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DEVELOPING AN APOLOGETICS COURSE TO EQUIP THE  
SAINTS AT LA GRANGE BAPTIST CHURCH  
IN LA GRANGE, KENTUCKY

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by  
Brian Daniel O'Connell  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

DEVELOPING AN APOLOGETICS COURSE TO EQUIP THE  
SAINTS AT LA GRANGE BAPTIST CHURCH  
IN LA GRANGE, KENTUCKY

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To Brittany—you are my precious helpmate.

Over the years you, have been a constant source of encouragement, love, and support and a godly example to our family. Your love, sacrifice, friendship, and support has made it possible for me to pursue this degree and complete this project.

You are truly a gift from God—more precious than jewels.

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## PREFACE

The completion and implementation of this ministry project would not have been possible without the love, prayers, encouragement, and support of my wonderful wife, children, pastors, professors, family, and friends. This project is the result of the sacrifice of many who have poured into me over several years and given me feedback.

I thank the Lord for giving me the wonderful opportunity to study and teach his Word. I am humbled and amazed at the many opportunities that he has given to me over the years. I pray that I will remain faithful as I “run the race.”

There are too many people to mention who have poured into me over the years. I do need to specifically mention my wife, Brittany, who has been my precious helpmate and editor over the years. You have been my rock as I wanted to quit several times through this academic journey. Thank you, my love.

In 2010, though I was nervous and felt inadequate about teaching, my friend and associate pastor Ron Falstad challenged me to teach an apologetics series at our church in Napa, California. That experience sparked in me a deep love of teaching the subject and acted as a catalyst that the Lord used to get me teaching apologetics fulltime.

Brian O’Connell

La Grange, Kentucky

December 2022

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Over two millennia ago, Christians were told that they needed to set Jesus Christ as Lord in their hearts. More than that, they were told that they needed to always be prepared to give a reason for the hope that was in them, and they were required to do so in a winsome and gracious manner (1 Pet 3:15). This command by Peter to the early church applies just as much to Christians today. Indeed, there exists a need to train members of La Grange Baptist Church (LBC) to defend their faith in a loving and winsome way.

#### **Context**

##### **Background**

La Grange Baptist Church in La Grange, Kentucky, has a rich history of over two hundred years. The church was established by pastor William Kellar along with twenty-two other members in 1802 under the name Lick Baptist Church. Over the years, the church moved locations several times, including to an old schoolhouse. Its name also changed over time—from Lick Baptist Church to DeHaven Baptist Church to its current name La Grange Baptist Church, when the church moved into its new building in 2005. Although the location and name of the church has changed with time, its faithfulness to preaching the gospel has remained steadfast.

The church has one Sunday morning service, which is held in a large auditorium at 10:45 am. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person church attendance has dropped as people remain home on Sundays and participate through livestreams of the service. Even with reduced in-person attendance, there are over three hundred

members present each week for the service. In addition to the main service, LBC offers numerous LIFE classes that take place Sunday mornings 9:30-10:30 am.

Although there are unique demographic differences among the LIFE classes, each one follows the same “Explore the Bible” curriculum from LifeWay. Attendees are given an “Explore the Bible” book so that they can follow along with the teaching, while leaders use the leader’s manual of the same curriculum to lead weekly discussions. The curriculum that LBC uses is excellent and theologically sound.

LBC is very intentional and protective of who is allowed to teach LIFE classes. Individuals must be a member of LBC for at least six months before they are able to teach. In addition, LBC requires that all prospective LIFE class leaders attend an eight-week LIFE class leadership class before they are able to teach their own LIFE class. This process further enhances the biblical teaching members receive through LBC. Not only does this leadership training help to maintain sound biblical teaching for each LIFE class, but it also helps to maintain uniformity throughout each LIFE class, which is extremely important for LBC.

In addition to Sunday morning LIFE classes for adults, LBC also offers Sunday school classes for all children from nursery to high school. A fun Bible curriculum is provided for the children that engages them with activities and stories from the Bible. Children are then sent home with coloring or other activity sheets that help to encourage further Bible discussions from parents regarding what the children learned in class. Children’s Sunday school is only offered 9:00-10:45 am, after which time parents are required to pick up their children so that the whole family can worship together.

### **Weaknesses of La Grange Baptist Church**

La Grange Baptist Church is an exceptional, loving church with a heart for missions, both local and global. The pastors and elders have done a wonderful job at providing the LBC congregation with biblical teaching and leadership. However, though

members receive excellent biblical instruction each week, there is a lack of apologetics instruction being offered that could help to counteract the bombardment of false information and competing worldviews members receive from culture.

A recent Gallup poll shows that in the past twenty years, there has been a 20-percent decline in church membership.<sup>1</sup> According to Gallup, “The decline in church membership is consistent with larger societal trends in declining church attendance and an increasing proportion of Americans with no religious preference.”<sup>2</sup> The sad reality is that more and more people—regardless of age, gender, or background—are getting caught up with contemporary cultural trends and rejecting traditional biblical teaching. Christianity is no longer seen as the one true faith but as one of many faith options. The Bible is no longer seen as the authoritative, inerrant Word of God that must be obeyed but as ancient man-made, error-ridden book that holds no authoritative value and thus should be rejected.

Sadly, many pastors are ill equipped to address the many questions that members have about the Christian faith, the Bible, and apologetics questions such as “Does the presence of evil disprove the existence of God?” “How can a loving God send people to an eternal hell?” and “If God is all powerful and all loving, then why does evil exist?” These types of questions are common both within and without the church. If pastors who have received four to six years of biblical training lack proper apologetics training, then it is safe to conclude that LBC LIFE class leaders also lack this type of training and, as a result, are not able to address serious questions about or common objections to the Christian faith.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey M. Jones, “U.S. Church Membership down Sharply in Past Two Decades,” Gallup, April 18, 2019, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/248837/church-membership-down-sharply-past-two-decades.aspx>.

<sup>2</sup> Jones, “U.S. Church Membership down Sharply in Past Two Decades.”

Oftentimes, LBC members refrain from asking questions out of fear that their questions will result in people's looking down on or judging them. Instead of asking their questions, members hold onto them without seeking the help of a knowledgeable person. This can cause members to feel discontent, to leave the church in search of another, or to walk away from the faith altogether. Consequently, it is important for teachers to address questions that have not even been asked. Doing so can lead to members' approaching teachers to thank them for addressing issues that they were too nervous to ask.

Having an apologetics-based ministry (or class) will help to further equip the saints at LBC. This ministry would complement the solid biblical teaching that LBC already offers its members, and it would help to expose members to common arguments and objections that are made against the Christian faith and the Bible. Such exposure would happen in a shepherding and safe environment where members would learn of objections to the Christian faith and how to respond to them. Participants in this class would be taught how to listen to these types of arguments, identify the flaws in these arguments, and answer each objection in a winsome manner.

The following subjects would be taught to LBC members. The first class would look at evolution and intelligent design/creationism. This class would ask "How did we get here?" and "Does evolution or intelligent design/creationism provide the most logical explanation for our existence?" The second class would look at Christianity in comparison with the world's major religions. This class would address the question "With so many religions in the world, how can we know that Christianity is the 'one true faith'?"

The third, fourth, and fifth classes would look at the Bible and answer the question "Can the Bible be trusted?" This question would be addressed by looking at what makes the Bible unique from all other religious books. These classes would also look at the manuscript, archeological, and extrabiblical evidence that supports the Bible.

The sixth class would look at Mormonism and ask “Are Mormons our brothers and sisters in Christ or members of a religious cult?” This question would be answered by looking at the beliefs, history, and prophecies of Mormonism as well as other topics related to this religion. The seventh class would look at Jehovah’s Witnesses and ask—similar to the previous question—“Are Jehovah’s Witnesses our brothers and sisters in Christ or members of a religious cult?” And similar to the previous class, this class would address the question by looking at the beliefs, history, and prophecies of Jehovah’s Witnesses as well as other topics related to this religion.

The eighth and final class would address the topic of evil. This class would address questions such as “How can a loving God send someone to an eternal hell?” and “Does the presence of evil disprove the existence of God?”

Although the apologetics course would not be able to address every possible question, it would answer the most common questions in an effort to strengthen the faith of each participant. In addition, each participant would have more confidence to study additional questions that may arise in the future. Their confidence would come from the knowledge that they can fully trust God and his Word.

Ideally, this course would be offered to LIFE class leaders and other ministry leaders as a way to better prepare them to shepherd the flock. After completing this eight-part series, leaders would be more equipped to answer questions that can arise in their individual classes. Once LIFE class leaders are trained, the same apologetics course would be offered to church members. Class sizes would be limited to twenty to twenty-five people, and members would be required to sign up for the class and sign a form indicating their commitment to complete the full course.

The pastors and elders of LBC recognize the importance of apologetics within the church and desire to create an apologetics course that will better equip their members. With this desire also comes caution. The pastors and elders desire for this course to complement and coincide with the vision and mission of the church. Their fear is that this

course will become a standalone ministry separate from the church's other ministries. To prevent this from happening, an apologetics course was developed under the supervision of the pastors and elders to ensure that it meets the goals and vision of the church.

### **Rationale**

La Grange Baptist Church has been blessed with wonderful biblical, Christ-centered teaching and preaching. However, as mentioned above, there is a clear lack of apologetics teaching taking place that is limiting the overall effectiveness of the church and its members. If members do not have confidence to share their faith with others, then they are not carrying out the Great Commission or the mission of LBC.

The call for apologetics is found in several parts of the New Testament. The primary text is 1 Peter 3:15. In this passage, Peter tells believers, "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."<sup>3</sup> In Greek, the word for "defense" is *apologia*, which is where the word "apologetics" comes from. This verse clearly states that Christians must set apart Christ Jesus as Lord, they must always be prepared to share with people who ask them about their faith, and they must give reasons for their faith in a gentle and respectful manner. Many Christians avoid studying apologetics because they believe apologetics is nothing more than arguing with others and telling them that they are wrong. However, it is clear from 1 Peter 3:15 that apologetics done properly is to be winsome.

Similarly, in 2 Timothy 2:25, Paul writes that the Lord's servant should not be quarrelsome but should correct his or her opponents with gentleness. As a result, "God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being capture by him to

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<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the *English Standard Version*.

do his will” (vv. 25-26). These verses plainly state that correction must take place in order to lead to the salvation of those who have been ensnared by the devil, and they also clearly indicate that correction is not the same thing as arguing.

Furthermore, Paul writes to the Corinthian church that Christians have been given divine power to “destroy strongholds” (2 Cor 10:4). More than that, Paul writes that with this divine power, “we destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God” (2 Cor 10:5). There are numerous other passages throughout the New Testament that elucidate that it is Christians’ responsibility to guard against false teaching (Col 2:8) and to “contend for the faith” (Jude 3).

After being resurrecting from the dead and before ascending into heaven, Jesus commanded his disciples to “go . . . and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19). This command is for all believers, not just for pastors or specific church members. In order for LBC to carry out Christ’s command to make disciples of all nations, members must be equipped to share and defend their faith. If LBC members feel ill-equipped to do so, then they are not obeying the Lord’s command to make disciples, and they are not obeying Scripture’s command to contend for the Christian faith and to correct opponents of the faith.

The desire of LBC is to “serve our community and the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.”<sup>4</sup> In order to effectively do this, members must be equipped to share and contend for their faith in this hostile world. An apologetics series was developed to accomplish this very task.

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<sup>4</sup> La Grange Baptist Church, “About LaGrange Baptist,” accessed February 25, 2021, <https://www.lagrangebaptist.com/about/>.



## **Purpose**

The purpose of this project is to develop and teach an apologetics course at La Grange Baptist Church in La Grange, Kentucky, to equip church members to share and defend their faith.

## **Goals**

Successful implementation of an apologetics course required the development of three goals. Each goal was ultimately intended to help church members have greater confidence about their Christian beliefs. Such confidence will lead members to pursue more gospel conversations and remain steadfast in their faith.

1. The first goal was to assess the current apologetics and biblical worldview knowledge of LBC members.
2. The second goal was to develop an eight-session apologetics course that equips LBC members to be able to defend their faith.
3. The third goal was to teach the apologetics course in order to equip LBC members to be able to share and stand firm in their faith.

To measure the success of these three goals a specific research methodology was created, which is addressed in the following section.

## **Research Methodology**

Successful completion of this project depends upon the completion of these three goals. The first goal was to assess the current apologetics and biblical worldview knowledge of LBC members. This goal was measured by administering the “Apologetics and Biblical Worldview Inventory” to twelve members of LBC (see appendix 1). This goal was considered successfully met when twelve members completed the inventory and the inventory was analyzed to yield a clearer picture of the current apologetics and biblical worldview knowledge of LBC members.

The second goal was to develop an eight-session apologetics course that equips LBC members to be able to defend their faith. This goal was measured by an expert panel

who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum (see appendix 2). This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the “sufficient” level (score of 3).

The third goal was to teach the apologetics course in order to equip LBC members to be able to share and stand firm in their faith. This goal was measured by readministering the “Apologetics and Biblical Worldview Inventory” to LBC members who participated in the apologetics course and comparing the pre- and post-course survey results (see appendix 1). Along with the inventory, participants also completed an anonymous course evaluation which was used to determine the course’s overall effectiveness in equipping believers to defend their faith (see appendix 3). This goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-course survey results (see appendix 4).

### **Definitions**

The following definitions of key terms are used in this ministry project:

*Apologetics.* The term “apologetics” comes from the Greek word *apologia*, which means to give a defense or a reason.<sup>5</sup>

*Worldview.* The term “worldview” refers to the “lens” by which people view the world around them. It is a philosophical view of the world and all reality.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2005), 1.

<sup>6</sup> James N. Anderson, *What’s Your Worldview? An Interactive Approach to Life’s Big Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 12.

### **Limitations/Delimitations**

Two limitations applied to this project. First is the accuracy of the pre- and post-course surveys that members completed. If members failed to provide honest responses, then the information would not accurately represent them. To mitigate this limitation, participants were encouraged to be open and honest. Members were also reminded that their surveys would be anonymous. Second, if members could not make it to one of the classes, then they would miss out on the instruction being provided. To mitigate this limitation, each class was recorded through Facebook Live, which allowed members to participate in the class from their home and be able to watch the recorded class at a later time.

One delimitation applied to this project. This project consisted of ten to thirty participants, which is much smaller than the congregation as a whole. The purpose of this delimitation was to provide the best overall interaction between the instructor and participants throughout the course. Smaller, more intimate settings create environments that are more conducive for participation by class members.

### **Conclusion**

Since the birth of the church, Christians have been mocked and attacked for their beliefs. Even when persecuted, Christians are called to set apart Christ as Lord in their hearts, to always being prepared to give anyone an answer for the Christian faith, and to give their answer in a loving and respectful manner. In the next chapter, the biblical and theological basis for developing an apologetics course to equip the saints are presented. In chapter 3, the practical way this can be carried out within the church is outlined.

CHAPTER 2  
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR  
DEVELOPING AN APOLOGETICS COURSE  
TO EQUIP THE SAINTS

After his resurrection and before ascending into heaven, Jesus gave a command to his disciples, which is now popularly known as the Great Commission. Jesus told them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:18-20).

**The Call for Apologetics**

Although Jesus’s command to “go and make disciples,” contextually, was given to his disciples, the command applies to all Christians. All Christians are required to not only share the gospel but also to be prepared to give a defense for why they believe. This directive is made clear in 1 Peter 3:15 when Peter writes that Christians must always be “prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” The call for Christians to be prepared to share their faith is clear. As a result, the church must help to equip the saints in this endeavor to be prepared to defend the Christian faith. Peter does not simply tell Christians to “be prepared”; he gives a three-part formula for how a defense of the Christian faith should take place. According to Peter, Christian apologetics requires followers of Christ to (1) honor Christ Jesus as holy in their hearts, (2) always be prepared to give a reason or defense for the hope that they have, and (3) give their defense in a gentle and respectful way.

## Honor Christ Jesus as Holy

After encouraging Christians to do good and warning them that they will incur suffering, Peter tells believers, “In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy” (1 Pet 3:15). At first glance, Peter’s call for Christians to honor Christ the Lord as holy in their hearts does not seem to coincide with Peter’s warning of future suffering. Robert Jamieson explains that Peter is quoting from Isaiah 8:12-13.<sup>1</sup> According to Jamieson, “God alone is to be feared: he that fears God has none else to fear.”<sup>2</sup> Further, Daniel Doriani explains that “to set Christ apart means, first, that since Jesus is sovereign over all, we should not fear whatever might befall us. Second, since Jesus is Lord, we should fear *him*, not what any lesser person or power can do (cf. Luke 12:5). If we have the right fear, the fear of the Lord, we can overcome lesser fears.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, Peter is telling Christians that the first part of being prepared to make a defense of the Christian faith is to fear God alone. As Jamieson writes, Christians should “not only be not afraid, but be not even agitated.”<sup>4</sup>

Ramsey Michaels also believes that Peter is referencing the prophet Isaiah. Michaels writes, “The admonitions of vv 14b-16 draw most conspicuously on the LXX of Isa 8:12-13. V 14b quotes Isa 8:12 with minor variations, while v 15a is a Christianization of Isa 8:13, the ‘Lord’ in Isaiah’s prophecy being interpreted as ‘Christ.’”<sup>5</sup> Peter’s quoting from Isaiah 8 is significant. In Isaiah 8, God warns Isaiah of the coming invasion by the Assyrians. In the face of impending destruction and doom,

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<sup>1</sup> Robert A. Jamieson, Andrew R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary Critical, Practical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (New York: F. H. Revell), 426.

<sup>2</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *Commentary on the Old and New Testaments*, 426.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel M. Doriani, *1 Peter*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2014), 138.

<sup>4</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *Commentary on the Old and New Testaments*, 426.

<sup>5</sup> Ramsey J. Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), 184.

God tells Isaiah not to fear what other people fear; instead, Isaiah is to honor the Lord as holy. For example, Isaiah writes,

For the Lord spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying: “Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the Lord of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.” (Isa 8:11-15)

Peter does not arbitrarily quote Isaiah in 1 Peter 3:15. The surrounding verses show that Peter recognized the persecution that Christians were facing and would face in the future. Peter equated Christian suffering and fear with the suffering and fear that the Israelites experienced during the time of the Assyrian invasion. Peter begins his letter by acknowledging the trials and suffering Christians are experiencing (1:6). He brings up Christian suffering again toward the end of his letter when he tells his readers, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you” (4:12).

Although these words by themselves seem shocking and uncomfortable, Peter bookends these statements with encouraging reminders. He reminds his readers, before acknowledging their suffering, that they have received an “inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1:4-5). These comforting words from Peter let his readers know that regardless of what persecution comes, their inheritance, which was given to them by God, is also being guarded by God and cannot be taken away from them. This same encouragement is present at the end of Peter’s letter when he tells his readers that even though they are suffering, they should rejoice because of the glory of Christ that will be revealed (4:13).

Peter then tells suffering Christians that their suffering is God’s will (4:19). At first, glance Peter’s statement seems confusing and even alarming. However, Peter is

declaring that their suffering is not by accident. More than that, their suffering is fully within the sovereign control of God. In other words, when Christians suffer at the hands of evil people, evil is not prevailing. God is fully in control and using their suffering for their good and his glory. Christians suffering from persecution need to know these truths. As Doriani writes, “We need to know what to fear and what not to fear, for the right fears bring sanity.”<sup>6</sup> These words by Doriani echo the words of Jesus when he said, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt 10:28). This is the purpose behind Peter telling his readers, “In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy” (1 Pet 3:15).

In talking about proper fears, Doriani gives the example of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s confrontation of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis during World War II. Doriani writes,

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor who had the courage to speak out against Adolf Hitler, write about it, organize opposition against Hitler, and even join plans to assassinate him. He also helped Jews to escape from Germany. Bonhoeffer preserved in all this for a decade, even though he was engaged to a woman for part of that time. The Nazis imprisoned and finally executed him. He said, “Those who are afraid of men have no fear of God, and those who fear God have no more fear of men.”<sup>7</sup>

When Christians have a biblical view of what they should fear, they are able to rest in the knowledge that their Creator is in control. Because of this, Peter tells his readers, “Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good” (4:19). As this verse shows, believers can entrust their souls to God because he is their faithful Creator. Because God is faithful, all powerful, and in control of all things, Michaels writes,

The readers are safe from harm, and blessed even in suffering, because their God rules the future and their vindication is near. The day of reckoning will show their

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<sup>6</sup> Doriani, *1 Peter*, 136.

<sup>7</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1937), 242, quoted in Doriani, *1 Peter*, 139.

lot to be infinitely “better” than that of their oppressors. It is this eschatological factor which binds the assurances and the admonitions of the passage into a unified whole.<sup>8</sup>

Not only does Michaels see 1 Peter 3:15 as being a “Christianization” of Isaiah 8:13, but he also believes that Peter is referencing the words of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. He writes,

At the same time, there are traces here of an awareness of certain words of Jesus. The exhortation “Have no fear of them,” in a context of persecution and Christian confession, recalls Matthew 10:26-33 and Luke 12:2-9, while the situation presupposed in v 15 parallels Jesus’ instructions to his disciples in the eschatological setting of Luke 21:14-15: “Decide in your hearts . . . not to worry ahead of time how to answer . . . for I will give you a mouth, and wisdom, which none of your enemies will be able to withstand or deny.” The writer of 1 Peter has used the terminology of Isaiah to introduce his own adaptation of this (or similar) apocalyptic material. The distinctly “Peterine” shaping comes in 3:16, which is constructed along the lines of 2:12.<sup>9</sup>

It is clear from each of the verses referenced that Peter is telling his readers to have no fear of those causing their persecution. That is Peter’s point when he writes, “In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy” (1 Pet 3:15). Michaels explains, “This acknowledgement must take place, Peter says, ‘in your hearts,’ as the positive counterpart to the ‘fear’ against which he has just issued a warning . . . . It is this ‘holy fear,’ or respectful awe focused on Christ, that drives out other fears, and makes possible an honest and effective response to interrogation.”<sup>10</sup>

Douglas Harink addresses these same verses but provides a different perspective on fear and the reason for the persecution that Christians face. Harink writes,

The ones who despise, persecute, and harm God’s people seem to have all the power and authority; they can do what they like with their subjects. They seem to be in supreme control, exercising their prerogatives freely. But Peter says they are in fact living in and acting out of “fear” (*phobos*; 3:14). How else would we explain their arbitrary and cruel exercise of power over even those subjects who are doing good? It can only be that they fear losing their image, honor, status, authority, and control in the various political, social, and economic orders in which they exercise their

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<sup>8</sup> Michaels, *1 Peter*, 185.

<sup>9</sup> Michaels, *1 Peter*, 184.

<sup>10</sup> Michaels, *1 Peter*, 187.



rule. They fear their own finitude, which they do not gratefully receive from God as the grace of creatureliness (contrast 4:19). Rather they rebel against their finitude in hubristic efforts to establish a claim against an infinity that they believe is finally empty, indifferent, or hostile to their existence. Fear is the father of compulsion, of the instinctive drive to survive, conquer, and rule at all costs. There is not freedom in fear.<sup>11</sup>

Regardless of the reason behind the persecution, Christians are called to honor Christ the Lord as holy.

Joel Green believes that Peter's words in 1 Peter 3:13-17 are influenced by Psalm 34.<sup>12</sup> King David wrote the following in Psalm 34:1-21,

I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together! I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them. Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! Oh, fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack! The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing. Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry. The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken. Affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned. The Lord redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

Throughout this Psalm, David is honoring the Lord as holy. In addition, David confesses that his safety and deliverance come from the Lord. In fact, in verse 4, David confesses, "I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears." David goes on in verse 9 to tell his readers to "fear the Lord." His reason is that those who fear the Lord will lack nothing. Although the psalmist admits that the righteous will

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<sup>11</sup> Douglas Harink, *1 & 2 Peter*, Brazos Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 93-94.

<sup>12</sup> Joel B. Green, *1 Peter*, Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 110.

encounter many afflictions, he declares that the “the Lord redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned” (v. 22).

According to Green, “The Lord of Psalm 34 is now identified unmistakably as Christ.”<sup>13</sup> Peter not only identifies Christ as the Lord of Psalm 34, but—as Green explains—he also “identifies his audience as the suffering righteous of the psalm.”<sup>14</sup> Identifying suffering Christians with the suffering righteous creates a dilemma. For example, Green writes, “Must it not be either that those to whom Peter addresses himself are actually wicked and so the object of the Lord’s ire or that the Lord will not or cannot protect his own?”<sup>15</sup> To this question, Green explains that there is actually a third option that is laid out by Peter in verses 13, 14, and 17:

Vv. 13-14a, 17 have a proverbial character about them, reminiscent of instruction very much at home in the Jesus tradition and congruent with the interpretive tradition of the suffering righteous in the OT and Second Temple Jewish literature. According to Matt 5:10-11 and Luke 6:22, Jesus redefined “the way things are in the world,” using oxymoronic language to declare that those who suffer for the sake of righteousness actually dwell in a state of blessedness. This sentiment is clearly echoed in v. 14 (see also 4:14), and is just as jolting in Peter’s letter as it must have been (and continues to be) in Jesus’ proclamation. This is because proverbial maxims appeal to a kind of enlightened common sense—“what everyone knows”—and draw their force from incontestable observations of the order of the universe—“what goes up must come down,” “the rich get richer, the poor get poorer.” But Peter’s words, and Jesus’ before him, turn the observed world and conventional valuations on their head. How can it be that those who “do good” suffer? And who would confuse suffering with a state of blessedness? What seems to be the case is not. This is because the axioms articulated here find their center in a recalibration of the universe—a recalibration for which there is evidence already in the OT in the long tradition of the suffering righteous, and which has now received the divine imprimatur in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>16</sup>

In other words, the fact that Christians are suffering does not mean that they have done something wrong and are experiencing God’s judgment as a result. Nor does their suffering mean that the God they serve is too weak to protect them. Their suffering

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<sup>13</sup> Green, *1 Peter*, 111.

<sup>14</sup> Green, *1 Peter*, 111.

<sup>15</sup> Green, *1 Peter*, 111.

<sup>16</sup> Green, *1 Peter*, 111-12.

is part of God’s plan—for their benefit and his glorification. The world considers suffering to be a bad thing. However, when Christians rejoice in their sufferings, their joy causes others to notice. In fact, in the Gospels Jesus says on numerous occasions that people who suffer for being righteous are blessed (Matt 5:10-11; Luke 6:22).

An example of God’s people being persecuted for their faithfulness to the Lord comes from the book of Daniel. Daniel 3:8-25 gives the account of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. At the start of the book of Daniel, readers learn that God punished the wickedness of his people by sending the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem and deport the Israelites to Babylon. Among those deported was the prophet Daniel, along with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, whom readers learn feared the Lord and faithfully served God even though they were experiencing extreme persecution for doing so. In fact, these three men were told that if they refused to bow down and worship Nebuchadnezzar, they would be thrown into a fiery furnace. These men remained faithful to their Lord and were therefore thrown into the fiery furnace. Throughout their persecution, these men responded righteously and pointed all attention to God. They even told their persecutors that they understood God to be in control and able to save them (3:16-18).

God had been with these three men the whole time. However, it was when they were thrown into the fire that other people saw the Lord. In Daniel 3:24-25, the prophet writes,

Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, “Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?” They answered and said to the king, “True, O king.” He answered and said, “But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.

Viewing persecution and suffering as a blessing is countercultural. However, when Christians understand that their suffering is temporary and for their benefit, such knowledge allows them to rest in the sovereign hands of their Creator. Christian suffering

is not new. There are many examples given throughout the Bible of righteous people who experience suffering. In each example, readers learn that the suffering served a greater purpose. For example, Green writes,

A formal analysis of the tradition of the suffering righteous (e.g., in the career of Joseph, the lives of Daniel and his friends, the suffering of the Maccabean martyrs, the psalms of the suffering righteous, and the Servant of Yahweh) underscores what Peter strives to make clear here. This is that contemporary suffering should not be confused with ultimate harm. When set within the grand story of God's will, the severity of present-day suffering is assuaged. The reality of suffering is not denied nor is this cancerous malice cured, but the crisis of suffering is lessened by its reinterpretation in 1 Peter — by means of assurances that the life-chapter currently being written is not the stories finale and that present suffering effectively serves the overarching, salvific aim of God.<sup>17</sup>

Even though suffering is real, life is simply a “chapter” in the whole book of God's plan. Although Christians suffer many times at the hands of wicked people, they are told not to hide and avoid discussing their controversial beliefs with those who are hostile but to share their faith with boldness and confidence.

### **Always Be Prepared to Give a Reason or Defense**

After telling his readers to honor the Lord as holy in their hearts, Peter tells them that they need to always be “prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15). In this verse, when Peter tells Christians to be ready to make a defense, the Greek word Peter uses for “defense” is *apologia* (ἀπολογία)—which is where the term “apologetics” comes from. The word ἀπολογία is also found in several other New Testament passages (e.g., Acts 22:1; 25:16; 1 Cor 9:3; Phil 1:7; 2 Tim 4:16). In each case, the term is used to refer to a defense that is made. Outside of the Bible, ἀπολογία also refers to a defense that is made. In fact,

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<sup>17</sup> Green, *1 Peter*, 112-13.

according to Archibald Hunter and Elmer Homrighausen, the word ἀπολογία “had been applied by Plato to Socrates’ famous defense of himself.”<sup>18</sup>

Although Peter is telling believers to always be prepared in 1 Peter 3:15, Charles Bigg believes that Peter is alluding to his own experience when he denied the Lord three times (Matt 26:31-35, 69-75).<sup>19</sup> Bigg explains that Peter’s denial of the Lord showed that he feared man more than he feared the Lord.<sup>20</sup> In addition, Bigg believes that Peter’s lack of readiness was tantamount to denying the Lord: “It was through want of meekness and fear that he denied; of meekness, because he had fancied that he loved the Lord ‘more than these’; and of fear, because though he feared man, the Lord at the moment was not his dread.”<sup>21</sup>

Peter is not denying the reality of persecution and fear. He had experienced it firsthand. Instead, Peter is admonishing believers so that they would not make the same mistake he made when they are under pressure. Paul Achtemeier explains that “verse 15b is probably best understood as further definition of how such acknowledgment of Christ is to occur, namely, through being prepared at all times to account for their beliefs and actions as Christians.”<sup>22</sup> Peter is encouraging believers to think about and understand what they believe. In a way, Peter is encouraging the type of “muscle memory” that is seen in athletes who practice the same moves repeatedly throughout the week so that when they encounter the pressure of “game day,” they can perform those rehearsed moves without thinking about them.

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<sup>18</sup> Archibald M. Hunter and Elmer G. Homrighausen, *1 Peter*, in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 12, *James; Peter; John; Jude; Revelation; General Articles; Indexes*, ed. George R. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), 129.

<sup>19</sup> Charles Bigg, *The Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, 2nd ed., International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902), 158.

<sup>20</sup> Bigg, *St. Peter and St. Jude*, 159.

<sup>21</sup> Bigg, *St. Peter and St. Jude*, 158-59.

<sup>22</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), 233.

Peter is telling his readers that they are to be strong and courageous and give an ἀπολογία for the hope that they have, regardless of whom they are speaking to.

Achtemeier writes,

On the one hand, the forensic connotations of the word ἀπολογία (“defense”) coupled with the legal implications of αἰτεῖν λόγον (“to require an account”) render it possible that what is described here is the Christians’ legal response when hailed into court: they are to undertake a defense of belief and actions rather than remain silent.<sup>23</sup>

Achtemeier explains that this ἀπολογία by Christians can refer to both the formal courtroom setting when Christians are called before magistrates and the private setting when believers are asked why they behave the way they do.<sup>24</sup> However, Achtemeier writes that “the presence of the word παντὶ (‘to anyone [who asks]’) seems to point rather in the direction of the informal demands that Christians account for why they do what they do, that is, fail to conform to accepted cultural practices.”<sup>25</sup> Christians’ lifestyle must be such that it causes them to “stick out” from culture, thereby leading people to inquire about what makes Christians different. Achtemeier states, “The implication would then be that Christians must take any such request as seriously as they would the requirement in a court of law to answer to formal charges.”<sup>26</sup>

The ἀπολογία that Peter is telling Christians to give served different purposes. First, the ἀπολογία helped to equip Christians in their faith in order to encourage them to stand strong with the confidence that their hope is based on the fact that Jesus is alive and reigning in heaven. Their ἀπολογία was also counter cultural. Many during that time would not have spoken out, so for Christians to be prepared with a defense would have been another way that they “stuck out” from other citizens. For example, according to

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<sup>23</sup> Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 233.

<sup>24</sup> Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 233.

<sup>25</sup> Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 233.

<sup>26</sup> Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 233.

Achtemeier, “This command to be ready with an account of one’s Christian life for anyone who might ask at any time is counter to the kind of attitude held by many esoteric groups in the Greco-Roman world at that time, for whom such divulgence would have been tantamount to betrayal of the community and their god(s).”<sup>27</sup>

In 1 Peter 3:15, Peter is exhorting his Christian readers not only to always be prepared but also to live without fear. They were to be prepared to give an *ἀπολογία* to anyone who asked them about the hope that they had. The exhortation for Christians to always being ready implied that they were living out their faith visibly for all to see, not hiding in fear of persecution. In addressing the visible faith that Christians were called to express, Achtemeier writes, “Such open explanation of the Christian ‘hope,’ far from something to avoid, is here added to the requirements expressed by our author such as to do good, not to recompense evil or defamation in kind, and to suffer if necessary for one’s faith.”<sup>28</sup> Achtemeier further explains that “in this context, not even fear of further persecution is to deter the Christian from giving a full account of their ‘hope.’ Cultural isolation is not to be the route taken by the Christian community. It is to live life openly in the midst of the unbelieving world, and just as openly to be prepared to explain the reasons for it.”<sup>29</sup>

As mentioned, Christians are called to live boldly for Christ and not shrink back out of fear of persecution. Thomas Schreiner explains that “the place where Christ is to be set apart as Lord is ‘in your hearts.’ We should not understand the heart as our inner and private lives, which are inaccessible to others.”<sup>30</sup> Schreiner goes on to say,

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<sup>27</sup> Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 234.

<sup>28</sup> Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 234.

<sup>29</sup> Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 234.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 142.

The heart is the origin of human behavior (cf. 1:22; 3:4), and from it flows everything people do. Hence, setting apart Christ as Lord in the heart is not merely a private reality but will be evident to all when believers suffer for their faith. The inner and outer life are inseparable, for what happens within will inevitably be displayed to all, especially when one suffers.<sup>31</sup>

Schreiner, like Achtemeier, believes that Peter's use of the word ἀπολογία refers to both public and private settings. However, Schreiner, believes that the Greek grammar of the text seems to imply that Peter is talking about informal public interactions; the text “envisions instead informal circumstances when believers are asked spontaneously about their faith.”<sup>32</sup> Schreiner goes on to say, “This interpretation is supported by the words ‘everyone who asks you’ . . . , suggesting that believers respond to a wide variety of people, not exclusively in court situations.”<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, A. R. Faussett argues that these same words “limit” Peter's command to always be prepared: “The last words limit the universality of the ‘always’; not to a roller, but to everyone among the heathen who inquires honestly.”<sup>34</sup> In other words, Faussett contends that Christians only need to give an ἀπολογία when the person asking the question is sincere.

The words of Peter in verse 15 reveal an important assumption: because Christians have put their faith in historical facts, they are in a position to provide answers to people who ask them about their beliefs. The Savior of Christians was Jesus Christ, a real person who lived a life that could be verified by others. Moreover, the miracles that he performed were witnessed by others as well. Most importantly, his death, resurrection and ascension into heaven were also witnessed by many people. As such, Peter's words are words of encouragement, aimed at reminding believers that their faith is not blind but built on verifiable facts. Hence, there is no need to hide and avoid the questions others

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<sup>31</sup> Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 142.

<sup>32</sup> Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 142.

<sup>33</sup> Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 142.

<sup>34</sup> A. R. Faussett, *1 Peter*, in *The Classic Bible Commentary: An Essential Collection of History's Finest Commentaries in One Volume*, ed. Owen Collins (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 1504.



might ask. Schreiner agrees and writes that the exhortation given in 1 Peter 3:15 is instructive, “for Peter assumed that believers have solid intellectual grounds for believing the gospel. The truth of the gospel is a public truth that can be defended in the public arena.”<sup>35</sup>

When Christians are asked, “Why are you a Christian?” they can answer by pointing to their Lord and Savior—who he was and who he claimed to be. James Hastings offers an example response that Christians can give when they are questioned about their faith: “I am a Christian because I believe in the Founder of Christianity, in the Christ, not only of theology, but of history.”<sup>36</sup> Hastings explains why he is a Christian by pointing people to Jesus—not merely to the Jesus in the Bible but also to the real historical person whose existence cannot be denied. Through the historical eyewitness testimony of the Gospels, readers are confronted with the powerful words of Jesus that show them who Jesus really is. Hastings writes,

As we read in the Gospels of the life of Christ we cannot help being struck not only by His work and His teaching, but by what He says about Himself. Again and again He puts Himself in the foreground. “Come unto me,” is His constant cry to men. He declares Himself to be King, Master, Saviour, Judge of man. He claims for Himself the personal allegiance and devotion of mankind. It is this that primarily distinguishes Him from the rest of teachers, not because He was guilty of self-assertion, but because it was true. And he who would be a Christian must take Christ at His own estimate of Himself. He must believe Him to be who and what He said He was.<sup>37</sup>

When Christians respond in the manner shown by Hastings, they are showing that they believe Jesus to be who he claimed to be. Hastings explains that “we cannot separate the Teacher from His teaching. We cannot say that He was the best of men, but that His teaching was untrue and not to be believed; for then the best of men would be the

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<sup>35</sup> Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 143.

<sup>36</sup> James Hastings, ed., *1 Peter*, in *The Speaker's Bible*, vol. 18, *James; 1-2 Peter; Jude* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 219.

<sup>37</sup> Hastings, *The Speaker's Bible*, 18:219.

worst of teachers.”<sup>38</sup> Jesus taught that he was the way, the truth, and the life and that no one came to the Father except through him (John 14:6). If Jesus claimed this of himself, then Christians must believe it and must be prepared to tell others these same truths.

The ἀπολογία given by Christians was a stark contrast to many of the religions circulating in the ancient world. Quoting Achtemeier, Schreiner writes, “In this respect we have an interesting difference between the Christian faith and mystery religions, for the latter required secrecy of their adherents.”<sup>39</sup> Not only were Christians supposed to be ready to give their *apologia*, but also their defense must be thought out. Hunter and Homrighausen explain that “the Greek phrase (αἰτεῖν λόγον) suggests a rational and intelligent explanation.”<sup>40</sup> In other words, when Christians are asked questions about their faith, they are expected to have a logical explanation for why they believe in the things they believe. Their answer needs to be more in-depth than “I believe because my pastor told me” or “I believe because my mom and dad told me these things are true.”

The reason for one’s faith must be more than just being born into a Christian home or into a Christian nation—this type of answer implies that a person’s faith is the result of nothing more than an accident or chance. According to Hastings, “The mere accident of birth cannot be enough.”<sup>41</sup> He explains that “on this principle a heathen by birth should remain a worshipper of many gods, or a Muhammadan remain a Muslim.”<sup>42</sup> Hastings admits that “in our case, indeed, the circumstance of our birth is a blessing; it is on the right side, and in our favor.”<sup>43</sup> However, with this circumstantial blessing of being

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<sup>38</sup> Hastings, *The Speaker’s Bible*, 18:219.

<sup>39</sup> Schreiner *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 143, quoting Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 233.

<sup>40</sup> Hunter and Homrighausen, *1 Peter*, 129.

<sup>41</sup> Hastings, *The Speaker’s Bible*, 18:219.

<sup>42</sup> Hastings, *The Speaker’s Bible*, 18:219.

<sup>43</sup> Hastings, *The Speaker’s Bible*, 18:219.

born into a Christian home or nation comes greater responsibility. For example, in Hastings's words,

It will add to our condemnation if we have had the light from our entrance into the world, and yet have not apprehended or used it intelligently. It is our inheritance, but what if, having the titles deeds, we have never taken the trouble to examine them, but have been content to take and enjoy our estate, and lo! The time comes when our right of possession is challenged, when we are told there is a flaw in the succession, and we have no answer to make? No, we must have a better reason to give.<sup>44</sup>

Peter's call for Christians to be prepared means that when they are asked about the hope they have, they will be able to provide logical reasons. In other words, this verse is saying that when Christians are asked, "Why are you a Christian?" they will be able to give an account of who Jesus is and why he died on the cross. More than that, they will be able to explain that Jesus rose from the dead, forever conquering sin and death, and that through faith in Jesus, all people can be saved from their sins and receive the free gift of eternal life. Hunter and Homrighausen write, "What sort of answer did Peter expect his readers to make to inquirers? It must have been simple and brief: The main facts about Christ, perhaps the few great truths which prove themselves to all religious men, and certainly the personal testimony of the answerer."<sup>45</sup>

Christians in the ancient world were able to talk about the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ—a real historical person. Not only that, but they were also able to also point to their own transformed lives as a testimony of the work of the Holy Spirit. Faussett also agrees and writes that when Christians give a reasonable account,

this refutes Rome's dogma, "I believe it, because the Church believes it." Credulity is believing without evidence; faith is believing on evidence. There is no repose for reason itself but in faith. This verse does not impose an obligation to bring forward a learned proof and logical defense of revelation. But as believers deny themselves, crucify the world, and brave persecution, they must be buoyed up by some strong "hope"; men of the world, having no such hope themselves, are moved by curiosity

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<sup>44</sup> Hastings, *The Speaker's Bible*, 18:219.

<sup>45</sup> Hunter and Homrighausen, *1 Peter*, 129.

to ask the secret of this hope; the believer must be ready to give an experimental account “how this hope arose in him” what it contains, and on what it rests.<sup>46</sup>

Although separated from the earliest Christians by two millennia, modern believers are still confronted and challenged by paganism. According to Hunter and Homrighausen, “Today, when paganism is rampant in our world and the Christian church often finds its teaching openly challenged, the same ‘readiness’ is demanded of him who would be a Christian in strong earnest.”<sup>47</sup>

### **Your Defense Must Be Gentle and Respectful**

According to 1 Peter 3:15, not only are Christians expected to set apart the Lord as holy and to always be prepared to give a reason to anyone asking questions about the Christian faith, but also Christians are expected to be gentle and respectful in their responses, regardless of how they themselves are being treated. Peter addresses his first epistle to Christians who were being attacked and persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ. So even when Christians are persecuted, Peter expects believers to reflect Christ to others by responding to questions about their faith in gentle and respectful ways.

Eighth-century Anglo-Saxon theologian Bede the Venerable addresses the words of Peter, writing that Christians must “act in such a way that those who revile you because they cannot see your faith and your hope for a heavenly reward may see your good works and be put to shame by them, because they cannot deny that what you are doing is good.”<sup>48</sup> Bede continues, “For it is quite certain, my brothers, that those who

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<sup>46</sup> Faussett, *1 Peter*, 1504-5.

<sup>47</sup> Hunter and Homrighausen, *1 Peter*, 129.

<sup>48</sup> Bede, *On 1 Peter*, quoted in Gerald Bray, ed., *James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament 11 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 105.

despise your good behavior will be put to shame when the last judgement comes and they see you crowned along with Christ, while they are condemned along with the Devil.”<sup>49</sup>

Peter’s admonition to Christians to respond in loving and gentle ways is not a standalone command. Throughout his letter, Peter points to the suffering of Jesus and reminds his readers that even though Jesus suffered, he did not retaliate. In each case, Peter shows that when the Lord suffered, he responded with gentleness and respect (1:11; 2:21-25; 3:18; 4:1, 13; 5:1). Peter follows up his mentions of the Lord’s suffering with statements concerning how Christians must respond to suffering and mistreatment (1:15; 2:11-20; 3:8-9, 14, 16-17; 4:14-19; 5:5-11). These verses clearly indicate that Peter’s command in 3:15 for Christians to respond with gentleness and respect was not a random sidenote but the main theme of his entire letter.

Anyone who has read the Gospels and recalls the account of Jesus’s arrest will find irony in Peter’s admonition for Christians to be gentle and respectful when facing questions and persecution. In that account, Peter attempts to stop Jesus’s by using a sword (Matt 26:47-56).<sup>50</sup> In response to Peter’s actions, Jesus admonishes Peter and tells him to put his sword away. In addition, Jesus warns Peter that those “who take the sword will perish by the sword” (v. 52). Peter then learns from the Lord that Jesus could call down an army of angels who could have fought for him, but he did not (vv. 53-56). Jesus explains that he did not want Peter to fight and he did not call down the legions of angels because his arrest was all part of God’s plan—to fulfill prophecy (vv. 54, 56). Likewise, the persecution that Christians encounter for their faith is all within the sovereign plan of God, and Christians are expected to put their “swords” away and respond in gentle and respectful ways to all people, regardless of how they are behaving.

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<sup>49</sup> Bede, *On 1 Peter* (Bray, 105).

<sup>50</sup> In fact, during the altercation with the crowd that was sent from the chief priests and the elders, Peter chops off one of the ears of Malchus, a servant of the high priest (John 18:10-11).

Ray Summers addresses Peter's admonition for Christians to respond to their questioners with gentleness and respect. He writes, "Even the defense of one's faith in Christ must be done in the spirit of gentleness and reverence. Confidence in the faith one professes is not established by violence any more than the kingdom is established by violence."<sup>51</sup> Summers continues, "By such [a] spirit of gentleness and reverence one will keep a clear conscience, and those who have been abusive of the Christian faith will be put to shame. A good life is the best demonstration of one's Christian faith."<sup>52</sup>

Many commentaries have been written on the subject of how Christians should behave when persecuted for their faith. For example, according to early church father John Chrysostom,

Should the empress determine to banish me, let her banish me; "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof." If she will cast me into the sea, let her cast me into the sea; I will remember Jonah. If she will throw me into a burning, fiery furnace, the three children were there before me. If she will throw me to the wild beasts, I will remember that Daniel was in the den of lions. If she will condemn me to be stoned, I shall be the associate of Stephen, the proto-martyr. If she will have me beheaded, the Baptist has submitted to the same punishment. If she will take away my substance, "naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return to it."<sup>53</sup>

Chrysostom's words are a wonderful example of how Christians should view the world and any persecution they might experience. When Christians have a proper heaven-oriented mindset, they can say to their persecutors, "Do to me what you want, but I am going to live for Jesus." This type of mindset is seen in Daniel 3:16-18 when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are threatened with fire by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. When told that they must worship the golden image of the king or die by fire, they respond respectfully but still refuse to submit to the king's command out of

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<sup>51</sup> Ray Summers, *1 Peter*, in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, *Hebrews-Revelation; General Articles*, ed. Clifton J. Allen (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1972), 162.

<sup>52</sup> Summers, *1 Peter*, 162.

<sup>53</sup> John Chrysostom, *Epistle ad Cyriacum*, quoted in G. F. C. Fronmüller and J. Isidor Mombert, *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Peter*, ed. John Peter Lange, trans. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1867), 62.

obedience to the Lord. In their response to the king, their focus is not on the imminent threat of death but on their God, who is capable of saving them.

Christians do not need to be theologians in order to respond to the questions of others, for their response is not about them but about the Lord and who he is. G. F. C. Frommüller and J. Isidor Mombert write that the *ἀπολογία* given by Christians is “a defense, an apology, no learned theories but a brief account of the Person in whom we believe, of the testimony on which, and the reasons we believe, and of the hope which this belief warrants us to cherish.”<sup>54</sup> Peter does not expect Christians to have “learned theories” or theological training in order to respond well to others. Instead, Peter expects believers to have true faith in who Jesus is, what Jesus did on the cross for all people, and the eternal life that Jesus offers. This faith in the salvation provided by Jesus equips believers for the persecution and temptations they may encounter in life. To this point, Frommüller and Mombert point out that

the primitive Christians were often persecuted for their hope in the salvation of the Messiah. Every believer should become thoroughly assured of the reasons for this hope. Christian faith and the hope founded on it, must attain such vital strength in our inmost heart . . . as to be able to become a counterpoise to the lust and fear of the world.<sup>55</sup>

Christians will face different fears and lusts of this world. However, the way they overcome those lusts and fears is through their faith in Jesus Christ. The strong faith of Christians in their Savior Jesus Christ acts as a spiritual lighthouse for believers who are like ships out at sea. For mariners, lighthouses warn them of unseen dangers and help to direct them safely to or from their harbors. Likewise, when Christians focus on Christ, he leads them through this perilous world to the safe harbor of heaven.

Although Christians’ faith gives them hope in the face of their trials and persecutions, Peter is concerned with how his readers might react. According to Eric Eve,

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<sup>54</sup> Frommüller and Mombert, *Peter*, 59.

<sup>55</sup> Frommüller and Mombert, *Peter*, 59.

“It is the audience’s behavior in the face of abuse that is the author’s prime concern, and he is anxious that the beleaguered communities addressed should make the best possible impression on outsiders, both to avoid provoking unnecessary persecution (v. 13) and to attract further converts (v. 15).”<sup>56</sup> As Peter explains at the end of verse 15, believers need to share their faith but with gentleness and respect. Although believers’ gentle and respectful behavior will not eliminate persecution, it should help them avoid unnecessary persecution, as Eve points out, or at least aid in making a positive impression for nonbelievers who observe Christians’ behavior. Eve explains that even though Christians may experience persecution, “aggressive evangelizing is discouraged, however (vv. 15-16). Believers should explain their hope when asked, but do so respectfully. Ideally, their conduct will bear out the genuineness of their faith (v. 16b).”<sup>57</sup>

Peter explains that when Christians respond to others with gentleness and respect even when they are persecuted, those persecuting them will be “put to shame.” However, as Eve states, there is some confusion concerning what this means:

It is not clear precisely how those who revile Christians for their good conduct will be “put to shame.” This could mean that they will be seen as malicious slanderers by more fair-minded nonbelievers, thereby winning sympathy for believers, but the phrase could also suggest an unfavorable verdict at the last judgement. Perhaps this ambiguity is deliberate. In any case, the author sees innocent suffering nobly borne as valuable in itself (vv. 14, 17).<sup>58</sup>

Whether the phrase “put to shame” relates to individuals’ being perceived as malicious slanderers or to their final judgment before God, the responsibility of Christians is the same. Christians are responsible for their actions in the face of questions and persecution, and they should respond to anyone who asks about the hope that they have with gentleness and respect.

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<sup>56</sup> Eric Eve, *1 Peter*, in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, ed. John Barton and John Muddiman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1267.

<sup>57</sup> Eve, *1 Peter*, 1267.

<sup>58</sup> Eve, *1 Peter*, 1267.



That Christians should have an attitude that reflects Christ in the face of persecution is undeniable. Commentary after commentary points out the same biblical truths. In addressing Peter's words of admonition in 1 Peter 3, Curtis Vaughan avers, "Verses 13-17 describe the attitude Christians should have as they face suffering. The essential teaching is that they can and should endure suffering with courage and confidence."<sup>59</sup>

This words of admonition echo the words of Jesus in his Sermon of the Mount when Jesus tells his audience that even when people mistreat them, they are to show love. In fact, Jesus tells the crowd, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matt 5:38-39). What Jesus is commanding his audience to do is contrary to fallen human nature.

Jesus go on to instruct the crowds, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (vv. 44-45). After exhorting his audience that they are to turn the other cheek, love their enemies, and pray for those who persecute them, Jesus explains that this is exactly what God does: "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (vv. 46-48).

In verse 48, when Jesus tells his audience that they must be "perfect," he is not telling them that they can somehow reach perfection. The Greek word for "perfect" is *τέλειος* (*teleios*), which means "well rounded" or "complete." The surrounding verses

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<sup>59</sup> Curtis Vaughan, *1 Peter*, in *The Teacher's Bible Commentary*, ed. H. Franklin Paschall and Herschel H. Hobbs (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1972), 789.

make this meaning clear. When Jesus tells his audience that they need to be perfect, he is instructing them that they are not to be one sided and only kind to people who are kind to them. Instead, they are to be τέλειος, just as God is τέλειος. They are to treat people with kindness and love, even when they are not treated with kindness and love—because this is what God does. He is τέλειος; therefore, believers need to be τέλειος! He is complete and perfect, not one sided; therefore, believers must be complete and perfect, not one sided.

Jesus’s admonition in Matthew 5:48 for people to be τέλειος is the same as Peter’s admonition to Christians in 1 Peter 3:15. Although Peter does not use the word τέλειος, the intention is the same. Peter is expecting believers to show love, kindness, gentleness, and respect to people regardless of how those people treat them. Although Peter is acknowledging that suffering is a real possibility for Christians, he is not telling Christians to go in search for persecution. As Vaughan writes, “Ver 14 suggests that suffering for righteousness may be unusual, but if it should occur, the sufferer should count himself fortunate. Christians, however, are not to court martyrdom.”<sup>60</sup> Peter is merely telling Christians that when asked about their faith, they should be ready to give a response with gentleness and respect. Such behavior will be used to spread the gospel. According to Vaughan, “Those who attack us for our faith are to be answered ‘with meekness’ (i.e., gentleness, courtesy, v. 15) ‘and fear’ (i.e., reverence for God, v. 15). Such an attitude will go far to commend the gospel to our critics.”<sup>61</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In summary, 1 Peter 3:15 clearly indicates that God calls Christians to defend their faith through a thoughtful ἀπολογία. Consequently, the church must help to equip the saints in this endeavor to be prepared to defend the Christian faith. Peter does not

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<sup>60</sup> Vaughan, *1 Peter*, 789.

<sup>61</sup> Vaughan, *1 Peter*, 789.

simply tell Christians to “be prepared”; he also gives a three-part formula for what a defense of the Christian faith should look like. First Peter 3:15 shows that Christian apologetics requires followers of Christ to (1) honor Christ Jesus as holy in their hearts, (2) always be prepared to give a reason or defense for the hope that they have, and (3) give their defense in a gentle and respectful way.

The way for Christians to be prepared is to receive apologetics training, not only in the Bible but in other disciplines as well. When Christians are well studied in multiple fields and are able to address a wide range of questions presented by skeptics, their knowledge and arguments lend credibility to the Christian faith. Oftentimes, skeptics view Christians as nothing more than weak-minded religious fanatics who have put their faith in a myth that lacks historical evidence. However, when Christians are able to give reasons for the hope that is in them by drawing from different fields of science, by addressing the differences between world religions, and by addressing the evidence for the Bible, they show that they are not weak minded but thoughtful and that the Christian faith is rooted in scientific and historical evidence. In the next chapter, the theoretical, practical, and historical issues confronting the Christian church is presented.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE PROJECT

In the previous chapter, the theological argument for Christian apologetics was addressed.<sup>1</sup> According to 1 Peter 3:15, Christians must (1) honor Christ Jesus as holy in their hearts, (2) always be prepared to give a reason or defense for the hope that they have, and (3) give their defense in a gentle and respectful way. The theological command is clear. However, how do the words of Peter, which were written two thousand years ago, apply to Christians today? How should Christians utilize apologetics when interacting with non-Christians? Christians will encounter many different objections to the Christian faith. Although objections may relate to different topics, such as origins, the belief that Jesus is the only way to get into heaven, and the reliability of the Bible, Christians must respond to objections through a biblical worldview.

#### **Worldviews in Conflict**

Nearly three thousand years ago, King Solomon began the book of Ecclesiastes by stating that “there is nothing new under the sun” (1:9). These famous words apply to all areas of life, including how Christians defend the Christian faith. Throughout human history, people have held many different views on the origin of life, the presence of evil and many other areas. These conflicting beliefs stem from presuppositions held by individuals and are known as a worldview. James Anderson explains,

Just as the word itself suggests, a worldview is an overall view of the world. It’s not a physical view of the world, like the sight of planet Earth you might get from an

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<sup>1</sup> Large portions of this chapter have been adapted as articles (forthcoming) for the North American Mission Board (NAMB). See <https://www.namb.net/apologetics/>.

orbiting space station. Rather, it's a philosophical view of the world- and not just of our planet, but of all of reality. A worldview is an all-encompassing perspective on everything that exists and matters to us.<sup>2</sup>

James Sire gives a slightly different definition. He defines a worldview as

a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.<sup>3</sup>

Using the analogy of glasses, Anderson writes, “Your worldview shapes and informs your experiences of the world around you. Like a pair of spectacles with colored lenses, it affects what you see and how you see it. Depending on the ‘color’ of the lenses, you see some things more easily, while other things are de-emphasized or distorted. In some cases, you don’t see things at all.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, if a person is wearing blue lenses (e.g., evolutionary worldview), then everything he looks at will have a bluish hue. Likewise, if a person is wearing glasses with red lenses (e.g., creationist worldview), then everything she looks at will have a reddish hue. The object or evidence being considered can be the same but interpreted differently based on the worldview of the person interpreting the data.

It is important for Christians to know that there are conflicting worldviews that cause some people to believe in a loving, all-powerful, and personal God and other people to believe in an impersonal God or no God at all. Each belief also affects other beliefs, such as how people should live and treat each other, whether there are consequences for immoral behaviors, where morality comes from, whether there is life after death, and many other areas.

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<sup>2</sup> James N. Anderson, *What's Your Worldview? An Interactive Approach to Life's Big Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 12.

<sup>3</sup> James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 141.

<sup>4</sup> Anderson, *What's Your Worldview?*, 13.

When interacting with non-Christians, believers must make sure that their responses are based on a biblical worldview. The Bible gives answers to all of life's questions. As such, Christians must provide biblical answers for the hope that they have. However, they must be able to provide answers to more than just questions about the Bible; they must be able to discuss other areas as well in order to show that the God of the Bible is the God of math, science, history, and all subjects. As J. P. Moreland notes,

Holy Scripture is the central object of study in loving God with the mind. However, it is not the only object of such study. God has revealed Himself and various truths on a number of topics outside the Bible. As Christians have known throughout our history, common sense, logic, and mathematics—along with the arts, humanities, sciences, and other areas of study—contain important truths relevant to life in general and to the development of a careful, life-related Christian worldview. According to the Bible, wisdom comes from studying ants as well as learning Scripture (Proverbs 6)!<sup>5</sup>

The apostle Paul's interaction with the Athenians in Acts 17 is an excellent example of what apologetics should look like. While waiting for Silas and Timothy, Paul talks about Jesus with anyone who would listen. His audience includes people from various backgrounds, ranging from Jews to Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. Although these people hold different worldviews, those conflicting views do not inhibit Paul from talking to them about Jesus and the gospel.

When Paul addresses the Areopagus in Acts 17:22-34, he does so by using the three-pronged approach that was addressed in chapter 2, which comes from 1 Peter 3:15. In these verses, Paul shows that he set Jesus Christ as Lord in his heart. This is made clear with what he says in verses 24-31:

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for "In him we live and

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<sup>5</sup> J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2012), 62-63.

move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said, “For we are indeed his offspring.” Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

Paul’s whole interaction (vv. 22-34) shows that Paul is prepared to make a defense to anyone who asked him for the hope that he had (see 1 Pet 3:15). Lastly, it is clear from these verses that Paul gives his reasons with gentleness and respect. Verses 22-23 show that Paul recognizes the Athenians’ desire to be “religious.” He does not mock their false beliefs; rather, he uses their religious culture as a catalyst to talk about Jesus and the gospel: “So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said, ‘Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: “To the unknown god.” What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you”’ (vv. 22-23).

When making his “defense” and giving “reasons” for the hope that he had, Paul does so with gentleness and respect, even when people mock him for his beliefs. This is exhibited in verses 32-34: “Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, ‘We will hear you again about this.’ So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.” These verses show that Paul is affective in his defense and presentation of the gospel. As a result, many believe his message and join him.

### **How Did We Get Here?**

In *The God Delusion*, evolutionist Richard Dawkins states, “If all the evidence in the universe turned in favour of creationism, I would be the first to admit it, and I would immediately change my mind. As things stand, however, all available evidence

(and there is a vast amount of it) favours evolution.”<sup>6</sup> The worldview that Dawkins presents is that there is no God and that the universe is the result of evolution. Dawkins’s view of origins is a belief held by many and acts as an intellectual obstacle to the gospel. An article from UC Berkeley seems to bolster the claims made by Dawkins and others. The article claims that evidence supports evolution as being the cause of life in the universe:

Chemists from the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Hawaii, Manoa, showed that conditions in space are capable of creating complex dipeptides—linked pairs of amino acids—that are essential building blocks shared by all living things. The discovery opens the door to the possibility that these molecules were brought to Earth aboard a comet or possibly meteorites, catalyzing the formation of proteins (polypeptides), enzymes and even more complex molecules, such as sugars, that are necessary for life.<sup>7</sup>

Dawkins and other evolutionists have claimed that there is a “vast amount” of evidence in support of evolution. Does chemistry and other fields of science show that evolution is true? Christians must be aware of what the “evidence” is. Not only that, but Christians must also be able to show how the “evidence” acts as evidence for belief in an intelligent Creator God and not as evidence for undirected processes resulting in a finely tuned universe. The UC Berkeley article cited above mentions that life on earth might be the result of molecules that were brought to earth by meteorites or a comet. However, this theory brings up a dilemma for the evolutionist: Where did those molecules come from? What about the matter that made up the comet or meteorites?

An even larger problem for evolutionists is how the earth or the universe came into existence in the first place to allow life to exist. In *Signs of Intelligence: Understanding Intelligent Design*, Walter Bradley describes the conditions of the Big Bang and how the formation of the universe is impossible through chance:

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), 19.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Sanders, “Evidence That Comets Could Have Seeded Life on Earth,” University of California Berkeley, March 5, 2013, <https://vcresearch.berkeley.edu/news/evidence-comets-could-have-seeded-life-earth>.



A fundamental boundary condition of the big bang that is critical is its initial velocity. If this velocity is too fast, the matter in the universe expands too quickly and never coalesces into planets, stars, and galaxies. If the initial velocity is too slow, the universe expands only for a short time and then quickly collapses under the influence of gravity.<sup>8</sup>

Based on how precise initial velocity had to be, according to cosmological models, these initial velocity requirements “seem to overwhelm chance.”<sup>9</sup>

According to Andrew Boyd, Sir Isaac Newton noticed another problem. If the universe “was formed by gravity pulling together bits of matter spread throughout the universe, why would there be planets? Specifically, why wouldn’t all the matter get pulled into a single great mass? Further, why was the sun the one and only body in the solar system to give off heat and light?”<sup>10</sup> Boyd also points out that Newton’s study of the planets and their motions “solidified his own personal belief in God.”<sup>11</sup>

Many great scientific minds have recognized God’s existence through science. Henry Morris lists many of the founders and primary developers of science and writes,

Men such as Johann Kepler, Isaac Newton, Robert Boyle, David Brewster, John Dalton, Michael Faraday, Blaise Pascal, Clerk Maxwell, Louis Pasteur, William Thomson (Lord Kelvin), and a host of others of comparable stature were men who firmly believed in special creation and the personal omnipotent God of creation, as well as believing in the Bible as the inspired Word of God and in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Their great contributions in science were made in implicit confidence that they were doing His will and glorifying His name in so doing. They certainly entertained no thoughts of conflict between science and the Bible.<sup>12</sup>

Walter Bradley writes that Johannes Kepler noted, “The chief aim of all investigations of the external world should be to discover the rational order and harmony

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<sup>8</sup> Walter Bradley, “The ‘Just So’ Universe: The Fine-Tuning of Constants and Conditions in the Cosmos,” in *Signs of Intelligence: Understanding Intelligent Design*, ed. William A. Dembski and James M. Kushiner (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 168-69.

<sup>9</sup> Bradley, “The ‘Just So’ Universe,” 169.

<sup>10</sup> Andy Boyd, “No. 3012: Newton, God, and Gravity,” University of Houston, July 2, 2015, <https://uh.edu/engines/epi3012.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> Boyd, “No. 3012: Newton, God, and Gravity.”

<sup>12</sup> Henry M. Morris, *The Biblical Basis for Modern Science* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2020), 24.

which has been imposed on it by God and which He revealed to us in the language of mathematics.”<sup>13</sup> Galileo Galilei came to the same conclusion when studying science. He observed that “the laws of nature are written by the hands of God in the language of mathematics.”<sup>14</sup>

In *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, John Frame rightly points out that

science itself presupposes the absolute personal God of the Bible to validate the relative uniformity of nature and the possibility of intelligible thought about the world. If the universe is fundamentally impersonal, there is no reason why we should feel obligated to seek truth rather than error, or any reason, why we should think our intellectual faculties capable of finding truth.<sup>15</sup>

In his book *There Is a God*, once-notorious-atheist Antony Flew addresses the laws of nature, writing,

The important point is not merely that there are regularities in nature, but that these regularities are mathematically precise, universal, and “tied together.” Einstein spoke of them as “reason incarnate.” The question we should ask is how nature came packaged in this fashion. This is certainly the question that scientists from Newton to Einstein to Heisenberg have asked—and answered. Their answer was the Mind of God.<sup>16</sup>

In the 1920s, Edwin Hubble discovered the “redshift,” which showed that the universe is expanding.<sup>17</sup> After observing the redshift with Hubble in 1931, Albert Einstein also concluded that the universe was expanding, which is shown in his “General Theory of Relativity.”<sup>18</sup> The significance of Hubble and Einstein’s discovery is that if the universe is expanding, then the universe must have had a beginning. If the universe had a

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<sup>13</sup> Johannes Kepler, *Defundamentis Astrologiae Certioribus*, thesis XX, 1601, quoted in Bradley, “The ‘Just So’ Universe,” 160.

<sup>14</sup> Morris Kline, *Mathematics: The Loss of Certainty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), quoted in Bradley, “The ‘Just So’ Universe,” 160.

<sup>15</sup> John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 199.

<sup>16</sup> Antony Flew, *There Is a God: How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 96.

<sup>17</sup> Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay W. Richards, *The Privileged Planet: How Our Place in the Cosmos Is Designed for Discovery* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2020), 169-70.

<sup>18</sup> Gonzalez and Richards, *The Privileged Planet*, 171.

beginning, then there must have been a First Cause. Christian apologist and philosopher William Lane Craig, in his book *Reasonable Faith*, addresses this line of reasoning with the *kalām* cosmological argument. Craig writes, “The *kalām* cosmological argument may be formulated as follows: 1) Whatever begins to exist has a cause. 2) The universe began to exist. 3) Therefore, the universe has a cause.”<sup>19</sup> The “Cause” according to Craig, is the God of the Christian Bible.

Although Einstein rejected the concept of a personal God, as found in the Christian Bible, he still believed in a rational God and thought that God’s existence was the only logical reason for why order existed in the universe.<sup>20</sup> In an interview with George Sylvester Viereck, Einstein said the following when asked if he believed in God:

I’m not an atheist. The problem involved is too vast for our limited minds. We are in the position of a little child entering a huge library filled with books in many languages. The child knows someone must have written those books. It does not know how. It does not understand the languages in which they are written. The child dimly suspects a mysterious order in the arrangement of the books but doesn’t know what it is. That it seems to me, is the attitude of even the most intelligent being towards God. We see a universe marvelously arranged and obeying certain laws, but only dimly understand those laws.<sup>21</sup>

In *God’s Undertaker*, John Lennox addresses the remarkable complexities seen in physics and cosmology. Lennox writes, “The remarkable picture that is gradually emerging from modern physics and cosmology is one of a universe whose fundamental forces are amazingly, intricately, and delicately balanced or ‘fine-tuned’ in order for the universe to sustain life.”<sup>22</sup> He continues, “Research has shown that many of the

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<sup>19</sup> William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2008), 111.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Olson, “Physics,” in *Science & Religion: A Historical Introduction*, ed. Gary B. Ferngren (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 360.

<sup>21</sup> Walter Isaacson, *Einstein: His Life and Universe* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 386; Kline, *Mathematics*, quoted in Bradley, “The ‘Just So’ Universe,” 160.

<sup>22</sup> John C. Lennox, *God’s Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2009), 70.

fundamental constants of nature, from the energy levels in the carbon atom to the rate at which the universe is expanding, have just the right values for life to exist.”<sup>23</sup>

Elsewhere, Lennox offers an example of the fine-tuning seen in physics and cosmology: “It is argued that an alteration in the ratio of the expansion and contraction forces by as little as 1 part in  $10^{55}$  at the Planck time (just  $10^{-43}$  seconds after the origin of the universe), would have led to either to rapid an expansion of the universe with no galaxies forming or too slow an expansion with consequent rapid collapse.”<sup>24</sup>

Evidence for God is found not only when looking through the lens of a telescope but also when looking through the lens of a microscope. Hugh Ross explains in *The Creator and the Cosmos* that advancements in technology have revealed things that had once been hidden. He gives the example of the F1-ATPase enzyme, which is a biological rotary engine.<sup>25</sup> Ross points out that “this tiny motor includes the equivalent of an engine block, a drive shaft, and three pistons.”<sup>26</sup> The bacterial flagellum is another example of evidence for a Creator. *Darwin’s Black Box*, Michael Behe explains that the bacterial flagellum has a propeller that is driven by a small motor and contains a universal joint, rotor, bushings, a stator, and a driveshaft—all parts found in a rotary engine designed by engineers.<sup>27</sup>

There is an even greater dilemma for evolutionists to overcome: the improbability of life’s coming into existence by chance. In *Signature in the Cell*, Stephen Meyer writes,

If we assume that a minimally complex cell needs at least 250 proteins of, on average, 150 amino acids and that the probability of producing just one such protein

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<sup>23</sup> Lennox, *God’s Undertaker*, 70.

<sup>24</sup> Lennox, *God’s Undertaker*, 71.

<sup>25</sup> Hugh Ross, *The Creator and the Cosmos* (Glendora, CA: Reasons to Believe, 2018), 162.

<sup>26</sup> Ross, *The Creator and the Cosmos*, 140.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Behe, *Darwin’s Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 71-72.

is 1 in  $10^{164}$  . . . , then the probability of producing all the necessary proteins needed to service a minimally complex cell is 1 in  $10^{164}$  multiplied by itself 250 times, or 1 in 1 in  $10^{41,000}$ .<sup>28</sup>

According to Alexandre Maia of the Mayo Clinic, “The human body is composed of an estimated 37.2 trillion cells.”<sup>29</sup> If the probability of one cell’s being formed by chance is  $10^{41,000}$ , then the probability of 37.2 trillion cells’ being formed by chance is an even more staggering number!

The emergence of a cell by chance gets even more complicated for evolutionists. For example, in an issue of *Scientific American*, Chemist Robert Shapiro points out that “DNA replication cannot proceed without the assistance of a number of proteins.”<sup>30</sup> Shapiro highlights an additional complication, writing, “Proteins used by cells today are built following instructions encoded in DNA.”<sup>31</sup> As the article clearly indicates, DNA cannot exist without proteins, and proteins cannot exist without DNA. Shapiro goes on to say, “The above account brings to mind the old riddle: Which came first, the chicken or the egg? DNA holds the recipe for protein construction. Yet that information cannot be retrieved or copied without the assistance of proteins. Which large molecule, then, appeared first—proteins (the chicken) or DNA (the egg)?”<sup>32</sup>

Besides the evidence for creation that has already been presented, another piece of evidence supporting creation is the laws of thermodynamics. In addressing the first law, Don DeYoung explains that “energy conservation implies that the universe did not start up by itself.”<sup>33</sup> In *The Creator and the Cosmos*, Hugh Ross explains that “the

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<sup>28</sup> Stephen C. Meyer, *Signature in the Cell: DNA and the Evidence for Intelligent Design* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 213.

<sup>29</sup> Alexandre Maia, “Functional Epigenomics,” Mayo Clinic, accessed January 14, 2022, <https://www.mayo.edu/research/labs/functional-epigenomics/about>.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Shapiro, “A Simpler Origin for Life,” *Scientific American* 296, no. 6 (June 2007): 47.

<sup>31</sup> Shapiro, “A Simpler Origin for Life,” 48.

<sup>32</sup> Shapiro, “A Simpler Origin for Life,” 48.

<sup>33</sup> Don B. DeYoung, “Physics,” in *In Six Days: Why Fifty Scientists Choose to Believe in Creation*, ed. John F. Ashton, (Green Forest, AZ: Master Books, 2014), 343.

second law of thermodynamics tells us that the entropy of the universe increases with time.”<sup>34</sup> Don DeYoung points out that these two laws greatly influenced his belief in creation. He writes,

My scientific belief in creation is largely based on two thermodynamic laws of nature. In fact, these are the two most basic laws in the entire science realm. The first law states that energy is conserved or constant at all times. Energy, in whichever of its many forms, absolutely can be neither created nor destroyed. This rule ensures a dependable and predictable universe, whether for stars or for human life.<sup>35</sup>

Scientific evidence clearly supports the belief in an intelligent Creator.

Although Dawkins and others claim that evolution is supported by an overwhelming amount of evidence, the evidence is actually lacking. Instead, the evidence is overwhelmingly in support of a Creator. Unfortunately, these evolutionary scientists are driven by their evolutionary worldview that causes them to suppress evidence that surrounds them. This suppression is made clear by their own words. For example, Richard Dawkins writes, “Biology is the study of complicated things that gives the appearance of having been designed for a purpose.”<sup>36</sup> Further, according to Stephen Meyer, Francis Crick once made a similar confession of suppressing the truth: “Biologists must constantly keep in mind that what they see was not designed, but rather evolved.”<sup>37</sup> In their own words, these scientists admit that the evidence must be ignored in order to hold to the evolutionary worldview.

When Dawkins and other evolutionists claim that “all available evidence favours evolution,” Christians must learn to defend the Christian faith by pointing to the evidence for the existence of God. Norman Geisler and Frank Turek make an excellent point in *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*:

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<sup>34</sup> Hugh Ross, *The Creator and the Cosmos* (Glendora, CA: Reasons to Believe, 2018), 99.

<sup>35</sup> DeYoung, “Physics,” 342-43.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2015), 4.

<sup>37</sup> Meyer, *Signature in the Cell*, 20.

“If there is not God, why is there something rather than nothing?” is a question that we all have to answer. And in light of the evidence, we are left with only two options: either *no one* created something out of nothing, or else *someone* created something out of nothing. Which view is more reasonable? Nothing created something? No. Even Julie Andrews knew the answer when she sang, “Nothing comes from nothing. Nothing ever could!” And if you can’t believe that nothing caused something, *then you don’t have enough faith to be an atheist! The most reasonable view is God.*<sup>38</sup>

### **Problem of Evil**

The previous section presented clear evidence that the universe and all of life is the result of an intelligent Creator. Even with the abundance of scientific evidence in support of a Creator, Christians may still encounter objections to the faith due to the presence of evil in the world. However, such objections should not paralyze Christians. Instead, believers must learn that the presence of evil is more difficult for atheists to explain than for Christians. In *The Reason for God*, Tim Keller, “Horrendous, inexplicable suffering, though it cannot disprove God, is nonetheless a problem for the believer in the Bible. However, it is perhaps an even greater problem for nonbelievers.”<sup>39</sup> Lewis as quoted in Keller writes,

My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of “just” and “unjust?” . . . What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust? . . . Of course I could have given up my idea of justice by saying it was nothing but a private idea of my own. But if I did that, then my argument against God collapsed too—for the argument depended on saying that the world was really unjust, not simply that it did not happen to please my private fancies . . . . Consequently atheism turns out to be too simple.<sup>40</sup>

Lewis realized that he was judging God based on a standard of morality that could only be explained if God existed. Keller points out that “if you are sure that this

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<sup>38</sup> Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 94.

<sup>39</sup> Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Dutton, 2008), 25.

<sup>40</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 31, quoted in Keller, *The Reason for God*, 26.

natural world is unjust and filled with evil, you are assuming the reality of some extra-natural (or supernatural) standard by which to make your judgement.”<sup>41</sup>

Paul Gould provides a helpful summary of C. S. Lewis’s arguments for the existence of God from morality based on the first five chapters of Lewis’s book *Mere Christianity*. Gould writes, “It can be summarized as follows: 1. There is a universal law. 2. If there is a universal moral law, there is a moral lawgiver. 3. If there is a moral lawgiver, it must be something beyond the material cosmos. 4. Therefore, there is something beyond the material cosmos.”<sup>42</sup> Gould adds, “Let’s complete the argument from morality to God by adding an additional statement. 5. This objective beyond the material cosmos is God. From which it follows straight away that 6. God exists.”<sup>43</sup>

William Lane Craig provides a similar yet more simplistic argument for the existence of God: (1) If God does not exist, then objective moral values and duties do not exist. (2) Objective moral values and duties do exist. (3) Therefore, God exists.<sup>44</sup>

Those who claim that there cannot be a God due to the presence of evil in the world are left with a dilemma. There are two options for how the universe and all of life came into existence: evolution or a Creator. Evolution is the only option available for those who deny God’s existence, and the theory of evolution states that life evolved through natural selection—survival of the fittest. This means that the strong survive and the weak die off; therefore, death has nothing to do with good or evil. The problem for evolutionists is their recognition of evil acts in the world. That humans recognize evil actions is evidence for God’s existence and the conscience he implanted in creatures.

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<sup>41</sup> Keller, *The Reason for God*, 26.

<sup>42</sup> Paul Gould, *Cultural Apologetics: Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience, and Imagination in a Disenchanted World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 156-57.

<sup>43</sup> Gould, *Cultural Apologetics*, 157.

<sup>44</sup> William Lane Craig, *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010), 145-46.



People who deny God’s existence based on what they believe is pointless evil are in fact denying God due to their own pride—that is, because they think that *they* know what is best. Keller writes, “Tucked away within the assertion that the world is filled with pointless evil is a hidden premise, namely, that if evil appears pointless to me, then it must be pointless.”<sup>45</sup> Keller continues,

This reasoning is, of course, fallacious. Just because you can’t see or imagine a good reason why God might allow something to happen doesn’t mean there can’t be one. Again we see lurking within supposedly hard-nosed skepticism an enormous faith in one’s own cognitive faculties. If our minds can’t plumb the depths of the universe for good answers to suffering, well, then, there can’t be any! This is blind faith of a higher order.<sup>46</sup>

In their book *When Skeptics Ask*, Norman Geisler and Ronald Brooks address this very issue. They write, “There is a difference between our knowing the purpose for evil and God having a purpose for it. Even if we don’t know God’s purpose, He may still have a good reason for allowing evil in our lives. So we can’t assume that there is no good purpose for something just because we don’t know what it could be.”<sup>47</sup>

Another problem for those holding to an evolutionary worldview while also recognizing the existence of evil is that such people are presupposing an objective moral standard that can only come from a moral law-giver. In *True for You, but Not for Me*, Paul Copan addresses this very issue:

We see that *things ought not to be this way*. But how do we make sense of evil if naturalism is true—after all, why *should* things be different than they are? Atheists using the argument from evil are assuming a standard of goodness. But where does that come from? If we’re simply random by-products of mindless, valueless processes, then we can’t really call something evil, even if we may not like it. In the end, *the atheist must grapple with not only the problem of evil but also the problem*

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<sup>45</sup> Keller, *The Reason for God*, 23.

<sup>46</sup> Keller, *The Reason for God*, 23.

<sup>47</sup> Norman L. Geisler and Ronald M. Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask: A Handbook on Christian Evidences* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 60.

*of goodness*. If a standard of goodness exists from which evil is a deviation, then we're pointed in the direction of God.<sup>48</sup>

As Copan points out, the objections made by atheists require that they borrow a moral standard from theists in order to judge God for the evil they perceive in the world. Copan further highlights the absurdity of atheists' rejecting God but holding to a moral standard in his book *Is God a Moral Monster?* He writes,

Some atheists will say that we know rape is wrong because it violates the victim's rights and rips apart the social fabric. The problem with moral atheism, though, is that it doesn't go far enough. Notice how atheists who believe in real right and wrong make a massive intellectual leap of faith. They believe that somehow moral facts were eternally part of the "furniture" of reality but that from impersonal and valueless slime, human persons possessing rights, dignity, worth, and duties were eventually produced. These moral truths were "anticipating" the evolution of morally valuable human beings who would have duties to obey them. Yes, atheists can *know* that rape is wrong, but that's no surprise if they have been made in the image of God, who they refuse to acknowledge. The more fundamental question that atheism seems unable to answer is: How did they come to be rights-bearing, valuable persons? The problem isn't one of *knowing*; it's one of *being*.<sup>49</sup>

### **The One True Faith**

The previous section provided scientific evidence for a Creator with respect to the problem of evil. Christians must have a knowledge of such evidence in order to address claims that science disproves the existence of God. With evidence supporting the existence of a Creator, the question then becomes "Which God is the Creator?" According to the religious studies department at Carroll University, "There are an estimated 4,200 religions in the world today."<sup>50</sup>

Christians must be prepared to answer people who wrestle with the exclusivity of the Christian faith and ask questions such as "With thousands of religions in the world, how can there be just one way into heaven?" Although America was once a

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<sup>48</sup> Paul Copan, *True for You, but Not for Me: Deflating the Slogans That Leave Christians Speechless* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2009), 106.

<sup>49</sup> Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 209-10.

<sup>50</sup> Carroll University, "Religious Studies," accessed January 20, 2022, <https://www.carrollu.edu/academics/arts-sciences/religious-studies>.

predominantly Christian nation, this is no longer the case. Harold Netland writes, “Clearly, North American society is already religiously highly pluralistic. The days when Western religious society could be thought of in terms of the “Big Three,” Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism, are long gone. And yet most Westerners—certainly most Western Christians—are only now beginning to realize the extent of this pluralism and to grapple with some of the issues that follow from it.”<sup>51</sup>

Christians are being confronted with religious pluralism from all angles, including big-name celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey. In fact, in an episode titled “What’s Your Spiritual Belief?” (which originally aired on January 30, 1996), Oprah makes this point clear. Discussing matters of spirituality and responding to an audience member’s statement on God, Oprah references Daniel Quinn’s book *Ishmael* and states, “One of the mistakes that human beings make is believing that there is only one way to live and that we don’t accept that there are diverse ways of being in the world. That there are millions of ways to be a human being and many paths to what you call God.”<sup>52</sup> This statement by Oprah expresses a New Age concept of God. In his book *Lies That Go Unchallenged in Popular Culture*, Charles Colson writes, “One critic calls this popular view of God and spirituality ‘Oprahfication.’ Talk Show host Oprah Winfrey’s view begins with the assumption that truth is rooted in human experience and feeling, rather than the claims of Christian doctrine or faith in a transcendent, personal God.”<sup>53</sup>

A popular analogy given to help support the pluralistic view is that of the “elephant and the blind men.” There are many versions of this story, but the main thrust is that there are ten blind (blindfolded) men who are led over to an elephant and

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<sup>51</sup> Harold A. Netland, *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth* (Vancouver: Eerdmans, 1997), 7.

<sup>52</sup> OWN, “What’s Your Spiritual Belief?,” last modified October 7, 2020, <https://www.oprah.com/own-podcasts/whats-your-spiritual-belief>.

<sup>53</sup> Charles Colson, *Lies That Go Unchallenged in Popular Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2005), 335.

positioned in such a way that each person touches a different part of the animal (e.g., tail, trunk, tusk, leg). Without being told what they are touching, the men are asked to describe their experience. Although each participant is also touching the elephant, his experience is drastically different from the other participants. According to this analogy, the blind men represent the world's religions. Even though each religion is describing its belief system in a unique way compared to other religions, all of them are truly experiencing the same God—just describing him differently.

There is a major flaw with this analogy. As Tim Keller points out, “This illustration backfires on its users. The story is told from the point of view of someone who is not blind. How could you know that each blind man only sees part of the elephant unless you claim to be able to see the whole elephant?”<sup>54</sup> Newbigin as quoted in Keller writes,

There is an appearance of humility in the protestation that truth is much greater than any one of us can grasp, but if this is used to invalidate all claims to discern the truth it is in fact an arrogant claim to a kind of knowledge which is superior to [all others] . . . . We have to ask: “what is the [absolute] vantage ground from which you claim to be able to relativize all the absolute claims these different scriptures make?”<sup>55</sup>

The elephant analogy is given by people who claim that Christianity is arrogant and narrow-minded. Those who give this analogy believe that they are presenting a humble, non-judgmental answer to the differences among the world's religions. But this analogy is far from a humble, non-judgmental response—and Christians must learn to recognize it. Keller rightly explains, “How could you possibly know that no religion can see the whole truth unless you yourself have the superior,

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<sup>54</sup> Keller, *The Reason for God*, 9.

<sup>55</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 9-10, 170, quoted in Keller, *The Reason for God*, 9.

comprehensive knowledge of spiritual reality you just claimed that none of the religions have?”<sup>56</sup>

Another problem with this analogy is that it completely ignores the contradictory teachings of each of the world’s religions. As Josh McDowell and Don Stewart write,

The problem with this illustration is identifying the elephant with God. You are assuming that all these people are experiencing the same God, when in fact this is not true . . . . All religions cannot be true at the same time, because they teach many things completely opposite from one another. They all may be wrong, but certainly they all cannot be right, for the claims of one will exclude the other.<sup>57</sup>

The problem facing Christians is that many people state that all religions basically teach the same thing, and because Christians lack the basic understanding of what other religions teach, they are left without a reasonable response. However, when Christians receive a basic overview on the teachings of other faiths, they are equipped to challenge the common claim that all religions teach the same thing. Norman Geisler makes this point when he writes, “If the Bible declares that Jesus died on the cross and rose bodily from the dead three days later (see 1 Corinthians 15:1-6), and the Qur’an teaches that he did not (see Sura 4:157), both books cannot be true on such a crucial teaching. One of them has to be wrong.”<sup>58</sup>

Besides the different views regarding the resurrection of Jesus, there are many other contradictory teachings among the world’s religions. The following are some examples. Regarding belief in God, Hinduism believes in millions of Gods as well as a main impersonal God (Brahman). On the other hand, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

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<sup>56</sup> Keller, *The Reason for God*, 9.

<sup>57</sup> Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, *Answers to Tough Questions Skeptics Ask about the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1986), 106-7.

<sup>58</sup> Norman Geisler, “Tough Questions about the Bible, False Prophets, and the Holy Books of Other Religions,” in *Who Made God? And Answers to over 100 Other Tough Questions of Faith*, ed. Ravi Zacharias and Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 138.

believe in only one God. However, even here there is disagreement. Christianity believes in a triune God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit), whereas Islam rejects this view.

Regarding the person of Jesus Christ, the Baha'i faith believes that Jesus, along with Buddha, Muhammad, and others, was nothing more than a messenger of God. Islam teaches that Jesus Christ was one of Allah's prophets but that even though he was perfect, he was only a man. Christianity, however, believes that Jesus is the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, and that he came to earth to take away the sins of the world.

Regarding the concept of sin, Buddhists and Baha'i reject the concept of original sin. As a result, there is no need for a Savior. Islam likewise denies the need for a Savior. According to Islam, Muslims earn their own salvation. In contrast, Christianity believes in "original sin" that all humans are born with. As a result, there is a need for a Savior, and Christians believe that Jesus is that only Savior.

While there are many other beliefs that could be compared, those that have been presented reveal the drastic differences between these different faith systems. Christians must learn about some of these differences so they can address statements like "all religions are serving the same God" or other similar claims. When Christians are familiar with these differences, they can point out the contradictions and show that these religions cannot be serving the same God—more than that, these religions cannot all be true. In fact, the law of noncontradiction states that two opposing beliefs, ideas, and statements cannot both be true at the same time. That is, a statement "cannot be both true and false at the same time."<sup>59</sup> Jesus cannot be God, as Christianity claims, and at the same time just a mere man, as Islam and Baha'i claim. All of these religions cannot be

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<sup>59</sup> Stanford University, "An Introduction to Philosophy: The Law of Excluded Middle," accessed January 21, 2022, <https://web.stanford.edu/~bobonich/glances%20ahead/IV.excluded.middle.html>.

true at the same time. As McDowell and Stewart point out, “Each religion can be wrong, but they all can’t be true. The claims of one are going to exclude the other.”<sup>60</sup>

What then makes Christianity significantly different from all other religions? The answer is who Jesus claimed to be; no other major religious leader claimed to be God. In fact, Buddha claimed that he was only a man who discovered a form of spiritual enlightenment. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, “There is strong emphasis from the Buddha that he is only a physician who can diagnose ills and suggest the path to a cure, but that each person must be his or her own savior.”<sup>61</sup>

Confucius never claimed to even be a religious leader. In fact, his teachings were humanistic, not religious. According to the *Cambridge Illustrated History of Religions*, Confucius believed that his mission on earth was to “transmit ancient culture.”<sup>62</sup> During his life, he called for universal education and a focus on humanist practices, which he called “the Way.” He believed that through knowledge and “studying the Way, students would be able to transform their characters.”<sup>63</sup>

Likewise, when it comes to Islam and the prophet Muhammad, nowhere does Muhammad or the Qur’an claim that he was God. In fact, Surah 3, Ayah 144 clearly states that Muhammad is not God: “Muhammad is no more than an apostle.”<sup>64</sup> This understanding of Muhammad is made clear throughout the Qur’an where it refers to him

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<sup>60</sup> McDowell and Stewart, *Answers to Tough Questions*, 107.

<sup>61</sup> John Bowker, “Salvation,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, ed. John Bowker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 844.

<sup>62</sup> Xinzhong Yao, “Chinese Religion,” in *Cambridge Illustrated History: Religions*, ed. John Bowker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 114.

<sup>63</sup> Yao, *Chinese Religion*, 114.

<sup>64</sup> *The Qur’an*, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali (Elmhurst, NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qur’an, 2001), 159.

as either the Apostle of God<sup>65</sup> or the Prophet.<sup>66</sup> Only Jesus claimed to be God. More than that, Jesus rose from the dead, proving that he was (and is) who he claimed to be.

Erwin Lutzer makes an excellent point:

Christ presented Himself as the one and only qualified Savior who is able to bring men and women to God the Father . . . . Logically, this excludes all other teachers/gurus who claim that they can bring men and women to God. Nor can Christ be the Savior for only the Western world, but not the Eastern world. If He is the truth, He is the truth for everyone. Whether one accepts Christ or not is a separate question, but He is either the truth for all people or the truth for none.<sup>67</sup>

As a result of celebrities like Oprah, as well as books, movies, and music making the same claims, many people have believed that the claim that there is only one God and only one way to get to heaven is arrogant and narrow-minded. Even “professing” Christians have claimed that the exclusivity of Christianity is arrogant and narrow-minded. These well-meaning Christians believe that telling other people that their beliefs are wrong is mean spirited and does not represent the love of God. As such, it is important that Christians learn how to graciously show people the uniqueness of Christianity to other religions and that the exclusivity of Christianity is actually loving.

The claim that “Jesus is the only way to heaven” would be an arrogant and narrow-minded statement if that statement originated from man—but it does not. This claim comes directly from God, as stated in Acts 4:12. The claim that Jesus is the only way to get to heaven is a statement of love that has been given to the whole world.

A dilemma facing Christians is that when they claim that Jesus is God, their proof comes directly from the Bible, which is circular. Christians must be able to demonstrate the uniqueness and reliability of the Bible in order to show skeptics why they can trust the Bible as being the Word of God. In addition, Christians must learn to

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<sup>65</sup> *The Qur'an*, 456-57.

<sup>66</sup> *The Qur'an*, 458.

<sup>67</sup> Erwin W. Lutzer, *Christ among Other gods: A Defense of Christ in an Age of Tolerance* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2016), 65-6.



analyze information and determine the worldview being presented. Christians who fail to think critically about the information they receive fall prey to the whims of the crowd. As James Sire writes,

One of the most important uses of worldview analysis is self-analysis. To become conscious of your grasp of the fundamental nature of reality, to be able to tell yourself just what you believe about God, the universe, yourself, and the world around you—what else could be more important? You would be able to live the proverbial examined life.<sup>68</sup>

There is a serious danger that comes when Christians lack a strong biblical worldview. In her book *Total Truth*, Nancy Pearcey explains that

not only have we “lost our culture,” but we continue losing even our own children. It’s a familiar but tragic story that devout young people, raised in Christian homes, head off to college and abandon their faith. Why is this pattern so common? Largely because young believers have not been taught how to develop a biblical worldview. Instead, Christianity has been restricted to a specialized area of religious belief and personal devotion.<sup>69</sup>

The view that Christians hold of God is crucial. Philip Ryken explains,

But the Christian worldview does not begin with God as we would like him to be—the “god of my understanding.” On the contrary, Christianity begins with the God who is really there. It’s not about us; it’s about him. When we say “God,” we mean the God of the Bible, in all his perfections, and not the God of the Talmud, the Qur’an, or any other religious text. We mean the God who is all-knowing, all present, all-powerful, all-sufficient. We mean the God who alone is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his wisdom, power, holiness, goodness, justice, truth, and love. We mean the God who has revealed himself as “the LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty” (Ex. 34:6-7).<sup>70</sup>

If believers are going to obey the Lord’s command in 1 Peter 3:15 to always be prepared, then they must prepare themselves to be “thinkers.” In their book *Come, Let Us Reason*, Norman Geisler and Ronald Brooks write,

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<sup>68</sup> Sire, *Naming the Elephant*, 138.

<sup>69</sup> Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 19.

<sup>70</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *What Is the Christian Worldview?*, Basics of the Faith (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), 13.

God is rational, and he has created us as rational beings. The Bible urges us to give the reason for the hope that is in us (1 Pet. 3:15, NIV). Indeed, Jesus declared that the greatest commandment is: “You shall love the Lord your God with all . . . your mind” (Matt. 22:37). The apostle Paul added, “whatever is true, . . . , think on . . .” (Phil. 4:8). Thinking is not an option for the Christian; it is an imperative.<sup>71</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The church has encountered skepticism and persecution since the very beginning. In each case, believers are called to “be prepared” and to give responses in “gentleness and love” (1 Pet 3:15). Believers must utilize apologetics when interacting with non-Christians. Christians will encounter many different objections to the Christian faith. Although objections may relate to different topics, such as origins, the problem of evil, or the belief that Jesus is the only way to get into heaven, Christians must respond to objections by using the three-pronged approach used by the Apostle Paul with the Athenians in Acts 17. In the next chapter, the details and a description of the project are given.

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<sup>71</sup> Norman L. Geisler and Ronald M. Brooks, *Come Let Us Reason: An Introduction to Logical Thinking* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 7.

## CHAPTER 4

### DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this project was to develop and teach an apologetics course at La Grange Baptist Church in La Grange, Kentucky, to equip church members to share and defend their faith. Successful implementation of an apologetics course required the development of three goals. Each goal was ultimately intended to help church members have greater confidence about their Christian beliefs. Such confidence will lead members to pursue more gospel conversations and remain steadfast in their faith. Successful completion of this project depended upon the completion of the following three goals. The first goal was to assess the current apologetics and biblical worldview knowledge of LBC members. This goal was measured by administering the “Apologetics and Biblical Worldview Inventory” to twelve members of LBC (see appendix 1). This goal was considered successfully met when twelve members completed the inventory and the inventory was analyzed to yield a clearer picture of the current apologetics and biblical worldview knowledge of LBC members.

The second goal was to develop an eight-session apologetics course that equips LBC members to be able to defend their faith. This goal was measured by an expert panel who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum (see appendix 2). This goal was considered successfully met because a minimum of 90 percent of the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceed the “sufficient” level (score of 3).

The third goal was to teach the apologetics course in order to equip LBC members to be able to share and stand firm in their faith. This goal was measured by readministering the “Apologetics and Biblical Worldview Inventory” to LBC members

who participated in the apologetics course and comparing the pre- and post-course survey results (see appendix 1). Along with the inventory, participants also completed an anonymous course evaluation which was used to determine the courses overall effectiveness in equipping believers to defend their faith (see appendix 3). This goal was successfully met per the analysis of the *t*-test results, which demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-course survey results (see appendix 4 and 5).

### **Rationale**

After his resurrection but his ascension into heaven, Jesus commanded his disciples to “go . . . and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:18-20). Although Jesus’s command to go and make disciples, contextually, was given to his disciples, the command applies to all Christians. All Christians are required to not only share the gospel but also to be prepared to give a defense for why they believe. This directive is made clear in 1 Peter 3:15, where Peter writes that Christians must always be “prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” The call for Christians to be prepared to share their faith is clear. As a result, the church must help to equip the saints in this endeavor to be prepared to defend the Christian faith. This command is for all believers, not just for pastors or specific church members.

The desire of LBC is to “serve our community and the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup> In order for LBC to carry out Christ’s command to make disciples of all nations, members must be equipped to share and defend their faith, which is the purpose of this project. Chapters 2 and 3 provided an in-depth look at the theological and theoretical factors related to this project. This chapter focuses on the preparation and implementation of this project.

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<sup>1</sup> La Grange Baptist Church, “About LaGrange Baptist,” accessed February 25, 2021, <https://www.lagrangebaptist.com/about/>.

## **Course Preparation**

### **Generating Opportunity**

Generating an opportunity to teach an apologetics course took time due to multiple factors. When I started this doctoral program in October 2020, I had recently transferred church membership to La Grange Baptist Church. Although each of the pastors knew I was a doctoral student at SBTS and were slowly getting to know me, there was still a need by the pastoral staff to have me go through their LIFE Class leadership training program in order to determine if I should be given opportunity to teach church members. Besides the obstacle of needing to prove myself a capable teacher, the COVID-19 pandemic was affecting all forms of ministry, which drastically impacted teaching opportunities.

The pastoral staff and elders understood that teaching a course was part of the requirement for my doctorate and although they were very supportive, they were unsure of what the future would look like. Fortunately, COVID-19 cases subsided, restrictions were lifted, and opportunities to teach were given to me. Over the past year and a half, the pastoral staff has afforded me frequent teaching opportunities as a way to give me more exposure before the church. This exposure was intended to help members get to know me so that when I teach my class, members would be more likely to attend. Support by the pastoral staff has been extremely effective. An announcement was made by the church's senior pastor that I would be leading a new LIFE Class. As a result of the support given by the pastoral team, attendance in my LIFE Class has been excellent and is opening up the door for me to be able to teach my apologetics course.

The LBC pastoral staff is very intentional and protective of their LIFE Classes. People who teach must be a member of LBC for at least six months before they are given opportunities to teach. In addition, LBC requires that all prospective LIFE class leaders complete an eight-week LIFE Class leadership training program before they can teach their own LIFE Class. This process further enhances the biblical teaching members

receive through LBC. In addition, all LIFE Class leaders follow the same teaching curriculum. Having this structure for all LIFE Classes helps to maintain sound biblical teaching and uniformity across all LIFE Classes, which is extremely important for LBC.

The requirement that all LIFE Class leaders teach the same curriculum made teaching my apologetics course difficult. However, it was decided that since I am a LIFE Class leader, the pastoral staff could announce to other LIFE Class leaders that I would be teaching an apologetics course on Wednesday evenings to help encourage and equip LIFE Class leaders. Offering this class on Wednesday evenings to LIFE Class leaders allows the pastoral staff to maintain the current structure of LBC LIFE Classes that are offered on Sunday mornings.

Besides promoting my class with LIFE Class leaders, the pastoral staff has given me permission to recruit members from the church to attend this special class. The concern of the pastors and elders is that they do not want members to feel like they can approach the pastoral staff and ask them to teach a random class. However, because I am a LIFE Class leader, my apologetics class was classified as an equipping tool for LIFE Class leaders and other LBC members as well as a course that is complementary to the normal LIFE Classes offered at LBC.

## **Curriculum Development**

### **Evaluating Needs**

The field of apologetics is massive, covering unlimited topics. In order to develop a curriculum that would be relevant to church members of LBC as well as the global church, I decided to create a curriculum based on the questions that I frequently received from members of LBC as well as members of many other churches. I also developed the curriculum based on questions I have received over the years from non-Christians about the Christian faith and the Bible. The curriculum needed to be scholarly yet easily understood by the average church member. Hundreds of hours were poured

into reading books covering a wide range of subjects in order to grasp the content and break it down to a level that was easy for laypeople to understand. Many conversations were had with friends, family, and anyone else willing to listen to make sure that the content met my balanced objective.

### **Curriculum Review**

In preparation for the course lessons, handouts were created. The purpose of the handouts was to help participants to be able to follow along better and to know what the main points of each lesson were. Handouts contained the title for each lesson along with an outline for each lesson so that participants knew what content would be covered in each lesson. Doing so helped to avoid unnecessary confusion. Space was given on each handout for notes so that participants could write down points of interest, things that they learned, or questions that they had. The handouts are a useful resource for future use as they contain a list of significant quotes along with a works cited page for participants who wish to conduct further research. The curriculum handouts were reviewed by the pastoral staff to ensure that the content met the standards of LBC.

### **Teaching Techniques**

The members who attended my apologetics course had different learning styles. Some people were auditory learners, other people learned better from reading, some learned from hands-on or group activities, and others were visual learners. Having this understanding, I developed a course that accommodated each learning style. Each lesson was taught using the Socratic method. Although there was a lot of lecturing, I made sure to ask many questions throughout the course as a way to draw members in and help them to come to their own conclusions. I believe my job as a teacher is not to teach people *what to think* but to teach them *how to think for themselves*. My goal was to guide them and help them to come to proper conclusions through the use of questions and class discussions.

In order to engage each class participant, I utilized several teaching techniques. All students were given a handout at the beginning of each class that helped to engage people who learn best through reading and writing. Besides being able to write notes on the handouts, these participants also had many opportunities to read various quotes throughout each lecture. Visual learners were engaged through the use of the lesson handouts that contained a visual outline of what each lesson covered. In addition, PowerPoint slides were also used which contained both videos and photos to help enhance each lesson. Auditory learners appreciated having lectures to engage their learning style.

Throughout each lesson, members participated in whole-group discussions which helped to keep all participants engaged, but especially auditory learners. Finally, for the kinesthetic learners, I had different props that were used to engage their learning style. Examples include having microfilm, court records, books, and other resources that they came up to the table to look at.

Another practical way to engage class participants is to have them act out mock-evangelism scenarios with one another whereby they put to use the information presented throughout the course. Unfortunately, time did not permit mock scenarios. However, several examples were given on how participants could engage nonbelievers and use the information gained from each class.

### **Lesson 1: Creationism vs. Evolution**

The first class began by discussing the purpose and goals of the eight-week course as well as providing a quick overview of what would be covered during each lesson. Lesson 1 initially answered the question of why Christians should study apologetics by providing several passages of Scripture that clearly show God's command for Christians to defend the faith. The lesson then shifted to answering questions about origins: "How did we get here?" "Are we here as a result of an Intelligent Creator or as a



result of undirected processes through evolution?” Another question that was answered was “Has science disproved the existence of God?” Throughout lesson 1, evolutionary and atheistic claims were analyzed to determine whether their arguments hold up to modern science.

The goal of lesson 1 was to help members understand that all Christians are called to defend the faith. Second, the lesson provided believers with answers to the most common scientific objections to the Christian faith. Although not all members had a background in science, they were able to understand that evidence for an Intelligent Creator is all around them and can be seen in every field of science, including mathematics, earth science, biology, and astronomy. At the end of lesson 1, participants were equipped to push back on statements made by nonbelievers that “science has disproved the existence of God.” Participants learned to ask simple questions, such as “What science has disproved the existence of God?” Learning these simple tools helped to encourage and equip believers to better defend their faith.

Although lesson 1 concluded with all evidence pointing to a Creator being the cause of our existence, it opened up the door for another question: “Which Creator is the cause of the universe’s coming into existence?” This question was answered in lesson 2.

## **Lesson 2: Christianity vs. World Religions**

I began lesson 2 by quickly reviewing the conclusion of lesson 1—that all scientific evidence points to the existence of an Intelligent Creator. However, I acknowledged that this creates a new dilemma: “Which God is the Creator of the universe?” The purpose of lesson 2 was to answer this question by looking at the world’s major religions and comparing them to Christianity. Although there are many differences among the world’s religions, the biggest difference that participants learned is that Jesus Christ is the only founder of a major world religion who claimed to be God. Not only did Jesus claim to be God, but he also rose from the dead, thereby proving to be who he said

he was (and is). The deity of Christ was shown through several passages from the Bible. Proving the uniqueness of Christianity and the deity of Christ through using the Bible creates another dilemma: “Can the Bible be trusted?” This question about the reliability of the Scripture was addressed in lessons 3-5.

### **Lesson 3: The Uniqueness of the Bible**

Lesson 2 showed that Christianity is unique from all other world religions because the founder of Christianity, Jesus, is the only founder who claimed to be God. This claim is proved by looking at many passages of Scripture. For skeptics, however, this claim creates a new question: “How do we know the Bible can be trusted?” To respond to this question, lesson 3 looked at several features of the Bible that show it to be unique from all other religious books. The main difference between the Christian Bible and other religious books that lesson 3 covered was that the Bible contains predictive prophecy, while other religious texts do not.

Several examples of prophecy were given to show that those prophecies could not have been fulfilled apart from the hand of God. Examples include kings being mentioned by name hundreds of years before those they were born as well as prophecies regarding the birth, life, and death of Jesus that were made hundreds of years before his birth. Research from mathematician Peter Stoner was also examined to show class participants that it is mathematically impossible for a person to have fulfilled the prophecies that Jesus fulfilled, unless he was (and is) truly God. This lesson helped participants to see that the Christian Bible is truly inspired by God.

### **Lesson 4: The Formation of the Bible**

Lesson 3 looked at many prophecies that were given in the Bible to show that the Bible is divinely inspired. However, class participants were left with questions about the origins of the Bible: “How was it written, and why?” “Was the Bible simply written by fallible men?” “If so, then why should it be trusted?” “What made the authors of the

Bible different from other men?” These are the questions that were addressed in lesson 4. Participants learned why the Bible was written, who wrote it, why they wrote it, and what their qualifications were. The lesson also addressed books that are included in the Roman Catholic Bible but not in the Protestant Bible in order to answer the question “Are there other gospels or books that were removed from the Bible?”

### **Lesson 5: The Reliability of the Bible**

Although lessons 3 and 4 address how the Bible is unique from other religious books as well as how the Bible was created, a question remained: “Is the Bible reliable?” Skeptics argue that knowing how the Bible was formed does not prove that the Bible is reliable. The same is said about the prophecies recorded in the Bible. Skeptics argue that these books were just written in a way to make them *seem* like they were fulfilled prophecies. These objections were addressed in lesson 5 by looking at the manuscript, archeological, and extrabiblical evidence for the Bible.

In this lesson, participants learned that there is more manuscript evidence to support the Bible than there is for any other ancient work. Participants also learned about the enormous amount of archeological evidence that proves the reliability of the events recorded in the Bible. Lastly, extrabiblical sources were analyzed to show what non-Christian writers such as Josephus, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, and others wrote about Christianity. Looking at these different sources helped participants to see that the Bible is reliable and that the doctrines taught by the church today are the same as those taught by the early church.

### **Lesson 6: Mormonism**

Lessons 1-5 provided arguments and proof for the existence of God and showed that Christianity is unique from all other religions because Jesus claimed to be God. These lessons also showed that the Bible is reliable and supported by manuscript, archeological, and extrabiblical evidence. Although evidence has been provided to show

that Christianity and the Bible are reliable, a question remained for participants about groups that claim to be Christian. Hence, lesson 6 was study of Mormonism. In this lesson, the question was asked “Are Mormons our brothers and sisters in Christ or members of a religious cult?” This question was answered by looking at the beliefs, history, and prophecies of Mormonism as well as other topics related to this religion.

After studying Mormonism, class participants were able to recognize the errors of the Mormon church (i.e., the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) and see that Mormons hold to doctrines that are not found in the Bible. At the conclusion of lesson 6, class participants understood, from Scripture, that Mormons are *not* our brothers and sisters in Christ and that sadly they *are* members of a religious cult.

### **Lesson 7: Jehovah’s Witnesses**

Lesson 6 looked at Mormonism and asked the question “Are Mormons our brothers and sisters in Christ or members of a religious cult?” This same question was asked about Jehovah’s Witnesses in lesson 7: “Are Jehovah’s Witnesses our brothers and sisters in Christ or members of a religious cult?” Similar to the previous lesson on Mormonism, this lesson addressed the question by looking at the beliefs, history, and prophecies of Jehovah’s Witnesses as well as other topics related to this religion.

After learning about Jehovah’s Witnesses, members were able to recognize the errors of Jehovah’s Witnesses and see that their organization holds to doctrines that are not found in the Bible. At the conclusion of lesson 7, class participants were able to understand, from Scripture, that Jehovah’s Witnesses are *not* our brothers and sisters in Christ and that sadly they *are* members of a religious cult.

### **Lesson 8: The Problem of Evil**

Lesson 8 looked at the topic of evil and asked several questions: “Does the presence of evil disprove the existence of God?” “Why does God allow evil?” “If God is all powerful and loving, then why is there evil in the world?” and “How can a loving God

send someone to hell?” At the conclusion of lesson 8, class participants were able to answer each of these questions. They recognized that the presence of evil is more of a dilemma for atheists than for Christians. Participants also learned that although the doctrine of hell seems, at first glance, to contradict who God is, without hell, God would be unjust.

### **Website and Podcast Development**

Oftentimes, the limitation of apologetics courses is that participants do not retain all of the information being presented to them. As a result, a website and podcast were developed as tools to allow people to have access to the information that was taught in class. On my website ([www.brianoconnell.org](http://www.brianoconnell.org)), people accessed content that has helped them to learn more about these different topics. Additional resources, such as videos and articles from top apologists, are also included on my website. The podcast (*Apologetics with Brian O'Connell*) can be accessed through all podcast platforms. This podcast goes into each class lesson in greater detail, providing more information for members who are interested in each subject. The benefit of this format is that it has allowed people to listen to episodes in the convenience of their homes or on the go through podcast apps. The podcast format has also given listeners the ability to share podcasts with others. This helped people not only to get equipped to share their faith with others but also to be able to share podcast episodes with friends and family as a way of creating opportunities for future dialogue with them about God, Christianity, the Bible, or any other topics.

Each lesson was also recorded though Facebook Live and then later uploaded to my website though YouTube. Using Facebook Live made each class available to a larger audience, including people who were forced to remain home due to sickness. Each class had on average 15 participants in person. However, according to Facebook Live analytics each video had over 100 views, most having over 200 views as well as multiple

people who shared the videos on their own personal Facebook pages. Recording lessons through Facebook Live gave members opportunities to participate in each class, even when they could not make it in person due to business trips and other activities which prevented them from being present.

### **Course Implementation**

The apologetics course started June 1, 2022, and was taught each Wednesday evening from 7:00 to 8:30 at LBC in one of the church's extra classrooms. The class ran for eight weeks and concluded on July 27, 2022. Although a midweek class is an additional burden and time commitment for church members, participants were asked to commit to attending each of the eight classes. Prior to the start of the course, participants were informed that the eight-week course would be a rigorous study of apologetics, covering a wide variety of topics. Participants were also be asked to complete a pre-course assessment and a post-course assessment. The first week participants were given the "Apologetics and Biblical Worldview Inventory" and asked to complete the inventory before the start of the first lesson. Some members took the inventory home and returned it the following week.

Throughout the course, I analyzed each class and requested constructive feedback from a select group on how each class went. It was important to have this feedback to know when questions needed to be clearer or whether there are different analogies that would work better to engage class participants. Having each lesson recorded has allowed me to review lessons for clarity and to show me where I need to make future adjustments, either adding or removing material.

### **Post-Project Follow-Up**

After participating in the eight-week course, participants were be asked to complete the "Apologetics and Biblical Worldview Inventory" for a second time, as an exit survey. This survey was the same survey that participants took the week before the

course began. The purpose of the survey was to gauge the theological and apologetic knowledge and confidence of class participants. Surveys were analyzed to determine whether the apologetics course was effective in equipping the saints. After the survey data was analyzed, the data was shared with the pastoral staff and elders. Each of the pastors, elders, and staff were very encouraging and thought that the course was well done and beneficial to LBC members as well as to other churches.

After the completion of the course, I asked members to participate in an anonymous survey. The purpose of the survey was to receive additional information outside of that which the “Apologetics and Biblical Worldview Inventory” collected. The survey asked participants to grade each lesson and provide feedback as to the usefulness and practicality of each lesson. Class members were also asked to give input on how the course could be improved and whether they would recommend that the course be offered as a regular training option for LIFE Class members or other LBC members.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter covered an eight-week apologetics curriculum that was developed with the purpose of equipping the saints at La Grange Baptist Church to share and defend their faith. The classes covered in the curriculum include (1) Creationism vs. Evolution, (2) Christianity vs. World Religions, (3) The Uniqueness of the Bible, (4) The Formation of the Bible, (5) The Reliability of the Bible, (6) Mormonism, (7) Jehovah’s Witnesses, and (8) The Problem of Evil. Chapter 5 provides the analysis of the course to determine the overall course effectiveness.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

In the previous chapter, the details and description of this project were given. In this final chapter, an evaluation is given to determine whether the eight-week apologetics course was successful. This is accomplished by reviewing the project's purpose and goals as well as examining the pre- and post-course surveys to determine if members received a positive change in their confidence to share their faith and their understanding of a biblical worldview. Other areas to be covered in this chapter include discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the project to determine what areas were effective and what areas could be improved for future use.

#### **Evaluation of the Project's Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to develop and teach an apologetics course at La Grange Baptist Church in La Grange, Kentucky, to equip church members to share and defend their faith. The first step in carrying out this project was to present participants with a pre-course inventory in order gauge their apologetics and biblical worldview knowledge and to help identify possible obstacles that are preventing their evangelistic effectiveness (see appendix 1). Analysis of the twelve participant inventories revealed that each of the concerns voiced by participants fell within three categories, all of which seem to be addressed by the apostle Peter in 1 Peter 3:15.

Two out of the twelve participants indicated that the primary reason they do not share their faith more often is that their "schedule is too busy and I do not have



enough time.”<sup>1</sup> Three of the participants indicated that they were “fearful of how people will respond.”<sup>2</sup> Six of the participants either indicated that they did not “have sufficient knowledge to answer difficult questions” or stated, “I am afraid I will be asked a question that I will not know the answer to.”<sup>3</sup> One participant stated, “I do not think it is right for me to push my religious beliefs on someone else.”<sup>4</sup> However, she then scribbled out her response and did not mark any other options.

In chapter 2, the biblical argument for Christian apologetics was addressed. According to 1 Peter 3:15, Christians must (1) honor Christ Jesus as holy in their hearts, (2) always be prepared to give a reason or defense for the hope that they have, and (3) give their defense in a gentle and respectful way. The biblical command is clear. As discussed in chapter 2, the words of Peter, which were written about two thousand years ago, still apply to Christians today. The results of the pre-course inventories indicate that Christians today—at least Christians at La Grange Baptist Church in La Grange, Kentucky—struggle still struggle with sharing their faith, even though Christians in La Grange, Kentucky, do not experience the kind of persecution that Christians faced in the first century.

Peter tells his audience that they must “honor Christ Jesus as holy in their hearts” (1 Pet 3:15). As discussed in chapter 2, Christ must be the motivating factor in Christians’ lives. Those who indicated that they are “too busy” and “do not have enough

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<sup>1</sup> Question 3 on the “Apologetics and Biblical Worldview Inventory” asks participants to “place an X next to the **single** primary reason you do not share your faith more often.” In response to this question, participants put an X next to the response that stated, “My schedule is too busy and I do not have enough time.”

<sup>2</sup> In response to question 3 on the “Apologetics and Biblical Worldview Inventory,” participants put an X next to the response that stated, “I am fearful to how people will respond.”

<sup>3</sup> In response to question 3 on the “Apologetics and Biblical Worldview Inventory,” participants put an X next to the response that stated, “I am afraid that I will be asked a question that I will not know the answer to” or “I do not have sufficient knowledge to answer difficult questions.”

<sup>4</sup> In response to question 3 on the “Apologetics and Biblical Worldview Inventory,” participants put an X next to the response that stated, “I do not think it is right for me to push my religious beliefs on someone else.”

time” to share their faith revealed that they are not obeying this command. The same is true for participants who indicated that the reason they did not share their faith was because they are “fearful of how people will respond.” This response, likewise, indicates that there is a fear of man instead of a proper fear of God. Lastly were those who indicated that they are “afraid that [they] will be asked a question that I [they] not know the answer to” or that they “do not have sufficient knowledge to answer difficult questions.” These statements also indicate a fear of man over a proper fear of God. However, these statements also indicate a lack of preparedness. Peter tells believers to “always be prepared.” This command does not mean that Christians must always have all of the answers, but it does imply that preparation is involved.

The words of Peter in 1 Peter 3:15 were used as the driving force behind this ministry project. A detailed explanation of what apologetics is and how it should be carried out was given at the start of lesson 1 and repeated several times throughout the eight-week course.

### **Evaluation of the Project’s Goals**

As stated above, the purpose of this project was to develop and teach an apologetics course to members of La Grange Baptist Church in La Grange, Kentucky, in order to equip them to be able to share and defend their faith. Successful implementation of an apologetics course required the development and completion of three goals. Each goal was ultimately intended to help church members have greater confidence about their Christian beliefs—which, as indicated by the pre-course inventory, is an area of concern. Such confidence will lead members to pursue more gospel conversations and remain steadfast in their faith.

#### **Goal 1: Pre-Course Assessment**

The first goal was to assess the current apologetics and biblical worldview knowledge of LBC members. This goal was accomplished through the analysis of the

completed “Apologetics and Biblical Worldview Inventory” mentioned above. Each completed inventory allowed me to gain insight into the strengths and weaknesses of each participant. For instance, part 2 of the inventory included twenty Likert-scale questions, with five questions focusing on the responsibility of evangelism, eight questions focusing on confidence levels, and seven questions dealing with worldview and doctrinal beliefs.

Although there were many participants who indicated that they were fearful of how people would respond or that their schedules were too busy to share the gospel, all of the participants indicated that they felt evangelism was the responsibility of all Christians. In fact, a majority of participants indicated that they “strongly agreed” that “every Christian is responsible for sharing the gospel with nonbelievers.” Only one participant indicated that they “agreed somewhat” with this statement.

Each of the inventories showed that while all participants had a correct view of God and affirmed that Christianity is the one true faith, their weakness had to do with their overall confidence along with their ability to apply their biblical worldview when confronted with competing worldviews. For example, each participant indicated, “I am confident that Christianity is the one true faith.” However, when presented with the statement “I feel that pushing my religious beliefs on someone else is offensive,” half of the participants indicated that they agreed with this statement.

The results of these inventories showed that the participants’ theological understanding needed to be applied to real-world scenarios. That is, participants needed to be given real-life scenarios where they could take their biblical understanding of there only being one God and only one way into heaven and learn that “pushing truth” that will lead to eternal life is not “offensive” but the most loving thing Christians can do. Their fear of man appears to be a major reason for why they are not sharing their faith with nonbelievers. However, 58 percent of the inventories revealed that participants did not feel equipped to answer difficult questions that may arise when sharing the gospel.

Equipping participants to do just this is the purpose of the curriculum that was developed—which is looked at next.

## **Goal 2: Curriculum Development**

The second goal was to develop an eight-session apologetics course that equips LBC members to be able to defend their faith. The field of apologetics is massive, covering unlimited topics. In order to develop a curriculum that would be relevant to church members of LBC as well as the global church, I decided to create a curriculum based on the questions that I frequently received from members of LBC as well as members of many other churches. I also developed the curriculum based on questions I have received over the years from non-Christians about the Christian faith and the Bible. The curriculum needed to be scholarly yet easily understood by the average church member. Hundreds of hours were poured into reading books covering a wide range of subjects in order to grasp the content and break it down to a level that was easy for laypeople to understand. Many conversations were had with friends, family, and anyone else willing to listen in order to ensure that the content met my balanced objective.

This goal was measured by an expert panel consisting of three LBC pastors, an LBC elder, a PhD in Systematic Theology, a PhD candidate in New Testament, a PhD candidate in Old Testament, and a Christian school public speaking and debate teacher with a background in worldview and apologetics. Each expert utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the developed curriculum (see appendix 3). This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceed the “sufficient” (score of 3) level.

A review of each “Apologetics Curriculum Evaluation Tool” shows that the curriculum met the standard of 90 percent of the evaluation indicators’ meeting or exceeding the “sufficient” level. Each panel member gave high reviews for the

curriculum. An analysis of panel feedback shows that most comments indicated an “exemplary” rating for the curriculum, with several marks for “sufficient.” One panel member gave a “requires attention” comment for lesson 8, on the problem of evil. He was very supportive and encouraging of the curriculum overall; however, he believed that “this lesson needs more elaboration and precision.” Another panel member also felt that I should “spend more time developing the problem of evil as an argument against God’s existence.” I took the panel members’ feedback and applied what I could with this series while making notes of more details I could add for future lessons.

### **Goal 3: Curriculum Implementation**

The third goal was to teach the apologetics course in order to equip LBC members to be able to share and stand firm in their faith. The apologetics course started June 1, 2022, and was taught each Wednesday evening from 7:00 to 8:30 at LBC in one of the church’s extra classrooms. The class ran for eight weeks and concluded on July 27, 2022. Although a midweek class is an additional burden and time commitment for church members, participants were asked to commit to attending each of the eight classes.

A review of the “Apologetics and Biblical Worldview Inventory” shows that this time commitment was successfully achieved. Out of the twelve participants who completed an inventory, nine of them attended 100 percent of the classes. Some participants indicated that they attended five or six lessons in person and the other classes at home through Facebook Live. One person indicated that they made it to 75 percent of the classes in person. Another person indicated that they attended 65 percent of the classes in person. And the last person indicated that he made it to 37.5 percent of the classes in person.

For members who indicated that they only made it to a certain number of in-person classes, they did not indicate on the survey whether or not they watched any of the lessons online through Facebook Live. However, I am aware of at least two of these

members who did watch the lessons online (based on what they told me), but on their inventories, they only wrote down the courses that they attended in person. There seemed to be confusion regarding what they should put for answers on their inventories. I received several text messages from people indicating that they had made a mistake on what they marked on the inventory.

Success of the third goal was measured by readministering the “Apologetics and Biblical Worldview Inventory” to LBC members who participated in the apologetics course and comparing the pre- and post-course survey results. Along with the inventory, participants also completed an anonymous course evaluation that was used to determine the course’s overall effectiveness in equipping believers to defend their faith. Review of the results indicated that the eight-week apologetics program was extremely successful. An analysis of the results is given below.

### **Strengths of the Project**

My goal in approaching this project was to develop an apologetics and biblical worldview curriculum by taking many confusing and difficult issues that Christians wrestle with (e.g., questions concerning the origin of the Bible, the reliability of the Bible, the problem of evil, and others), researching them at the scholarly level, and presenting them at a level that the average person could understand. Through my seminary journey, I have acquired many books on these subjects. Some of them, although extremely well written and scholarly, were also very technical, which prevents non-theologically trained people from grasping the answers these books provide. As someone who has struggled as a student my whole life, I wanted to approach this ministry project and the course curriculum as though I was teaching the content to myself.

Over the years, I have also made it a point to research and study difficult questions that other people have asked me about. Whenever I find sufficient answers to these questions, I then add them to my curriculum. As a result, I developed a curriculum

that is well researched yet understandable to the average person. In fact, in order to test my curriculum, I constantly had discussions with my three children (ages 10, 8, and 6) about the content of the curriculum. Through our discussions, I have been able to determine whether or not the content is clear. There were some parts that were too complex for my children to fully grasp, but that was to be expected. I also had a group of friends who are non-theologians whom I taught these lessons to. Their feedback has been extremely helpful in my creating a curriculum that is clear and understandable. Based on the responses I received from this course, it was clear that I achieved this goal. One participant wrote, “Brian presented each lesson in a way that people who have not studied theology in depth could understand controversial topics.”

After comparing the data from the pre-course and post-course inventories, I determined that the eight-week apologetics course was successful in achieving the goal of equipping church members to share and defend their faith. This goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples showed a positive statistically significant change in member confidence in apologetics and understanding of a biblical worldview:  $t_{(11)} = -4.271, p < .0006$ .

Although these figures show *that* there was a significant statistical improvement in members confidence and understanding, these figures fail to express *the way in which* these members grew in their confidence and understanding. For example, on the pre-test inventory, several participants received a score in the 80s, whereas on the post-course inventory, they scored in the high 90s, and some even over 100. Four participants saw their knowledge and confidence scores improve by 10-15 points. Although not everyone saw results as drastic as these, most of the participants saw their scores go up. There was one participant whose score remained the same, and one participant whose score went down by 1 point. However, of those two participants, one score was 100, and the other score was 115. Both inventories show that these participants came into the eight-week course with a strong biblical understanding along with a solid

biblical worldview. With the growth shown through these results, it is clear that the apologetics course was successful.

Another indication of the success of the course comes from the anonymous feedback given on the course evaluation. Out of the evaluations that were filled out, each of them indicated increased knowledge, growth, and confidence. One participant wrote, “The curriculum has empowered me to be able to discuss topics with others that I did not attempt to discuss before the class.” Another participant commented, “These lessons have caused me to desire to study the presented topics further because some confusion was eliminated for me on many issues. I feel more empowered to share my faith and reasons for my beliefs with my coworkers, friends, and family members in a loving way because of the way this class was taught.” Another participant stated, “My own faith was strengthened through the presentation of this curriculum.” Yet another participant noted, “These lessons were great. I have learned so many things such as creation versus evolution that will help me share my faith by having ‘answers’ to many objections.” Finally, one participant commented, “These lessons have given me strength and confidence as I speak with non-believers.”

Besides improving their confidence through these lessons that can be used for evangelism, members learned how to approach apologetics in a biblical way. Throughout this project, I have pointed out that the call for apologetics is found in several parts of the New Testament but that the primary text is 1 Peter 3:15. In this passage, Peter tells believers, “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.” In Greek, the word for “defense” is *apologia*, which is where the word “apologetics” comes from. In previous chapters, I pointed out that there is a three-part approach to this verse. Peter is telling Christian that apologetics requires followers of Christ to (1) honor Christ Jesus as holy in their hearts, (2) always be prepared to give a reason or defense for the hope that they have, and (3) give their



defense in a gentle and respectful way. In other words, apologetics is first and foremost about Christ and not about winning arguments. Apologetics is supposed to be done in a loving a respectful way. This is another way in which this course was successful. A member commented on their inventory, “Before, I thought of apologetics as having ‘Gotcha!’ statements/questions ready but this class was not that! Good, broad knowledge base provided.” A review of the post-score scores and comments clearly indicates that participants were encouraged and equipped to pursue more gospel conversations and remain steadfast in their faith.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

Although the project was extremely successful in achieving the goals I put in place, there are areas that need improving. One of the major weaknesses of project was that I attempted to cram too much information into each lesson. The content itself was excellent. However, I could have thinned out some of the slides and allowed for more participant interaction throughout the course. One of the attendees noted, “Need to shorten up or take some of the quotes out of a couple lessons. Ran long on a couple lessons. Well done. Good job.” This same person noted that sometimes I would make the “same point multiple times.”

Another weakness of my project was my lack of preparation. Although I knew the material well, I found that some weeks I had been adjusting lessons for multiple weeks, which led to some confusion on my part while teaching. I would think that a particular topic was coming up, but when I scrolled through my notes, I would not find it. I would then realize that the particular topic I was thinking about was going to be covered the following lesson the next week. This was especially the case when I taught three lessons dealing with the Bible.

In addition, during the series, I had too many notes that I was attempting to read through. This led to my getting lost in my notes frequently. Although I knew what I

was getting ready to cover, I used a lot of repetitive filler words while I found my spot. This was something that my wife told me I should work on. I also received feedback from one of the participants regarding this point: “The course was amazing. The only suggestion is that you might want to cut back on repeating yourself so much within each lesson.” Besides my having too many notes, there were several slides that had quotes that were too long, which made it hard for the audience to read the content. One participant noted, “Some of the slides are hard to read. The font is too small on slides with a lot of text.”

Another weakness of the project was that there were several instances where the quote I read did not match up with what was on the projected screen. The reason for this mix-up is that each of my presentations had been created through Keynote. However, LBC’s projector would only connect to Chromecast. Because of this, each lesson had to be converted from Keynote to PowerPoint. Even with the conversion, I could not use my iPad; instead, I had to use the church’s computer. However, the laptop would not allow me to access my speaker notes through the PowerPoint presentation. So, I was forced to use the church’s computer to project each slide while at the same time using my iPad to access my notes. As I would present, I attempted to scroll with both hands to make sure each device was on the same slide. However, there were many times when I was talking about a something and the proper slide was not projected.

The last weakness of the project had to do with timing. Teaching these lessons during the summer made it hard for people to make it. There were many people who expressed interest but were unable to attend due to their summer schedule. In June, LBC has two major church events that conflicted with when the class was being taught. The first event was Vacation Bible School (VBS). During VBS, the church decorates the entire church and uses the room that I taught my classes in. As a result, I postponed lesson 4 one week. However, the following week was an event called La Grange Missions, which lasted one week. This is an event where all of the high school students

do work in the local community during the day and sleep at the church at night. Although I was able to teach my lesson at the church while La Grange Missions was taking place, there were several people who were participants in my class that were helpers for the event and ended up missing out on two weeks (one week for training and one week for the event missions).

### **What I Would Do Differently**

The first thing I would do differently would be to teach these lessons in the fall or spring instead of the summer. Teaching in the fall or spring would allow for more families to attend. I would want to research things more and schedule a time when sports have ended and when the class would not conflict with any major church activity.

Next, I would spend more time figuring out PowerPoint and how to access presenter notes from the computer so that I can project and see my notes at the same time. Doing so would make it so that each slide matched up with my notes. This would clean up my presentation significantly. Besides this simple fix, I would change the format of each slide to clean up how they look. I would use shorter quotes and make sure that the letters were clear for the audience to be able to read.

Regarding content, I would like to extend the course length from eight weeks to sixteen weeks. The purpose in doing this would be to have more time to present the content and more time for in-depth group discussions and even mock-witnessing scenarios where participants can walk through how they could share their faith with a nonbeliever. In extending the class length, I would go through each lesson and thin out information that is repetitive. Taking the feedback I received from several participants, I would make sure that I do not make the same point repeatedly but simply make my point and then move on.

Lastly, I would add an additional lesson dealing with the topic of evil. In that lesson, I would go into other topics that people wrestle with and that cause them to

question the goodness of God—topics such as why God wiped out complete people groups in the Old Testament and a more thorough discussion on the topic of hell.

### **Theological Reflections**

Through the development of each lesson and while teaching this series, theological reflection took place. The words of Peter in 1 Peter 3:15 were a motivating factor for each lesson. I made sure that in each lesson my motivating factor was (1) helping believers to honor Christ Jesus as holy in their hearts, (2) helping to equip believers so that they will always be prepared to give a reason or defense for the hope that they have, and (3) helping believers to be able to give their defense in a gentle and respectful way.

Besides the words from Peter, several other passages of Scripture were reflected on throughout the series. During lesson 1, I reflected on Genesis 1:1 (“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”) and Psalm 19:1 (“The heavens declare the glory of God”). These verses complemented the scientific evidence that pointed to an intelligence throughout all of creation at the macro level through the planetary rotations down to the micro level with things such as the bacterial flagellum.

Each of the other lessons dealt with many other scriptural truths that helped to challenge me and each of the class participants to hold to the truths of Scripture regardless of our feelings. Many participants initially expressed concern that it was not right to push our religious beliefs on others. Many people also expressed concern that pushing their religious beliefs on others was offensive. They also wrestled with thinking that the religious beliefs held by others were just as true as their own beliefs. However, our looking at passages such as Acts 4:12 helped to reenforce the truths of Scripture—that “there is salvation in no one else [but Jesus Christ], for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” This verse, along with many other verses, gave scriptural clarity to each of the lessons that were taught. Through these

passages, each participant was able to see that the statement “there is only one way to get into heaven” is not an arrogant and narrowminded statement but a statement of truth; this is factual statement of love because it originated from God and not man.

When we looked at Mormonism and Jehovah’s Witnesses, there were many participants who asked, How can these men and women not see that what they are doing is wrong and unbiblical? In response, I shared 2 Corinthians 4:4 (“the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbeliever”) and Ephesians 6:12 (“we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”).

In the lesson dealing with the problem of evil, there were several passages used to show that a God’s ways are above our comprehension, such as Isaiah 55:8-9. We also reflected on Galatians 1:3-5, which reminds us that even though it is a “present evil age,” Jesus has delivered us from it. Lastly, we closed out the series by looking at Revelation 21:4, which reminds us that God “will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

### **Personal Reflections**

As I reflect on this project, I realize that this has been a long journey that began long before I was even accepted into this doctoral program. In 2010, I had a strong interest in apologetics and was pushed into teaching an apologetics class for my church by my friend and mentor Ron Falstad. Ron was the associate pastor and thought I was ready to be challenged. That experience forced me to get outside of my comfort zone and teach a class that I was passionate about. That experience propelled me to pursue further education, which led me to Southern Seminary.

My wife is also another person who has motivated me to get to where I am today. Brittany has been a constant source of encouragement and constructive feedback

over our twelve years of marriage. As a public speaking and debate teacher, she has put her expertise to work in helping me to improve my public speaking.

Thinking about this project has also made me realize the sacrifice my family has made for me over the years. My wife and children supported me in the decision to relocate from Napa, California, to Louisville, Kentucky. Not only have they sacrificed by leaving family and friends behind so that I could pursue higher education, but they also sacrificed their time with me. I think back at the many times I had to say, even this past week, “Sorry, I can’t play with you right now. Daddy needs to get this assignment done. We’ll play in a couple hours.” This project, in addition to being long and tiring for me, was long and tiring for my friends and family—but it has been a journey that has caused me to grow and mature.

Lastly, reflecting on this assignment has caused me to think about the Lord and his grace in my life. I am thankful that in 2001 he redeemed a lost sinner and adopted me into his family. I am thankful that he has directed my steps and allowed me to be part of this program at Southern Seminary where I get to study and learn more about him every day. I am thankful that he has got me to the finish line, especially since there were many times when I did not think I would ever make it.

### **Conclusion**

My prayer is that this project will be used to help Christians share and defend their faith. My prayer is that Christians will follow the three-point approach to apologetics that Peter lays out in 1 Peter 3:15: (1) honor Christ Jesus as holy in their hearts, (2) always be prepared to give a reason or defense for the hope that they have, and (3) give their defense in a gentle and respectful way. Although this project was directed at members of La Grange Baptist Church in La Grange, Kentucky, my prayer is that it will be used to strengthen the faith of and equip believers all over the world.

## APPENDIX 1

### APOLOGETICS AND BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW INVENTORY

The following inventory was used to determine each participants' knowledge of apologetics and a biblical worldview. The inventory identified areas where participants were weak so that I could better equip them to be able to defend the Christian faith. A pre- and post-course questionnaire was conducted on all participants to determine the effectiveness of the eight-week ministry project.

## APOLOGETICS AND BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW INVENTORY<sup>1</sup>

### Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure your confidence in the area of evangelism and apologetics. This research is being conducted by Brian O'Connell for purposes of collecting data for a doctoral ministry project. In this research, you will answer the questions before the ministry project begins and you will answer the same questions at the completion of the eight-week ministry project. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

### The first section of this questionnaire will obtain some demographic information about project participants:

1. Please provide *only* the last 3 numbers of your Social Security Number: \_\_\_\_\_
2. How many weeks of the 8-week project have you attended? \_\_\_\_\_  
*Note: Only to be answered on week 15 of the project.*
3. How many years has it been since you came to faith in Christ? \_\_\_\_\_
4. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

### The second section of this questionnaire deals with your confidence when it comes to sharing your faith (evangelism) and how equipped you feel to defend your faith (apologetics):

1. Please circle the answer that best indicates how often you attempt to share your faith.  
2 + times a week    1 time a week    once a month    once a year    almost never
2. Have you ever received evangelism training?            Yes            No

If you answered yes, what type of training have you received?

- 
3. Place an X next to the **single** primary reason you do not share your faith more often.  
\_\_\_\_ I am fearful of how people will respond  
\_\_\_\_ I am afraid that I will be asked a question that I will not know the answer to  
\_\_\_\_ I do not have sufficient knowledge to answer difficult questions  
\_\_\_\_ I do not believe evangelism is my responsibility

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<sup>1</sup> This survey is adapted from Jeremy Neil Todd, "Teaching Worldview Apologetics to Increase Evangelistic Confidence at Piperton Baptist Church, Collierville, Tennessee" (DEdMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), appendix 2 (pp. 93-95).



- \_\_\_ My schedule is too busy and I do not have enough time
- \_\_\_ Science has disproved Christianity
- \_\_\_ I do not think it is right for me to push my religious beliefs on someone else.
- \_\_\_ Other people hold religious beliefs that are true for them just as mine are true for me.
- \_\_\_ There are so many errors in the Bible that I feel funny telling people to read it.
- \_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Using the following scale, please write the number that best corresponds to your beliefs in response to the following statements:**

| <b>1</b>                 | <b>2</b>        | <b>3</b>                 | <b>4</b>              | <b>5</b>     | <b>6</b>              |
|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Strongly Disagree</b> | <b>Disagree</b> | <b>Disagree Somewhat</b> | <b>Agree Somewhat</b> | <b>Agree</b> | <b>Strongly Agree</b> |

1. \_\_\_ Every Christian is responsible for sharing the gospel with nonbelievers.
2. \_\_\_ Witnessing to nonbelievers should be left to pastors and Bible scholars.
3. \_\_\_ I feel I am ill-equipped to defend my faith.
4. \_\_\_ I feel that pushing my religious beliefs on someone else is offensive.
5. \_\_\_ I am confident in my understanding of the gospel.
6. \_\_\_ I feel equipped to give a defense for the existence of God.
7. \_\_\_ I feel the claim that Christianity is the “one true faith” is arrogant and narrowminded.
8. \_\_\_ I feel that the religious beliefs held by others is just as true as my own beliefs.
9. \_\_\_ I feel equipped to give a biblical defense for the meaning of life.
10. \_\_\_ I am confident in sharing the gospel with others.
11. \_\_\_ I am confident that Christianity is the one true faith
12. \_\_\_ I feel comfortable sharing Christ with someone who expresses serious doubts about the truthfulness of Christianity.
13. \_\_\_ I am confident in initiating spiritual conversations.
14. \_\_\_ I feel equipped to give a biblical response as to why a loving God allows pain and suffering.

15. \_\_\_\_ I feel equipped to answer difficult questions that may arise when sharing the gospel.
16. \_\_\_\_ I am fearful of how people will respond when I share my faith.
17. \_\_\_\_ Every Christian should be able to give a defense for their faith.
18. \_\_\_\_ I am interested in learning how to defend my faith.
19. \_\_\_\_ Evangelism and Apologetics should be left to pastors and theologians.
20. \_\_\_\_ I am confident in having a spiritual conversation with someone who does not share the same worldview as me.

**The third section of this questionnaire deals with your worldview and your understanding regarding the worldviews held within the local culture:** A worldview is one's view of the world. It is a model of the universe that informs individuals what the world is like and how they should live in it.

1. Briefly explain what has influenced the shaping of your worldview. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
2. Explain how your worldview shapes how you live. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
3. How do the worldviews that exist within your community differ from yours if at all?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
4. Does one's worldview determine the method you use to share the gospel with them?  
 Circle one:      Yes      No  
 Explain: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 2

### APOLOGETICS CURRICULUM ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

The following rubric was given to an expert panel consisting of three LBC pastors, an LBC elder, a PhD in Systematic Theology, a PhD candidate in New Testament, a PhD candidate in Old Testament, and a Christian school public speaking and debate teacher with a background in worldview and apologetics. Using the following rubric, this professional panel analyzed the curriculum to determine its theological faithfulness and usefulness.

Name of Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

| <b>Participant Evaluation Tool<sup>1</sup></b>                              |          |          |          |          |                 |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------|
| <b>1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary</b> |          |          |          |          |                 |
| <b>Criteria</b>   | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>Comments</b> |
| The curriculum is faithful to the Bible’s teaching on apologetics.          |          |          |          |          |                 |
| The curriculum is theologically sound.                                      |          |          |          |          |                 |
| The thesis of the lessons are clearly stated.                               |          |          |          |          |                 |
| The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.                        |          |          |          |          |                 |
| The curriculum contains points of practical application.                    |          |          |          |          |                 |
| The curriculum is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.    |          |          |          |          |                 |
| Overall, the lessons are factually accurate and clearly presented.          |          |          |          |          |                 |

Other Comments:

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<sup>1</sup> This evaluation tool is taken from James Patrick Gregory, “Developing an Apologetics Ministry at LifePoint Church in Indianapolis, Indiana” (DEdMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019), appendix 2 (p. 124).

APPENDIX 3  
APOLOGETICS COURSE PARTICIPANT  
EVALUATION

The following evaluation was given to course participants and used by them to evaluate the effectiveness of the eight-week apologetics course. The survey was completely anonymous, allowing participants to give honest feedback on each class as well as the course's overall effectiveness in equipping members to be able to defend their faith.

| <b>Apologetics Curriculum Evaluation Tool<sup>1</sup></b>   |          |          |          |          |                 |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------|
| <b>1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary</b>   |          |          |          |          |                 |
| <b>Criteria</b>   | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>Comments</b> |
| Each lesson was clearly relevant to the issue of Christian apologetics.   |          |          |          |          |                 |
| Lessons were faithful to the Bible's teachings.   |          |          |          |          |                 |
| Able to make a rational defense for the existence of God.   |          |          |          |          |                 |
| Effective in providing evidence for the reliability of Scripture, the Deity of Christ, and the resurrection.        |          |          |          |          |                 |
| Lessons were sufficiently thorough in their coverage of the material.   |          |          |          |          |                 |
| Provided logical and scriptural evidence to show that Mormon's and Jehovah's Witnesses are not Christian groups.    |          |          |          |          |                 |
| Effectively showed that all religions do not believe the same things. They can all be false but cannot all be true. |          |          |          |          |                 |
| Can successfully provide answers to the problem of evil.  |          |          |          |          |                 |
| Has a winsome manner that demonstrates the love and grace of Christ.  |          |          |          |          |                 |

Other Comments:

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<sup>1</sup> This evaluation tool is adapted from Roger Curtis Olson, "Training Church Members in Christian Apologetics at First Baptist Church in Watertown, Wisconsin" (DEdMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), appendix 3 (p. 130); James Patrick Gregory, "Developing an Apologetics Ministry at LifePoint Church in Indianapolis, Indiana" (DEdMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019), appendix 3 (p. 125).

APPENDIX 4  
 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF T-TEST RESULTS

Table A1. Raw data of pre- and post-test scores

| Participant No.  | No. of Class sessions attended (out of 8) | Percentage of class sessions attended |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| 468  | 5 in person, 3 online                     | 100.0%                                |
| 051  | 6 in person, 2 online                     | 100.0%                                |
| 148  | 3 in person*                              | 37.5%                                 |
| 090  | 5 in person*                              | 62.5%                                 |
| 254  | 8 in person                               | 100.0%                                |
| 153  | 8 in person                               | 100.0%                                |
| 500  | 6 in person*                              | 75.0%                                 |
| 649  | 6 in person, 2 online                     | 100.0%                                |
| 546  | 8 online                                  | 100.0%                                |
| 698  | 8 online                                  | 100.0%                                |
| 915  | 6 in person, 2 online                     | 100.0%                                |
| 734  | 8 in person                               | 100.0%                                |
| *Inventory did not indicate whether they watched any lessons online. |   |                                       |

Table A2. *T*-test for pre- and post-test scores for all students

| Participant No. | Pre-Test | Post-Test | Course Impact     |
|-----------------|----------|-----------|-------------------|
| 468             | 90       | 96        | 6-point increase  |
| 051             | 93       | 97        | 4-point increase  |
| 148             | 95       | 96        | 1-point increase  |
| 090             | 84       | 101       | 17-point increase |
| 254             | 97       | 100       | 3-point increase  |
| 153             | 97       | 109       | 12-point increase |
| 500             | 101      | 100       | 1-point decrease  |
| 649             | 99       | 108       | 9-point increase  |
| 546             | 95       | 99        | 4-point increase  |
| 698             | 84       | 97        | 13-point increase |
| 915             | 87       | 102       | 15-point increase |
| 734             | 115      | 115       | 0-point increase  |



APPENDIX 5

STATISTICAL RESULTS FOR THE APOLOGETICS  
PROJECT AT LA GRANGE BAPTIST CHURCH

Table A3. Statistical results for apologetics project

|                              | <i>Pre-test</i> | <i>Post-test</i> |
|------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Mean                         | 94.41666667     | 101.6666667      |
| Variance                     | 73.35606061     | 35.6969697       |
| Observations                 | 12              | 12               |
| Pearson Correlation          | 0.727786956     |                  |
| Hypothesized Mean Difference | 0               |                  |
| df                           | 11              |                  |
| T Stat                       | -4.271597865    |                  |
| P(T<=t) one-tail             | 0.000658569     |                  |
| T Critical one-tail          | 1.795884819     |                  |
| P(T<=t) two-tail             | 0.001317137     |                  |
| T Critical two-tail          | 2.20098516      |                  |

APPENDIX 6  
COURSE CURRICULUM

**Lesson 1: Evolution vs. Christianity**

- I. What is apologetics and where does it come from?
- II. How did we get here? Evolution or a Creator
- III. Has science disproved the existence of God?
  - a. Philosophy: If there is no God, how did we get here?  
Cosmological argument, cause & effect
  - b. Physics: First & Second Laws of Thermodynamics
  - c. Biology: Irreducible Complexity, F1-ATPase Enzyme, Bacterial Flagellum, Y-Chromosomal Adam & Mitochondrial Eve
  - d. Earth Science: Earth's placement, earth's angle, earth's speed
  - e. Mathematics & probability: probability of amino acids forming to make a protein by chance, probability of proteins forming to create a cell by chance, how many cells are in the human body?
  - f. Astronomy: Fine-tuned universe- Sir Isaac Newton, location of the earth, size of the moon, other planets and their orbits, our sun and its stability, Hubble: Red Shift- the universe is expanding, Einstein: Theory of Relativity- the universe had a beginning
  - g. Conclusion: Science points to an Intelligent Creator

## Lesson 2: Christianity vs. World Religions

- I. Which “Creator” does science point to? With over 4,000 religions, how can there be only “one” true faith?
  - a. Are the claims of Christianity arrogant and narrow-minded?
  - b. Are all religions serving the same God?
    - i. Elephant Analogy
- II. Do all religions teach the same thing? Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Christianity
  - a. Law of non-contradiction
- III. What makes Christianity different?
  - a. Other religious leaders claimed to teach a form of truth, Jesus claimed to be “the way the truth and the life.”
  - b. All other religious leaders died, and their bodies/ashes can be visited except for Jesus.
  - c. No other major religious leader claimed to be God.
    - i. Jesus claimed to be God and he rose from the dead; proving to be who he claimed to be.
- IV. Did Jesus really believe He was God or did Christians make this up hundreds of years after He died?
  - a. What did Jesus say and teach?
  - b. What does the reaction of the Jewish leaders reveal to us?
  - c. Who did Jesus’ disciples and apostles think he was?
- V. Why do we need Jesus?
  - a. Jesus is the only way to get to heaven (Acts 4:12).
  - b. We can’t get to heaven on our own. Our most righteous deeds are filthy rags before God (Isaiah 64:6)
  - c. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).
  - d. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23a).
  - e. The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23b)
  - f. If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved... (Romans 10:9-10)
  - g. God demonstrated his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).
  - h. Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved (Romans 10:13).
  - i. It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

- VI. Conclusion: What makes Christianity different from other religions?
  - a. No other major religious leader claimed to be God.
    - i. Jesus claimed to be God and rose from the dead; proving to be who He claimed to be.

### Lesson 3: The Uniqueness of the Bible

- I. The Bible says that Jesus is God. Can I trust the Bible? What makes the Bible different from other religious books?
- II. Predictive prophecy examples:
  - a. King Cyrus mentioned 150 years before he was born (Isaiah 44:28).
  - b. Josiah was mentioned 300 years before he was born (1 Kings 13:2).
- III. Predictive prophecy relating to Jesus:
  - a. Daniel gives pinpoint accuracy on when the Messiah would come as well as explain that the Messiah would be killed yet would reign eternally; and it would all happen before the temple was destroyed (Daniel 9).
  - b. Jesus would be called "...Mighty God, Eternal Father..." (Isaiah 9:6)
  - c. Jesus would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14).
  - d. Jesus would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver (Zechariah).
  - e. Jesus would be poured out like water, he would be surrounded by evil people, his hands and feet would be pierced (Psalm 22:14-18).
  - f. Jesus would be pierced for our transgressions (Isaiah 53:4-5).
  - g. Jesus would not stay dead (Psalm 16:9-10).
- IV. Is it possible that Jesus accidentally fulfilled these prophecies?
  - a. Mathematician Peter Stoner: Cover the whole state of Texas with silver dollars. Mark one of them with a red "X". Mix all the coins up. Have a blindfolded man walk around the whole state. This is the same chance ( $10^{17}$ ) that the prophets could have made these prophecies about Jesus. Those odds are for just eight prophecies, yet Jesus fulfilled over three hundred prophecies.
- V. What else makes the Bible unique?
  - a. The Bible is made up of 66 different books, written by over 40 authors, in 3 different languages and on 3 different continents. Yet it reads as though it is 1 book, written by 1 author.
- VI. The main character throughout the Bible is Jesus Christ.
  - a. Jesus makes this clear after his resurrection, when He's on the road to Emmaus with two of His followers (Luke 24:13-53).
  - b. The Old Testament clearly speaks of Jesus:
    - i. Philip found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom

the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’ (John 1:45)

- ii. Paul went into the synagogues and reasoned with the Jews (Acts 17-18) and in he told the Corinthian church that Christ died for our sins “according to the Scriptures,” and that Christ was buried, and was raised on the third day “according to the scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)” What “Scripture” is Paul referring to? Paul did not have the New Testament. Therefore his “reasoning” came from the Old Testament and the “Scripture that he’s referring to, was the Old Testament.
- iii. Preached to the crowds (Acts 2:14-42). He did not have the New Testament. Therefore his “reasoning” came from the Old Testament.

VII. Are the Gospels reliable? Are oral traditions reliable?

- a. Kenneth Bailey: Informal Controlled Oral Tradition. This form of oral tradition is still used today in the Middle East and offers control, flexibility, and accuracy.
- b. Oral histories and traditions are accurate and have been used in Canadian courts to prove land ownership for indigenous peoples.
- c. Are the Gospels the result of non-eyewitness memories?
  - i. The Gospels were written by eyewitnesses:
    - 1. John was a disciple and eyewitness and wrote the Gospel of John.
    - 2. Matthew was a disciple and eyewitness and wrote the Gospel of Matthew.
    - 3. Mark was the secretary of Peter and wrote down Peter's sermons and therefore also represents eyewitness testimony.
    - 4. Luke was the traveling companion of Paul and interviewed eyewitnesses for his Gospel. Therefore, the Gospel of Luke also represents eyewitness testimony.
- d. Were the Gospels written anonymously?
  - i. There are no anonymous Gospel manuscripts.
  - ii. All of the Gospel manuscripts are attributed to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
- e. Did “legendary” stories influence the Gospel narrative?
  - i. There is zero evidence of legendary stories influencing the Gospel narratives.
    - 1. Acts of Peter

2. Proto-Gospel of James
3. Infancy Gospel of Jesus
  - a. The early church recognized that these books represented the “national enquirer” or the fake news of their time. Study of the New Testament shows that these stories had zero influence on the church nor the New Testament Scripture.

- VIII. Conclusion: The Gospels represent eyewitness testimony
- a. Jesus Christ was a real person, who died on the cross. And according to eyewitness testimony, he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven.

## Lesson 4: How did we get the Bible?

- I. God commanded it.
  - i. Exodus 34:27
  - ii. Jeremiah 30:2
  
- II. How was the Bible written?
  - a. Inspiration
    - i. 2 Timothy 3:16
    - ii. 2 Peter 1:20-21
    - iii. 1 Thessalonians 2:13
    - iv. John 14:26
  
- III. How were books chosen?
  - a. Jews and Christians did not “choose” which books went in the Bible, they “recognized” which books were from God. They did so using the following guiding principles:
    - i. Was the book written by a prophet of God or written by a close associate (Joshua, Paul, Mark, and Luke).
      1. The mark of a true prophet of God, all prophecies come true. The mark of a false prophet, prophecies do not come true; even if it’s just one prophecy that does not come true (Deuteronomy 18:15-22)
  
    - ii. Was the writer confirmed by acts of God?
      1. Moses parted the Red Sea.
      2. Elijah called down fire from Heaven.
      3. Peter healed people, raised Tabitha from the dead.
      4. Paul brought Eutychus back to life and healed many different people.
  
    - iii. Did the message tell the truth about God?
      1. Each book represents God’s truth and does not contradict other books.
  
    - iv. Does it come with the power of God?
      1. For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)
      2. Does the book have the power to transform lives?



- v. Was it accepted by the people of God?<sup>1</sup>
    - 1. 2 Peter 3:15-16
    - 2. 1 Timothy 5:18
    - 3. Deuteronomy 25:4
    - 4. Luke 10:7
- IV. Why were the books collected and preserved?
- a. Jews and Christians recognized that these books came from God and were therefore authoritative.
    - i. 1 Corinthians 2:13
    - ii. 1 Thessalonians 4:2
  - b. "...Books did not receive their authority because they were placed into the canon; rather, they were recognized by the nation of Israel as having divine authority and were therefore included in the canon."<sup>2</sup>
- V. Were books removed?
- a. Old Testament: Apocryphal books
    - i. These books do not claim to be from God.
    - ii. They are never mentioned in the New Testament.
    - iii. Jesus gives a breakdown of the Old Testament and does not include these books.
      - 1. Matthew 23:34-35
      - 2. Luke 11:49-51
    - iv. These books are not seen as being canonical, but still useful for the church.
    - v. Catholic church canonized these books as a result of their disputes with Martin Luther (Council of Trent).
    - vi. Jewish Historian Josephus did not view these books as being on par with Old Testament Scripture.
    - vii. There is even indication from these books that they were written during a time when the prophets had stopped speaking (1 Maccabees 9:27, 14:41).
  - b. New Testament: Gnostic Gospels
    - i. The early church recognized that these books represented the "national enquirer" or the fake news of their time. Just like you can recognize "fake news" so could the early church. Just because something claims to be news does not make it news. Likewise, just because something claims to be Scripture does not

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<sup>1</sup> These guiding principles comes from Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 223-34.

<sup>2</sup> Paul D. Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 101.

make it Scripture. A review of these books makes it clear why the early church rejected these books. They were clearly not from God.

- VI. When was the Bible written?
  - a. Old Testament:
    - i. The Septuagint was written over 200 years before Christ and each of the Old Testament books were included in it. Therefore, the Old Testament was completed at least 200 years before the time of Christ.
  - b. New Testament:
    - i. The New Testament books were written by the end of the first century.
  
- VII. Is the New Testament complete?
  - a. With the death of the Apostles came the end of the Apostolic era. There are no disciples of Jesus living, therefore the canon is complete.

## Lesson 5: Reliability of Scripture

- I. Has the Bible been altered? Can it be trusted?
  - a. Did Christian change Psalm 22?
    - i. “They pierced my hands and feet (Psalm 22).”
    - ii. “Like a lion, they are at my hands and feet (Psalm 22).”
      1. How can we answer this question?
- II. Manuscript evidence for the Bible
  - a. There is more manuscript evidence for the Bible than for any other ancient source:
    - i. Plato
    - ii. Caesar
    - iii. Homer
- III. The gap of when the originals were written to the copies we have is much smaller for the Bible than for other ancient sources.
- IV. Are the manuscripts riddled with errors?
  - a. Textual variants: According to Bart Ehrman there are between 200,000 to 400,000 variants in the New Testament manuscripts. With so many variants, can the Scripture be trusted?
  - b. What are these variants?
    - i. Spelling errors, meaningless word order changes, missing the definite article on proper nouns, as well as other kinds of similar errors.
  - c. How can there be variants if Scripture comes from God? Did God make mistakes?
    - i. God spoke through His prophets through a process called inspiration. There were no errors in those manuscripts. However, inerrancy only applies to the original manuscripts, not the copies.
- V. Without the original manuscripts how can we know that we have the trustworthy Scripture?
  - a. Even without the original manuscripts we can know that what we have matches what the original manuscripts said, due to the abundance of writings from the early church fathers.
- VI. Archeological evidence for the Bible
  - i. Lachish Reliefs
  - ii. Sennacherib Prism
  - iii. Cyrus Cylinder

- iv. The Dead Sea Scrolls
- v. Erastus Inscription
- vi. The Census of Quirinius

VII. Extra-biblical evidence for the Bible

- a. Flavius Josephus: Jewish Historian—He mentions Jesus, John the Baptist, and James the brother of Jesus.<sup>3</sup>
  - i. Verifies that not only was Jesus a real person but so were these other prominent New Testament figures.
- b. Tacitus: Roman Senator & Historian—He described the persecution that happened to Christians by Emperor Nero. In his account he mentions Jesus and that he was killed under the hands of Pontius Pilate and that Tiberius was reigning during the time of Christ’s death.
  - i. Significance is that it shows that Jesus was a real person, and that Pontius Pilate and Tiberius were ruling, which is exactly what Luke records in his gospel.
- c. Pliny the Younger: Governor of Bithynia—He wrote letters to Emperor Trajan asking him what should be done with the Christians. In his letters he described the early Christian worship practices.
  - i. The significance is that in his letters, which were written around 111 AD, he verifies that the early Christians worshiped Jesus as God.
- d. Lucian of Samosata: Second-century Greek writer—He wrote several letters which criticized and mocked Christians.
  - i. The significance of his letters is that he verifies that the worship practices he described are identical to worship practices that happen today. He also verified that Christians in the second-century worshiped Jesus.
- e. Early church fathers: Ignatius (A.D. 35-A.D. 108), Polycarp (A.D. 69-A.D. 155), Clement (A.D. 35-A.D. 100)—From their writings we see that they believed in the writings and the claims of the New Testament. The miracles of Jesus, His teachings and ministry, His virgin birth, His death by crucifixion, His resurrection from the dead, and his Deity.
  - i. The significance of these writings is that it verifies and confirms that these beliefs were held by the early

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<sup>3</sup> I did not use the longer inauthentic reference to Jesus but the shorter authentic reference accepted by scholars.

church and did not evolve over hundreds of years as the critics claim.

- VIII. Conclusion: predictive prophecy shows that the Bible is unique from all other religious books. Manuscript, archeological and extra-biblical evidence shows that the Bible is reliable and has not been changed over thousands of years. There is evidence to support that the events, people, and locations described in the Bible were accurate.

## Lesson 6: Mormonism

- I. What Mormons believe
  - a. God evolved into Godhood
  - b. There are many Gods
  - c. Man can become a God
  - d. Salvation is by works
  - e. They are the only true church
  - f. There is no salvation outside of the LDS church
  
- II. The origin of Mormonism
  - a. Joseph Smith Jr.—Born December 23, 1805 to Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Smith
    - i. Joseph Smith Sr. was involved in criminal activity and witchcraft
    - ii. Lucy Smith was involved in witchcraft
    - iii. Several generations of the Smith family were involved in occult practices.
    - iv. Joseph Smith was also involved in occult practices and ended up getting arrested for his practices.
  
- III. The Start of Mormonism
  - a. Joseph Smith Jr. had a vision at 14 and was told that all churches are an abomination.
  - b. At 17 years old the Angel Moroni appears to Joseph and tells him about the golden plates.
  - c. The golden plates were later dug up and translated by Joseph Smith and is known today as The Book of Mormon.
    - i. Mormons believe The Book of Mormon is more reliable than the Bible. Other volumes that the Mormon Church considers to be scripture are:
      1. Doctrine and Covenants, which is a collection of Joseph Smith revelations and other church presidents.
      2. Pearl of Great Price, which according to Mormon belief it includes the writings of Moses & Abraham as well as modern writings of Joseph Smith,
      3. Lastly they believe that there are “living prophets” and they believe that the words from their living prophets are inspired and are to be seen as Scripture.
  
- IV. Prophecies
  - a. New Jerusalem Prophecy
  - b. Christ’s Return Prophecy

- c. David Smith Prophecy
- V. Inspired Version of the Bible: Written because Joseph Smith noticed that the Angel Moroni quoted passages of Scripture that differed from the Bible.
- VI. The Book of Mormon
- a. Developed through occult practices
  - b. Developed by plagiarizing the King James Bible, including editor notes.
  - c. Developed by plagiarizing the fictional book “View of the Hebrews” which came out 5 years before the Book of Mormon was published.
- VII. Archeology and the Book of Mormon
- a. Smithsonian and National Geographic Society claim that there is zero evidence to support the book of Mormon. This is after Mormons have claimed that these institutions have used the Book of Mormon as an archeological guide.
  - b. BYU Professor and Archeologist claims that the early American civilizations do not match up with the civilizations mentioned in The Book of Mormon
- VIII. Are we serving the same Jesus
- a. Side by side comparison of Bible verses and passages from The Book of Mormon show that Mormons and Christians do not serve the same Jesus.
    - i. The Bible teaches that Jesus had a virgin birth, The Book of Mormon rejects this idea.
    - ii. The Bible teaches the Jesus is God’s only begotten Son, The Book of Mormon teaches that Jesus is one of God’s sons and that Jesus and Satan are brothers.
    - iii. The Bible teaches that Jesus was not married, Mormon teachings show that they believe Jesus was married.
    - iv. The Bible teaches that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, in fulfillment of prophecy, The Book of Mormon teaches that Jesus was born in Jerusalem.
    - v. The Bible teaches that Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross atoned for all our sin, Mormon teachings show that Jesus’ sacrifice is unable to atone for our sin.
- IX. A look at Scripture
- a. Matthew 5:48: Mormons view this as a proof text to show that we can be perfect like God. And therefore, this text is showing us that we can become a God.

- b. 1 Corinthians 15:40-42: Mormons view this text as a proof text for their being three levels in heaven—Terrestrial, Celestial, Telesstial
  - c. Psalm 82:6: Mormons view this text as a proof text that God is calling us Gods and that therefore all humans can become a God and that there are many Gods.
  
- X. Origin of their theology
  - a. Genesis 3:4-5
  - b. Isaiah 14:12-14
  
- XI. The Mormon Tabernacle
  - a. No crosses anywhere. Instead, the focal point is the Angel Moroni. The Angel that gave Joseph Smith a “different gospel”
    - i. God warns us not to believe an angel from heaven if they preach a different gospel (Galatians 1:8).
  - b. The Bible tells us that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14).
  - c. The Bible also tells us that Satan’s servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness (2 Corinthians 11:15).
  
- XII. How should we respond?
  - a. In love, remembering God’s command from 1 Peter 3:15.
    - i. Sanctify Jesus as Lord in our hearts
    - ii. Always be prepared
    - iii. Do this with gentleness and respect
  - b. We also need to remember that people come to faith by hearing Scripture (Romans 10:17).
  - c. Realize that if a Mormon leaves the LDS Church they say goodbye to all of their friends and family.
  - d. Be in prayer for them.
  - e. The best way to minister to Mormons is to know your Bible and love on them. Be willing to talk to them about their faith. Ask them questions. You don’t need to know everything about Mormonism in order to talk to Mormons.
  - f. Lastly, remember that “...our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12).”



## Lesson 7: Jehovah's Witnesses

- I. What Jehovah's Witnesses Claim
  - a. The Watchtower believes that they are the only way God speaks to people on earth.
  - b. They believe that their organization provides a prophetic voice to people on earth.
  
- II. What Jehovah's Witnesses Believe
  - a. They reject core Christian doctrines:
    - i. The Trinity
    - ii. The Deity of Christ
    - iii. The Deity of The Holy Spirit
    - iv. The Doctrine of Hell
  
- III. A Brief History of Their Church: Presidents
  - a. Charles Taze Russell: Founder & 1st President—President from 1872-1916
    - i. When he was 18 he began developing a new system of theology and launched his own magazine, titled "Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence." Now known as the "Watchtower."
    - ii. At age 34 he published "The Millennial Dawn" now known as "Studies in the Scriptures."
    - iii. He claimed it was better for people to read his books and ignore the Bible.
  
  - b. "Judge" Joseph F. Rutherford: 2<sup>nd</sup> President—President from 1917-1942
    - i. Under his leadership their name changed to Jehovah's Witnesses
    - ii. He was known for his many prophecies
    - iii. He had a mansion built in San Diego, California (Beth-Sarim) in order to house the Biblical patriarch during their return.
  
  - c. Nathan H. Knorr: 3<sup>rd</sup> President—President from 1942-1977
    - i. Under his presidency the New World Translation was developed
    - ii. He was also famous for many prophecies
  
  - d. Raymond W. Franz: 4<sup>th</sup> President—President from 1977-1992
    - i. He had served as the Watchtower's Vice President.
    - ii. He was known as the Watchtower's leading theologian for over 60 years.

- iii. During his presidency he gave testimony under oath that the Watchtower gave false prophecies. This court case is known as the Douglas Walsh court case and took place in Scotland in 1954.
  - e. Milton G. Henschel: 5<sup>th</sup> President
    - i. Nothing notable took place under his presidency.
  - f. Don Adams: 6<sup>th</sup> President
    - i. Nothing notable took place under his presidency.
  - g. Robert Ciranko: 7<sup>th</sup> and current President
    - i. Nothing notable has taken place under his presidency.
- IV. Prophecies
  - a. Charles Taze Russell
    - i. In 1902, Russell made the prophecy that the end of the time of the gentiles would be in 1914.
  - b. “Judge” Joseph F. Rutherford
    - i. In 1920, Rutherford made the prophecy that in 1925 The patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the Prophets would return to earth and live in San Diego, California.
      - 1. They built the mansion “Beth-Sarim,” which they later sold. In court, in 1954, Frederick Franz was asked about the mansion that the Watchtower organization had purchased for the return of the Patriarchs and why the Watchtower had sold the property.
  - c. Nathan H. Knorr
    - i. In 1968, Nathan Knorr admitted that the first two presidents were guilty of making false prophecy.
    - ii. In 1968, Knorr made a prophecy that the world was going to end in 1975.
      - 1. The Watchtower encouraged their members: To not go to college, to not pursue a career, to not get married, to not have children to sell their homes and give the proceeds to the Watchtower to be used for “kingdom ministry” before the world ended.
- V. The New World Translation
  - a. This is the Bible of the Watchtower Organization
  - b. Translation committee names were kept secret. The committee names were later made known by Raymond Franz. He was the

Nephew of Frederick Franz and had been a member of the “Governing Body” for the Watchtower Organization.

- i. When the list of names was given it was shown that no one on the committee was qualified to translate the Biblical languages. Frederick Franz was the highest educated person on the committee and he had dropped out of college.

## VI. A Look at Scripture

a. Are the doctrines that Jehovah’s Witnesses reject taught in the Bible?

### i. The Doctrine of Hell

1. Isaiah 66:24
2. Mark 9:43-48
3. Matthew 25:46
  - a. Jesus talks more about Hell than he does Heaven. Not only that but he describes Hell in great detail.
  - b. Without Hell, God would not be a just God.

### ii. The God of the Bible

1. There is only one God.
  - a. Isaiah 43:10
  - b. Isaiah 44:6
  - c. Isaiah 45:5
  - d. Deuteronomy 6:4
2. Within this one God, there is a plurality
  - a. Genesis 1:26
  - b. Genesis 3:22
  - c. Genesis 11:7

### iii. The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

1. Psalm 95:7-11
2. Exodus 17:7
  - a. Both of these passages show that the people of Israel were sinning against God. However, in Hebrews 3:7-11, it quotes these two verses and explains that when the Israelites were sinning against God, it was the Holy Spirit, that they were sinning against.
3. Acts 5:3-4

- iv. The Deity of Christ: This is shown through what Jesus said and taught, the reaction of the Jewish leaders, who Jesus' disciples and apostles said he was and what extra-biblical sources said.
  - 1. What Jesus said and taught
    - a. Mark 2:5-7: "your sins are forgiven"
    - b. John 10:30: "I and the Father are one"
    - c. John 14:9: "He who has seen me has seen the Father"
    - d. John 8:58: "Before Abraham was born, I am"
  - 2. The reaction of the Jewish leaders
    - a. John 10:30-33 "You a mere man, claim to be God."
  - 3. Who Jesus' disciples and apostles said he was
    - a. Matthew 16:15-16: Peter confesses, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
    - b. John 20:27-28: Thomas confesses, "My Lord and my God"
    - c. John 1:1 and verse 14: John confesses "The Word was God... The Word became flesh."
    - d. Philippians 2:5-8: Paul confesses "Christ Jesus: Who being in very nature God"
      - i. There are many other verses that I could share but these ones clearly show that these men clearly saw Jesus as being God.
      - ii. Another argument for the Deity of Jesus is that fact that Angels did not receive worship in the Bible (Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9), whereas Jesus did (Matthew 14:33, Matthew 28:8-9).
  - 4. What Extra-biblical Sources Said
    - a. Pliny the Younger: "They sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god"
    - b. Lucian: "The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day- the distinguished personage who introduced

their novel rites, and was crucified on that account”

- c. Early church fathers: Ignatius (A.D. 35-A.D. 108), Polycarp (A.D. 69-A.D. 155), Clement (A.D. 35-A.D. 100):
  - i. From their writings we see that they believed in the writings and the claims of the New Testament.
  - ii. The miracles of Jesus, His teachings and ministry, His virgin birth, His death by crucifixion, His resurrection from the dead, and his Deity.
  - iii. The significance of these writings is that it verifies and confirms that these beliefs were held by the early church and did not evolve over hundreds of years as the critics claim.

v. Doctrine of the Trinity

1. The Father is God, The Son is God, The Holy Spirit is God. The Father is not The Son, The Son is not The Holy Spirit, The Holy Spirit is not The Father.
2. Wayne Grudem, in his book *Systematic Theology* writes, “The fact that God is three persons means that the Father is not the son; they are distinct persons. It also means that the Father is not the Holy Spirit, but that they are distinct persons. And it means that the Son is not the Holy Spirit.”<sup>4</sup>
3. Matthew 28:19
4. 2 Corinthians 13:14
5. 1 Peter 1:2
  - a. Scripture makes it clear that there is only one God and that God reveals Himself through the three persons of the Godhead: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit

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<sup>4</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 231.

- VII. How should we respond?
- a. In love, remembering God's command from 1 Peter 3:15.
    - i. Sanctify Jesus as Lord in our hearts
    - ii. Always be prepared
    - iii. Do this with gentleness and respect
  - b. We also need to remember that people come to faith by hearing Scripture (Romans 10:17).
  - c. Realize that if a Jehovah's Witness leaves their faith they say goodbye to all of their friends and family.
  - d. Be in prayer for them.
  - e. The best way to minister to Jehovah's Witnesses is to know your Bible and love on them. Be willing to talk to them about their faith. Ask them questions. You don't need to know everything about the Watchtower in order to talk to Jehovah's Witnesses.
  - f. Lastly, remember that "...our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12)."

## Lesson 8: The Problem of Evil

- I. Does the presence of evil disprove the existence of God?
  - a. I can't believe in God, because of all the evil in the world!
    - i. There are only two options for the origin of life:  
Evolution or a Creator
  - b. Philosophical argument for God:
    - i. Everything that begins to exist has a cause. The universe began to exist. Therefore, the universe must have a cause.
  - c. Philosophical argument against God's existence:
    - i. If God exists, then God is omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect. If God is omnipotent, then God has the power to eliminate all evil. If God is omniscient, then God knows when evil exists. If God is morally perfect, then God has the desire to eliminate all evil. Evil exists. If evil exists and God exists, then either God doesn't have the power to eliminate all evil, or doesn't know when evil exists, or doesn't have the desire to eliminate all evil. Therefore, God doesn't exist.
      1. The problem with this view of God is that it ignores a very important question. How did we get here? There are only two possibilities for how life came into existence.
        - a. We are here either as the result of a Creator, or by undirected processes through evolution.
        - b. The argument that is being made is that the presence of evil acts as evidence that a good God could not possibly exist. However, there is a huge problem with this argument.
- II. Science points to an Intelligent Creator: Planetary orbits, bacterial flagellum, the doctrine of creation and belief in God is what has made science possible, we live in a universe that can be charted mathematically, great scientific minds from the past understood that our existence was a result of an Intelligent Creator—Men like Galileo, Kepler, Pascal, Boyle, Newton, Faraday, Kelvin and Clerk Maxwell.

- III. There is no God!
  - a. Since science points to an Intelligent Creator the person who denies God's existence is doing so based on morality and not scientific evidence.
  - b. Their decision is based on "evil" they have experienced or witnessed, not based on scientific observations.
  - c. For people who have wrestled with this issue, evil is pointless and inexcusable.
  
- IV. The prideful view of evil
  - a. If I can't see a point to evil, there must not be a point!
  - b. If I can't understand why something bad could happen, there must not be a good explanation!
  - c. "No-see-ums" If you can't see them, should you conclude that they do not exist?
  
- V. Does evil serve a purpose?
  - a. We see examples of this throughout the Bible where horrible things happened to people that ended up serving a greater purpose.
    - i. We see this when we look at Biblical characters like Joseph, Daniel, Paul, and many others. Most importantly when you look at Jesus.
      - 1. He was beaten by Roman soldiers, and then crucified on the cross.
      - 2. His death at first seemed to have served no purpose and was an example of pointless, inexcusable evil. However, his death served a great purpose. His death served to save all of humanity.
  - b. "If you have a God great and transcendent enough to be mad at because he hasn't stopped evil and suffering in the world, then you have (at the same moment) a God great and transcendent enough to have good reasons for allowing it to continue that you can't know. Indeed, you can't have it both ways."<sup>5</sup>
  
- VI. Evil is more of a problem for the Atheist than for the Theist?
  - a. There are only two options for our existence: An Intelligent Creator, or evolution.
    - i. The dilemma is this. When the argument is made that "You can't believe in the existence of God because of the evil you see in the world," you've just removed one

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<sup>5</sup> Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Dutton, 2008), 25.



of two options for the cause our existence. You have just removed God out of the equation.

- ii. If there is no God, then we're here as a result of evolution. In other words, all of life evolved through a process of natural selection, or to word it differently, survival of the fittest.
  1. According to natural selection, the process of survival of the fittest states that the strong species survived because they learned how to adapt to their environments, while the weak died off.
  2. According to the evolutionary worldview, survival of the fittest has nothing to do with morality. Meaning the death of the weak organism and the survival of the strong organism has nothing to do with evil and good.
  3. If there is no God, which is what is being proposed by people making this argument, then according to this worldview, the evolutionary worldview, then what you see around you is not evil.
  4. When you see acts of violence and murder, and death, then according to the evolutionary worldview this is not something to be angry about. In fact, according to the evolutionary worldview this is actually something to be celebrated.
  5. What you are seeing is the weaker species dying off and the stronger species surviving. What you see happening is the process of natural selection, according to the evolutionary worldview.

VII. Your Conscience acts as evidence for a Creator.

- a. The fact is that each of us recognizes that there is evil in the world.
- b. We each recognize that mass shootings, murder, and all other evil acts are just that, heinous and evil acts. But, ask yourself this question, "why is it that you recognize these acts as being evil and morally wrong?"
- c. If there is no God, and if evolution is true, then there is no such thing as morality, right and wrong, or good and evil.
- d. The fact that each of us is able to recognize certain acts as being morally wrong and evil, actually points to the existence of a Creator.

- e. The fact that we know that murder is wrong acts as evidence that God exists and gave us a conscience in which we are able to recognize things that are right and wrong.

VIII. Why does God allow evil?

- a. God is a God of love, as seen throughout Scripture. In order to have love, you must have choice and free-will.
- b. Augustine of Hippo: God is sovereign and there is freewill.
- c. Examples from Scripture:
  - i. Isaiah 46:10
  - ii. Romans 8:29-30
  - iii. Genesis 50:20
  - iv. Isaiah 53
  - v. Psalm 22
  - vi. Genesis 3:15

IX. Conclusion:

- a. Although this lesson didn't provide an explanation for evil that is emotionally satisfying, it shows that removing God does not provide a logical answer to the problem.
- b. Just because we can't see a purpose of evil existing, does not mean that God does not have a good reason for it.
- c. God's ways are beyond our comprehension
  - i. Isaiah 55:8-9
- d. Although there is evil in the world, we can rest in the words of the apostle Paul:
  - i. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen (Galatians 1:3-5)."
  - ii. Although there is evil in the world, we can rest in the fact that Jesus died on the cross to set us free of our sins and to deliver us from this present evil age. This present evil age will not last. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we can rest assured that regardless of what happens in this world our salvation is secure. We have been adopted into God's family.
  - iii. Jesus tells us in John 16:33, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."
  - iv. In 2 Corinthians 4:18 we read, "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."

- v. Revelation 21:4 reminds us that in heaven, “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

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## ABSTRACT

### DEVELOPING AN APOLOGETICS COURSE TO EQUIP THE SAINTS AT LAGRANGE BAPTIST CHURCH IN LA GRANGE, KENTUCKY

Brian Daniel O'Connell, DMin  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Timothy Paul Jones

The purpose of this project is to develop and teach an apologetics course at La Grange Baptist Church in La Grange, Kentucky, to equip church members to share and defend their faith. In chapter 1, I present the strengths and weaknesses of my ministry context. In chapter 2, I provide scriptural support for my ministry project. In chapter 3, I lay out the practical way that apologetics can be taught within the church. In chapter 4, I cover the way in which I prepared for and taught the apologetics course. In chapter 5, I evaluate the effectiveness of the ministry project.



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