

**Christianity on Trial**  
**TRYING THE CHRISTIAN CASE IN A COURT OF LAW.**

*Class 1: Introduction and the need for this series*

**The End Result: The end result of my case is that Christian theism provides the best explanation for the world as we know it: for the fine-tuning of the universe, for the existence of human life, for creation, for the existence of truth and morality, for the existence of the Gospels, for the spread of a fringe religion called Christianity, for the resurrection, and for the problem of evil. Christianity provides comprehensive and complete answers to all of these issues. No other worldview comes close.**

**I.**  
**OUTLINE**

Class 1: Questions of faith and the need for this series

Class 2: Opening statement- What the evidence will show

Class 3: Reasonable belief- Evidence for a beginning, and a beginner

Class 4: Reasonable belief- The fine tuning of the universe

Class 5: The moral law 1- There is a moral law, and every law has a lawgiver

Class 6: The moral law 2- There is a moral law, and every law has a lawgiver

Class 7: Evidence for the Reliability of the Gospels- The Gospels as historical documents.

Class 8: Evidence for the Reliability of the Gospels- preservation and corroboration

Class 9: The Resurrection as historical fact

Class 10: Objection! What about all the evil in the world?

Class 11: Objection! Did God commit genocide and slavery in the OT?

Class 12: Closing- Tactics on discussing, sharing, and presenting evidence.

**II.**  
**WHY DEFEND?**

**A. It is commanded of us: 1 Pet. 3:15**

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.

“Made a defense” = Apologia = legal defense.

**B. It can be helpful in sharing**

Look at Paul in Acts 17:16-33. A roadmap of how to defend your faith in a secular world

- He is “reasoning” with Jews, Greeks, and anyone who happened to be there
- He unflinchingly takes on Epicurean and Stoic philosophers
- He even quotes a secular poet!
- Do you see mention of Abraham, line of King David, Isaiah’s prophecies? Why not?

**C. The cultural milieu**

“milieu” = social environment, backdrop, setting, context

The gospel is always heard against the cultural backdrop.

Internet. Social Media. Easy to lob stuff out there. If we get enough attacks we can go into our shell without even realizing it. Timidity abounds.

**Apologetics can shape this backdrop.** That answers the objection “no one comes to Christ through arguments.”

For the value of apologetics extends far beyond one’s immediate evangelistic contact. It is the broader task to help create and sustain a cultural backdrop in which the gospel can be heard as an intellectually viable option. *William Lane Craig*.

**Our children face an ever-more-hostile cultural backdrop. How can we equip them?**

**D. Building up the church**

- Each time this church has gone through a class like this, people have come away encouraged.
- Boldness for Christ: put ourselves in situations for Christ that may have been intimidating in the past.
- Nothing inspires confidence and boldness more than knowing that one has good reasons for what one believes and good answers to the typical questions and objections that an unbeliever may raise.
- Paul: For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ. 2 Cor 10:4 - 5.

**E. Balance**

"I confess that I do not believe that one human brain is capable of answering every objection that another human brain could raise against the most obvious truth in the world." – *Charles Spurgeon*

Apologetics is the seasoning, the Gospel is the main course. You do not want too much of the seasoning or it will make the main course insipid. Apologetics does not dominate our message; it undergirds our message. Argument doesn't save people, but it certainly clears the obstacles so they can take a direct look at the Cross. Support the argument justifiably, but recognize it is Jesus Christ who you need to lift up, and it is the Holy Spirit who brings about change within the human heart. An argument may remove doubt, but only the Holy Spirit can convict of truth.  
-- *Ravi Zacharias*

We are free of all having to become experts. God calls, he justifies, he saves.

The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of. –*Blaise Pascal*

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*Class 3: Creation, Science, and the Cosmological Argument*

**I.**

**THE COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT**

Premise 1: Everything that begins to exist, had a cause.  
Premise 2: The universe began to exist (had a beginning).  
Therefore, The universe has cause.

**Premise 1: Everything that begins to exist, had a cause**

- Aristotle and the oldest law of causation
- Do things pop into existence all the time? Do we see that very often?

**Premise 2: The universe began to exist (had a beginning).**

Second law of thermodynamics  
Universe is expanding  
Radiation from the Big Bang  
Great galaxy seeds  
Einstein's theory of relativity

**Therefore, The universe has cause.**

Jastrow (agnostic)

"Now we see how the astronomical evidence supports the Biblical view of the origin of the world. The details differ, but the essential elements in the astronomical and Biblical accounts of Genesis are the same: the chain of events leading to man commenced suddenly and sharply at a definite moment in time, in a flash of light and energy."

Christians have an answer for both the "how" and the "why." The First Cause- God.

A questions everyone has to answer: *If there is no God, why is there something, rather than nothing??*

**II.**

**ARGUMENT FROM INFINITY**

Defeats the steady-state theory.

If the universe has always existed, then today would be impossible  
if the universe has always existed, then we are talking about infinity in the past, and infinity in the future.

If there were an infinite number of days behind us, then today never would have come!

Think of trying to count to infinity. You can't. There's always one more. How about trying to count backwards from today, if the universe has an infinite past? You can't.

### III.

#### **PRINCIPLE: NATURE TENDS TOWARDS DISORDER, NOT ORDER**

Drop letters from upstairs to downstairs, will it spell "Take out the garbage -mom?"

The atheist will say, well, we need more time and chance for that to happen- given unlimited time and chance it could happen. Ok then, let's drop them from a tall building. A plane. What happens? *They spread out even further, because **nature, left alone, tends towards disorder, not order.***

So, why and how would those letter organize themselves into an encyclopedia (like DNA)?

Given unlimited time and chance, nature gives us the Grand Canyon, not Mount Rushmore.

Jastrow (agnostic): "For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountain of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries."

### IV.

#### **SOURCES**

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG, *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision* (David C. Cook 2010)

FRANK TUREK AND NORMAN L. GEISLER, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist* (Crossway 2004).

<https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/existence-nature-of-god/the-kalam-cosmological-argument/>

## Christianity on Trial

### TRYING THE CHRISTIAN CASE IN A COURT OF LAW.

*Class 11: Is God a Moral Monster: Slavery and Genocide in the Bible?*

#### I.

### SLAVERY<sup>1</sup>

When we Americans read slavery, we think of the slavery that is in our cultural DNA. Thus, Sam Harris says: "While slaves are human beings who are capable of suffering and happiness, the Old Testament regards them as "farm equipment," which is "patently evil.""

This is, unfortunately, distortion and terrible misrepresentation.

God actually chose an enslaved people to be his chosen nation. God liberated slaves!

#### **A. Slavery in the Old Testament**

##### 1. Hebrew debt-servanthood

- is more fairly compared to apprentice-like positions to pay off debts
- much like the indentured servitude during America's founding. People would work for about seven years to pay off the debt for their passage to the New World; then they went free.
- like a live-in employee, temporarily embedded within the employer's household until terms of the contract were completed.
- contractual arrangement to be fulfilled

##### 2. Mechanics

- financial disaster tended to come to families, not individuals
- they could sell themselves or a child into servanthood, which would last 6 years
- any family land mortgaged until the year of Jubilee- 50 years

##### 3. Differences with our understanding

- Not imposed by an outsider—as in the pre-war South.
- Indentured servants could even be "hired from year to year" and weren't to be "rule[d] over . . . ruthlessly" (Lev 25:53–54).
- they were full members of society

##### 4. Three remarkable provisions in Israel

***Anti-Harm:*** When an employer ("master") accidentally gouged out the eye or knocked out the tooth of his male or female servant/employee, she was to go free. No bodily abuse of servants was permitted. If an employer's disciplining his servant resulted in immediate death, that employer ("master") himself was to be put to death for murder (Exod 21:20)— Not so in other Ancient Near East cultures.

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<sup>1</sup> Most of this material is drawn from *Paul Copan- Does the Old Testament Endorse Slavery?*

**Anti-Kidnapping:** condemnation of kidnapping a person to sell as a slave—an act punishable by death: "He who kidnaps a man, whether he sells him or he is found in his possession, shall surely be put to death" (Exod 21:16 NASB; cf. Deut 24:7). By contrast, of course, kidnapping is how slavery in the antebellum South got off the ground.

**Anti-Return:** Israel as a safe haven for slaves around the world, due to the fact that escaped slaves would not be sent back and would not be mistreated and would not be second-class citizens. (Deut 23:15–16)

From this, we conclude two things: (1) this slavery was very different than the American South; (2) Israel's treatment of servants unparalleled in the Ancient Near East.

## **B. Slavery in the New Testament**

**Key point:** the NT is revolutionary when it comes to slavery. Are all "one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28 NASB; cf. Col 3:11)

In the first century, a very large percentage of Rome's population consisted of slaves with both lowly and prestigious positions.

### 1. Slaves as persons

- Some critics claim, "Jesus never said anything about the wrongness of slavery."
- Not so! In his "mission manifesto," He explicitly opposed every form of oppression; after all, he came "to proclaim release to the captives . . . to set free those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18 NASB;

### 2. Paul

- In fact, Paul gives "household rules" in Ephesians 6 and Colossians 4 not only for Christian slaves but for Christian masters as well.
- Commentator Peter O'Brien points out that "Paul's cryptic exhortation is outrageous" for his day.
- Paul's ministry illustrates how in Christ there is neither slave nor free, greeting people in his epistles by name. Most of these individuals had commonly used slave and freedman names. For example, in Rom 16:7 and 9 he refers to Andronicus and Urbanus (common slave names) as kinsman, fellow prisoner, and fellow worker. The New Testament's approach to slavery is utterly contrary to that of aristocrats and philosophers like Aristotle, who held that certain humans were slaves by nature.
- Paul called on human masters to grant "justice and fairness" to their slaves (Col 4:1 NASB).
- clear that spiritual status was more important than social status

### 3. Other NT admonitions against slavery

- the repudiation of slave trading (1 Tim 1:9–10);
- the affirmation of the full human dignity and equal spiritual status of slaves;
- the encouragement for slaves to acquire their freedom whenever it is possible (1 Cor 7:20–22);

- the revolutionary Christian affirmations (e.g., Gal 3:28) which, if taken seriously, would help to tear apart the fabric of the institution of slavery; indeed, this is precisely what took full effect several centuries later—namely, the eventual eradication of slavery in Europe;
- and the condemnation of treating humans as cargo (Rev 18:11–13, where doomed Babylon—the "city" of God-opposers—stands condemned because she had treated humans as "cargo," having trafficked in "slaves [literally 'bodies'] and human lives," NASB).

#### 4. Undermining slavery

- A direct undermine would have been foolhardy.
- A slave uprising would do the gospel a disservice—and prove a direct threat to an oppressive Roman establishment (e.g., "Masters, release your slaves!" or "Slaves, throw off your chains!"). Rome would quash flagrant opposition with speedy, lethal force.

#### 5. Indirect approach

- On the other hand, early Christians undermined slavery indirectly, rejecting many common Greco-Roman assumptions about it (e.g., Aristotle's) and acknowledging the intrinsic, equal worth of slaves.
- Like yeast, such Christlike living can have a gradual leavening effect on society so that oppressive institutions like slavery could finally fall away.

#### 6. Philemon- a step backward?

No. Gaps:

- we only hear Paul's voice
- what was the relation to Philemon?
- what debt was owed to Paul?
- Had Onesimus wrong Philemon?

It's been plausibly suggested that Onesimus and Philemon were estranged Christian (perhaps biological) brothers. Paul exhorted Philemon not to receive Onesimus as a slave (whose status in Roman society meant alienation and dishonor); rather, Onesimus was to be welcomed as a beloved brother: "that you might have him back for good—no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord" (Phlm 1:15–16 NIV, my emphasis).

### Conclusion

Slavery not abolished but made utterly irrelevant!

All the structures that separated Jew and Greek, male and female, slave and free were radically overturned by these Christians sharing a common meal together to celebrate the Lord's death (cf. 1 Cor 11:17–34). Indeed, this was a defiant, countercultural act against Rome's embedded social structures—a far cry from the critics' "passive resignation" argument ("Paul didn't speak out against slavery but accepted it").

**That's a social revolution!**



## II. GENOCIDE?

### The Command. Dt. 20:16 - 18:

But in the cities of these peoples that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall devote them to complete destruction, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the Lord your God has commanded, that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the Lord your God.

### The action.

Joshua records the carrying out of this command at Jericho: "they devoted the city to the LORD and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it—men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys" (6:21 NIV).

Several chapters later, we read that throughout the region Joshua "left no survivors. He totally destroyed all who breathed, just as the LORD, the God of Israel, had commanded" (10:40).

The text mentions city after city where Joshua, at God's command, puts every inhabitant "to the sword," "totally destroyed everyone," and "left no survivors" (chi 10 and 11).

This leads to atheists accusing God of genocide, and moral monstrosity.

### A. LITERAL VIEW<sup>2</sup>

Proponents of this view see it in terms of judgment. Not morality, conquest, rules of war, but judgment.

1. Canaanites were a nasty bunch.
  - a. Dt. and Lv. note that they were "wicked" and "defiled".
  - b. The culture was grossly immoral:
    - Debauchery came from their fertility religion that tied eroticism of all varieties to agrarian cycles of planting and harvest.
    - Divination, witchcraft, and female and male temple sex.
    - "Adultery, homosexuality, transvestitism, pederasty (men sexually abusing boys), sex with all sorts of beasts, and incest."
  - c. Sodom: note that after the Canaanite city Sodom was destroyed, Lot's daughters immediately seduced their drunken father, imitating one of the sexual practices of the city just annihilated.
2. Child sacrifice
  - a. Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech" (Lev. 18:21 NIV):

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<sup>2</sup> *This handout explores two views: Literal and Non-Literal. It is not an endorsement for either, but is simply informational. You must make up your own mind. The handout will happen to spend more time on the non-literal because it needs more explanation.*

- Molech was a Canaanite underworld deity represented as an upright, bull-headed idol with human body in whose belly a fire was stoked and in whose outstretched arms a child was placed that would be burned to death...And it was not just infants; children as old as four were sacrificed.”

Archaeological evidence indicates that the children thus burned to death sometimes numbered in the thousands.

### 3. Judgment

- God cared only about sin.
- This was capital punishment on a national scale, for hundreds of years of idolatry and unthinkable debauchery.
- Indeed, God brought the same sentence of destruction on His own people when they sinned in like manner.

### 4. Prevention

- God’s rescue plan to save mankind depended on the theological purity of Abraham’s seed,
- Israel. The cancer of idolatry needed to be cut out for the patient—God’s plan of redemption—to survive.
- Coexistence with pagan religions would have corrupted Israel’s theological core. By purging the land of this evil, God ensured that redemption—forgiveness for the evils of any nation—would be available in the future for people of every nation

## B. NON-LITERAL VIEW

Espoused by some Christian apologists; this study comes from apologist/author Matthew Flanagan and Dr. Richard Harris of Biola University.

### 1. Note on non-literal:

a. If we take everything in Scripture to be literally true, then:

- Trees sing. (1 Chr 16:33; Ps 96:12),
- Christ is a door. (Jn 10:7),
- God flies in the sky on Cherubs. (2 Sam 22:11),
- Elihu’s heart jumped out of his chest. (Job 37:1).

b. Proponents of this view hold that these passages must be read in context and compared to the literature of the day.

2. Old non-literal view: Holds that the passages are hyperbole: This response goes back to the patristic era (early church). They commonly held that this was hyperbolic. Should understand it more like-

- "Knock his block off!

- Hand him his head!
- Take him out!"
- "annihilate the Patriots"
- "totally slaughter the Dallas Cowboys."

### 3. Modern non-literal view

Based on textual analysis, original language, comparison to other ancient literature.

#### Joshua v. Judges

1. Joshua states that Joshua conquered the whole land:
  - repeatedly the text states that Joshua left "no survivors" and "destroyed everything that breathed" in "the entire land" and "put all the inhabitants to the sword."
  - cities include Hebron, Debir, the hill country, the Negev, and the western foothills (Josh 10:38,40).
  - Likewise, Josh 11:23 states that "Joshua took the entire land" and then "gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions" (NIV).
2. And yet Judges states that much of the land was unconquered:
  - ch. 1 we are told that the Canaanites lived in the Negev, the hill country, the western foothills, Hebron, and Debir (1:9–11).
  - they were there in such numbers and strength that they had to be driven out by force.
  - These are the same cities that Joshua 10 tells us Joshua had annihilated, leaving no survivors.

Therefore, taken as a single narrative and taken literally, Joshua 1–11 gives a seemingly different account of events to that narrated by Judges and also to that narrated by the later chapters of Joshua itself.

#### Type of literature

1. Clues:
  - The early chapters of Judges read like "down-to-earth history."
  - Joshua has "certain stylistic renderings"—"formulaic phrasings" and "formulaic convention[s]" as well as "the highly ritualized character of some of the major events described"
2. Stylistic Phrasing:
  - "edge of the sword" gets repeated, seven times in close succession in chapter 10, two more times in chapter 11, and several times in other chapters. The repetition makes it unmistakable that we are dealing here with a formulaic literary convention.
  - "From man to woman" means generally go kill, not necessarily women as well. If they were there, they were probably killed. But it is not a command to seek them out.

- “City” means population center. The same word for city is also used for village (Bethlehem) and even a tent encampment. When used in 2 Samuel, it refers to the fort in Jerusalem, the citadel, not the whole town.
- Flanagan: "Thus Joshua itself appears to be full of ritualistic, stylized, formulaic language. It therefore looks like something other than a mere literal description of what occurred. In light of these facts Wolterstorff argues that Judges should be taken literally whereas Joshua is hagiographic history, a highly stylized account of the events designed to teach theological and moral points rather than to describe in detail what literally happened."

### Compared to other Ancient Near East Conquests

1. Very similar to writing about conquests in Egyptian, Hittite, Akkadian, Moabite, and Aramaic texts.
2. Those accounts are "highly figurative" and narrate military events very similarly.

Example:

- 1500 BC: Tuthmosis III: "the numerous armies of Mitanni, was overthrown within the hour, annihilated totally, like those (now) non-existent"
  - but we know in fact, the forces of Mitanni lived to fight many another day, in the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries.
- 840/830 BC: Mesha king of Moab: "Israel has utterly perished for always"—a rather premature judgment at that date, by over a century!
- Such studies show
  - (1) such accounts are highly hyperbolic, hagiographic, and figurative, and follow a common transmission code;
  - (2) part of this transmission code is to portray a victory hyperbolically in absolute terms of totally destroying the enemy or in terms of miraculous divine intervention: "such statements are rhetoric indicative of military victory," not necessarily literal descriptions of what occurred.
- It is in this frame of reference that the Joshua rhetoric must also be understood.

**Implication:** When we understand it this way, "killing everyone that breathed" is this:

Israel scored a decisive victory. Joshua did not conquer all the cities in the land nor did he slaughter all the inhabitants in the cities he did conquer. The book of Joshua does not say that he did.

# DEFENDING THE GOSPELS

## INTRODUCTION

We can learn two lessons from trials in the American court system:

1. The evidence can be aligned to point in more than one direction
2. We align the evidence, knowingly or unknowingly, to fit our preconceptions and biases (paradigm)

One skeptic-turned-believer states: "I had read enough philosophy and history to find support for my skepticism-- a fact here, a scientific theory there, a pithy quote, a clever argument."

- Believers: have we read any? are we ready to contend with even the most basic arguments?

*Support for defending the faith*

*1 Cor 1:18 - 31*

*2 Cor 10:4 - 5*

*Acts 17:16 - 34*

## EXAMINING THE RECORD

"synoptic"- to view at the same time. Mathew, Mark, and Luke are called the synoptic gospels because of their similar outline and relationship

**Motive regarding authorship:** no reason to lie about who wrote the synoptic gospels.

- Mark and Luke weren't even among the 12 disciples. Matthew was a former hated tax collector.
- contrast to the fanciful apocryphal gospels later, who chose well-known and exemplary figures to be their fictitious authors

**Historical acknowledgement of Authorship:**

- Papias, 125 A.D.:
  - specifically affirmed that Mark had recorded Peter's observations. Mark "made no mistake" and "did not include any false statement"
  - said that Matthew had preserved the teachings of Jesus as well
- Irenaeus, 180 A.D.:
  - "Matthew published his own Gospel among the Hebrews in their own tongue" when Peter and Paul were in Rome
  - "Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, himself handed down to us in writing the substance of Peter's preaching."
  - "Luke, the follower of Paul, set down in a book the Gospel preached by his teacher."
  - "Then John. . . produced his Gospel while he was living in Ephesus in Asia."

### **Motive regarding content:**

- written with obvious care and exactitude, with incidental details. Does not contain the outlandish flourishes and blatant mythologizing in other ancient writings
- contain “embarrassing” details
  - Jesus at one point did not have the power to perform miracles because of a lack of faith by the people
- Contradictions
  - There’s enough of a discrepancy to show that there could have been no previous concert among them; and at the same time such substantial agreement as to show that they were all independent narrators of the same great transaction

### **Style:**

- ancient writers did not write chronologically, and did not give equal weight to all periods of a person’s life (birth, life, death).
- Ancient Greek and Hebrew didn’t even have a symbol for quotation marks
- In the ancient world the idea of writing a dispassionate, objective history merely to chronicle events, with no ideological purpose, was unheard of
  - thus, if we can reasonably reconstruct history from other ancient sources, we should be able to do so from the gospels
- theologically, the crucifixion is important, hence the focus on the events leading up to that

### **The difference of John:**

- old assumption was that John had the other three, and chose to write his gospel as a supplement to their material
- now it is assumed that John was largely independent of the other three, hence the different choices of material and different perspectives on Jesus
- For almost every major theme or distinctive in John, you can find parallels in the other three

### **Dating of the Gospels:**

- standard scholarly dating:
  - Mark in the 70s, Matthew and Luke in the 80s, John in the 90s
  - still within the lifetimes of eyewitnesses, including hostile witnesses who could correct or contradict
- comparison to Alexander the Great
  - Arrian and Plutarch’s biographies were more than 400 years later, yet historians consider them to be generally trustworthy
- early option
  - Acts cuts off early, before Paul’s death, thus cannot be written later than AD 62
  - Acts is the second of a two-part work, of which Luke is the first
  - Luke incorporates parts of Mark’s gospel, meaning Mark is earlier
  - puts Mark at AD 60 at the latest--an ancient “news flash”

- a good case can be made for Christian belief in the Resurrection, though not written down, less than two years from the event.
  - Creed in 1 Cor 15. If the Crucifixion was AD 30, Paul's conversion was in 32. Three years in Damascus. His first meeting with the apostles would be AD 35. At some point in there, Paul was given this creed, which had already been formulated and was being used by the early church.

### Ability to get it right

- oral culture
- Jewish rabbis became famous for having the entire OT memorized, so it is well within the disciples capability to commit a ton to memory and pass it on accurately
- how come this isn't like the game "telephone?": when you're carefully memorizing something and taking care not to pass it along until you're sure you've got it right, you're doing something very different than playing the game of telephone
  - to analogize it to Jesus culture and time, it would be like every third person being able to go back to the first person and say "do I still have it right?"

### Credibility

- No gain. The disciples had nothing to gain except criticism, ostracism, and martyrdom. No financial gain. But they proclaimed what they saw, even when it meant suffering and death
- Adverse witnesses. People existed at the time who could have discredited the movement. They had an option to tell history better.
  - but later Jewish writings called Jesus a sorcerer who led Israel astray--which acknowledges that he really did work wonders
  - no one said, "we're here to tell you he did not do these things."

## PRESERVATION AND CORROBORATION

**The new testament is in a class of its own when compared to the preservation of other ancient literature.**

- Tacitus, *Annals of Imperial Rome*: Long gap between the time Tacitus sought his information and wrote it down and the only existing copies. It was written in AD 116. His first six books exist only in one manuscript, copied about AD 850. Books 11 - 17 are in another manuscript from the 11th century. Books 7 - 10 are lost.
- Josephus, *The Jewish War*: 9 existing Greek manuscripts, copied in the 10 - 12th centuries. One Latin translation from the 4th century
- New Testament. **More than 5,000 manuscripts have been catalogued.** "Embarrassing" when compared to other ancient works
  - Second to the NT is Homer's *Iliad*, of which 650 manuscripts exist. Even these, though, are fragmented, and come from the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD...and the original work was from 800 BC. . . . quite a lengthy gap

- “There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament.” F.F. Bruce.
- “In no other case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest manuscripts so short as in that of the New Testament.” Sir Frederic Kenyon.

| Author                                                                   | Date Written | Earliest Copy | Time Span       | Copies |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|--------|
| <b>Secular Manuscripts:</b>                                              |              |               |                 |        |
| Herodotus (History)                                                      | 480 - 425 BC | 900 AD        | 1,300 years     | 8      |
| Thucydides (History)                                                     | 460 - 400 BC | 900 AD        | 1,300 years     | ?      |
| Aristotle (Philosopher)                                                  | 384 - 322 BC | 1,100 AD      | 1,400 years     | 5      |
| Caesar (History)                                                         | 100 - 44 BC  | 900 AD        | 1,000 years     | 10     |
| Pliny (History)                                                          | 61 - 113 AD  | 850 AD        | 750 years       | 7      |
| Suetonius (Roman History)                                                | 70 - 140 AD  | 950 AD        | 800 years       | ?      |
| Tacitus (Greek History)                                                  | 100 AD       | 1,100 AD      | 1,000 years     | 20     |
| <b>Biblical Manuscripts:</b><br>(note: these are individual manuscripts) |              |               |                 |        |
| Magdalene Ms (Matthew 26)                                                | 1st century  | 50-60 AD      | co-existant (?) |        |
| John Rylands (John)                                                      | 90 AD        | 130 AD        | 40 years        |        |
| Bodmer Papyrus II (John)                                                 | 90 AD        | 150-200 AD    | 60-110 years    |        |
| Chester Beatty Papyri (N.T.)                                             | 1st century  | 200 AD        | 150 years       |        |
| Diatessaron by Tatian (Gospels)                                          | 1st century  | 200 AD        | 150 years       |        |
| Codex Vaticanus (Bible)                                                  | 1st century  | 325-350 AD    | 275-300 years   |        |
| Codex Sinaiticus (Bible)                                                 | 1st century  | 350 AD        | 300 years       |        |
| Codex Alexandrinus (Bible)                                               | 1st century  | 400 AD        | 350 years       |        |

\*Total New Testament manuscripts = 5,300 Greek; MSS, 10,000; Latin Vulgates, 9,300 others =



24,000 copies

### Compiling the New Testament

- The NT books became canonical because no one could stop them from doing so. Like the analogy, “the most traveled roads in Europe are the best roads; that’s why they’re do heavily traveled.”
- **Criteria used**
  1. Apostolic authority. they must have been written either by the apostles themselves, or by followers of the apostles. If a writing was clearly by an apostle, then it was definitely regarded as authoritative and certainly to be included in the canon.
    - a. Mark was a helper of Peter
      - Luke an associate of Paul
      - for this reason, James and Jude encountered some hesitation
  2. Antiquity. It had to belong to the apostolic age.
  3. Orthodoxy. Simply, conformity to the rule of faith. Was the document congruent with the basic Christian tradition that the Church recognized as normative?
  4. Continuous acceptance. Did the document have continuous acceptance and usage by the church at large?
  5. Inspiration.

### Corroboration

#### Josephus

- *The Antiquities*: “He convened a meeting of the Sanhedrin and brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus, who was called the Christ, and certain others. He accused them of having transgressed the law and delivered them up to be stoned.”
- *Testimonium Flavium*. Contains a longer passage about Jesus that has been tampered with, but still corroborates Jesus’ life

**Tacitus**. In AD 115 he explicitly states that Nero persecuted the Christians as scapegoats to divert suspicion away from himself for the great fire of Rome in AD 64..

**Pliny the Younger**. Also corroborates that Christians existed and would not deny their faith in the face of torture and execution in AD 111.

**Phlegon**. Greek author corroborates that the earth had “the greatest eclipse of the sun” and the “it became night in the sixth hour of the day so that even the stars appeared in the heavens.” Also notes an earthquake. All this occurred “in the fourth year after the 202nd Olympiad (i.e., 33 AD)”

**Jewish Rabbinical writings**. Though mentioning Jesus only sparingly, confirm that he was a healer and miracle worker (though attributing those deeds to sorcery), that he had disciples, and that they though he was a “heretic” or a “deceiver.”

## Archaeology

- Archaeology has not produced anything that is unequivocally a contradiction to the Bible
- Luke's references to thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities, and nine islands have been examined and not a single mistake found

## Rebuttal--Refuting the Jesus Seminar

- **Flawed Criteria.** Their assumptions and premises are skewed to achieve the results they want. In other words, the results are predetermined. All assumptions are rooted in their suspicion of the gospels, which comes from their assumption that the supernatural cannot occur.
  - they rule out supernatural explanations from the beginning (this is not historical but metaphysical)
  - they assume that the later church put sayings into the mouth of Jesus unless they have good evidence to think otherwise
  - double dissimilarity. They will believe Jesus said something if it doesn't look like something a rabbi or later church would say. With Jesus being Jewish and founding the Christian church, there's not going to be a whole lot of saying that can pass this.
  - multiple attestation. we can only be sure Jesus said something if it's found in more than one source. And Matthew, Mark, and Luke don't count because they're too similar.
    - obvious problem is that this is not applied to ancient history-- most of ancient history is based on only one source writing.
- **"Secret Mark."** "a nonexistent work cited by a now nonexistent text by a late second-century writer who's known for being naive about these things. There is no credibility to this "Secret Mark."
- **Gospel of Thomas.** written mid second-century and influenced by Gnosticism (a heresy that salvation is by what you knew--*gnosis* is Greek for "know").
  - "There is no good reason for preferring the second-century Gospel of Thomas to the first-century gospels of the NT."

## THE MURATORIAN FRAGMENT

The numbers indicate the lines of the original Latin text which suffered from being copied by one or more barely literate scribes. Translational expansions are enclosed in square brackets. Alternative translations are enclosed in parentheses.

- (1) . . . at which nevertheless he was present, and so he placed [them in his narrative].
- (2) The third book of the Gospel is that according to Luke.
- (3) Luke, the well-known physician, after the ascension of Christ,
- (4-5) when Paul had taken him with him as one zealous for the law,
- (6) composed it in his own name, according to [the general] belief. Yet he himself had not
- (7) seen the Lord in the flesh; and therefore, as he was able to ascertain events,
- (8) so indeed he begins to tell the story from the birth of John.
- (9) The fourth of the Gospels is that of John, [one] of the disciples.
- (10) To his fellow disciples and bishops, who had been urging him [to write],
- (11) he said, 'Fast with me from today for three days, and what
- (12) will be revealed to each one,
- (13) let us tell it to one another.' In the same night it was revealed
- (14) to Andrew, [one] of the apostles,
- (15-16) that John should write down all things in his own name while all of them should review it. And so, though various
- (17) elements may be taught in the individual books of the Gospels,
- (18-19) nevertheless this makes no difference to the faith of the believers, since by the one sovereign Spirit all things
- (20) have been declared in all [the Gospels]: concerning the
- (21) nativity, concerning the passion, concerning the resurrection,
- (22) concerning life with his disciples,
- (23) and concerning his twofold coming;
- (24) the first in lowliness when he was despised, which has taken place,
- (25) the second glorious 'n royal power,
- (26) which is still in the future. What
- (27) marvel is it, then, if John so consistently
- (28) mentions these particular points also in his Epistles,
- (29) saying about himself: 'What we have seen with our eyes
- (30) and heard with our ears and our hands
- (31) have handled, these things we have written to you'?
- (32) For in this way he professes [himself] to be not only an eye-witness and hearer,
- (33) but also a writer of all the marvelous deeds of the Lord, in their order.
- (34) Moreover, the Acts of all the apostles
- (35) were written in one book. For 'most excellent Theophilus' Luke compiled
- (36) the individual events that took place in his presence --
- (37) as he plainly shows by omitting the martyrdom of Peter
- (38) as well as the departure of Paul from the city [of Rome]
- (39) when he journeyed to Spain. As for the Epistles of

(40-41) Paul, they themselves make clear to those desiring to understand, which ones [they are], from what place, or for what reason they were sent.

(42) First of all, to the Corinthians, prohibiting their heretical schisms;

(43) next, to the Galatians, against circumcision;

(44-46) then to the Romans he wrote at length, explaining the order (or, plan) of the Scriptures, and also that Christ is their principle (or, main theme). It is necessary

(47) for us to discuss these one by one, since the blessed

(48) apostle Paul himself, following the example of his predecessor

(49-50) John, writes by name to only seven churches in the following sequence: to the Corinthians

(51) first, to the Ephesians second, to the Philippians third,

(52) to the Colossians fourth, to the Galatians fifth,

(53) to the Thessalonians sixth, to the Romans

(54-55) seventh. It is true that he writes once more to the Corinthians and to the Thessalonians for the sake of admonition,

(56-57) yet it is clearly recognizable that there is one Church spread throughout the whole extent of the earth. For John also in the

(58) Apocalypse, though he writes to seven churches,

(59-61) nevertheless speaks to all. [Paul also wrote] out of affection and love, one to Philemon, one to Titus, and two to Timothy; and these are held sacred

(62-63) in the esteem of the Church catholic for the regulation of ecclesiastical discipline. There is current also [an epistle] to

(64) the Laodiceans, [and] another to the Alexandrians, [both] forged in Paul's

(65) name to [further] the heresy of Marcion, and several others

(66) which cannot be received into the catholic church

(67) -- for it is not fitting that gall be mixed with honey.

(68-69) Moreover, the Epistle of Jude and two of the above-mentioned (or, bearing the name of) John are counted (or, used) in the catholic [Church]; and [the book of] Wisdom,

(70) written by the friends of Solomon in his honor.

(71) We receive only the Apocalypses of John and Peter,

(72) though some of us are not willing that the latter be read in church.

(73) But Hermas wrote the Shepherd

(74) very recently, in our times, in the city of Rome,

(75) while bishop Pius, his brother was occupying the [episcopal] chair

(76) of the church of the city of Rome.

(77) And therefore it ought indeed to be read; but

(78) it cannot be read publicly to the people in church either among

(79) the prophets, whose number is complete, or among

(80) the apostles, for it is after [their] time.

(81) But we accept nothing whatever of Arsinous or Valentinus or Miltiades,

(82) who also composed

(83) a new book of psalms for Marcion,

(84-85) together with Basilides, the Asian founder of the Cataphrygians . . .

## The Problem of Evil and Suffering in Light of a Good and Holy God<sup>1</sup>

**Introduction.** The problem of evil and suffering is the number one objection to faith in God. It is probably the most powerful objection because of the emotions it invokes. For this reason it is especially damaging when left uncontested. It is in the face of this withering challenge, however, that Christianity shows itself especially tenacious under fire, and completely adequate to speak to the problems of life. Indeed, the answers of the Christian to this problem are far more compelling than the answers of any other religion. I hope you find the below notes helpful to engage others in meaningful discussions, helpful to your own heart when it struggles with suffering, and, in all things, to point to Jesus as the answer and make him ever more glorious in your eyes.<sup>2,3</sup>

### I. OFFENSIVE

**1. Problem of Evil.** This is not just a problem for Christians. It is for everyone to answer. How does your worldview account for the problem of evil?

**2. Problem of Good.** Atheists have to deal not only with the problem of evil, but also with the problem of good. If this world is just a cosmic accident, just atoms running into each other, then where did good come from? How do we get beauty, laughter, love, sacrifice, courage?

**3. You have to assume God exists to even ask the question.**

Raising the problem of evil assumes two things inconsistent with secular humanism/naturalism: (1) objective good; and (2) the intrinsic worth of human beings.

**(1) Objective good.** Using standards of good to judge evil--saying that this horrible suffering isn't what it ought to be--means that they have a notion of what ought to be. When you assume there is good, you assume there is such a thing as a moral law by which we can differentiate good and evil. You can't have a moral law without a moral lawgiver. God. Thus you must assume God exists to even be outraged at evil.

**(2) Intrinsic worth of humans beings.** To express outrage at evil and suffering, you must also assume the intrinsic worth of human beings. Under secular humanism/naturalism, we have no worth. British philosopher and atheist Bertrand Russel said it best, "...all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system..." Under this view, we are just advanced members of the animal kingdom, evolved from some prehistoric slime. How can there be any outrage if one animal kills another animal? Thus, You must assume humans have some intrinsic worth for evil and suffering to even be a problem.

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<sup>1</sup> Lesson at Eastridge Church of Christ by Curt Covington (3/23/14)

<sup>2</sup> This is not a guide on walking with someone through personal tragedy. This is a guide to addressing intellectual and emotional objections to Christianity based on the existence of evil and suffering. In all things be "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." 1 Peter 3:15.

<sup>3</sup> Though I have compiled this outline as a result of my study, none of the material is my own. The most helpful resources have come from work of William Lane Craig, Ravi Zacharias, Gregory Koukl, John Piper, Jonathan Edwards, and John Stott.

These two assumptions are incompatible with atheism, secular humanism, and naturalism.

**4. Problem of God.** Grant that evil exists. Does the existence of evil negate all evidence that God even exists? That the universe had a beginning (and thus a beginner)? That it is finely tuned for our existence? That there exists a moral law that we did not create but are compelled to follow? (No.) Or does it make you just not like the God that exists?

**5. Burden of Proof.** If the atheist makes the claim that the coexistence of God and suffering is impossible, he bears the burden of proof, since he is the one making that claim. Thus, he must put forth his argument and support it, and you may play the skeptic and question whether he has carried his burden of proof.

## II. DEFENSIVE- INTELLECTUAL ARGUMENTS

**1. Free will**--The classic defense.

(A) It's not logically possible to have free will and no possibility of moral evil. Once God chose to create human beings with free will it was up to them, rather than God, whether there was sin or not. That's what free will means. Built into the situation of God deciding to create human beings is the chance of evil, and consequently, the suffering that results.

(B) God could have created a world without suffering, but it would have also been a world without free will. Love, the highest value in the universe, requires free will for it to be true love. Real love--our love of God and of each other--must involve a choice. But with the granting of that choice comes the possibility that people would choose instead to hate.

Man is in rebellion, and many of the evils we see are caused by humans misusing their free will to harm others and cause suffering.

**2. Infinite Wisdom and Human Limitations.**

God could have overriding reasons for allowing the suffering in the world. We all know cases in which we permit suffering to bring about a greater good (taking a child to the dentist). We as humans are just not in a position to say that God lacks good reasons for permitting the suffering and evil that he permits. As finite persons, we are limited in space, time, intelligence, and insight. God's reasons may not be apparent until centuries later or even in another country. Thus, he can easily have morally sufficient reasons for allowing what he allows, which we simply cannot grasp.

*Burden of proof.* You can flip it here and make the questioner show that he must prove that God has NO reasons to allow what he allows, to show that the evil could not have ever resulted in some greater good.

Biblical examples:

Paul's unjust imprisonment gave us the prison epistles. God allowed that injustice to occur to bring about an ENORMOUS work through Paul.

Job, Esther, Jonah, Joseph--same thing.

In all things God works for the good of those who love him and who are called according to his purpose. Rom 8:28

### **3. Christian Doctrines**

Christianity entails certain doctrines that increase the probability of the coexistence of God and suffering. Indeed, the Bible teaches that we will experience suffering at some point.

#### **(1) The Glory of God and our Knowledge of Him**

The chief purpose of life is not happiness, but the knowledge of God and his glory. One reason that the problem of suffering seems so puzzling is that some people tend to assume that if God exists, then his purpose is to make us all happy--God's role is to provide a comfortable environment for his human pets.

We know this to be false, and that God created the universe to magnify and display his glory so that we may exult in it. Much of suffering in life may be pointless with respect to producing happiness, but may be used to create a greater knowledge and fellowship with God for a greater number of people.

God is not glorified when people make a lot of money and then give thanks to him. He is glorified when, in the deepest pain and suffering, people point to him as their source, their strength, their all. He is sufficient.

Example: It is precisely in the countries with the most suffering that Christianity is growing at its greatest rates--China, El Salvador, Ethiopia. Compare that to Christianity's growth in the stagnant West.

Example: Look at the beautiful hymns, which have given comfort to many, but that were written by great sufferers. E.g., It is well with my soul.

Biblical example: Jesus healing the blind man, and answer to the Pharisees, in John 9:1-5. "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."

#### **(2) Mankind is in a state of rebellion against God**

This dovetails with the free will defense. Due to man's rebellion, the Christian is not surprised at the moral evil in the world; on the contrary, he expects it. The Bible in fact promises that we will experience pain and suffering. Philippians 1:29, 2 Timothy 3:12, Romans 8:17-18.

#### **(3) God's purpose is not restricted to this life but spills over beyond the grave into eternal life.**

If this physical world is all that there truly is, and there is no afterlife, then evil really is a dire problem for which there is no justice. But this is not a problem for the Christian, because we view things in light of eternity. In light of the afterlife, in light of God's final judgment, evil is not inconsistent with our worldview. When God asks his children to bear horrible suffering in this life, it is only with the prospect of a heavenly joy and recompense that is beyond all comprehension.

This is why Paul, who bore more suffering than any of us, can say: "So we do not lose heart. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." 2 Cor 4:16-18.

**(4) The knowledge of God is an infinite good.**

God is infinite goodness and love. To know him is an incomparable good, the fulfillment of human existence. The sufferings of this life cannot even be compared to it.

**III.**

**DEFENSIVE-EMOTIONAL ARGUMENTS**

**1. The Sovereignty of God.**

"But when a person settles it biblically, intellectually, and emotionally—that God has ultimate control of all things, including evil, and that this is gracious and precious beyond words—then a marvelous stability and depth come into that person's life." John Piper.

The Bible treats human life as something God has absolute rights over. He gives it and takes it according to His will. We do not own it or have any absolute rights to it. It is a trust for as long as the owner wills for us to have it. To have life is a gift and to lose it is never an injustice from God, whether He takes it at age five or at age ninety-five.

God is sovereign over moral and natural evil.

Job 1:21: Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return. the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.

Dt. 32:39: There is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.

Isa. 45:7: I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the Lord, who does all these.

Eph. 1:11: God is the one "who works all things according to the counsel of his will

Prv. 16:33: The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.

Moral evil: Joseph and his brothers...and many others

Thus, Charles Spurgeon says,

I believe that every particle of dust that dances in the sunbeam does not move an atom more or less than God wishes—that every particle of spray that dashes against the steamboat has its orbit, as well as the sun in the heavens—that the chaff from the hand of the winnowing is steered as the stars in their courses. The creeping of an aphid over the rosebud is as much fixed as the march of the devastating pestilence—the fall of...leaves from a poplar is as fully ordained as the tumbling of an avalanche

Romans 9, especially 9:19-24.

God's foreknowledge of sin does not make him less glorious, but more glorious. For without evil and pain and suffering, we would not know what good is and thus be able to fully taste the good he has for us. We wouldn't be able to taste his entire glory. If everything was good we wouldn't know what good is. God does not need to be rescued from his foreknowledge of sin.



To those who say, "Is not God, love?" we should say, "Is not God, God?"

## **2. JESUS!**

First, for those who accept Christ, suffering is redeemed by eternal life with God, which is a benefit that far outweighs any sufferings and evils we experience in our earthly lives.

Second--

"Why doesn't God do something about evil?" God has done something, the most profound thing imaginable. He sent his son to die for evil men. Instead of punishing all evil, he chose instead to offer mercy.

Moreover, God himself was not immune to pain. Jesus walked through it. Suffering and pain did not spare the very Son of God.

"I could never myself believe in God, if it were not for the cross. The only God I believe in is the One Nietzsche ridiculed as 'God on the cross.' In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it? I have entered many Buddhist temples in different Asian countries and stood respectfully before the statue of the Buddha, his legs crossed, arms folded, eyes closed, the ghost of a smile playing round his mouth, a remote look on his face, detached from the agonies of the world. But each time after a while I have had to turn away. And in imagination I have turned instead to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross, nails through hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from thorn-pricks, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged in Godforsaken darkness. That is the God for me! He laid aside his immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death. He suffered for us. Our sufferings become more manageable in the light of his. There is still a question mark against human suffering, but over it we boldly stamp another mark, the cross that symbolizes divine suffering. 'The cross of Christ ... is God's only self-justification in such a world' as ours... 'The other gods were strong; but thou wast weak; they rode, but thou didst stumble to a throne; But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak, And not a god has wounds, but thou alone.'" --*John Stott*

Who can identify with your struggles more? Who can say "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." ?

The only complete answer is God, in Jesus, on a cross, at Calvary.