

Why Believe? An Introduction to Christian Apologetics

I. Foundations

A. The Bible on apologetics (1 Pet. 3:15-16, Acts 17, 1 Ki. 18, Acts 1:3, etc...) – the prophets and apostles often appealed to reason and evidence.

B. Apologetics and discipleship

1. Loving God with our minds – the Great Commandment requires us to think deeply about our faith
2. Strengthening our faith – seeing that Christianity is rational makes us more confident

C. Apologetics and evangelism – sharing the gospel effectively includes answering people's questions when they arise

D. Philosophical foundations

1. Truth – objective truth exists and can be known.
 - a. How do we know truth exists?
 - b. How do we know truth?
2. Worldview – everyone has a worldview and we use it to interpret evidence
3. Religious exclusivity – not all religions are true
4. The role of emotion – feelings need to be governed by truth

II. Revelation

A. The two books of God's revelation

1. God reveals himself through His words in Scripture (Psalm 19:7-14, 2 Tim. 3:16-17, etc...)
2. God reveals himself through his works in Nature (Psalm 19:1-6, Rom. 1, etc...)

B. The Argument from Contingency

1. All contingent entities require an explanation for their existence
2. The universe is a contingent entity
3. Therefore, the universe requires an explanation for its existence

C. The Argument from Mathematics

1. It is not necessary that the universe have an underlying mathematical structure.
2. It is not necessary that human beings can comprehend this structure.
3. The best explanation of the underlying mathematical structure of the universe and the ability of humans to comprehend it is God.

D. Cosmological Fine Tuning

1. If the universe is finely-tuned for life, then the explanation is design, chance, or law
2. The universe is finely-tuned for life
3. The explanation of the fine-tuning of the universe is not chance or law
4. Therefore, the explanation of the fine-tuning of the universe is design

E. The Moral Argument

1. If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist
2. Objective moral values and duties exist
3. Therefore, God exists

III. The Trilemma

A. The claims of Jesus – Jesus made numerous claims to deity

B. Liar, Lunatic, or Lord – if the gospels are historically reliable, then the historical Jesus was either lying, insane, or God incarnate

C. The historical reliability of the gospels

1. Textual criticism – we can trust that the text of the gospels has not been corrupted
2. Non-Christian historians – confirm Jesus' existence and basic facts about him
3. Geography – the gospels are replete with accurate geographical details
4. Archaeology – many details of the gospels have been confirmed by archaeology
5. Jewish context – the gospels fit naturally into a 1st century Palestinian context
6. Onomastic evidence – the use of proper names in the data is evidence that they record eyewitness testimony
7. Undesigned coincidences – details from the gospels corroborate each other in subtle ways

IV. The Resurrection

A. The significance of the Resurrection – the resurrection is God's vindication of Jesus and our assurance of salvation

B. The evidence for the Resurrection

1. Crucifixion and burial – Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried
2. Empty tomb – Jesus' tomb was found empty three days after his death
3. Appearances to disciples – Jesus' disciples had experiences of the risen Jesus over many days, in numerous locations, in numerous settings
4. Appearance to Paul – Paul, a persecutor of the church, had experiences of the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus, leading to his conversion

C. Naturalistic interpretations of the evidence

1. The swoon theory – Jesus merely fainted on the cross and remerged from the tomb three days later
2. The stolen-body hypothesis – Jesus' body was stolen from the tomb
3. The wrong-tomb hypothesis – Jesus' followers went to the wrong tomb
4. The hallucination hypothesis – Jesus' followers imagined their encounters
5. The twin hypothesis – Jesus had an identical twin

D. Interpreting the evidence – given the implausibility of the alternative explanations of this evidence, we have good reason to think that Jesus was physically resurrected, as the Bible claims.

V. The Gospel

A. The gospel as evidence for Christianity – Christianity is unique among all major world religions in affirming two truths of which we can be immediately aware through introspection: the depth of our sin and our need for a Savior. If we come to realize that these claims are true and that Christianity is unique in affirming them, then we have very good reason to think that Christianity is true

B. The uniqueness of the gospel

1. Buddhism teaches that our fundamental problem is suffering and that the solution is awakening
2. Hinduism teaches that our fundamental problem is the cycle of reincarnation and that the solution is following one of the three *yogas* or 'disciplines'
3. Islam teaches that our fundamental problem is pride and that the solution is submission
4. Judaism teaches that our fundamental problem is exile from God and that the solution is

return to God

5. Christianity teaches that our fundamental problem is sin and that the solution is salvation

6. Only Christianity teaches that we are radically sinful and require rescue

C. The doctrine of sin

1. Sin as transgression of God's law

2. Sin as slavery

D. The doctrine of salvation

1. Justification as release from sin's penalty

2. Regeneration as freedom from sin's power

VI. Defeaters

A. The nature of defeaters – a 'defeater' is a belief which, if true, entails that some other belief is false.

B. The problem of evil

1. Evil vs. atheism – if atheism is true, then objective moral evil cannot exist.

2. Theodicy and the problem of evil – several theodicies are available to explain how a perfectly good God can permit evil

a. Free will

b. Soul building

c. Interconnectedness of events

d. Skeptical theism

e. Felix Culpa

3. The gospel and the problem of evil – only Christianity claims that God absorbed the consequences of evil Himself

C. Evolution

1. Definition of evolution

a) change over time - species on Earth have changed over time

b) universal common descent - all species share a common ancestry

c) natural selection and random mutation - primary drivers of modern biodiversity

2. Christian views on evolution – compare and contrast young-earth creationism, old-earth creationism, intelligent design, and theistic evolution

3. Random mutation as the major point of contention

a. Philosophical objection – 'randomness' as philosophical interpretation, not empirical statement

b. Scientific objection – 'unguided' selection practically indistinguishable from 'guided' evolution

D. Divine hiddenness – a loving God would have provided more evidence for His existence than what we observe

1. Universality and accessibility – evidence for God's existence is everywhere

(Rom. 1, Ps. 8, Ps. 19, etc...) and is comprehensible even to children

2. Sin and evidence – lack of evidence is not the ultimate reason for our unbelief; sin is.

Even if God provided evidence to convince us intellectually of His existence with perfect certainty, our hearts would still be at war with God.