



Basic Apologetics Course

Set I: Reasons for Faith

How to Use This Study Guide

While individuals can certainly learn from this course, you will get the maximum value from the Basic Apologetics Course by using the following approach:

1. Convene a group of four to six others who are interested in studying apologetics and are willing to commit themselves to meeting regularly for discussion and processing. (The small size of the group allows more time for each person to take part in the discussion.)
2. Each member of the group should commit themselves to pray regularly that God will help them to understand truth and share it with grace, love and humility.
3. In preparation for the regular meeting, everyone should complete the recommended reading for the lecture. When this is not feasible, the recommended book for the lecture should be read by at least one group member, who will share key insights with the group at discussion time.
4. When the group meets, plan for two hours in order to view the video lecture and then discuss the study questions, drawing on insights from the recommended reading. If you find that you cannot cover the material in two hours, consider scheduling a follow-on meeting to complete your processing. In some cases, it may be more practical to ask group members to view the lecture on the C.S. Lewis Institute web site prior to meeting in order to allow more time for discussion.
5. When you meet, seek to clearly understand the study material but avoid the temptation to focus exclusively on the intellectual dimension. Also seek to understand why people hold such views and look for ways to engage them with truth in a gentle, humble and respectful manner. The purpose of apologetics is not only to strengthen our own faith but also to equip us to share it winsomely with those who do not yet believe.

Introduction

Apologetics is being able to give a reasonable defense for the hope that is within you (1 Peter 3:15). The Basic Apologetics Course is designed for those who wish to be better equipped to reach non-believers by giving honest answers to honest questions with gentleness and respect. Obviously, this course cannot cover everything one may wish (or even need) to know, but it does address many of the fundamental questions one encounters today. The converging lines of evidence found in the lectures and readings demonstrate that God exists, that Jesus is the Son of God and that the Bible is the Word of God. They also counter the major oppos-

ing worldviews we face – atheism and pantheism. The cumulative weight of these reasons for belief will enable you to respond effectively to those who ask you for a reason for the hope within you and will strengthen your personal faith in the process. C.S. Lewis maintained that he believed in Jesus as he believed that the sun is risen, not because he saw it all clearly, but because by it he saw everything else. These lectures will help us see clearly as we seek to engage those around us in a confident and winsome way, understanding their worldview and seeking an opportunity to present our own views in a relevant and compelling way.

Set I: Reasons for Faith

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

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

Disc I – Does God Exist? The Cosmological Argument: Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe

Arguments for God's existence are in disfavor today. Perhaps this is because the postmodern mood doesn't like rational arguments or because these arguments can be so philosophical and difficult to grasp. Another reason might be that most people are not ultimately persuaded to believe in Christ because of them. However, if we believe that God created the world, how can we say that there is little or no evidence that would indicate "whodunit"? Are there enough clues to solve the mystery of the maker? In fact, there are many lines of evidence we can pursue. The Handbook of

Christian Apologetics lists 25 arguments for God's existence. The next two lectures will pursue two of these arguments: "The Cosmological Argument," and "The Argument from Desire." The first argument is developed primarily by looking out at the evidence of the cosmos. The second is discerned by looking within at our own human desires and aspirations. The Cosmological Argument has persuaded many, and can be stated in a simple way. For believers, it shows the strong rational grounds for believing in a creator of the cosmos – which is under attack today.

Study Questions

1. Why should we consider arguments for God's existence?
2. What can we say if someone denies that something exists now?
3. What are the options for something always existing?
4. What are the arguments for the world having a beginning? What is the Big Bang?
5. What is the Anthropic Principle?
6. How do atheists respond to the fine tuning argument?
7. Why have some (like Antony Flew) become persuaded of God's existence because of fine-tuning arguments (despite atheist objections)?

Disc II – Does God Exist? The Argument from Desire: Can We Know God Exists by Looking Within?

Today, the most appealing argument for God's existence to postmodern students is the "Argument from Desire." This is because it focuses less on logical syllogism (although it has a logical side) and more on reflections on our deeply human desires and aspirations. If we consider our aspirations for meaning, dignity, immortality, truth, goodness, beauty, a capacity for awe, guilt over what we have done, a yearning for significant work and community, etc., we are caused to ponder whether these yearnings can be fulfilled.

Is life full of sound and fury but signifying nothing? Are these aspirations cosmic pointers to the nature of reality? Can we reduce all the yearnings of poets, novelists, philosophers and saints to a mere quirk of our physiology, or are they indicators of what is real? This argument was a favorite of C.S. Lewis. It will not only strengthen your own faith but help you to see how your human desires are cosmic pointers to God, immortality, and much more.

Study Questions

1. Why is Kafka viewed by some as the representative atheist of the twentieth century?
2. How can the argument from desire be put into a logical form?
3. What does C.S. Lewis mean by "Sehnsucht"?
4. How was the argument from desire central in Lewis's conversion?
5. How does Lewis develop this theme in his writings?
6. What are Lewis's three ways of dealing with aspirations?
7. Why does the atheist or materialist view of desires make human beings the most miserable of creatures?

Disc III – Can the Gospels be Trusted? Did the Early Church Create Jesus or Did Jesus Create the Early Church?

The Scriptures in general, and the Gospels in particular, have been under a massive assault in recent years not only from atheists but from those in the liberal theological sector. Some say that much of the Gospels was invented by the early church. In the last generation the representative of this criticism was Rudolf Bultmann. In this generation critics include the Jesus Seminar (i.e., Marcus Borg, John Dominic Crossan, etc.), Bishop Spong, and Elaine Pa-

gels. From a more secular point of view, Bart Ehrman and Dan Brown's DaVinci Code have attracted a large readership. What can be said to these attacks that so permeate our culture, surfacing in editorials, TV talk shows, and blogs? Can we give a credible argument that the Gospels are historical? Yes. There is strong evidence for the reliability of the Gospels, and it is important to know it if our faith is to withstand the attacks of unbelieving scholars.

Study Questions

1. Who are some of the authors that maintain that much of the Jesus we see in the Gospels was invented by the early church?
2. What is the relationship of the Gospels to history?
3. What are some of the problems with this critical approach?
4. What is the importance of eyewitnesses?
5. Why is the time for the invention or creation of “myth” too short?
6. How is the Jewish (and Middle Eastern) perspective on memory different from ours?
7. In what ways are Jesus’ teachings utterly unique?

Disc IV – Argument from Prophecy: Were the Details of Christ’s Life Foretold in the Old Testament?

One of the most ancient arguments for Jesus being the Christ (and the Son of God) is the argument from prophecy. Throughout the Old Testament and New Testament, the Messiah is placed front and center. One author has maintained that there are 332 prophecies of Christ in the Old Testament. In Luke 24 Jesus teaches his disciples a presumably lengthy study on how the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings (the whole Old Testament!) pointed to him. What might have been the shape of this study? This lecture

sketches the development of the Messianic prophecies from the more general to the increasingly specific. A couple of highlights include prophecies that indicate that the Messiah would be God, and a study of Isaiah 53. This line of argument is particularly helpful in dealing with Jews who take the Bible seriously. The lecture points out that up until about 1000 AD Judaism believed that the Messiah would die for our sins.

Study Questions

1. How do prophecies function like an address?
2. How do prophecies move from the general to the specific?
3. What are some prophecies that indicate that the Messiah is to be God himself?
4. What jumps out at you from Isaiah 53?
5. How do some Jews explain away this prophecy (Isaiah 53) as not applying to the Messiah?
6. In the history of Judaism, did they believe that the Messiah died for our sins?
7. How does the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls help confirm this argument?

Disc V – Case for the Resurrection: Can You Prove that Christ Was Raised From the Dead?

The resurrection of Christ is at the center of our faith. If Christ is not raised we have believed in vain (I Corinthians 15). The evidence for the resurrection comes from several directions. It is agreed by almost all scholars (secular or Christian) that Jesus’ tomb was empty. A majority also agree that there were appearances of Christ seen by disciples in many different settings. The greatest opponent of early Christianity, the apostle Paul, was con-

verted by an appearance of the risen Christ on the Damascus road. James, the brother of Jesus, was skeptical of his brother’s claims but became a leader of the Jerusalem church because he saw the risen Christ. The early disciples were changed from a fearful group hiding in the upper room for fear of the Jews into world changers. Why? Because they saw the resurrected Christ. This lecture sets forth the evidence for the resurrection of the Son of God.

Study Questions

1. What’s the difference between resurrection and resuscitation?
2. What are the reasons to argue that the tomb was empty?
3. What’s the problem with the swoon theory?
4. What are the appearances of the risen Christ mentioned in the New Testament?
5. How does the conversion of a leading opponent or enemy of the Gospel, Paul, argue for the resurrection?
6. Why is hallucination an inadequate response to explain the resurrection appearances?
7. How radical was the transformation of the early disciples?

Recommended Readings:

1. *There Is a God: How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*, by Antony Flew and Roy Abraham Varghese
2. *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*, by Timothy Keller
3. *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, by Josh McDowell
4. *The Case for Jesus the Messiah: Incredible Prophecies That Prove God Exists*, by John Ankerberg, John Weldon, and Walter C. Kaiser