

Biblical Apologetics:

1. Why do you believe?

Part 1

Tonight we are beginning a series looking at how the bible answers common questions or objections to the faith. Now in the series we will do a lot of thinking, a lot of looking round the bible and I make no apology for that. I am however conscious that some of us here may not yet be Christians or are new to the faith. Others may have doubts and questions of their own, while some are looking for how to answer questions that their friends ask and part of my hope is that this series will answer our own questions, strengthen our own faith and when we are asked about our faith and we are stuck for an answer we might be better equipped to have a go at an answer. This series will not be comprehensive – plenty comprehensive books out there but I hope it will be helpful.

My premise is that you know much more than you think but maybe things like a sense of inability or lack of brains or inability to articulate holds us back.

Let's think round the topic to begin with. Groups 6 think about common objections to the faith and if you are a Christian and were asked why you believe what type of things you might put in your answer.

1. **What** are the commonly held objections to the faith?
2. If you are a Christian and were asked why you believe what types of things would you include in your answer (bible verses to back up what you are saying?)

Part 2

It might be reasonable to object at this point and say this is all really the work of the Spirit – to contend with the heart, soul and mind of man to convince them of his reality. “I mean, nobody was ever argued into the kingdom!”

Correct but even God himself in the bible instructs us to be ready to answer common objections to the faith

1 Peter 3:15

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

The word in the Greek for answer is **apologia** or **apologetic** – reasoned defence. What is also interesting is that the Greek word used for **reason** is logos which of course word or reason or logic!

At this point I think some of you will be really interested and others beginning to switch off. Some are thinking excellent this is what I need to hear and others are

thinking 'all I know is Jesus came into my life and I believed'. Your experience of God is a reasoned defence, sometimes the best line of reasoning but more is envisaged for those gifted to do so. That's what we are looking at here.

Many of the answers we would give as to why we believe fall into these categories that the bible itself would give as reason why we should believe:

General Revelation	Special Revelation
Creation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universe • Inner sense • Moral Experience • Reason/Logic 	Jesus Christ – Incarnate Word Bible – Written Word Personal experience of these

General Revelation

Creation: Universe

Psalms 19:1-4 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. ²Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. ³ There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. ⁴ Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

Isaiah uses it

Isaiah 40:26 ²⁶ Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by

one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.

Just recently there has been some spectacular full moons and clear nights to see the starry skies. I have looked up at them and asked, "Is this really all by chance?"

The Apostle Paul uses it

Romans 1:19-20 ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

If these are true then there should be a correspondence amongst those who study such things. Amongst microbiologists, cosmologists, astrophysicists and biochemists today, as the complexities of the universe and dna etc are being unlocked, there is an increasing conviction that the only plausible explanation is that of intelligent design. Yes, sure there are many who do not accept it but more and more it would seem cannot see otherwise

E.g. (taken from bethinking.org) astronomer and former atheist as **Fred Hoyle**, has written: "*I do not believe that any scientists who examined the evidence would fail to draw the inference that the laws of nuclear physics have been deliberately designed with regard to the consequences they produce inside stars.*" That and other such observations from Hoyle have prompted Harvard

astronomy professor, **Owen Gingerich**, to comment: *“Fred Hoyle and I differ on lots of questions, but on this we agree: a common sense and satisfying interpretation of our world suggests the designing hand of a super-intelligence.”* Or to put it even more plainly, consider the verdict of **Robin Collins**, an American scientist with three degrees and two doctorates in mathematics, physics, and philosophy: *“The extraordinary fine-tuning of the laws and constants of nature, their beauty, their discoverability, their intelligibility – all of this combines to make the God hypothesis the most reasonable choice we have. All other theories fall short.”*

Romans 1 video

Some might object and say – look this is all just a waste of time. We can never really know the answers to these kinds of questions, we just bumble along as best we can. Well think of this illustration:

Imagine a spaceship of the thirty first century flying deep into hyperspace, many of its members having been stored in cryogenic freezers. Some hundreds of years later, having been thawed, and ready for duty, a member of the crew petitions the captain for some answers

Crew member: Sorry to bother you Captain but I have a couple of questions. Firstly, where did this ship set out from?

Captain: Whatever are you asking questions like this for? You're part of a wonderful mission, exploring the universe. You have wonderful companions, a superb library, the best food this side of the galaxy, entertainment to delight, sports facilities to invigorate – what more could you want?

Crew member: I'm sorry I asked captain I just wanted to know where we've come from?

Captain: Like you, I came aboard in a cryogenic freezer, and that information has not been made available to us. Just be grateful you're here!

Crew member : Do you mind if I ask you another question, captain? If it's not too much to ask, could you tell me where we are going? I mean, where are we heading, what is our destination?

(Captain looks exasperated – he clasps his head in his hands and strains out his reply:)

Captain I don't know who put such fanciful questions into your brain, but you must eradicate them at once. They stand in the way of progress. Clearly they prevent you from enjoying your duties and pleasures during your life and mission, and are therefore inappropriate and unproductive.

Remove God from the equation, ignore the witness of nature and we are left come from nowhere and going nowhere!

Now people will oppose such ideas and say what about evolution and suffering and evil in the world. There is no God we have just evolved. Others will say how can there be a God in heaven when there is such evil and suffering in the world. We will in turn look at these in coming weeks but just as an aside, a news article recently carried the news of a research project that showed that evolution in certain species can happen within 6 months – undermining the previously held view that it took millennia!

Creation: Inner and Moral Experience

In addition to the witness of the creation Paul uses the inner awareness that we all have that we are not here by chance and our common experience of moral conscience.

Acts 17:24-28 ²⁴"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. ²⁵And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. ²⁶From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. ²⁷God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸For in

him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

Romans 2:14-15 ¹⁴(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, ¹⁵since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)

When I speak with folks who do not go to church most would say, 'Yep I believe there is something out there'. And that is backed up by research; (I've said it often) 80% of folks in the UK believe in something out there. So there is that inner sense, a God shaped hole in all of our lives. Augustine described it this way, "*You have created us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you*".

Ask your friends this week. Do you think there is something out there? Interested to hear feedback next week.

A philosophical proof for the existence of God is a moral code adhered to by the all societies. The logic is then

1. Objective moral values exist
2. Objective moral values require the existence of a God
3. Therefore, a God exists

The logic is that if there is no God, then there is no good or evil. But immediately folks might object – ‘Ah but each community decides its own moral code, it’s a component of our evolution for us to survive’. That is a fair comment but what you are essentially saying there are no absolutes! Do you mean that absolutely? Relativist statements like that are absolutist and contradicts the point is was trying to make. Look at that in more detail in future weeks! Others might object and say Christianity is purely a psychological experience and we will look at that in more detail in future weeks also.

In one sense this is all very interesting but the weakness of this is that whilst demonstrating the possibility of the existence of God we are somewhat clueless as to what that God might be.

Sir Robert Winston, the well know scientist, has said there is a “God shaped hole at the centre of the universe” and one person has followed that by asking “But what shape is it, exactly? And, more to the point, what's filling it right now??” and to that could be added the idea that if there is a God surely by definition because he is infinite and we are finite he is completely incomprehensible to our tiny minds.

Here is the nub of the issue we believe because he has written himself into our history in the person of Jesus Christ and those who were there testify to it for us

Special revelation

John 1:18 ¹⁸No-one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

John 1:14 ¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Colossians 1:13-15 ¹³For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. ¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

Think on this, if you were the playwright William Shakespeare and you wished to make yourself known to Hamlet and get to know him, how could it be arranged? Hamlet can only speculate as to who his creator might be and is incapable of reaching out and finding him.

However if Shakespeare were to write himself into the play Hamlet as Shakespeare, he would dialogue with his creation and reveal himself to Hamlet and others. However, he would have to dialogue with his creation and reveal himself to Hamlet and others. However, he would have to be pretty remarkable to convince Hamlet that he is the creator, the writer of life’s great story. The Christian contention is that in Jesus, God was writing himself into human history. Does the evidence support that? We will look at that in future weeks.

Just by way of finishing I want to ask the question:

The bible says “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength” Mk 12:30

How much do you love God with each of these areas? Heart and soul – passionate but without substance of mind. All mind but little passion. Mind, passion but little by way of strength or actual action. Theoretical self orientated form of Christianity? My prayer for myself and us all is that this series will engage us heart, soul, mind and strength – boosting our faith in and love for Christ and his gospel. Enabling for acts of service he has prepared in advance for us to do.

TTT – This time tomorrow