilled in Him! As C.S. Lewis says we are too easily pleased with the constantly unfulfilling fleeting joys of sex, while neglecting knowing and loving God which would overwhelmingly satisfy us: **“Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”** *The fact that our deepest longings and desires cannot be fulfilled by these temporal earthly things points us to the fact that there is an eternal supernatural fulfilment for them in God – our desire for sex is really a sign pointing us to the reality of a good and all-satisfying God!*
- **God's restrictions are for our good and protection:** While God has made sex as a secondary good to be enjoyed, He has restricted it to be between a married husband and wife for the rest of their lives. Is that unfair to restrict something so good from everyone else? Well some restrictions are good and built into a mechanism by the designer as they prevent us hurting ourselves and destroying the mechanism. You see sexual freedom is not free of consequences – broken hearts, devastated marriages and families, sexual diseases, etc. are the consequences of having violated God's safety boundaries for sex!
- **Sex is not the greatest thing we can experience in life:** The fact that sex will not exist in heaven, since there will be no more marriage in heaven, shows that sex is only a temporary good thing which will be replaced by joy and satisfaction far greater in Heaven. So for a short time to abstain from sex

in this life if you are unmarried or struggle with same-sex attraction is outweighed by the incredible joy and delight (far better than sex) that will be your experience in Heaven.

- **The selfless commitment of marriage protects us from being selfishly used only for pleasure:** Sex is such an intimate experience, that the Bible calls it “becoming one flesh” and “knowing” each-other, it is something that touches and shares with another our deepest person. That requires great vulnerability and trust in the other person’s care – something that can only safely take place within a loving covenantal commitment of marriage. However, our culture’s approach to sex is also inherently selfish because it’s all about each individual seeking their own pleasure by using the other person in this moment now, without a lifelong commitment of trust and love. In God’s design, sex was a way for two people who know who they are to express their self-sacrificing love and commitment to one another and celebrate their marital union by experiencing a physical union. However, it is very dangerous for two people to be selfishly using each other and playing with something that can harm the other person in a very deep and irreparable way.
- **God’s grace and Homosexuality:** Homosexuality is an increasingly live issue in Christian apologetics which requires its own study altogether.
 - However, it is worth pointing out that however homosexuality arises (either genetically [doubtful given current scientific evidence] or environmentally) that it is a matter of sexual preference rather than a matter of personal identity. As controversial as it is to say, there are many who have been able to change from a homosexual preference to heterosexual one upon conversion.
 - Just as an unmarried heterosexual male has a sexual preference for a woman that is unsatisfied, yet He is able to be fully human and be fulfilled as a person (Like Jesus Christ Himself); likewise someone with homosexual preference that cannot be satisfied because of God’s design and restrictions can likewise be fulfilled as a person.
 - Our culture has made sex and sexual fulfilment a necessary part of the formation of our identity, but that is not true. Our dignity, value and identity arises from the fact that we have been made in the image of God and with the ability to know Him through Jesus Christ. In Him we find our fulfilment and all we need, even if we do not get to fulfil our sexual preferences and desires.
 - These desires will not find themselves in Heaven, because sex is not crucial to our enjoyment of never-ending life. This requires a counter-culture mind-shift on the part of those who struggle with this attraction to see themselves as someone loved by God and with inherent dignity from God, regardless of their sexual preferences and actualisation of those desires.
 - Our job as apologists is to avoid judging and instead demonstrate the love of God towards people struggling in this way.

(4) OTHER MATTERS OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS

A very helpful introduction to Christian ethics is found at the back of the English Standard Version Study Bible which covers these subjects:

- Bioethics
- The Beginnings of Life and Abortion
- The End of Life
- War and Conflict
- Speaking the Truth and Lies
- Capital Punishment and Obedience to Civil Government
- Marriage, Divorce and Re-Marriage
- Racial Discrimination
- Wealth and Stewardship

Lecture 11:

WORKSHOP

PRACTICALLY USING APOLOGETICS IN EVANGELISM AND PREACHING

Practically Using Apologetics in Evangelism and Preaching

(1) Workshop Introduction:

*If we really know our audience then we must know and anticipate the doubts, problems and questions that will come up for non-Christians in our postmodern secular culture. In our evangelism and preaching we need to remove these as obstacles to hearing the gospel and believing in Christ as we go along. We cannot just wait for them to come ask questions later, we need to incorporate apologetics into our preaching and evangelism to pre-empt the questions and prevent the person having an opportunity to switch off ignoring the rest of what you have to say.

*We also need to have apologetic arguments and answers at our finger tips in a clear and concise (or short and snappy) form to share with people when they ask questions. It is not always helpful to be trying to remember things and formulate ideas on the spot while tripping over our words and making mistakes. We need to make apologetics a part of our thinking and speaking so that it comes out as naturally as possible because we've thought it through, developed our own style of using these tools, and are confident in our understanding of apologetics. Some good resources for developing short and snappy answers are:

- The Toolkit (produced by UBM)
- Good Questions (produced by The Good Book Company)
- Ultimate Questions (produced by John Blanchard)

(2) Workshop: Apologetics in Evangelism and Preaching:

What are the objections and doubts that a sermon or gospel talk on these passages or themes would provoke today?

Come up with a 2 minute gospel explanation that follows the four point structure for the Christian Worldview

What are the assumptions or accusations being made in these questions – what is the person really asking?

Can you give a concise and clear answer to the following apologetics questions:

(3) Workshop: Worldviews in Evangelism and Preaching:

Case Study: Learning from Worldview Evangelism in Athens for Today

(a) WORK OUT WHERE YOUR AUDIENCE IS AT (v.18-21):

The Epicureans were materialists, even the gods were made out of atoms and they did not create the universe but they were far away and did not interfere in human affairs – as a result the universe was meaningless matter and humans must construct their meaning by pursuing their own pleasure.

The Stoics also believed that God was a material substance, the eternal universe itself, and called it "Nature". We all come from Nature and are infused with a world-soul that desires to Nature. This return is made possible by seeking to live in harmony with the cosmos and accepting whatever happens to you in a cold, emotionless fatalistic attitude.

So two of the dominant types of people you meet in today's culture: the Evolutionary Naturalist and New Age Pantheist are similarly in view in this text (v.18). Paul will use this knowledge to tailor how he now presents the truth to maximise its impact and reception by these people.

We need to know our culture and what people are thinking in it, in order to communicate most effectively. As John Stott said, the Christian must be someone who has the Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other⁷¹. Likewise, there's little point in spending all your time talking about an issue like evolution with someone whose main problem is the problem of suffering they've been through. It's more likely if you deal with the suffering issue first you'll win them for Christ and out of submission to Christ they'll change their view on the origins of life.

(b) ESTABLISH A CULTURAL BRIDGE (v.22-23):

Paul uses their pantheon of idols as a springboard to talk about the unknown god, whom they've made an altar to. Paul says: let me tell you about Him because in all your religious fervour you've missed the only true God! This is his way in to talk about true things. Likewise in our culture today there are lots of issues, events, ideas, films, art, books and music which either contain some element of truth, or reflect something to do with the gospel that we can grasp to turn into a bridge to communicate the gospel in a way our Biblically illiterate and secular culture can relate to and understand.

(c) LAY FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW (v.24-27):

Paul introduces them to the living God who is the foundation for all being and reality. In so doing he is also challenging and refuting the false religious beliefs that the people have in their minds.

- Powerful creator of all things, and thus owner of all things and the only true God (v.24a)
- Uncontainable within His creation because He is not part of it (v.24b)
- Not contingent on His creation to need anything from it (v.25a)
- Sustainer of all things (v.25b)
- Sovereign over all things, people and places (v.26)
- A personal God who desires to have relationship with humanity (v.27)

We need to be able to introduce people to God where they are at and be able to correct their false understandings about who God is and how they relate to Him in this world.

(d) DEMONSTRATE INCONSISTENCY OF THEIR WORLDVIEW (v.28-29):

Then Paul points out that even their own poets say that we are God's offspring, therefore it is completely inconsistent and irrational to worship idols and created things whenever they are merely the products of the creative work of God, the same as we are, rather than actually God Himself (v.28-29).

People believe many things today but they cannot live consistently with what they think is true. For example, someone who does not believe in God must believe the universe has no cause, no purpose, and no destiny. There is no such thing as good or bad; beauty; or purpose. However, no one actually lives that way. We all live as if these things are true, because naturally they are born to do so because these things do exist, as there is a God who made it all! By turning the tables and showing a person the incredible inconsistencies they are living can really turn the lights on for them to see that only the Biblical worldview makes sense of everything!

(e) PRESENT THE GOSPEL (v.30-31):

Then he tells them about the gospel call of repentance and placing trust in Christ, whom He has appointed to judge the world for its wicked rebellion, and demonstrated this appointment by raising Him from the dead. (v.30-31). **He presents them with a historical fact that demonstrates the truth and validity of the Christian worldview, and impresses upon them their need to get right with God based on the future judgement which the resurrection demonstrates is a reality.**

This is last but most important. This is what we always want to get to. Don't get bogged down in arguments and debates – get people to the gospel and to grapple with the historical reality that Jesus

⁷¹ John Stott: *Between Two Worlds*.

Christ came as a man, died on the Cross and rose again – and that He's changed your life in an unmistakable way! The Christian worldview and story is not simply a fictional account or fanciful idea – it is plain, irrefutable and compelling fact!