

***Knowing What We Believe Is Not Enough. We Must Be Able To Defend Our Faith,
Especially When We Are Asked Tough Questions About It***

What follows is a summary of information discussed in a Fall, 2004 Sunday School class on “Answering Hard Questions About Our Faith” at Trinity Christian Reformed Church. This information on eight such questions was assembled by the members of that class and most of it was taken from the Old and the New Testament, “Exploring Apologetics; Selected Readings” (Christian Schools International, 1992) and “Know Why You Believe” (Paul E. Little, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, Fourth Edition, 2000). We sincerely hope it is useful to you. If you have any comments or questions, please feel free to contact Pastor Tom Niehof (amesterc@aol.com) or John Verkade (jverkade@iastate.edu).

1. How do you know God exists?

- ❖ Most of the oldest traditions in the world are monotheistic (one God).
- ❖ The moral law of fair play (the Golden Rule) is universal and if one accepts that law as true, there must be a moral law giver because the law giver feels the same way (i.e., it is part of His image in which He created us).
- ❖ The most effective way to communicate His love for us was to become one of us through Jesus Christ. (“If you want an ant to love you, you have to become an ant.”)
- ❖ Science demands reproducibility of a result as proof of validity of the experiment. In this sense God’s existence can not be proven. But neither can the “Big Bang” theory of the origin of the universe (see below). Yet the vast majority of scientists believe in the Big Bang theory.
- ❖ We must not try to mold God into something He is not.
- ❖ The truth of the reality or non reality of God and His attributes is not determined by popular opinion.
- ❖ Without God there is no wonder, no science, no music, no beauty, no space and no art.
- ❖ See also the next section, the section on Miracles and the section on Creation versus evolution.

2. How do you know Jesus existed on earth and that He rose from the dead?

- ❖ His existence is attested to by manuscripts of all the Gospels written before 200 AD and by a recently discovered fragment of John’s Gospel written in 125 AD.
- ❖ Non Christian sources refer to His existence [Tacitus (100 AD) Suetonius (49 AD) Pliny (110 AD)], also Jewish documents [the Jerusalem Talmud, Josephus (100 AD)].
- ❖ Facts to consider regarding the reality of Christ’s resurrection:
 1. The Christian church has a long continuous history (back to 32 AD).
 2. The monumental shift in the calendar of the day of worship from the Jewish Sabbath (Saturday) to Sunday.
 3. The New Testament which contains independent and eyewitness testimonies to the resurrection (ten distinct post-resurrection appearances).
 4. “The disciples stole the body” theory: All twelve disciples (except one) were martyred for their faith in the resurrection. Isn’t it logical to suppose that perhaps at least one of those victims of martyrdom would have confessed in an attempt to save his life if the “stolen body” theory were true?

5. “The authorities moved the body” theory: For what purpose? And would they then not have displayed the body to kill the Christianity movement?
6. “The distraught women went to the wrong tomb” theory: Why then did not the authorities take them to the right tomb and show them the body?
7. “The Christ was buried alive and passed out for three days” theory: Could He have survived without food or water for that long while wound up in grave clothes? After that ordeal, would He have had the strength to untangle himself, push away the heavy stone, overpower the Roman guards and walk miles on his spike-pierced feet to present himself as a majestic God to be worshipped?
8. “The women and His disciples were hallucinating about seeing Jesus after his death” theory: They all were persuaded of His resurrection against their wills. Mary mistook Him for the gardener. The other disciples initially thought the women’s news was untrue and later they thought they saw a ghost. Also, recall Thomas who doubted Jesus’ resurrection until he touched His wounds.
9. There is no historical evidence that the Roman or Jewish authorities or any of Jesus’ followers saw His corpse after the stone was rolled in front of the grave, although they all were undoubtedly certain His body was in that grave. Recall that the Roman guards placed the stone at the opening of the grave.

3. How can you know the Bible is reliable concerning historical events, miracles and the issue of evolution versus the creation of humans?

Historical events

- ❖ Jesus fulfilled in detail predictions made by prophets 500 to 1000 years before Christ was born (e.g., His birth, betrayal for 30 pieces of silver, silence when accused, condemnation with criminals, thirst while dying, pierced hands and feet, piercing after death, burial by a rich man).
- ❖ The earliest complete copy of the Old Testament is from around 900 AD made by Jewish scribes (custodians of the Hebrew text from about 500 to 1000 AD).
- ❖ The Dead Sea Scrolls confirmed the accuracy of the record and history of the Hebrews from 200 BC to 916 AD.
- ❖ Specific biblical events previously doubted and ridiculed were later verified by archaeological discoveries (e.g., Israel’s war with Moab).
- ❖ Some issues of apparent conflict between the biblical record and limited information previously available have been cleared up by more recent archaeological discoveries (e.g., the last king of Babylon named in the book of Daniel turns out to be correct after all, putting to rest the earlier controversy).

Miracles

- ❖ Are essential to Christianity (creation, virgin birth, the miracles of Jesus, His resurrection, and His return).
- ❖ Are essential to Judaism (Old Testament: the sun standing still for Joshua, the ten plagues of Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea to let all the Israelites across, etc.).
- ❖ Are not essential to other religions (Islam, Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism) although they have them too.

- ❖ Are occurrences beyond the normal laws of the universe which teach us about God's power and grace. If God created the normal laws of the universe, He certainly has the power to alter them to perform miracles.
- ❖ Miracles are the extraordinary steps God takes to meet extraordinary needs of mankind; they are never capricious.
- ❖ The laws of the universe as we know them today are much more complex than what we knew about them 50 years ago. For example, mathematics tells us that basketballs can be turned inside out in a couple of dimensions beyond the 4 in which we are able to operate (length, width, height and time) without penetrating the skin of the ball. Other things, such as Jesus walking through walls, and hearing the prayers of millions of people simultaneously also become feasible in extra dimensions. Dimensions well beyond the four in which we exist were present during the now scientifically well supported "Big Bang" creation of the universe from a highly dense dot containing the contents of the universe; a dot created out of nothing.
- ❖ If miracles occurred now, they probably would be interpreted by people in a naturalistic rather than supernatural way.
- ❖ The miracles of Jesus were not secret (they were done in public), and skeptics, unbelievers and doubters were in the audience.

Creation (by a Designer) versus evolution (by chance)

- ❖ Evolution within a species does occur, but there is no evidence that evolution takes place from a species to give a new species.
 - ❖ The chances that man could have evolved during the 4.5 billion years the earth has existed are astronomically small (about as likely as a 747 being assembled by a tornado roaring through a junkyard of parts as big as the universe).
 - ❖ The many parameters in our universe that must possess exactly the values they have in order to support life on Earth (e.g., the size of Earth, the speed of light, the gravitational constant, and the properties of electrons, atoms, water) indicate a Designer/Creator.
 - ❖ Darwin in his famous book, "The Origin of Species", stated that, the idea that an organ as complex and organized as the human eye could come about as the result of natural selection was "absurd".
 - ❖ The highly complex functions of the estimated 100,000 genes in the human genome (which possesses all the information that defines who we are) contain a total of about 6 billion molecular subunits arranged in very orderly sequences. This too indicates the work of a Designer/Creator.
 - ❖ Humans stand apart from animals in that they are capable of:
 1. asking why everything is the way it is,
 2. sophisticated reasoning,
 3. expressing creativity in art, music, architecture, engineering, etc.
- 4. If the Christian church is so Christian, why is it so full of hypocrites?**
- ❖ It is full of hypocrites because we are all sinners. However many of them have received forgiveness through Christ.
 - ❖ Actually we are all hypocrites because we all believe one thing and often live contrary to that belief.

- ❖ This accusation does not face the real issue. The existence of hypocrites in the church should not prevent a person from knowing God better. The existence of counterfeit currency does not undermine the fact that genuine currency exists.
- ❖ Some hypocrites only belong to a church for selfish reasons such as “respect” or business opportunities.
- ❖ In general, Christians are not “nicer” than non-Christians because:
 1. All gradations of behavior occur in both groups, from bad to good.
 2. The behaviors people ask God to manage in their lives vary.
 3. Niceness is not all that God demands of us.
- ❖ Church is more than just a social force that brings people together to interact with each other for developing better ethics.

5. Why should Christianity be relevant to my life?

- ❖ Christians enjoy but do not depend on outward and material things; they draw on inner resources through the Grace of God; they have inner peace and the presence of Jesus in their lives dispels loneliness.
- ❖ The type of life a Christian leads counts not only for this life, but also for eternity.
- ❖ Christianity is not true because it works; Christianity works because it is true.
- ❖ The truth (or falsehood) of Christianity does not depend on one’s feeling of a need or lack of need for a religion.
- ❖ Christianity is authenticated by the tests of its nature and character, its role in history and the power it has exerted in the lives of people.
- ❖ Christianity is more than just humanizing or personalizing the forces of nature, or a “crutch” or a belief in a benign “higher power” that does not hold us accountable and which is not completely sovereign.
- ❖ Christianity is the belief and faith in a God who is:
 1. Holy (terrifying, self-image shattering, mind boggling),
 2. Omniscient (all-knowing, including every detail of our individual futures because of His many dimensions beyond those to which we are limited),
 3. Sovereign (whose laws are absolute and our guilt in breaking those laws is real and demands real forgiveness, thus denying us absolute freedom to do as we please),
 4. Omnipotent (holds absolute power),
 5. Immutable (unchangeable),
 6. Immanent (everywhere present) in the universe,
 7. Transcendent to (i.e., over and superior to) His creation,
 8. Faithful to and caring for His creation. He is not capricious with the laws of nature,
 9. Always truthful, although He may choose to be silent or incomplete at times for reasons best known to Himself for our overall benefit (“..secret things belong to the Lord”, Deut 29:29).
- ❖ Christianity brings wholeness and integration into people’s lives, especially if they believe with their heads as well as their hearts.
- ❖ Christianity is not:
 1. the result of simple “wish fulfillment” for “something beyond ourselves”,
 2. simply an armor that protects weak inadequate people with no inner resources,

3. not an “add on” to our being because it transforms what is already there to illuminate God’s gifts through the work of the Holy Spirit.

❖ Christianity is not a path but a Person, not rules but a relationship with Christ.

6. What is death and Heaven like for a Christian?

❖ Death is generally feared less or not at all because it was conquered by Christ.

❖ Death is the servant that brings the Christian into the glorious presence of God; it is the most dynamic experience he/she can ever have on Earth.

❖ Heaven will be a dynamic, expanding, creative experience far beyond anything our finite minds can comprehend. It will be the essence of joy and satisfaction. It will be filled with enjoyable activities to the glory of Our Creator.

❖ The entire creation, including our bodies, will be renewed by its Creator God in the new Heaven and the new Earth.

7. If God is perfectly good, why is there evil?

❖ God created us with a free will; not as robots or puppets.

❖ Evil was the result of poor judgment on the part of mankind while exercising his/her God-given free will.

❖ God can not be blamed for mankind’s poor judgment.

❖ Without the Fall, we would never have known the infinite love and mercy of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

❖ If the world were perfect, communion with God would be perfect and there would be little or no point to a heaven and a new creation.

❖ God does not *cause* evil to happen to us; He does *allow* it to happen for our good (recall the biblical story of Job).

❖ For the Christian, evil is like homework to learn from and grow up spiritually in his/her journey through this life on to eternal Heavenly life. God, like a good parent, does not do our homework for us.

❖ Evil happens to both good and bad people. If just being good would allow people to avoid pain and suffering, there would be little if any incentive to be redeemed of our sins and to lead Christ-regenerated, Christ-centered lives.

❖ We have to trust God that evil is sometimes necessary for Him to get us to see our way out of the trap of sin, just like a dog has to trust the hunter who has to push the dog further into a bear trap for it to gain freedom, which for the Christian is freedom that the cross of Christ offers from the punishment of sin.

❖ God never promised that we would not suffer, but He did promise that suffering would never separate us from His love and compassion.

❖ If God stamped out all evil right now, who of us would be left to enjoy the result of that action?

❖ In God’s own time (when history has run its course and the story of the present creation is over) Christ will come again, this time to claim His own and to conquer evil just like He conquered death through His resurrection the first time He came to Earth.

8. Aren’t all religions pretty much alike?

❖ They do not have the same God:

1. Hinduism is pantheistic (the cosmos is God or somehow equal to God, or, God and the cosmos are the same).

2. Buddhism is atheistic.

3. Judaism and Islam are Unitarian.
 4. Christianity is Trinitarian.
- ❖ They do not have the same main objectives:
 1. Buddhism teaches that suffering is a part of life and that one can be liberated from it by mental and moral self-purification to reach a state of nirvana (extinction of one's self-identity through absorption into the "supreme spirit"). Buddha never claimed to be a god and was agnostic about whether a god even existed.
 2. Hinduism teaches that nirvana (reunion with Brahma, the all-pervading force of the universe which is the chief Hindu god among the 330 million it claims) is achieved through transcendental meditation or yoga as well as by continuous cycles of death and rebirth in various other bodily forms, but nirvana does not result in total self-annihilation of one's identity as in Buddhism.
 3. Islam, the faith of Muslims, teaches submission to the will of Allah (creator and sovereign lord of the universe) in order to achieve a paradise of pleasure and indulgence by living an earthly life of strict abstinence from self-indulgence. Allah is not a personal god and he tends to be capricious in his acts.
 4. Judaism teaches belief in one God who is the creator, ruler and redeemer of the universe.
 5. Christianity is the belief in one God who is the creator and ruler of the universe who sent His Son Jesus to redeem with His death and resurrection those who believe in Him. His Holy Spirit can influence our lives.
 - ❖ The different religions teach different things, but logically, it is reasonable to suppose that only one can be fully true.
 - ❖ The "it doesn't matter what religion you believe as long as you are sincere" argument: Hitler's slaughter of six million Jews was based on a sincere view of race supremacy. What we believe has to be true in order to be real.
 - ❖ Christianity is unique because it is the only religion:
 1. that has as its basis Ruin (the total depravity of mankind), Redemption (through Christ) and Regeneration (turning around one's life to obedience to God),
 2. whose founder is God Himself while other religions have earthly long-deceased founders,
 3. that does not suppress or distort some or all aspects of the Creator's general revelation to us (e.g., nature, science, art, music, the sense of right and wrong).
 4. in which God came to Earth, died for his people and rose from the dead.
 - ❖ The content of Christianity is not hidden in vague symbols.
 - ❖ Christianity does go beyond reason but not against reason.
 - ❖ Christianity is disbelieved by educated and uneducated people alike because they use their free will to choose not to believe in it.
 - ❖ Christianity's claims are not for Christianity as a religion, but for a Jesus who represents a "scandal of particularity". Unlike the founders of other religions, He

is the main issue in Christianity. No one else did what He did or said what He said.

- ❖ No one else but Jesus was able to conquer what is most people's ultimate fear; the fear of death and/or of nothingness thereafter.
- ❖ Jesus does not ask Christians to defend Him and His claims because he is perfectly capable and powerful enough to do that Himself at any time with any means He chooses. But He does call on believers to proclaim what He did and said. He also invites non-believers to believe in Him as the only way to pardon for sin, to a relationship with Our Creator God and to a wonderful eternal life after death.