

Defending the Faith – The Case for a Creator

Lesson 1 – “Apologetics...What and Why?” January 5, 2020

Classical Apologetics – The classical approach is so named, because it was employed by the earliest Christian thinkers to practice formal apologetics, such as **Augustine** (*highly influential early Christian theologian AD 354 to 430*), **Thomas Aquinas** (*highly influential Catholic priest, philosopher and theologian AD 1225 to AD 1274*), and **Anselm** (*Archbishop of Canterbury AD 1033 to AD 1109*).

Classical Apologetics Is Comprised of Two Parts:

1. **Establish the existence of God** - (broad theism) through rational argumentation using the **Cosmological** (*William Lane Craig, Thomas Aquinas*), **Teleological** (*William Paley, Michael Behe*), **Moral** (*C.S. Lewis, William Sorley*), or **Ontological** arguments (*Anselm, Alvin Plantinga, W.L. Craig*). Different apologists may prefer one of the four arguments, rejecting one or more of the others.
2. **Establish the truth of Christianity** - specifically by appealing to the historical evidence, particularly of the life of Jesus, his miracles, and his resurrection.

This series focuses on the first part of classical apologetics, “Establishing the existence of God”.

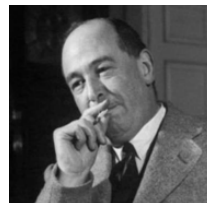
Three Traditional Classical Arguments Examined in this Series:

1. **Moral / Philosophical Arguments** – Perceived universal truths and principles of being that through logical deduction, provide rational support for belief in a Creator.
2. **Cosmological Arguments** – Facts related to our understanding of the origin, structure and evolution of our physical universe that would support our belief in a Creator.
3. **Teleological Arguments** – Evidence and facts found in all of nature that reflect a design or purpose in creation that supports a belief in a Designer/ Creator.



William Lane Craig – An American analytic philosopher, Christian theologian, historian and apologist. Craig has debated the existence of God with Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens and Lawrence Krauss.

He established and runs the online apologetics ministry ReasonableFaith.org. Craig is considered one of the most influential Christian apologists alive today.



C.S. Lewis – Was a British writer, lay theologian and Christian apologist. Best known for his non-fiction Christian apologetics works such as ‘*Mere Christianity*’, ‘*Miracles*’ and ‘*The Problem of Pain*’. Lewis wrote more than 30 books which have

been translated into more than 30 languages and have sold millions of copies. He is widely considered to have been one of the most influential Christian apologists of the twentieth century until his passing in November of 1963.

Apologetics?

The word **Apologetics** comes from the Greek word **Apologia**, which means a defense, as in a court of law.

Three reasons to study and utilize apologetics:

1) To maintain the gospel's relevancy in a rapidly evolving

world culture – Historians generally agree that from 1650 AD until about 1800 AD, world culture and scientific understanding rapidly evolved in what has been called “The Age of Reason” or “The Age of Enlightenment”. This was a cultural movement of intellectuals whose purpose was to reform society using reason, challenge ideas grounded in tradition and faith, and to advance knowledge through what is known as the “*scientific method*”.

Today, in order to be taken seriously, the gospel needs to be seen as an ***intellectually viable*** option. Otherwise, it will be progressively dismissed as mere superstition. This is where Classical Apologetics comes in. By demonstrating the ability to reconcile our faith in a Creator, with what we have discovered about the world around us, we provide legitimacy and potency to our belief system. Doing so, greatly increases the likelihood our message will be received and considered by the secular world.

2) The bible commands us to be ready to make a defense - As

Christians, we should be prepared to share objective facts with those around us that could reasonably support our convictions and beliefs. We are commanded in 1 Peter to do just that.

1 Peter 3:15 (ESV) *15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ESV*

Question: But, is apologetics biblical? Shouldn't we just preach the gospel and let the Holy Spirit do His work?

Response: The Gospel's method of delivery is, and always has been, filtered through a cultural and societal lens.

Message Bearer: *Jesus Christ*

Target Audience: *Jews*

Points Emphasized to Validate Message: *Fulfilled Prophecy and Supernatural Works*

Luke 24:25-27 (ESV) “Fulfilled Prophecy” ²⁵ *And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.*

Terms You Should Know

Scientific Method: A method of procedure that has characterized natural science since the 17th century, consisting of systematic observation, measurement, and experimentation, and the formulation, testing, and modification of hypotheses.

Secularism: A worldview that allows no room for the supernatural: no miracles, no divine revelation, no God.

Intellectually Viable: A premise or belief that is consistent and theoretically harmonious with all known facts available.

John 14:11 (ESV) “Supernatural Works” ¹¹ *Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.*

Luke 7:20-22 (ESV) “Supernatural Works” ²⁰ *And when the men had come to him, they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’”* ²¹ *In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. ²² And he answered them, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.*

Message Bearer: *Apostle Peter*

Target Audience: *Jews*

Points Emphasized to Validate Message: *Fulfilled Prophecy, Supernatural Works and Eyewitness Testimony of Supernatural Works*

Acts 2:22 (ESV) “Supernatural Works” ²² *“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—*

Acts 2:25-31 (ESV) “Prophecy” ²⁵ *For David says concerning him, “I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; ²⁶ therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. ²⁷ For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. ²⁸ You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.”* ²⁹ *“Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, ³¹ he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.*

Acts 2:32 (ESV) “Eyewitness to Supernatural Works” ³² *This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.*

Message Bearer: *Apostle Paul*

Target Audience: *Gentiles*

Points Emphasized to Validate Message: *Perfection of Natural World, Power and Majesty of Creation and Eyewitness Testimony of Supernatural Works*

Acts 14:16-17 (ESV) “Perfect Design in Nature” ¹⁶ *In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. ¹⁷ Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.”*

Romans 1:20 (ESV) “Power and Majesty of all of Creation” ²⁰ *For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*



You can find a deep library of writings, videos and podcasts that provide intelligent, articulate and uncompromising perspective on issues concerning the Christian faith at:

www.reasonablefaith.org

1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (ESV) “Eyewitness Testimony of Supernatural Events” ³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and ⁵ that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.



3) It Can Strengthen Believers – As followers of Christ, we all go through periods where we find our faith challenged. Expecting to go through life never wavering in our beliefs, is to fail to recognize the enormity of life’s challenges.

John 16:33 (ESV) *33 I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”*

Raw Emotional Belief Systems Without Intellectual Roots, Are Often Untenable

If our faith is built primarily or solely on emotional experiences, we may find that faith vulnerable if we’re not equipped with something more substantial. Our youth are particularly susceptible to attacks upon their faith. Once out of the home where their faith is encouraged and fostered, they are targeted by a secular world that disparages and aggressively attacks any belief system rooted in the spiritual or supernatural.

Classical Apologetics Cannot Eliminate the Necessity of Faith

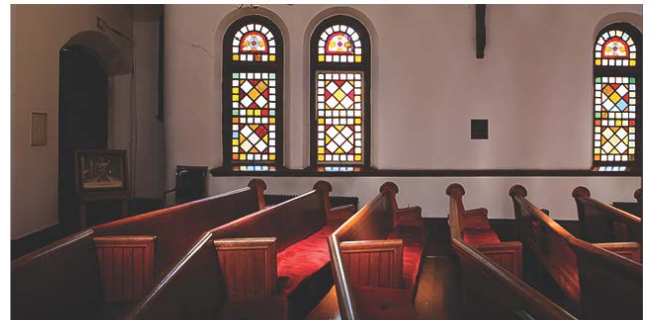
Hebrews 11: 1-6 (ESV) *1 Now **faith** is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2 For by it the people of old received their commendation. 3 By **faith** we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible*

2 Corinthians 5: 6-7 (ESV) *6 So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, 7 **for we walk by faith, not by sight.***

AUGUST 24, 2016

Why America’s ‘nones’ left religion behind

BY MICHAEL LIPKA



(Photo by Raymond Boyd/Getty Images)

Half of ‘nones’ left childhood faith over lack of belief, one-in-five cite dislike of organized religion

Reasons for disaffiliating among those who were raised in a religion and are currently ...

	NET Unaffiliated %	Atheist %	Agnostic %	Nothing in particular %
Don't believe	49	82	63	37
Disenchanted/don't believe	36	71	46	25
Not interested in/don't need religion	7	3	8	7
Views evolved	7	7	12	5
Went through a crisis of faith	1	2	1	1
Dislike organized religion	20	10	19	22
Anti-institutional religion	15	2	17	16
Religion focuses on power/politics	4	5	1	6
Religion causes conflict	1	3	2	1
Religiously unsure/undecided	18	5	12	22
Unaffiliated but religious	7	1	1	10
Seeking/open-minded	6	3	5	7
Spiritual but not religious	3	2	4	3
Uncertain about beliefs	2	0	4	2
Inactive believer	10	0	3	14
Non-practicing	8	0	2	11
Too busy	2	0	1	3
Other	<1	0	<1	1

Source: 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study conducted Mar 17 to May 6 Pew Research Center

Today's society recognizes two types of faith:

Blind Faith – A faith that believes in something logically inconsistent. Or, believes in something that is at odds with historical facts and / or physical evidences.

Reasonable Faith – A faith that believes in something logically consistent. Or, believes in something in harmony with historical facts and / or physical evidences.

*God does not expect our faith to be blind. Through His creation, God has given us ample evidence of his existence. His “fingerprint” can be readily found throughout all of creation, to a degree that belief in his **existence** can be considered reasonable!*

Psalms 19:1 (ESV) *1 ... The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.*

Romans 1:19-20 (ESV) *19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*

Questions for discussion:

1. How would you describe the attitude toward Christianity in today's society?
2. Do you feel that society's attitude toward Christianity has evolved over your lifetime? If so, can you describe the nature of this evolution? What specific examples can you point to that support your opinion?
3. How would you describe the relationship between science and faith in a Creator? *A-Totally compatible and mutually reaffirming. B-Uneasy companions. C-Hostile Adversaries.* Or, in some other way? Why?
4. Have you ever had your belief in a Creator challenged by non-believing family members, co-workers, acquaintances or strangers? If so, how did you respond in defending your faith? Was your defense effective? Why do you believe it was or was not?
5. Do you believe it is possible to effectively defend your faith in today's society?

Join us next week as we look at the “Moral Argument” for God's existence by asking the most important question of all...

” What difference does it make if God exists?”

Why is there something rather than nothing?

All beliefs related to the origin, meaning and purpose of life (why the universe exists at all and how it got here), require elements of faith. None are immune.