

Reasons to Believe

An Introduction to Apologetics

Class Schedule (revised)

Reasons to Believe

July 6 | Lesson 1 – Introduction to Apologetics

Reasons to Believe God is Creator

July 13 | Lesson 2 – The God of the Bible

July 20 | Lesson 3 – Arguments for God

July 27 | Lesson 4 – Objections to God

August 3 | Lesson 5 – God and Evolution

Reasons to Believe Jesus is Lord

August 10 | Lesson 6 – The Historical Jesus

August 17 | Lesson 7 – Can We Trust the Gospels?

August 24 | Lesson 8 – Evidence for the Resurrection, Part 1

August 31 | Lesson 9 – Evidence for the Resurrection, Part 2

Reasons to Believe the Bible is True

September 7 | Lesson 10 – The Inspiration of the Bible

September 14 | Lesson 11 – The Text of the Bible

September 21 | Lesson 12 – The Canon of the Bible

Conclusion

September 28 | Lesson 13 – Summary and Implications

Reasons to Believe

Lesson 1 – Introduction to Apologetics

Class Objectives

- *Explain the usefulness of apologetics for ourselves and others.*
- *Identify our reasons for believing as either objective or subjective.*
- *Define crucial terms to use throughout the class.*

Pre-Class Questions

1. Read 1 Peter 3:13-16
 - a. What does it mean to “sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts”?
 - b. What does Peter say we should defend? What are we giving an answer for?
 - c. What attitudes should characterize our defense?
2. Evaluate your own faith. If someone were to ask you to give a concise summary why you believe in God, Jesus, and the Bible what would you say?
3. Look at your answers above. Are they more objective or subjective? Do you think they would convince a skeptic? Why or why not?
4. Are there areas you doubt God, Jesus, and / or the Bible? If so, how do you handle these? Please take the time to think this through carefully and honestly.

In-Class Discussion

1. Define these terms as we’ll use them in class.
 - a. Faith

- b. Doubt
 - c. Presuppositions
 - d. Naturalism
 - e. Supernaturalism
2. Do these passages define “faith” as a blind belief in the absence of evidence?
- a. Hebrews 11:1
 - b. 2 Corinthians 5:7
 - c. John 20:29
3. What are the three steps for developing biblical faith?
- a.
 - b.
 - c.

Notes / Questions / Topics for Exploration

Reasons to Believe

Lesson 2 – The God of the Bible

Class Objectives

- *Highlight God's characteristics as described in the Bible.*
- *Differentiate other views of God.*
- *Emphasize the importance of establishing who God is in our discussions with skeptics.*

Pre-Class Questions

1. Read the following passages. What characteristics of God do they emphasize?
 - a. Genesis 1:1, Hebrews 11:3
 - b. Exodus 34:6-7
 - c. Isaiah 6:3, Revelation 4:8
 - d. Isaiah 40:18-20
 - e. Ezekiel 18:32, 1 Timothy 2:4
 - f. Acts 17:22-31
2. What qualities of God do you think might be key to emphasize when talking to a skeptic? What characteristics might you expect an atheist to question or challenge?
3. Have you ever heard any "false versions" of God that don't fairly represent Him as described in the Bible?

In-Class Discussion

1. Define these views of God. How do they compare to how the Bible presents God?
 - a. Atheism
 - b. Agnosticism
 - c. Deism
 - d. Pantheism
 - e. Polytheism
2. What is the difference between the *essence* and *existence* of God? Why is it important to establish who God is before we can discuss whether or not He exists?
3. What is the “straw man” fallacy, and how does it relate to our discussions we may have with people about God?

Notes / Questions / Topics for Exploration

Reasons to Believe

Lesson 3 – Arguments for God

Class Objectives

- *Define the three classical arguments for God's existence.*
- *Provide examples of these arguments for use in everyday conversation.*
- *Prepare for potential objections to these arguments.*

Pre-Class Questions

1. Why do you believe in God? You might want to look back at your answer to Question 2 in Lesson 1 to get started. If you can, give more detail here.
2. Read these passages and answer the following questions.
 - a. Psalm 19:1-6
 - b. Romans 1:18-21
 - c. Do these passages strengthen your belief in God's existence? Why or why not?
 - d. Do you think these passages would convince an unbeliever of God's existence? Why or why not?
3. Read Paul's sermon to the Athenians in Acts 17:22-31. What arguments did Paul use to persuade them of God's existence? What do you learn from his approach?

In-Class Discussion

1. The Universe Argument
 - a. Definition
 - b. Example
 - c. Potential Objections and Answers

2. The Design Argument

- a. Definition
- b. Example
- c. Potential Objections and Answers

3. The Moral Argument

- a. Definition
- b. Example
- c. Potential Objections and Answers

4. Have you used any of these arguments before, either in discussions with others or in your own study? Which ones do you think are the most convincing to you personally?

Notes / Questions / Topics for Exploration

Reasons to Believe

Lesson 4 – Objections to God

Class Objectives

- *Explain the importance of listening actively as a tool to meet people where they are.*
- *Discuss common objections to God and understand their arguments.*
- *Prepare possible answers to these objections.*

Pre-Class Questions

1. Read the following passages about listening wisely.
 - a. Proverbs 18:13
 - b. James 1:19-20
 - c. What do you learn about the importance of listening to the reasons people give for not believing in God?
 - d. How might we be tempted to not listen fairly?
2. What are some common reasons people do not believe in God?
3. Which of these arguments do you think are the easiest to answer? Most difficult?
4. Can you identify any assumptions or flaws in these objections?

In-Class Discussion

1. Lack of Verification or Proof

2. The Existence of Evil

3. Slaughter of the Innocents

4. Miracles

5. Others?

Notes / Questions / Topics for Exploration

Reasons to Believe

Lesson 5 – God and Evolution (Is Naturalism a Legitimate Alternative?)

Class Objectives

- *Understand naturalism as the primary assumption behind Darwinian evolution.*
- *Distinguish between macroevolution and microevolution.*
- *Explain the problems with naturalistic evolution as an alternative to God.*

Pre-Class Questions

1. What is the relationship between science and the Bible? Do they contradict or corroborate one another? Explain.
2. List some benefits of science. What are some of its limits? In other words, are there things science *alone cannot* prove or demonstrate?
3. Respond to the following statement: “If something cannot be proven scientifically it cannot be true.”
4. Look up one or two definitions of “evolution” as it relates to the origin and diversity of life on earth. Now, do your best to explain this concept in your own words.
5. How would you explain variations and changes within different kinds of species (for example, dog breeds or human skin colors)? Does this Bible address this?
6. Based on your current understanding, do you see any problems with Darwinian evolution as an explanation of the origin of life? If so, what?

In-Class Discussion

1. Naturalism and Evolution
2. Macroevolution vs. Microevolution
 - a. What's the difference?
 - b. Examples.
 - c. Why does this difference matter?
3. List some problems with naturalistic evolution as an explanation for the origin of life.

Notes / Questions / Topics for Exploration

Reasons to Believe

Lesson 6 – The Historical Jesus

Class Objectives

- *Explain why the resurrection is the most important argument for Christianity*
- *Provide historical evidence for Jesus as a historical figure*
- *Establish who Jesus claimed to be*

Pre-Class Questions

1. Why do you believe in Jesus as Lord and Christ? You might want to look back at your answer to Question 2 in Lesson 1 to get started. If you can, give more detail here.
2. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 and answer the following questions.
 - a. Identify the four “that...” statements which Paul calls “of first importance.”
 - b. Based on verses 1-2, why are these the most important facts about the gospel?
 - c. What individuals are listed as witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection?
3. Based on the following passages, who did Jesus claim to be? What Old Testament texts did He reference in each statement?
 - a. Luke 4:16-21
 - b. John 8:58, 10:31-39
 - c. Luke 22:66-71

In-Class Discussion

1. List the Acts verses in which the apostles claimed to be witnesses of Jesus' resurrection.
2. From historical sources outside the Bible, what basic facts can be gathered about Jesus?
3. Explain why Jesus must be either a liar, lunatic, or Lord (and not a combination of all three). What 4th option do skeptics often add today?

Notes / Questions / Topics for Exploration

Reasons to Believe

Lesson 7 – Can We Trust the Gospels?

Class Objectives

- *Understand reasons why skeptics dismiss the gospels as unreliable history.*
- *Provide reasons to accept the gospels as reliable history.*
- *Overview the four gospels' basic presentation of the resurrection of Jesus.*

Pre-Class Questions

1. Do you believe that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are an accurate presentation of the facts regarding Jesus? Why?
2. Read Luke 1:1-4. What was Luke's intent in writing this book? Describe Luke's method of research, organization, and writing.
3. Why might someone doubt the historical reliability of the gospels?
4. Answer the following argument: "If you believe Jesus was raised because the gospels say so, you are using the Bible to prove the Bible which is circular reasoning and therefore false."
5. Scan through the resurrection accounts (Matt. 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20). What differences do you notice? What notable similarities are there?

In-Class Discussion

1. What criteria do historians use to evaluate the trustworthiness of their sources? How do the gospels stack up?
2. Why can't the gospels' testimony be easily dismissed? Why can they be viewed as reliable history?
3. How should we handle the differences in the details of the resurrection accounts?

Notes / Questions / Topics for Exploration

Reasons to Believe

Lesson 8-9 – Evidence for the Resurrection, Parts 1-2

Class Objectives

- *Explain the “minimum facts” approach to Jesus’ resurrection.*
- *Identify the minimum facts of Jesus’ resurrection and their evidence.*
- *Demonstrate the fruitlessness of alternative theories to sufficiently explain these facts.*

Pre-Class Questions

1. What does it take for you to believe an event occurred if you did not witness it yourself?
2. Who saw Jesus alive after His death, according to 1 Cor. 15:5-8?
 - a. How large of a group did Jesus appear to at one time? (v. 6)
 - b. Who was James, and why is his inclusion in this list significant? (v. 7)
 - c. Why is Paul’s inclusion of himself important, given his background? (v. 8)
3. Read Luke 24.
 - a. Who were the very first witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection? (v. 1-10)
 - b. What did Jesus do to prove He was risen in body, not just spirit? (v. 36-43)
4. What explanation did the Jewish authorities give for the empty tomb (Matt. 28:11-15)? Why does it make little sense?

In-Class Discussion

Minimum Facts of Jesus' Resurrection

1. Fact # 1 –

Evidence

2. Fact # 2 –

Evidence

Reasons to Believe

Lesson 8-9 – Evidence for the Resurrection, Parts 1-2

3. Fact # 3 –

Evidence

4. Fact # 4 –

Evidence

Alternate Theories for Jesus' Resurrection

1. Theory # 1 – myth / legend which grew from disciples' belief

Refutation

2. Theory # 2 – hallucination / vision / spiritual experience

Refutation

3. Theory # 3 – mistaken identity

Refutation

4. Theory # 4 –

Refutation

Why is Jesus' bodily resurrection the only reasonable explanation for the facts?

If Jesus' resurrection is a historical fact, what does this mean for us spiritually?

Notes / Questions / Topics for Exploration

Reasons to Believe

Lesson 10 – The Inspiration of the Bible

Class Objectives

- *Compare the Bible's claims for inspiration with those of other religious books.*
- *Identify the most important argument for the Bible's inspiration.*
- *Demonstrate Jesus' belief in the inspiration of the Old and New Testaments.*

Pre-Class Questions

1. Now that you've evaluated your belief in God as Creator and Jesus as Lord, why do you believe in the Bible as the inspired word of God?
2. Are your reasons for believing in the Bible more objective or subjective? How might a skeptic respond to your reasons?
3. Read the following passages. What claim does the Bible make regarding its origin?
 - a. Exodus 24:1-4, 34:27-28
 - b. Jeremiah 1:1-10
 - c. 2 Timothy 3:14-17
 - d. 2 Peter 1:19-21
 - e. Ephesians 3:1-5
4. Answer this objection – “Many other religious books, like the Qur'an or Book of Mormon, also claim to be from God. Why do you believe the Bible's claims, but not others'?”
5. What did Jesus believe, say, and teach about the Scriptures' inspiration?

Reasons to Believe

Lesson 10 – The Inspiration of the Bible

In-Class Discussion

Jesus' View of the Old Testament Scriptures

1.

2.

3.

4.

Jesus' View of the New Testament Scriptures

1.

2.

3.

4.

Notes / Questions / Topics for Exploration

Reasons to Believe

Lesson 11 – The Text of the Bible

Class Objectives

- *Explain what textual criticism is and why it is necessary.*
- *Overview some variant readings in and evidence for the text of the Bible.*
- *Provide reasons for having confidence in the Bible as faithfully preserved.*

Pre-Class Questions

1. How would you respond – “The Bible has been changed and corrupted over 1000s of years that no one knows whether or not is even says what the original said.”
2. These passages have been questioned as to whether they belong in the text. Does your Bible include them, either in brackets or a footnote?
 - a. Mark 16:9-20
 - b. John 7:53-8:11
 - c. Acts 8:37
 - d. 1 John 5:7-8 (compare KJV or NKJV to another translation)
 - e. Read the above verses carefully. Does adding or removing these passages either change or contradict what the Bible teaches?
3. What do God and Jesus promise in these verses?
 - a. Isaiah 40:7-8
 - b. Matthew 5:17-18
 - c. Matthew 24:35
 - d. How do you reconcile these verses with mistakes or changes which scribes made while copying the text?

Reasons to Believe

Lesson 11 – The Text of the Bible

In-Class Discussion

Reasons for Confidence in the Preservation of Bible's Text

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Notes / Questions / Topics for Exploration

Reasons to Believe

Lesson 12 – The Canon of the Bible

Class Objectives

- *Understand why the question of the canon is important to our faith in the Bible.*
- *Identify wrong approaches to how the canon was established.*
- *Explain how the Old and New Testament books were recognized as authoritative.*

Pre-Class Questions

1. Why does it matter which books we view as Scripture? What gives a book authority?
2. How would you answer this question – “Many books not included in the Bible have been discovered, like the Gospel of Thomas and Gospel of Judas. So, how do you know the Bible is complete and isn’t missing something?”
3. Read Acts 2:40, 16:32, and Colossians 4:16. Based on these passages, does the Bible include every inspired sermon or letter? How do you know what we have is all we need?
4. Read Matthew 5:17 and Luke 24:25-27, 44-45. How did Jesus refer to the Old Testament Scriptures? What does this show about Jesus’ view of the OT canon?
5. What additional books does the Catholic Church include in the Bible?
6. Jude references at least two non-biblical books – the Assumption of Moses (Jude 9) and the book of Enoch (Jude 14). Does this imply these writings were inspired?

In-Class Discussion

The Three Steps of Canonization (a simple process)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

The Old Testament Canon

1. What was Jesus' view of the Old Testament canon?
2. What books did the Jews view as inspired Scripture? How do we know?

The New Testament Canon

1. How did Jesus and the apostles anticipate and validate the New Testament canon?
2. What criteria did the early Christians use to determine if a book was authoritative?

Notes / Questions / Topics for Exploration

Reasons to Believe

Lesson 13 – Review and Summary

Class Objectives

- *Review the major arguments covered in each section – God, Jesus, Bible.*
- *Discuss how to personalize the information for use in our service.*
- *Recognize the importance of responding in faith to what we know.*

Questions

1. Take a few minutes to look over each previous lesson. What do you think are the most important points we've discussed?
2. How has this class helped you, if at all? Specifically, how has this study provided a foundation for your own faith? How important do you think this material is in evangelism?
3. What are the limitations of this study? In other words, while this information is essential to our faith, what can it *not* do for us?

God Is Creator

Definitions

- Faith – a conclusion based on observable evidence, leading to a belief in something unseen
- Presupposition – a belief assumed true from the beginning
- Three steps of Biblical faith – look at evidence, reason through evidence, choose the right path

The God of the Bible

Creator – Gen. 1:1, Heb. 11:3
Merciful & Just – Ex. 34:6-7
Holy – Isaiah 6:3
Singular – Ex. 40:18-20
Loving & Good – 1 Tim. 2:4
summarized in Acts 17:22-31

Two Basic Presuppositions

Naturalism [leads to atheism] – “this universe is all there is” (a room with no windows/door)

Supernaturalism [allows for God] – “something could exist outside of nature” (a room with windows/door)

Three Major Arguments

Universe Argument – “why is there something rather than nothing?”

Cause & effect in nature

Vast size of universe

Design Argument – “why is there complexity in the world?”

Fine tuning of earth

Molecular machines

Moral Argument – “why do we have a sense of right and wrong?”

Some things are always wrong

Morality is objective

Two Common Objections *(remember to listen!)*

Existence of Evil – “why would God allow this?”

God created free will

If no God, no basis for “good & evil”

Evolution – “science disproves God’s existence”

Limitations of science

Micro-(valid) vs. Macro-(unproven)

Doesn’t explain all evidence

Most Important Argument – Resurrection

Acts 17:30-31,
Romans 1:4

If Jesus rose from the dead, God must exist

How did life begin?

How did intelligence begin?

Jesus Is Lord

Key Issue: Jesus' Resurrection

"Of first importance" – 1 Cor. 15:1-5,17-19

Apostles' preaching – Acts 2:31-32, 3:15, 4:10...

Jesus' Existence

Outside sources – Tacitus, Josephus, Pliny Younger, etc.

Historical facts – when Jesus lived, how he died, what happened after, how followers lived

Jesus' Claims

Messiah, Son of God – Luke 4:16-21, 22:66-71, John 8:58-59, 10:31-39,

Liar?

Lunatic?

Legend?

Lord?

The Gospels as Reliable History

Criteria for good history

Contemporary, Independent, Consistent, Unbiased

Resurrection stories developed as legend?

Not enough time for fiction to erase facts

Oral history passed down reliably

Writers intended to preserve history (Luke 1:1-4)

Contains embarrassing & damaging material

Minimal Facts of the Resurrection

Disciples claimed Jesus appeared to them

Gospels

1 Cor. 15 – earliest testimony

Martyrs died believing this claim

Liars make poor martyrs

Two martyrs were previously skeptics

James, Jesus' brother (1 Cor. 15:7)

Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9)

Jesus' tomb was empty

Gospels

Enemy attestation (Matt. 28:11-15)

Alternate Theories

Legends

Visions, spiritual experiences

Mistaken identity

Resurrection doesn't happen

Do not explain all the evidence

Not naturally, but supernaturally

Implications – Jesus Is...

Son of God – Rom. 1:4
Judge – Acts 17:31
Savior – Luke 24, 1 Cor. 15,

Bible Is God's Word

Bible's Claim of Inspiration

OT – Ex. 24:1-4,
34:27-28, Jer. 1:1-10

NT – 1 Cor. 2:12-13, 2 Tim.
3:16-17, 2 Pet. 1:19-21

Key Issue – Jesus' View

If Jesus is Lord, we must
accept His view of Scripture

Jesus' View of Inspiration

Old Testament

Written by
God thru
men

Every detail
is true

The final
authority

New Testament

Apostles as
spokesmen

Apostles
inspired
by HS

Apostles'
claim

Internal
confirmation

The Text of the Bible

Minor mistakes
are easy to
explain

Eyesight, hearing,
judgment errors

No doctrine
changed by
variants

John 8,
Mark 16

OT text has
multiple witnesses

Masoretic
Text

Dead Sea
Scrolls

NT text is best
attested ancient
work

5,800+
manuscripts

Early
copies

Jesus'
promise
(Matt. 5:17-
18, 24:35)

Jesus' View of the Canon

Accepted Old Testament Canon

"Moses, Prophets, Psalms" (Luke 24:27,
44-45, Matt. 5:17-18)

Different
order, same
39 books

Josephus

No inclusion
of Apocrypha

Anticipated New Testament Canon

Apostles
inspired (John
16:12-13)

Writers'
claims
(Eph. 3:4-5)

Widespread
recognition &
circulation (Col.
4:16, 2 Pet. 3:15-16)

Criteria for
acceptance

Apostolic
authorship /
association

Consistent
revelation (Deut.
13:1-4, Gal. 1

Implications – God's Word is...

Infallible

Indestructible

Consistent

Authoritative