

Reasons for Belief • Session 1

“I Struggle With Doubt. Is That OK?”

God desires active faith in Christians (James 2:14-26). As James shows, this type of faith involves the mind, emotions, and will. If any of these ingredients are missing, faith won't be what it's supposed to be. For many, personal faith has failed and they don't know what to do about it or where to turn. Some don't even realize when or how they “lost” their faith.

Why is faith in God and Scripture sometimes rejected? There are many reasons, and likely it's not just one reason by itself.

- A lack of information?
- Pride?
- Moral problems that get in the way of making the necessary commitment to God?

Not everyone is trying to make excuses, though. Sometimes people *do* have questions, doubts, and concerns, not because they want to do what's wrong, but simply because they see what they perceive to be an inconsistency or they just have questions and they genuinely want answers.

Personal doubts *need* to be addressed, not just swept aside. If merely cast aside, those doubts will keep coming back and may create even more problems later. We may feel ashamed if we have doubts, but it's far better to admit and confront our questions and doubts, understanding that true faith does not need to fear questions.

Questions to Help You Prepare For Class

- Why do you think people sometimes reject faith in God?
- How would you respond to someone who told you that he or she was “losing” faith or had doubts about God and the Bible?
- Why is doubt a spiritual problem, not just an intellectual problem?
- How can properly dealing with doubts help strengthen our faith?
- Why is it important to understand the relationship between faith and reason?
- How can recognizing the limitations of our personal knowledge help us with doubts?
- How can you learn to “live victoriously” with unanswered questions?

Reasons for Belief • Session 2

The Relationships of Reasoning, Evidence and Faith

Faith is a key component of conviction. If we're convinced that something is true, then we trust:

- That our evidence or reason for believing is solid.
- That our reasoning abilities are sufficient to properly interpret the evidence so that our conclusion is true (agrees with reality).

If either the evidence or the reasoning process is faulty, then our faith has been misplaced and our worldview won't accurately reflect reality.

The Bible teaches that faith is “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). Without faith, we cannot please God (11:6). In order to see how the Bible ties faith and evidence together, consider the following passages:

- **John 20:19-31.** “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (20:29). The question is, how do we believe if we have not seen? John provides the answer in 20:30-31.
- **Matthew 11:2-6.** Notice that Jesus didn't say, “You just have to believe,” as if it didn't matter what evidence he had given. Instead, Jesus pointed to what people could see and hear.

A common misconception about faith is that it is “belief without evidence” or “believing something in spite of the evidence.” But everyone exercises faith in *something*. Faith is as much a part of life as breathing. The question is, will I use my intellect to inform my faith so that God will be glorified?

Questions to Help You Prepare For Class

- Why is faith necessary to live life?
- How is faith tied to evidence? How do John 20 and Matthew 11 illustrate that truth?
- What is biblical faith? Why is it sometimes misunderstood?
- What is necessary for reasonable faith?
- What isn't necessary for reasonable faith?
- What does “beyond a reasonable doubt” mean? Why is the principle significant?
- How do you know anything historically? Why is this type of evidence important?

Reasons for Belief • Session 3

Pluralism, Multiculturalism, Syncretism ... OH MY!

We live in interesting times, to say the least. Students of history can easily detect a pivotal shift in cultural sentiments and sensibilities leading to social, moral and ethical drifts. Unchecked, these drifts naturally lead to spiritual chaos.

“Postmodernism” is a broad term many are using to describe the trends of modern culture. Postmodernist approaches to life are typically critical of the possibility of objective knowledge of the “real” world and draw attention to the ways in which social dynamics such as power and hierarchy affect human interaction and relationships. In contrast to the “modernist” paradigm which emphasized knowledge and science, postmodernist thought often emphasizes pluralism, multiculturalism and syncretism in its approaches to knowledge and understanding. This cultural cocktail has come to produce an intense sense of skepticism in the hearts of many, especially those who are younger. Some definitions:

- **Pluralism** – the notion that all religious belief systems and philosophies are of equal validity.
- **Multiculturalism** – the idea that no culture is superior to or preferable over any other culture in the world; all cultures—regardless of basic religious, moral, ethical or spiritual beliefs and practices—are equally credible, viable representations of proper behavior, interaction and living.
- **Syncretism**—the effort to fuse differing systems of belief.

Ironically enough, these cultural trends and drifts that define much of the modern religious landscape around us are not nearly as unique to the 21st century as we might be led to believe. “Is there a thing of which it is said, ‘See, this is new’? It has been already in the ages before us” (Eccl 1:10). Those words are 3,000 years old.

Take a moment to reflect on the three cultural trends mentioned above. How have you personally observed them in the world around you? Are they dangerous? If so, why? And can you think of anything in the Bible (commands, examples, outright warnings, principles or inferences) that speak to these ancient and modern trends?

➤ **Pluralism** –

➤ **Multiculturalism** –

➤ **Syncretism** –

Reasons for Belief • Session 4

“The Bible is Just a Man-Made Book”

A basic principle to keep in mind when considering the reliability of the Biblical records is that when subjected to the same tests that are used of other ancient documents, the Bible surpasses every expectation. When historians look at any ancient document, they ask certain questions.

1. “Do we possess copies that are reasonably close to the originals?”

2. “Did the authors intend to convey reliable history to the readers?”

3. “Were the authors in a position to know what they were talking about?”

4. “Did the author’s bias distort their historical reporting?”

5. “Are the reports consistent with what we know about eyewitness testimony?”

6. “Is there self-damaging material in the documents?”

7. “Are the documents reasonably self-consistent and consistent with other documents that tell about the same events?”

8. “Are the recorded events believable?”

9. “Is there other literary evidence that helps to establish the reality of the events recorded in the examined documents?”

10. “Does archaeology help to shed any light on the recorded events?”

Reasons for Belief • Session 5

“You Can’t Take the Bible Literally”

Many are surprised or even shocked to find modern disciples of Christ listening so carefully to the Bible. Some would say that they know there are many great stories and sayings in the Bible, but today “you can’t take it *literally*.” What they mean is that the Bible isn’t entirely trustworthy because some parts—maybe many or most parts—are scientifically impossible, historically unreliable, and culturally regressive.

We’ll tackle the “scientifically impossible” question next week. In the meantime...

- “The Bible is a historically unreliable collection of legends.”
 - Why is this not so?

 - Why would such a charge be made?

 - How would you respond?

- “The Bible is archaic, outdated and offensive to modern culture.”
 - Why is this not so?

 - Why would such a charge be made?

 - How would you respond?

Reasons for Belief • Session 6

“Hasn’t Science Disproved the Bible?”

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We tackled the “historically unreliable” and “culturally regressive” objections last week. What about the science objection?

➤ “Aren’t miracles scientifically impossible?”

- What should we make of this question?
- Why would such a charge be made?
- How would you respond?

➤ “Isn’t science in conflict with Christianity?”

- Why is this not so?
- Why would such a charge be made?
- How would you respond?

Reasons for Belief • Session 7

“Jesus Was an Amazing Man, But Nothing More”

“For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col 2:9). The biblical witness to the divine nature of Jesus is summed up in that passage. Jesus possesses all divine attributes.

The identity of Jesus has long been a debated issue. Some called him an imposter (Matt 27:63). Some said that he led the multitudes astray; others said he was a good man (John 7:12). Some claimed that he was one of the prophets, perhaps Elijah or Jeremiah (Matt 16:14). Peter confessed his faith that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt 16:16). The debates have been ongoing ever since.

- Why do you think the debate over the identity of Jesus continues to boil?

- Why would skeptics argue that the idea of Jesus as God was something invented by later Christians?

- What sort of claims from Jesus stand out to you as definitive on his identity?

- How do the works of Jesus back up his claims?

- How should we respond to the evidence of Jesus, and why?

Reasons for Belief • Session 8

“A Literal Resurrection is Just Too Far-Fetched”

We have frequently repeated throughout this study that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is an absolute linchpin for Christian faith. The apostle Paul framed the importance of the resurrection in the same sort of terms. Take the time to read 1 Corinthians 15:1-20.

- In your own words, how would you summarize Paul’s message?

- Using your Bible, take a brief survey of Matthew 27-28, Mark 15-16, Luke 23-24, and John 19-21. Based on your survey, how would you list the basic facts attached to the resurrection claims of the Bible?

- What is the relevance of the “empty tomb”?

- Why is the resurrection so vital to the Christian’s faith? What are the consequences if it did not happen?

- What does it mean to call Jesus “Lord”? Why is the Lordship of Jesus crucial to a defense of the faith in response to modern skepticism? Why is it crucial to your life?

Reasons for Belief • Session 9

“Isn’t Proclaiming Jesus as the Only Way to God Arrogant?”

Take the time to read the astounding claims of Jesus in Matthew 7:13-14, 12:30, John 14:6 and what was said of him in Acts 4:12. How do the Biblical claims about Christ and salvation indicate “exclusivism”?

Why do you think that saying there is only one way to heaven is so offensive in our world today?

Why is just focusing on the ethics of Christian behavior not going to be very convincing when arguing for salvation only in Christ?

What do you think we should be emphasizing to people lost in sin, and why?

Beyond the passages mentioned above, what other reasons are there for saying that Jesus Christ is the only way?

Reasons for Belief • Session 10

“How Could a Good God Allow Suffering?”

One of the greatest challenges to the Christian's faith is the question of suffering and the problem of evil. There are at least three reasons for this. First, the problem is one that strikes right at the very heart of the God in whom we believe. Because of this, it serves as an apparent proof of atheism, something that unbelievers can point to and argue that the Biblical God is not consistent with evil or suffering. Second, the problem is universal. People everywhere and throughout all ages have suffered. There is nowhere to go where we will not run into the problem in some form. Third, the problem is practical. This is not about some great philosophical debate as much as it is ordinary people who have to grapple with a loved one riddled with disease or having to cope with the loss of a child. The problem is real, not simply a hypothetical construct in a classroom.

- How can we know that we are not alone in feeling the pain of life? What does Biblical history show?

- What attributes of God does the problem of evil primarily strike against? How does that make it a real problem?

- What should we keep in mind about our knowledge and why?

- What is evil? How can we find a true definition of it?

- Why is the issue of free will so important? How does “love” fit into this?

- Why is God's justice so significant in helping answer the problem? What does God's justice guarantee in the end?

Reasons for Belief • Session 11

“How Could a Loving God Send People to Hell?”

In our culture, divine judgment is one of Christianity’s most offensive doctrines. Psalm 89 beautifully describes some of the foundational aspects of the character of God. How would you, in your words, summarize the attributes of God described in Psalm 89:14?

- Righteousness –

- Justice –

- Steadfast love –

- Faithfulness –

In what way do righteousness and justice form the foundation of God’s throne?

In what way do steadfast love and faithfulness go before him?

Some are quick to say, “A God of judgment can’t be a God of love.” Is this so? If not, why not?

Some are quick to say, “A loving God would never even allow hell.” Is this so? If not, why not?

Some are quick to respond, “But I believe in a God of love.” Is this a valid response? If not, why not?

Reasons for Belief • Session 12

“Christianity is a Straightjacket That’s Just Too Tight”

“Christians believe they have the absolute truth that everyone else has to believe—or else.” “A ‘one-Truth-fits all’ approach is just too confining.” “The Christians I know don’t seem to have the freedom to think for themselves.” “I believe each individual must determine truth for him- or herself.” “True freedom is freedom to create your own meaning and purpose.”

Is belief in absolute truth the enemy of freedom? Many believe that it is. Meanwhile, the Bible clearly labels some beliefs “false” and some practices “immoral.” The question, of course, is how will we respond to this tension?

- How should we respond to the charge that the Bible is too exclusive in its calls for personal purity and morality?

- How should we respond to the charge that Christianity is too rigid in relation to culture?

- How should we respond to the charge that freedom involves the right to choose our own beliefs, practices, meaning and purpose?

- In your own words, what is the freedom available in Christ Jesus?