

Challenges to Christianity

Science vs. Faith

Course Description

If you were to ask your neighbor “what’s your biggest problem with Christianity?” what would she say? And how would you respond? This four-week class seeks to equip God’s people in responding to the major objections raised in opposition to the Christian faith. Specifically, we will address the following challenges: Science has disproven Christianity; the Bible is unreliable; all religions lead to God; and How can a good God allow suffering?

Discuss: If you were to ask your neighbor “what’s your biggest problem with Christianity?” what would they say?

The goal of this class: To help you respond thoughtfully, effectively and kindly to the major objections people raise in opposition to the Christian faith.

Apologetics

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” 1 Peter 3:15

The word apologetics comes from the Greek word *apologia*, which literally means “verbal defense” or “speaking in defense.” That’s more or less what we’re after-- defending the Christian faith when objections arise.

Things You Should Know Before We Begin

Have a conversation, not a fight.

Be thoughtful, not an expert.

Trust that God is already working.

John 16:7-8; 13: “But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment...But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth.”

Aim to move people one-step at a time.

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Responding to Objections:

Responding to an objection has 4 parts: Understand the challenge, Form a response, Be ready for action, and speak to be heard.

1. Understand the challenge

Perhaps the reason some people never become a Christian is because they have never heard an intelligent response to their question. But before we can even attempt an answer, we need to really understand the question our non-Christian friend is *actually* raising.

What exactly is my friend's objection?

This is a time to ask clarifying questions: what do you mean? Or can you explain that to me? Or why do you think that's true? Don't assume you know what their objection is.

The Burden of Proof

- The burden of proof is the responsibility of a person to defend his or her belief, opinion, or view.
- The burden of proof is always on the person who makes the claim.

Applying this rule in your conversations has several advantages:

1. It will help advance the conversation in fruitful directions, where you are more likely to arrive at the truth of the matter.
2. It shows an interest in how your friend thinks, showing that you value him as a person.
3. It helps you to understand the objection so that you can respond to it better.
4. It takes the pressure off you, because you're not taking on the responsibility of disproving every wild and ridiculous claim that your friend comes up with.

Take Mental Note of Significant Barriers

Emotional Barriers: Objections to faith are based on deep emotion. In this case you will need to do some work to address one's emotional concerns.

Intellectual Barriers: The objection to faith is based upon rational thinking. God and Christianity just doesn't make sense, it isn't reasonable, it just can't be true.

Cultural Barriers: The objection to faith stems from a particular way of viewing the world, someone's basic pre-suppositions.

2. Form a response

What questions are distractions to avoid?

Sometimes when we are trying to respond to a particular objection we get sidetracked by other questions that need not be answered.

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What possible responses are there?

This is where you may need a little help from outside sources. Start collecting a list of good resources.

How would you respond?

While there are many answers one could give to any particular objection, how would *you, personally*, go about responding to the objection in focus? What responses have helped *you* move from doubt to faith? A good place to start is, “I’ve wrestled through this question myself, and here’s what I’ve been thinking...”

3. Be ready for action

It’s one thing to go through answers to these questions in this class. It’s another thing to remember them on the street, or in the coffee shop or office. At this point you will need to memorize two or three of the possible responses, so that when you’re asked, you will be ready to speak.

4. Speak to be heard

Simply speaking doesn’t mean you’re communicating. No one wants a packaged answer. They want a kind and thoughtful response to a question they have.

Seek Understanding

2. When we are talking with our friends and colleagues we need to first and foremost make sure we are seeking understanding. No one wants to talk to someone pushing an agenda or an idea. But we are happy to talk to someone who listens and wants to know what we are thinking. So we should listen and ask questions to understand what our friends are thinking and what questions remain unanswered for them.

- Listen well, and reflect back what you’ve heard.
- Continue to ask clarifying questions: What do you believe? Why do you believe that?
- Note areas of common ground and agreement. Build from here.

Science vs. Religion

Group Activity: At work you overhear your colleague say, “I don’t believe in God, I believe in science.” How might you respond to their comment?

1. What questions are distractions to avoid?

- a. Is the Bible meant to be taken literally?
- b. How should we interpret the book of Genesis?
- c. Did mankind evolve from animals?
- d. Exactly how did God create the world?
- e. How old is the earth?

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2. What are some possible responses?

Claim: There is a contradiction between science and belief in God

Response:

- Ask: “Why can’t I believe in both science and God at the same time? Where is the contradiction?”
- Science is a way of investigating the physical world and how it operates. God is a spiritual being and therefore not physical, so science is not the right tool to investigate God, and science can’t properly conclude that it is not reasonable to believe in God.
- Science can provide clues to God’s existence. The beginning of the universe, the fine tuning of the universe for intelligent life, the complexity of life, the existence of mind and consciousness; these things cry out for an explanation beyond nature. Science is now more open to the existence of God than it has been for a very long time.

Claim: Science shows that miracles are impossible

Response:

- What kind of scientific experiment could show this?
- Science can only investigate phenomena that are the results of natural causes. Miracles have supernatural causes and therefore fall outside the realm of scientific investigation. Science is not able to tell us whether or not miracles can occur.
- You have to assume that a miracle has not occurred in order to apply the scientific method, so science can’t reach the conclusion that a miracle has not occurred without using circular reasoning.

Claim: Science explains everything about reality and so God is not necessary

Response:

- This claim assumes that only physical things are real. If even one thing that’s not physical exists, then science can’t explain *everything* about reality. If only physical things are real, this means that love, truth, knowledge, free will, moral virtue, purpose, meaning, and everything we consider important in life is an illusion. Try asking the person if their life has meaning, or if they believe their actions are free choices. If they say yes, remind them that these things are not physical, and so they can’t be explained by science, meaning that the objection is based on false assumptions.
- It is false that science explains everything about physical reality. Science provides explanations for how the world operates according to physical laws but it can’t explain why there is a universe in the first place, or why it is orderly and understandable and obeys these laws.

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Claim: Belief in God is a leap of faith and only science leads to knowledge

Response:

- The statement “only science leads to knowledge” can’t be known through science. This is self refuting, so must be false. We also know it is false because many of our most basic beliefs about reality can’t be known through science. For example, this false theory of knowledge implies that the principles of logic and mathematics can’t be known, and science itself would be impossible if that were the case.
- Biblical faith is active trust in God based on what we know about Him. It is not a “leap of faith.” Evidence plays an important role in the Christian faith. The apostles used the evidence of scripture and eyewitness testimony of Jesus’s resurrection to convince people that Christianity is true.
- There are good reasons to believe. These books are a good introduction:
 - On Guard - William Lane Craig
 - I Don’t Have Enough Faith To Be an Atheist - Norm Geisler and Frank Turek

Claim: Belief in God is not reasonable because scientists don’t believe in God.

So many prominent scientists have come out publically in support of atheism and unbelief, and the majority of scientists do not believe in God.

Response:

- Scientists who speak about God are speaking outside of their field. We shouldn’t give their opinions any special status or authority.
- To emphasize this point, some respected scientists have made ridiculous statements about God. For example: “The universe can create itself out of nothing and God is no longer necessary” –Stephen Hawking. How could the universe create itself before it existed to do the creating?
- Do most scientists not believe in God? Survey results show roughly equal numbers of those who believe in a God who personally communicates with humanity and those who do not.
- In most cases the scientists who do not believe in God already held this view before they became scientists, and so their belief is not grounded in scientific evidence.

Claim: Science has disproved the Bible

Response:

- Get them to give an example. What in the Bible has been disproved by science?
- Watch out for simplistic interpretations of the Bible. For example, taking poetic, symbolic, or otherwise figurative language to be a statement of scientific fact. Remember that the Bible is not a science textbook.
- Avoid discussing issues that are controversial within Christianity. Don’t set up your personal view as an entry requirement. Defend “mere Christianity,” the core doctrines and beliefs that lead us to eternal life in Christ. “Do you think it’s

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possible to understand the Bible in a way that is consistent with your view of science?” If it’s even possible, then their claim of a contradiction is defeated.

- Don’t try to make them believe in biblical inerrancy before they become Christians. That’s an unrealistic expectation. If Jesus really did rise from the dead, then a few inconsequential details about astronomy or biology aren’t really that important, are they? (Save those discussions for people who already believe in Christ)
- Many famous scientists were believers in God: Galileo, Isaac Newton, Johann Kepler, Blaise Pascal, Robert Boyle, Michael Faraday, James Joule

The Christian worldview, and its belief in a rational God who upholds the creation in a consistent way, is what spawned the scientific enterprise in the first place. The Christian worldview provides grounding for the assumptions that the universe is orderly, consistent, and understandable, which are required for science to work.

3. Which responses resonate with you?