

Big Questions

- Can we be confident God exists?
- How can God be good when there so much suffering in the world?
- How do we know Jesus is the only way, isn't that too exclusive?
- Can we really trust the Bible?

These are not new questions, and they are not questions Christianity is afraid of. Followers of Jesus have been answering them thoughtfully for centuries. Christianity has always welcomed questions. The Bible itself is full of them.

Intended audience:

Seekers

1 Peter 3:15b

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...

“Answer”

- **ἀπολογία**; (*apologia*), N. *defense*.
- **Noun:** defense (legal) — the speech act of attempting to prove some act or belief to be reasonable, necessary, or right; especially occurring in a court of law.¹

This is where we get the word apologetics from. This is not Christians apologizing for their beliefs or their behaviours but giving an answer for them. The word is stronger than “answer”; it's defense. A well-thought out, rational, reasonable explanation for the hope you have.

Apologetics can be defensive in nature, defending against accusations of being false, etc. or they can be positive in nature, simply presenting arguments for Christian belief.²

It's not accidental the instruction to present a defense or a reason with gentleness and respect. Explanations can come across strong and aggressive. The right thing said the wrong way can defeat the whole purpose in the first place. An important goal in Christianity is to see people come to faith in Christ. What we say and how we say it is important.

¹ Brannan, Rick, ed. 2020. In [Lexham Research Lexicon of the Greek New Testament](#). Lexham Research Lexicons. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

² Steven B. Cowan, “Introduction” *Five Views on Apologetics*, Zondervan, 2000, 8. “Apologetics is concerned with the defence of the Christian faith against charges of falsehood, inconsistency, or credulity. Indeed the very word apologetics is derived from the Greek *apologia*, which means defence. As it concerns the Christian faith, then, apologetics has to do with defending, or making a case for, the truth of the Christian faith it is an intellectual discipline that is usually said to serve at least 2 purposes number one to bolster the faith of Christian believers and #2 to aid in the task of evangelism. Apologetics seek to accomplish these goals in two distinct ways. One is by refuting objections to the Christian faith, such as the problem of evil or the charge that key Christian doctrines are incoherent. This apologetic task can be negative or defensive apologetics. The second, perhaps complementary, way apologists fulfilled their purposes is by offering positive reasons for Christian faith. The latter called positive or offensive apologetics, often takes the form of arguments for God's existence or for the resurrection and deity of Christ but are by no means limited to these. Of course, some apologists, as we will see, contend that such arguments are unnecessary or perhaps even detrimental to Christian faith. These apologists focused primarily on the negative task and downplay the role of positive apologetics. Nevertheless, most, if not all, would agree that the apologetic task includes the giving of some positive reasons for faith.”

Apologetics is for seekers and for believers...

Believers

Hebrews 11:6b

...anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Luke 10:27b

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind...

We do not disengage the mind; we love him with it.

Luke 1:1-4

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

Luke has done a careful investigation into the things that have happened and written those things into an orderly account so that the recipient of his work may know, have confidence, in the things they have been taught.

This is one of the goals of apologetics: to strengthen faith.

Personal story: I believed as a young teenager that even if Christianity were not true, at least following it, I will be living a moral life. If there is a God, he would likely accept me into heaven if I'm a good person.

This is not the Christian message.

As a result of this inaccurate belief, I was often very stressed because my behaviour was not good enough. Outwardly, I was decent but the thoughts I entertained were not good and I knew I was in trouble.

It wasn't until I was in my late teens that I got some exposure to apologetics. Defenses or reasons for belief in God that my faith in God strengthened. I realized that there is good reason to believe what is said about God and about Jesus is accurate. Around the same time, I also had a spiritual awakening that God loved me even while I was a sinner, and that the sacrifice of Jesus was an act of love and that it covered all my sin.

Reason and faith met together. My story is encountering Jesus and not looking back.

We're going to address some of those questions during this series.

The first is pretty foundational:

Can we have confidence God exists?

Many people already do. Whether Christian or not.

- Christians = 2.3-2.5 billion (28.8%)
- Muslims = 1.9-2.0 billion (25.6%)

While their understanding of God differs, these 2 religions are monotheistic, belief in one God, and represent over half the world.

→ The Bible reveals God to us.

→ Nature reveals a creator.

→ Our very existence and existential questions, desire for understanding, meaning, and purpose, our intricacies, consciousness... point to Something beyond.

→ Spiritual experiences, good and evil, angelic or demonic reveal a spiritual dimension.

→ Countless testimonies

→ Miracles

→ Others through faith in Christ, claim to have a relationship with God and therefore have confidence he exists.

For those of you who have confidence God exists, as a pastor:

- I want to only **add to your confidence.**
- I also believe the Scriptures bring clarity to who God is, and I pray that will be the case every time we open God's word. This is my angle. This is what I want for us.

The question, however, is still important to address because:

- There are some who do not believe God exists, or who feel like the non-existence of God is the default position and therefore, the burden of proof is on the theist to prove God exists.
- There's also a difference between adherence to Christianity and confidence in the existence of God.

If you don't already know, belief in God is not irrational or a leap in the dark.

There are strong reasons to believe God exists.

That said, the purpose of what we're doing is to strengthen faith and help seekers find God.

Two Disclaimers:

1. There is a difference between knowing Christ and showing Christianity is true.
 - Knowing Christ is a major goal of Christianity, if you will, and this is only possible through the inner work of the **Holy Spirit**.
 - Many people claim to know Christ and say they experience his joy, peace, and love in a profound and real way. You don't need arguments to be convinced of something you already know to be true.
 - I'm in a relationship with my wife. I don't need to be convinced she is real. Same applies to many Jesus followers today.
 - That said, no one is saying, “Jon, your wife is make belief!” How do you know what you're experiencing is real? How do you know you're not in the Matrix? This seems silly. But the same things are said about belief in God because we cannot see him.
 - What happens when someone claims, “God does not exist” and presents reasons to disbelieve? Do their arguments have the ability to erode that relationship? They can.
 - And we hear stories, sometimes of young people, for example, who go off to university, where sometimes faith is not celebrated; at best it's tolerated, at worst is ridiculed.
 - It is helpful to be prepared: Is Christianity defensible? How?
 - In addition, since we want others to know Christ and experience his forgiveness, his love, his salvation, we want to be able to show the truth claims of Christianity are rational, defensible, able to withstand criticism.

2. The term “Theological Proof” is misleading. Proving anything philosophically beyond any shadow of a doubt is a nearly impossible standard. These “proofs” are not seeking to prove God's existence beyond any possible shadow of doubt but to demonstrate that the Christian truth claims are possible, plausible, and even probable.³

If the existence of God can be shown to be possible, plausible, even probable, then the miraculous claims in the Bible become possible.

If God exists, then the resurrection of Jesus is not impossible; it becomes a historical question rather than a scientific one.

³ The concept of movement from “Possible→Plausible→Probable” is from Dr. Chamberlain ACTS Seminary.

So, what are the most convincing arguments for the existence of God?

People find different things convincing.

What’s important/convincing to you, might not matter to someone else, and vice versa.

For William Lane Craig—arguably the most well-known and respected Christian apologist of our time—this argument is the most convincing for him:

Cosmological Argument

1. Everything that begins to exist has a cause
2. The universe began to exist
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause

That’s a simple argument, but it’s powerful.

- If the universe had a beginning, then it must have a cause beyond itself.

Now sometimes people ask:

“What caused God?” Luke when he was 3 years old: When did it happen?

- That’s a fair question.
- But the argument isn’t saying everything has a cause.
- It’s saying **everything that begins to exist** has a cause.
- Christians believe God did not begin to exist.

Instead, God is eternal.

In fact, if something caused the universe to exist, it would have to be:

- outside of space
- outside of time
- outside of matter

...because space, time, and matter all began when the universe began.

So whatever caused the universe must be:

- timeless
- spaceless
- immaterial
- powerful beyond imagination

And that sounds very much like what the Bible describes when it says:

Genesis 1:1

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

This argument doesn’t tell us everything about God.

- But it strongly suggests the universe has a cause beyond itself.
- And once we see that belief in a Creator is reasonable, the door opens to take seriously what the Bible tells us about who that Creator is.

William Lane Craig notes that on university campuses, the most convincing argument is the Moral Argument

Moral Argument

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 exists⁴

The moral argument doesn't prove Christianity by itself, but it points strongly toward the existence of Moral Being who is the Source of Objective Morality.

What are objective moral values and duties?

- Moral values are things that are good or bad, whereas moral duties are things that are right or wrong (things we ought to do or ought not to do).

Objective means— timeless, universal, unchanging moral principles outside of, beyond, or independent from humanity.

For example:

- A rich person stealing a poor person's last morsal of food just because they want it is always wrong (it ought not be done).
- Seducing someone who is happily married just because you want that person is always wrong.
- Torturing a vulnerable person just for the fun of it is always wrong.

To do that we would say is “morbid” the actions of a psychopath—something is broken in them—they're not right; they're sick.

These actions are bad and it is wrong do those things. People ought not do them, ever.

It doesn't matter **when** it happens, yesterday, today, or tomorrow.

It doesn't matter **where** it happens, in Canada or the US, or earth or on Artemis II. it's always wrong.

This is Objective Morality.

⁴ Adaptation of the version presented by William Lane Craig.

Subjective morality is the belief that morality is relative. It changes from person to person, from area to area, from society to society, from time to time (some claim it is a product of evolution, but this means it changes over time).

- What’s right for you is right for you, what’s wrong for you is wrong for you (or “us”)
- That’s *your* truth. Etc.

The problem with this view is that it makes it challenging to condemn anything.

- At best, you could yell out, “Hey, I don’t like that you’re going after my wife. It doesn’t make me feel good when you do that. I don’t want you to do that... But if you think otherwise, then that’s just the way it is, and it’s my loss. I would fight you but you’re bigger than me so that’s not going to work.”
- In a more serious sense, saying, “The holocaust was bad and what they did was wrong,” has little force if morality is subjective. As far as making a moral judgment goes, at best, you can say, “I don’t like what they did.”
- No one lives or talks like this. Everyone, whether they say they believe morality is objective or subjective, lives and talks like they believe it’s objective.
- People on both sides of the claim talk and speak with conviction when they make moral judgments.

C.S. Lewis – most well known as the creator of the Narnia series which includes *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.

- He’s written more than 30 books.
- The most popular non-fiction book is *Mere Christianity*
- He was an atheist who journeyed toward theism and eventually to Christian faith.

One of the most convincing factors was the existence of objective morality.

In *Mere Christianity*, he writes about this, noticing this behaviour when people argue. They appeal to some kind of ultimate moral code.

C.S. Lewis

“These then are the two points that I wanted to make. First, that human beings, all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and cannot really get rid of it. Secondly, that they do not in fact behave in that way. They know the Law... they break it. These two facts are the foundation of all clear thinking about ourselves and the universe we live in.”⁵

C.S. Lewis says there is a Moral Law everyone is under.

William Lane Craig says, “Objective moral values and duties exist”

The Big Question then becomes, “Where does it come from?”

Both (C.S. Lewis and W.L. Craig) conclude they come from a Moral Law Giver.

⁵ C.S. Lewis, “Book One: Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe,” in C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 8.

This aligns with what is revealed in Scripture.

Romans 2:14-15

Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.

- The Bible talks about things like the requirements of the law being written on the human heart.
- Where did the law come from? God.

In addition, some atheists reject objective morality because they recognize how closely it connects to belief in God.

(French, existential, atheist)...

Jean-Paul Sartre

“... it [is] very distressing that God does not exist, because all possibility of finding values in a heaven of ideas disappears along with Him; there can no longer be an *a priori* Good, since there is no infinite and perfect consciousness to think it... If God does not exist, we find no values or commands to turn to which legitimize our conduct.”⁶

Prominent Australian atheist...

J.L. Mackie

“There are no objective values...”⁷

“We might well argue...objective intrinsically prescriptive features... are most unlikely to have arisen in the ordinary course of events, without an all-powerful God to create them. *If*, then, there are such intrinsically prescriptive objective values, they make the existence of a god more probable than it would have been without them.”⁸

The problem however is that rejecting objective morality removes the ability to make moral judgments with any kind of force.

- In short, you can't eat your cake and keep it.
- Either morality is subjective and moral judgments are reduced to preferences alone.
- Or morality is objective, and it must be explained or grounded in something.

There are some philosophers who, recognizing the dilemma, still believe objective morality exists apart from God.⁹ When compared to theistic moral arguments, theism alone provides a foundation, something necessary to ground objective morality. You can read about this in my thesis.

- My contention along with many others, including some atheists, is that God is the best explanation for objective morality.

⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, trans. Bernard Frenchman and Haze E. Barnes. (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc. 1957), 22-23.

⁷ J.L. Mackie, “The Subjectivity of Values,” in *Essays on Moral Realism*, ed. by Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 95.

⁸ J.L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and Against the Existence of God* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1982), 115-116. Emphasis added.

⁹ Some have labelled their view as godless moral realism. See thesis for list of biggest proponents.

To come back full circle, the goal is not to win an argument for the sake of winning an argument. The goal is to be able to give an answer for the hope we have.

1 Peter 3:15b

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...

At its very foundational level, the Christian claims that God exists. You don't have to sacrifice your brain to believe that.

There is reason to believe.
Today, we've looked at just 2 of them
Briefly at the Cosmological Argument
Also, the Moral Argument

Again...

- The goal is to not to only know about Him, but to know him and trust him.
- Christianity does not begin with an argument; it begins with a relationship.
- The same God who created the universe, who wrote His moral law on our hearts, stepped into history in the person of Jesus so that we could know Him personally.
- These arguments help us see that faith is reasonable.
- But the gospel shows us that faith is also relational and available to us.

Resource: www.reasonablefaith.org