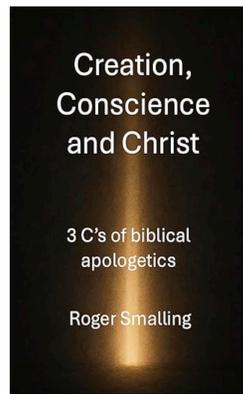


CREATION, CONSCIENCE, AND CHRIST
The three “C’s” of biblical apologetics

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Preface

Apologetics is the rational and factual defense of the Christian faith.¹ It has two purposes:

- Confirm to Christians the credibility of their faith.
- Expose to unbelievers their suppression of truth in order to prepare them to hear the gospel.

Where do we start?

The title "Biblical Apologetics" means I have chosen to limit this book to arguments the Bible itself uses. I have also chosen to limit it to a particular audience: Christian laymen who may appreciate basic tools for dealing with their non-Christian acquaintances, without complex philosophical elaborations. This book is not intended as an evangelistic device for unbelievers.

Romans chapters one and two form the basis of this book with amplifications from other texts. This approach fits better with the needs of the church members I know and with my own calling as a missionary and Bible teacher in Latin America.

Am I suggesting it is wrong to use philosophical arguments not found in the Bible? By no means. Use whatever works!

A lot has happened since the canon of Scripture was closed. Pseudo-Christian movements, scientific developments, and philosophical thought-forms have inundated humanity. These need addressing, but other books have been written about them.

Do apologetics lead people to Christ?

Imagine approaching an on-ramp leading to a highway. You notice a small tree fallen across the ramp, hindering you from proceeding. You remove the tree and then continue onto the highway.²

Removing the obstacle is like the role of apologetics. The tree represents intellectual arguments against the existence of God, the authority of Christ, or the validity of the Bible. The highway symbolizes the gospel, which, as Paul put it, is *repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ*.³ You want the debris out of the way as quickly as possible to gain a hearing for the message.

Dwelling too long on intellectual arguments would be like discussing the history of a tree before removing it. You would probably never get to the highway, which is precisely why the unbeliever put the tree there in the first place.

So the answer to the above question is **no**, apologetics does not lead people to Christ. It removes the barriers to make it possible for an unbeliever to hear the gospel and consider it plausible.

The gospel itself is *the power of God for salvation*, and nothing else is (Romans 1:16).

My own limitations

The doctrine of salvation is my specialty, within a Latin American context as a missionary. Yet apologetics, to some degree, is forced upon any minister by the nature of his calling.

I have found a helpful tool. Let me share it with you.

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Free study guides, essays and books by the Smallings are available in Spanish and English at www.smallings.com

Part 1: The 3 C's

Chapter 1: Why the 3 C's?

I have limited the apologetics in this book to the 3 C's: *Creation*, *conscience*, and *Christ*. If there is a creation, there must be a Creator. If we have a conscience with universal moral law written in it, there must be a universal lawgiver. The person and life of Christ is inexplicable without a deity.

Imagine a three-layer cake. The bottom layer is labeled *creation*. This is the foundation for the other two. We put *conscience* next because the conscience of a person is a part of creation.

The top is Christ. As the Apostle Peter put it, *Who by him do believe in God" (1 Peter 1:21)*. Peter means Christ is the pinnacle proof by his life, death, and resurrection, not that he is the only proof.

Each layer has its own particular evidence. We will examine some of the main aspects of each; the evidence with the most potential for confirming the faith of the believer and allowing him to use it easily with ordinary people has priority.

The 3 C's summarize the kind of apologetic the Bible itself uses but is not limited to those. They are useful for most settings to confirm the faith of the believer and give a *reason for the hope that is in us. 1 Peter 3:15*

Here's how the 3 C's help.

They are in one location

It is convenient that Romans chapters one and two contain them.

The evidence assures the believer

Every morning, I awake and notice the *creation* is still here testifying to a Creator; my *conscience* confirms the existence of a lawgiver, and *Christ* has not changed. Profoundly comforting! For the devil to inject doubts, he will need to insert them somewhere between these three pieces of evidence, and the burden is on him to figure out how to do that.

These proofs never change. This puts my faith on objective grounds.

Easy to remember

Even children can be taught the 3 C's. In my opinion parents should teach them to their children not only because they are biblical but also because they will root themselves in a way that God can use later.

Boldness in witnessing

For their simplicity

When an unbeliever asks why I believe in God, I reply, “If there is a creation, there is a Creator. If we have a conscience that defines universal moral laws, then a universal moral lawgiver exists. Christ speaks for himself.”

All 3 C’s are found in one place in the Bible, Romans chapters one and two, though not in that order. This makes it handy to introduce believers to apologetics in settings like a Sunday School class. These chapters can serve as a springboard to other texts throughout Scripture.

For cutting off the assumption that “we lack proof”

Today’s relativistic pagan society teaches that religious and philosophical ideas exist only within a realm of personal perspective, apart from proof. This notion is so strongly rooted in the minds of unbelievers that it seems inconceivable that we could prove anything we believe.

Countless times we have had people say, “You can't prove...etc.” In a conversation with a young man who said this, I replied, “How do you know that? How did you obtain all the knowledge in my mind to be able to state that?” Then I went on to say, “Here is the proof...”

He was attentive but unconvinced. I said, “You are free to think the proof is inadequate. From a rational viewpoint, however, you are no longer free to say no proof at all exists.” He accepted that point and we had an amiable conversation from then on about the gospel. Though he did not accept the Lord, he promised to consider the issues.

In college at the age of 19, I felt stunted in my witness for Christ because I lacked adequate evidence to demonstrate what I believed. I assumed that if my church leadership had substantial proof for the Christian faith, they would have shared it by now. In retrospect, I realize the leaders held weak views about logic, truth and evidence.

For allowing more opportunity to use Scripture

We can paraphrase biblical texts without the unbeliever realizing we are doing that. This gives opportunity for the word of God to have its effect. Example: “God’s existence and attributes, such as his eternal power and deity are clearly seen by the things that have been created.” We need not mention we are paraphrasing Romans 1:20.

Or, “Look at this fact. We all have moral law written in our conscience that either accuses or excuses us every day. We have no grounds for rejecting the notion of a moral lawgiver.” Again, we need not mention we just paraphrased Romans 2:14,15.⁴

In most ordinary witnessing situations, these are sufficient for the moment. After all, it is the truths of Scripture that God uses to regenerate, not complex arguments, according to James 1:18.

Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

General versus special revelation

The first two, *creation* and *conscience*, fall under the category of *general revelation* because all mankind in general have both. On the grounds of these alone, every person on earth is accountable to God, as we will see in Romans one and two.

The last revelation, Christ, is called *special revelation* because it is given only to some, the elect.

Do the 3 C’s work?

If by *work* we mean, "Does this evidence persuade people to become Christians? The answer is no. Only grace works—that special drawing of God the Father without which no one can come to Christ (John 6:44). These proofs serve only to remove objections and provide a plausible platform for the gospel to be heard, because that alone *is the power of God for salvation...* Romans 1:16

To do this better, we must clearly understand what the Bible says is the major obstacle in the heart of the unbeliever. We will discover this in the next chapter.

From this chapter we learn...

- Biblical apologetics can be summarized as *creation, conscience, and Christ*, found in Romans one and two.
- The believer benefits from these points because they are an assurance to his faith, easy to remember, and grant greater boldness in witnessing.
- General revelation refers to *creation* and conscience, which everyone knows. Special revelation refers to Christ and the gospel, revealed to some only.
- It is God’s grace alone through the gospel that persuades people. The evidence merely serves to gain a hearing for the gospel.

Chapter 2: Do you feel competent?

Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant— 2 Corinthians 3:5,6

Do you feel competent to address the questions of unbelievers? Don't worry about it. Paul did not feel competent in himself and neither should we. Despite his vast knowledge, which even his detractors recognized, Paul knew it was empty until God anointed it.

How often have you looked back on an evangelism opportunity and felt the following? — Maybe they would have been persuaded if I had said it differently or used a better argument. Did I fail?

That feeling of inadequacy is perfectly normal because the truth is, we are indeed inadequate in ourselves. It is also true that this is irrelevant.

It is God who opens the hearts, as with Lydia in Acts 16:14; the *Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message*. Jesus also made it clear that no one can come to him unless the Father draws him (John 6:44).

It is not the persuasiveness of our arguments that brings people to Christ, though God may use it. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, over which we have no control.

God may use a phrase we speak that we thought was irrelevant to open a heart. Therefore, we take no credit for the results and no blame for the lack thereof.

Part 2: The Psychology of unbelief

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Romans 1:18,19⁵

Chapter 3: What the Bible says about unbelievers

All unbelievers believe in God whether they know it or not.

Does that sound peculiar? I got it from the Apostle Paul. Let's take a look at Romans 1:16-24.

Paul says the gospel is *the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes* (verse 16) but does not say salvation from what. After explaining that righteousness is obtained by faith, he describes next precisely from *what* the gospel is designed to save us.

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.
Romans 1:18*

It shocks some Christians to hear this, but the thing from which the gospel is designed to save us is God! Not poverty, not disease, although that may also take place. We need saving from the wrath of God.

What makes God so angry, according to this text? On the surface of it, *ungodliness and unrighteousness* are grounds enough. Yet one particular unrighteousness is mentioned at the end of the verse: ***the suppression of truth.***

Ungodliness by itself is justifiable cause for God's anger. Suppressing the truth that could set man free is the reason for anger to turn to wrath.

Once we understand this, the entire foundation of Christian apologetics comes into focus and makes perfect sense. All unbelievers, with no exception, play a game of suppression of clearly revealed truth. They do this in preference to the ungodliness in their life, with one sin in particular as central—the sin of autonomy. We cannot wake someone who is pretending to be asleep.

This was Adam's sin, his declaration of self-rule apart from God—the attitude that being obedient to his Creator, even for his own good and to save his own life, was unacceptable. From that stem all other forms of sin.

This sinful autonomy spawns man's philosophies and idolatrous religions. Neither of these is designed to lead to truth or God, but to avoid both. Truth, like anything else, gets distorted when suppressed. When a person suppresses truth long enough, he may even convince himself truth never existed.

Oh, the amazing grace of God! We were once there too before Christ rescued us. Let us *never* forget that. Paul eventually gets to Romans Five, where he talks about the

love of God, but he must take his time to make sure we clearly understand the depth of his words: *while we were still sinners, Christ died for the ungodly.*

In our day, it has become popular among Christians to talk about the *brokenness* of people and how the gospel can heal that brokenness. Such an approach is perfectly valid in many situations, especially when people are abused by the sins of others. This can be very attractive in drawing some to Christ. It was, after all, the compassion of Christ in ministering healing and counseling that brought many to him.

We must keep in mind, however, that man's root problem is rebellion against God's authority. Brokenness is a consequence. Unless sinful autonomy is dealt with, healing the brokenness will be a Band-Aid over cancer.

You and I were once ungodly truth suppressors; every minute of every day with the sight of birds, trees, sky, and mirrors in our face, masters at the art of indifference to truth, the most insidious form of suppression.

That is why every apologist I have ever heard makes it clear we must remember the word *compassion*. As we deal with people, we should be concerned about them as individuals, not just engrossed in proving our point. We can express this to them as it seems appropriate.

I recall Dr. Francis Schaeffer mentioning this at L'Abri⁶ during a visit of mine. He said we must let people know we are concerned about them as people even if it seems they are not listening. The chosen ones will listen. Winning people, not arguments, is the goal.

Is autonomy all that bad?

It depends on which kind, the good one or the bad one.

In a U.S. Marines recruitment ad, the repeated refrain was, "Be all that you can be."

Good stuff! I liked it, although I managed to restrain myself from enlisting. The difficulty with becoming "all that you can be" as a soldier is that the recruit must submit to authority. Such submission can become a tad uncomfortable.

Simply put, if a guy tries to be a marine without submitting to the Marine Corps, he is already in trouble. He is self-deceived and certainly no patriot.

Once a recruit graduates from marine training, he is on the road to being the best he can be. Not only the best, but better than most who did not join up; stronger, healthier, skilled, and equipped in ways unavailable to the common man. Ironically, he is now capable of a greater degree of self-reliance than ever before. He has a type of autonomy superior to others.

That's the paradox of discipline and the rules that embody discipline: It leads to a good kind of autonomy with the deepest satisfaction and fulfillment.

The bad kind is the one Adam chose in the garden. He wanted the comforts of the garden but with independence from God's authority and discipline. So he lost both God and the garden. He also lost something else: the opportunity to be the best that he could be...a partner with God Almighty in the government and care of creation. A glorious future was forfeited.

When talking to unbelievers, I like to use phrases like *a wrong kind of independence*. The word "autonomy" is a bit austere. Sometimes the simple word "pride" will communicate the concept just as well.

It helps to keep in mind that the problem with the unbeliever is not ignorance, philosophy, or religion. It is a fundamental desire to be independent of any authority, legitimate or otherwise.

Unbelievers invariably imagine we are trying to bind them with religious rules and rob them of their independence. We are, in fact, trying to set them free to be in Christ all that God intended them to be.

Next, we will look at the kind of logic Paul uses to prove the existence of God.

From this chapter we learn...

- The purpose of the gospel is to save people from the wrath of God. Anything else is secondary.
- All unbelievers suppress the evidence of God's existence and attributes to maintain a sinful autonomy.
- Our motivation in apologetics should always be compassion, not winning arguments. We need to ask God for that.
- The desire for a wrong kind of independence is the root of man's condemnation.

Chapter 4: Getting our P's and Q's straight about logic

...*invisible* attributes... have been clearly perceived... Romans 1:20

Before we proceed with Paul's evidence, we need to look at the kind of logic he employs to see why it is valid.

When Paul used the phrase "invisible attributes," he was acknowledging God is invisible but nevertheless has attributes we can understand on the grounds of adequate evidence. God is not *directly* observable, but his existence can be inferred *indirectly*.

This approach to evidence is called *inferential logic*. It helps to understand this because sometimes people ask, "Why can't we see God?"

We don't mind this question when it comes from a child. For children, we may answer something along the lines of, "God is like the wind. It is there, but we can't see it."

An adult who asks the question may be doing so to avoid truth. The way I answer depends on the tone and attitude of the questioner. While the form of the question may be the same as a small child's, the meaning may actually be an argument: *If we cannot see God, then he must not exist. Therefore, my rejection of your Christian message is legitimate.* The assumption here is that all things that exist must be visible.

To such a person, we simply refer back to *eternal power* and mention that a lot of knowledge is based on conclusions drawn from clues. After giving an example, such as from science or a court of law, we can say that the evidence from creation, conscience, and Christ is more than adequate.

We do not need to know the difference between *inferential logic* and *deductive logic* to give a gospel witness. It helps, though, to understand where Paul is coming from in the Romans text we are studying.

Suppose a detective is trying to prove a suspect walked on a certain beach at a recent time. How would he go about finding evidence?

First, find eyewitnesses. That is *deductive*. We can call that kind of evidence *direct observation*. Suppose witnesses are unavailable. He could then go to that beach and observe the tracks of the suspect in the sand.

Either approach is valid. Although sand is not a human being, the form it takes when a person walks on it grants us a world of data about the person. That footprint describes his human attributes: size, weight, etc. That is *inferential logic* and in a court of law would stand as adequate evidence.

We learned from a crime program that most homicides are judged by inferential logic, clues rather than eyewitnesses. Most of science is based on inferential logic, by observing phenomena and drawing conclusions about the causes. Innumerable examples could be given here, but that would be superfluous.⁷

Paul considers his inferential evidence in Romans 1:20 to be adequate to hold humanity accountable for knowing God exists and understanding what kind of God he is. In our witness to unbelievers we must speak and act with confidence in that evidence. We have every right to declare it totally adequate and that mankind is inexcusable to suppress it. Paul did not back down from that before any Greek or Roman philosopher, and neither should we.

The difference between logic and reason

Some Christians, in particular those lacking formal education, react negatively to the word "logic" in discussions on apologetics. The reason is usually because they have heard philosophers, atheists, or other anti-Christian elements using supposed logic. One such believer said to me, "Atheists use logic to prove their point," insinuating that logic is unreliable as a means for arriving at truth.

The believer mentioned above assumed atheists use logical arguments, but they do not. The arguments of atheists are irrational, as Christian apologists have proven consistently. Atheism itself violates an important law of logic, as we shall see in Chapter 12.

If we are going to attack logic, we must be careful to avoid using logic to do so. That would be cheating. Attacks on logic are self-contradictory, unworthy of a thinking person.

Anti-intellectual attitudes among Christians are indefensible because logic is precisely what Paul was using in his defense of God's existence in Romans one. Christian apologists have shown consistently that anti-Christian arguments are no logic at all but are illogic.

Interestingly, in a college class on philosophy of education, the professor mentioned that Christianity was only one of two philosophies that are internally self-consistent.⁸ For unbelievers to try to point out inconsistencies in Christian doctrine is simply a display of ignorance.⁹

Logic is like math. It follows fixed rules. Two plus two is four, regardless of who gets it wrong. In that sense, logic is an absolute.

Reason refers to our ability to be consistent in our logic. We all commit logic fallacies in trying to reason. Some are better at reasoning than others, which means they commit fewer logic fallacies. When we refer to reason, we mean a person's ability to arrange arguments logically without committing fallacies.

A good way to remember this is the difference between mathematics and a mathematician. Math does not make mistakes. The mathematician does.

Avoid cutting your own throat

In my conversation with a fellow believer on some astronomy issues, he asked, "Have you ever seen a star evolve?¹⁰ Was anyone there when the Big Bang occurred?"¹¹ He was implying that direct observation is the only valid kind of evidence and inferences drawn from effects are meaningless.

Big mistake. I simply replied, "Has anyone seen God?"

Sometimes Christians attack the inferential logic non-Christians may use. It is legitimate to question the validity or sufficiency of the evidence or if the starting premises are true. However, if we attack the nature of the logic involved, we simply cut our own throats.

In reverse, if an unbeliever attacks the value of Paul's inferential logic, we can turn the tables around and ask the same questions: Have you ever seen a star evolve? Then repeat the evidence for God's existence and attributes.

Next, we will see why individuals cannot rationally pick and choose their own truth.

From this chapter we learn...

- Two kinds of evidence exist: direct observation, called deductive, and indirect observation, called *inferential*. Both kinds are sufficient for establishing truth.
- Paul uses inferential logic in Romans and considers it valid as grounds for God's wrath against mankind's suppression of the evidence.
- Christians must beware of attacking inferential logic used by unbelievers because doing that undermines the Christian evidence used in Scripture.

Chapter 5: Is truth relative to the individual?

When Pilate asked Jesus, “What is truth?” He was not denying that truth exists but only questioning whether it can be known with certainty.

We know this from ancient literature because the question was always, “What is truth?” not whether such a thing as truth exists.

If we ask ten people today, “Is truth relative to the individual?” we are likely to get ten *yes* answers. In fact, I recall hearing about a survey among evangelical Christians that claimed 75% gave an affirmative answer to that question. That is deplorable.

This is a view of truth known as *relativism*. It is self-contradictory and profoundly irrational. All we need to refute it is to ask, “Is that statement absolutely true, or is it just relative to you?”¹²

Sometimes relativism is so deeply rooted in a person’s mind that he will actually deny the existence of any absolute truth and not see the contradiction. Is it absolutely true that absolute truth does not exist?

This is the way fallen man today suppresses truth: not by rejecting any particular truth but by suppressing the entire concept of truth itself. This avoids confronting God and repentance from any possible angle. Relativism is actually atheism in disguise, for if God exists, then truth must ultimately be relative to what he is.¹³

Relativism is a denial not only of absolute truth but also of the validity of reason itself. When Bible characters used the word “truth,” as did Jesus, they meant *that which actually exists whether we understand it or not*.

Christians must constantly be aware in their witness of this shift in the concept of truth because what we say to people is not necessarily what they hear. What they hear us saying when we use the word “truth” is *“my personal feelings and perspective*.

Suppose we had a bucket and wanted to fill it with truth. Where would we go? In philosophy this question is called the *locus veritas*, meaning the place where truth is found.

If we ask people today where to go for truth, the answer will probably be something like, “Look within yourself.” Or, “It depends upon your personal perspective.” For today’s society, the *place of truth* is inside the individual. It assumes this is particularly so of any abstract subject such as philosophy or religion.

If we were to be able to ask the same question to anyone before the last two centuries, including Bible writers, the answer might be, “Go find the evidence.” Or,

“Find out the facts of the matter.” In this sense, the *place of truth* is in facts, not internal perceptions or feelings.

The biblical view of truth, therefore, is *that which actually exists, regardless of whether we like it or not, know it or not, or believe it or not*. In turn, we are saying that the nature of truth is absolute, universal, and eternal.

For example, it is a fact you are reading this paragraph right now. That fact will never change and will be true a million years from now throughout the whole universe, whether anyone exists to know it or not.

This is the only view of the term “truth” that does not contradict itself nor lead us out of reality, although most relativists will simply reply irrationally that this view of truth is merely our perspective. In this sense, we can say objectively, without intending arrogance, that Christians who hold to a view of truth as absolute are rational and the society around them is not.

In an essay on my website, I show why no such thing can exist as a truth relative to any individual, if we respect reason at all.¹⁴

Why elaborate on this philosophical point? In our witness today, we must constantly communicate that what we are saying is fact, not just our opinion. We must be aware that between our mouth and their ears, any evidence we give, however concrete, will be heard as “personal perspective.”

We can say it in many ways, like, “I mean concrete evidence, not mystical stuff.” Or, “This is fact, not my personal opinion.” It helps to intersperse such comments within our conversation to try to break down the relativism.

One Christian college professor was sharing some evidence about Christianity to a student who totally ignored the evidence and said to the professor, “That’s your perspective.” The professor replied, “I have no perspectives. What I have is truth; absolute rational fact-based truth.”

This may sound sharp, but sometimes it is necessary. Depending on the conversation and the person with whom we are dealing, we can soften it as we like. My own personal preference is the phrase “I stand on the evidence.”

From this chapter we learn...

- Modern man holds to a view of truth called *relativism*, radically different from that assumed by Bible writers: that truth is found in individual perspective.
- The only rationally consistent view of truth is that it is based on objective evidence, not relative to any individual.

- In our witness, we must be aware that today's unbelievers interpret everything we say as just our own personal perspective, not absolute truth. We must intersperse in our conversation that our beliefs are based on evidence, not opinions.

Part 3: Creation

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. Romans 1:18-20

Chapter 6: How does the word "eternal" show the existence of God?

...his **eternal** power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived,...
Romans 1:20

The power behind creation must have existed forever. Why? Philosophers before Paul's time expressed it as, *Ex nihilo nihil fit*, or "out of nothing, nothing comes."¹⁵ This means if there were ever a time in eternity when nothing at all existed, not even God, then nothing could exist now.

It doesn't take a philosopher to deduce that something must have existed from all eternity to cause everything else. Nor does it take much time; a couple of seconds is enough for the obvious to flash on the brain. Children can figure it out.

Paul is attesting that all adults on the planet with normal minds have already concluded that. They might suppress the conclusion, but it is inescapable. This is true even if they lack the vocabulary to express it.

Who made God?

Sometimes people ask, *Who made God?* Children might ask this because their minds lack the development to deal with abstract concepts like *eternity*. Some adults, however, have trouble with abstract cognition and occasionally may ask that question.

The error here confuses the difference between self-creation and self-existence. Self-creation is a contradiction in terms. For something to be self-created, it would have to exist before it existed to make itself. That is simply gibberish.

However, it violates no known law of logic that something could exist forever. In fact, the Apostle Paul is claiming that logic *demand*s that an entity must have existed forever to be the source of everything else. That *something* must have the power of existence in itself, or it could never have existed to give existence to anything else.

Part of the problem is linear thinking about the word *eternity*. If we ask a group of people for a definition of that word, we may hear statements like, "Eternity means a really long time," or "Eternity means time without end." This kind of definition is erroneous because eternity is a dimension without reference to time at all.

If we define time as the relationship between material objects, like the moving hands on a clock, then time began at the creation. For the creation to take place, therefore,

it must have come from a dimension outside of time and from a self-existent source, independent of time and creation.

This is one of several reasons why we can say that God is a *necessary being*. We mean it is logically impossible for God not to exist.

That is the longhand version of Paul's simple statement, *invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power...* The shorthand is simply that the power that created the universe must have existed from all eternity.

The simplicity of Paul's argument from the phrase "eternal power" might make us wonder why some people ask the question, *Who made God?* A lot depends on the tone and attitude of the person who asks the question.

For a few people, their tone may indicate a degree of honest inquiry. In my personal experience, however, this is not the case with most. The last person who asked me that question did so with a snide attitude as though the question itself refuted God's existence and therefore invalidated my gospel witness. This is what we call a *point of suppression*, which was what Paul was talking about in Romans 1:18 when he said, *...who **suppress** the truth in unrighteousness.*

If the person is capable of asking the question with a negative attitude, then he already knows the answer. He has already suppressed the truth, whether he realizes it consciously or not; otherwise, there would be no grounds for a negative attitude.

How then do we answer an adult who asks that question? If I think the individual is intellectually honest, then I may go into the explanation as above, explaining briefly the difference between self-creation and self-existence, the first being impossible, the second inevitable.

In the case of an antagonistic person, I keep the answer as short as possible, knowing he will probably reject the answer no matter what it is because suppression of truth, not the pursuit of it, is his game. I simply tell him I will give him an answer, and then I would like to ask him a question about himself.

I then give a short answer, such as, something uncreated must have existed from all eternity to create everything else. Now I have a question about you. Are you a good person...? etc. Then I proceed with the evangelism plan we will see in Chapter 21 to uncover the particular unrighteousness he is hiding that motivated him to suppress this truth in the first place.

Remember, we are out to win people, not arguments. Romans continues after chapter one and eventually leads to, *God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* Romans 5:8

We have seen how Paul's use of the word "eternal" suggests God's existence. Next, we will see how the concept of *power* nails it down.

From this chapter we learn...

- Something must have existed from all eternity for anything to exist now. That *something* must be self-existent and uncreated.
- Those who honestly ask, "Who made God?" need to understand the difference between self-created and self-existent. The former is impossible, the latter inevitable.
- If a person asks the above question with a hostile tone, then we should give a short answer and proceed with the gospel.

Chapter 7: How does the word "power" show the existence of God?

*...his eternal **power** and divine nature, have been clearly perceived,...*

Romans 1:20

A glance at creation tells us the entity that existed from eternity must be unimaginably powerful.

The more scientists delve into natural phenomena, the more striking this point becomes, whether individual scientists ascribe the power to God or not. Astronomers know a cupful of the matter comprising a neutron star weighs more than the earth; the amount of power necessary to cause the universe to expand is mind-boggling.

Why does the power in creation prove God's existence? What is it about power that would lead to the inevitable conclusion that God is the source?

What is *power*? In its simplest form, we can say that power is a force that causes other things to move or change.

One evening, I noticed on TV a billiard table viewed from above. From the bottom of the screen a ball emerged, rolling across the table. It was evident that a person, probably with a cue stick, was the cause of the movement of the ball.

Why did I assume that? Why not suppose the ball moved across the table on its own accord? Billiard balls have no power of motion in themselves. To move, they must acquire motion from an external source.

This is true of any material object. For a physical thing to move or change, it must obtain that power from an outside source because matter possesses no such ability inherently. Movement or change of any kind for material substances must be acquired.

This is also true of living things like ourselves. Our power of motion was acquired from parents who obtained it from their parents and so on.

Like a line of dominoes that stays put indefinitely, a finger must push over the first one.

Working it backwards like this, we see that at the beginning of creation, something must have existed with the power to move matter, yet is itself unmovable.¹⁶ That something is called, *the unmoved mover*.¹⁷

The idea of such an *unmoved mover* violates no law of logic. In fact, logic demands it. This is embodied in the meaning of Paul's simple word *power*.

The term "unmoved mover" is by no means new. It existed in Paul's day. He may have known it, being the educated man he was. Regardless, the concept is still deducible from creation itself, as Paul claims.

Believing in God is not a question of blind faith. Trusting him, yes. Submitting to his authority, yes. Believing in his existence, no. It is fact based on adequate evidence. That is the point Paul is making in Romans 1:16-20 and the reason why all humanity, including pagan Romans, are accountable to God.

This is why Romans one is so handy. We can use the same simple evidence that Paul did: *creation, conscience, and Christ*.

First cause

All the above is known as the argument from *first cause*.¹⁸ Some may think this refers to the beginning of the universe. That is not the meaning of *first cause*. Something put movement into matter regardless of whether matter is eternal or not.

People get confused here sometimes. They may say, "If everything has a cause, then what caused God?" The error is in saying every *thing* has a cause. This is not the meaning of *first cause*. It simply means every *event* must have a cause. To apply the question to God is therefore a mistake.

Another way to express this is simply *argument from cause and effect*. Behind this phrase is the assumption that every effect must have an adequate cause equal to or greater than the effect. Knowledge, including all science, is ultimately based on that assumption. Without it, no scientist would seek for an answer as to the cause of any natural phenomenon.

Scientists are usually consistent with this until we get to the existence of God as a *necessary being*. At that point, they may ignore the logic of cause and effect and therefore ignore God. Scientists are human too.

If we ask what could be the attributes of the source of the creation, the answer is plain enough...unless we want to suppress the answer.

In short, Paul's brief phrase, *eternal power*, sums up a world of evidence that leaves the unbeliever *without excuse*. Romans 1:20

Next, we will see why the *eternal power* must be a deity.

From this chapter we learn...

- For any physical object to move or change, the power to do so must be acquired from outside itself.
- This power must be unmovable and self-existent. This can only be God.

- It requires no faith at all to believe in God. It requires intellectual honesty.

Chapter 8: How does creation demonstrate *divine nature*?

...his eternal power and **divine nature**, have been clearly perceived,...
Romans 1:20

This is called *argument from design*. If an object looks like it has been designed, it must have a designer. The creation reflects that.

Notice Paul separates *eternal power* from *divine nature*. Why?

First, eternal power must be non-material. If it were composed of matter, then it would have the same problem as any other physical thing; its power to move or change would have to come from something outside.

Second, the *unmoved mover* must have the intelligence to make matter move and change with the incredible complexity we observe in nature. This may explain why Paul sets the *divine nature* apart from *eternal power* as though it were a separate point.

In the last hundred years, some atheistic scientists have pointed out how natural law by itself is most certainly capable of creating complex designs. The resulting complexities need not have an intelligence behind them, or so we are told.

That attitude is changing in some circles. Why? Though scientists knew that nature is complex, they did not realize it is SO complex. The more they delve into it, the more unimaginably complex it appears. This has caused some peculiar reactions among a few scientists and non-scientific intellectuals.

The late Anthony Flew of England was the president of the British Atheist Society for 50 years. He resigned his post a few years before his recent death. His last book was **THERE IS A GOD.**¹⁹

In his book, Flew explains why he changed his mind. He studied the incredible complexity of DNA and concluded it could not have happened on its own, on this planet, by natural law. Another reason he gave was Aquinas' argument on the unmoved *mover*.²⁰

The reaction of others in the life sciences toward the complexity of DNA has been fascinating to observe. One anti-Christian British scientist, Sir Fred Hoyle, and a colleague,²¹ after doing calculations on the possibility of a single cell coming together on its own by the natural laws on earth, claimed the probability was a number greater than the atoms in the universe. They concluded that our planet could not have produced life on its own.

So they supported the notion of *panspermia*,²² meaning that life must have come to earth from somewhere in outer space. This simply transfers the problem to another planet than ours.

Do we see any suppression of truth here?

Not all scientists have reacted this way. Dr. Francis Collins, winner of the Nobel Prize for leading the team that deciphered the human genome (DNA), was an atheist before studying biology in detail. He yielded to the evidence and ultimately became a Christian.²³

When an unbeliever attests to the evidence he has, God will give him more. No logical reason exists to compel God to grant more evidence to someone who suppresses truth he already has. Yet that is exactly what God does in some cases. It is called grace for the elect.

I have on my shelf an astronomy book with the intimidating title, **THE ANTHROPIC COSMOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE** by two scientists, Barrow and Tipler.²⁴ The book is directed to other scientists and some of it is incomprehensible to those of us who are not.

The title of the book, translated into comprehensible English, means that the structure of the entire cosmos seems to carefully follow a principle: to make life of our kind possible on a planet like ours. The point made by these two astronomers is that the universe appears to have been created to accommodate mankind.

The authors are well aware this looks laughable because people ask what relationship could a galaxy billions of light-years away have to us? They answer that life would not exist anywhere unless the universe were constructed exactly as is, with those galaxies as they are. It is not, they said, that any particular galaxy could affect us. The point is rather that this entire expanding ball, the universe in which we exist, must be exactly this kind of ball, or we would not be here.

Another astronomer, Hugh Ross of Canada, a devout Christian, employs the same kind of data as above in lectures to other scientists. He mentions that if the expansion of the universe were one quintillionth of one percent different, life of any kind would be impossible anywhere in the universe. Such fine-tuning, he implies, looks deliberate.²⁵

Caution

In mentioning scientific data with unbelievers, we must keep in mind the warning of Augustine:

If they find a Christian mistaken in a field which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions about our books, how are they going to believe those

books in matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven, when they think their pages are full of falsehoods on facts which they themselves have learnt from experience and the light of reason?

Never has there existed in the history of mankind an epoch in which scientists have less excuse for atheism than this one. Let us remember that scientists are sinners also. If they reject God, it is because of the heart, not because they are scientists.

Though the Apostle Paul was no scientist, he was able to deduce, as we do today, that the eternal power that created everything must be unimaginably intelligent. Though natural law can create complexities, those laws had a source. The conclusion is inescapable. The source must be a deity.

When we sum up the possible ramifications of the phrase, *eternal power and divine nature* it is no wonder Paul finished the verse with, *so that they are without excuse*.

From this chapter we learn...

- The eternal power that set everything in motion must be incredibly intelligent because of the mind-boggling complexity of it all.
- Some shy away from the conclusion not because they are intelligent but because they choose to suppress it for the sake of their own autonomy.
- God has used the complexity in creation to open the eyes of many scientists to find him.

Chapter 9: Empty wisdom

Claiming to be wise, they became fools. Romans 1:22

People filled with philosophy are empty. The Apostle Paul says so.

*See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and **empty deceit**, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. Colossians 2:8-10*

To be filled, we must be filled with Christ.

Paul had little respect for men's philosophies and made it abundantly clear in several places in the New Testament.

He saw philosophy for what it is: a favored device for suppressing truth while pretending to seek it. Few of the old Greek and Roman philosophers showed a disposition to acknowledge the kind of God *clearly perceived* in creation (Romans 1:19). Among some who did, there seemed a lack of zeal in repentance.²⁶ Paul was well aware of this disconnect in the unregenerate soul between the intellect and the life people lead.

Yet Paul was not ignorant of the philosophies of his day. This is clear from his encounter with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in Athens and his quoting from a couple of their poets to illustrate a point.²⁷ Likewise, we must be aware of the prevailing winds of thought in our own culture if we are going to engage people at all.

As with Paul, we must be astute enough to avoid entangling ourselves in philosophy and never getting around to the message of *repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ*, because such entanglement is precisely why men invent philosophies in the first place.

Paul showed no inclination to validate the thought forms of his day, yet did not hesitate to use them as a springboard when convenient, as he did when quoting the two Greek philosopher-poets in Acts 17:28.

Captivating

Paul recognizes that philosophy is captivating. It incites the intellect in a pleasurable way like certain games, and it can become addictive. Chess, for example, is highly addictive because it stimulates the reasoning faculty along with the enjoyment of competition. Some video games are the same.

Sports that require complex strategies, like football, also have mentally pleasurable elements. All these are legitimate and enjoyable pastimes... until they become addictive and therefore turn into idols.

Philosophy can function exactly the same way, especially with young people who are developing their own reasoning abilities. It is captivating but empty, as hollow as a game when it is over. How many of us have to think hard to remember who was the losing team in the Super Bowl last year?

Empty deceit

Paul calls philosophy *empty deceit* for good reasons. It is *empty* because it does not lead to reality. The Apostle uses a strong Greek word here, *KENOS*, which means “pertaining to a complete lack of understanding and insight.”²⁸ Paul’s mockery of the philosophies of his day comes through here because understanding and insight were precisely what the philosophers were claiming to have attained.

The Greek word for *deceit* here is equally strong, *APATÉ*, “to cause someone to have misleading or erroneous views concerning the truth.”²⁹ Deceitful because it makes people think they have arrived at truth from the mere ability to grasp complex abstractions.

Another problem with philosophy is that it rarely raises a person above ground level. It won’t raise a person’s life as high as it pretends. Paul expresses this with the peculiar phrase “elemental spirits” in the text above. The Greek is *STOICHEIA*, a word almost impossible to translate. It can mean “the materials of which the world and the universe are composed.” Or, “the supernatural powers or forces regarded as having control over the events of this world.”³⁰

Paul expounds on this point at the end of Colossians Two by repeating the word *STOICHEIA* and calling such philosophy *human precepts and teachings*. He recognizes the central deception by saying, *These have indeed an appearance of wisdom...* (Verse 23) and shows the inconsistency of being in Christ and following such. Men’s philosophies may lead to a useless asceticism, a *severity of the body*, that has ***no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh***. Colossians 2:23

The Stoic philosophers and other Greeks thought that through the study of nature, they might find the answer to the meaning of life. Others, the Gnostics, assumed events were under the control of mystical creatures or laws we need to understand to control our destinies. Paul is saying, *Don’t look there. Look to the Creator of all*.

That is precisely what we must do in our apologetics. Try to get the eyes of the person away from the low-down stuff and confront the Creator. Depending on the person, it may be necessary to show why what he is focusing on is in fact, low-down empty

deceit; then get on the gospel highway as quickly as possible with *repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ*.

Next we will see the other favorite strategies for suppressing truth.

From this chapter we learn...

- Philosophy may often be a device for avoiding truth under the pretext of searching for it.
- Philosophy can be captivating to the mind but may also be self-deceiving.
- We need to be aware of the prevailing winds of thought in the culture to be able to deal with them so the gospel can be heard.

Chapter 10: Exchanging the glory

*Claiming to be wise, they became fools and **exchanged** the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Romans 1:22,23*

Just as philosophy is man's favorite device for avoiding truth, so idolatrous religion is his favorite device for avoiding God. This happens because something has been exchanged, as the Apostle Paul put it.

All idolatrous religions have one thing in common: they leave man autonomous. Man controls the god, not vice versa.

Though fallen man perceives the true God correctly, as Paul shows in Romans one, that perception is threatening. The most obvious thing about an eternal and all-powerful deity is that he cannot be controlled. Therein lies the threat. It challenges man's autonomy.

Man wants to worship. It is a part of his nature because that is what he was created for. In his fallen state, that presents a problem: how to get a feeling of worship without giving up his sinful autonomy.

The answer is to reduce God to a manageable size. Remove the glory of the immortal God for an image that can be controlled. Since it is hard to represent eternal power by an image, the obvious solution is to make an image of something in the creation, such as *mortal man and birds and animals....* Romans 1:23

Little god, little man

Now comes the great irony in idolatrous religion: when a person reduces God to less than what God is, he usually reduces himself to less than what a human is. He ends up worshiping something not only less than God but less than himself. Idols are less than human, as the Old Testament prophets expressed.

They have mouths, but do not speak; they have eyes, but do not see; they have ears, but do not hear, nor is there any breath in their mouths. Psalm 115:5

*Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.
Psalm 135:16-18*

The irony of man's pursuit of self-made religion is that both God and man get reduced to less than what they are. Paul is not unkind, just factual, when he says *they became fools*.

Why works don't work

This is why all non-Christian religions, without exception, base their righteousness on works performed by the adherents. It leaves them autonomous while providing a feeling of rightness. The gospel, on the other hand, is based on a work performed for us by God and received by grace alone.

The works, in and of themselves, may be good. However, those very works may be a means of suppressing truth, the very thing Jesus condemned in the Pharisees and what Paul censures in idolatrous religion.

In Romans 10, Paul clarifies what religion without Christ is attempting to accomplish:

For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Romans 10:3

Christ did not come to supplement what is lacking in our righteousness. He came to replace it. He attributes to us his own righteousness. This requires abandonment of one's autonomy, which a religious sinner will never do unless the grace of God reaches him.

It is amazing what a religious sinner is willing to go through to establish his own righteousness: tedious rituals, deprivation, and even torture. As long as the righteousness is generated out of the autonomous self, it is acceptable to him.

God rejects all of it, not because any particular element of a religion without Christ is bad but because of the source from which it proceeds.

But they seem so sincere!

...and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images...Verse 22

Is it possible to exchange one thing for another without recognizing the existence of the thing exchanged? If we exchange a football for a basketball, it is because we have a football to exchange. So, if a pagan exchanges the glory of God for an idol, it is because he has already perceived the glory of God in creation and in his conscience.

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Psalm 19:1

How does that square with the concept of sincerity? The term "doublethink" describes the ability of people to convince themselves of their own lie.³¹ This may indeed lead to a form of sincerity in which a person really ends up believing his own lie.

This may sound like an intolerant criticism of other religions, but that is exactly what Paul is saying in Romans one. Here is the progression:

- First, they perceive the existence and attributes of God in creation. ...*clearly perceived*... Verse 20
- Second, *they knew God* (verse 21). This means a clear recognition of God and his attributes, though not a saving knowledge.
- Third, they chose to not *honor him as God nor give thanks* (verse 21).
- Fourth, they invent other ideas, whether philosophical or religious, that are contrary to what they already know (verse 22).
- Fifth, they *exchanged* the real God for images, whether physical or mental, that they can control (verse 23).
- Sixth, God gives them over to immorality (verse 24).

Paul concludes that idolatry is the consequence of a previous rejection of the revelation of God's existence and facilitates man's sinful autonomy.

This may be a deeper form of corruption than atheism. While the atheist rejects God's revelation outright and simply ignores it, the religious sinner takes the same revelation and perverts it.

From here we will look at how to deal with idolatry.

From this chapter we learn...

- Idolatrous religion is another device mankind uses to suppress the knowledge of God revealed in creation.
- Mankind normally ends up worshiping something not only less than God but less than himself.
- The idolatry of non-Christian religions may disguise an underlying avoidance of God.

Chapter 11: Dealing with idolatry

We deal with idolatry the same way Paul did in Athens and other places. Remind idolaters that the Creator cannot be represented by images, and doing so is folly. The true God now commands them to repent.

While on the mission field in South America, I was intrigued by the way some of the new believers were witnessing to their friends and relatives. They spent a lot of time talking against idolatry. At first I thought this might hinder the process of getting to the gospel. The results proved me wrong.

I now realize that religious idolatry is a form of debris on the onramp that must be addressed before the gospel has impact.

Idolatry is not ignorance

In part it is ignorance, but not primarily. Paul's speech to the Athenians illustrates this:

For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring." Acts 17:28

Notice the incredible amount these pagan Greeks clearly understood about God and his attributes! Two poets are quoted here.³² The first phrase shows they understand there is a God who:

- Is a deity and not a mindless force because of the word *him*.
- Is the source of all life; *In him we live...*
- Encompasses everything because *in him* we move.
- Is the source of the power of motion...and *move*.
- Is the ground and basis of existence...and *have our being*.

Equally remarkable is the second statement from the Greek poet: *we are indeed his offspring*, showing to some degree an understanding of the image of God in man.³³

None of the Greeks Paul was addressing contradicted him on these points. Ignorance? Not on your life! How then did they deal with this knowledge of God? They erected a monument to *the unknown God* and went back to worshiping idols.

Their ignorance was not about God but about his Son and how they could know him. The same is true of unbelievers today, no matter how religious.

Paul's indictment of his hearers is clear, but equally clear is his compassion. *Yet he is not far from each one of us. Acts 17:27*

Once we deal with the idolatry, we can get on the gospel highway and talk about *repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ*.

Are all unbelievers idolaters?

Yes, regardless of whether they are religious or not. Living for anything less than God will normally result in living for something less than oneself.

I recently saw an excellent documentary about a man who dedicated his life to preserving wolverines. Nothing is wrong with that. Preserving endangered species is a noble occupation, a respectable way to earn a living. That can fit quite well into man's original job description as caretaker of God's creation in Genesis One.

What might be less noble is if that naturalist makes wolverines his reason for living. Which is greater? A wolverine or a man? In this case, the naturalist might be doing what Paul warned about in Romans 1:25: *...they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and **served** the creature rather than the Creator*. The risk is in serving something less than himself, like any other idolater, religious or secular.

Hopefully, the naturalist is not doing that. If he is, then no moral difference exists between him and a pagan with a bone through his nose, dancing around a stone.

Let us remember that each of us was in the same moral condition at one time. When Paul used the word "they," he was referring to us.

From this chapter we learn...

- We deal with idolatry the same way Paul did: by exposing it and then proceeding to the gospel.
- All unbelievers are idolaters because they invariably live for something not only less than God but frequently less than themselves.

Chapter 12: Why atheism is rationally indefensible

Suppose someone says, “No life exists anywhere else in the universe.” How would we respond?

Answer: “How do you know?”

To declare with certainty that life exists nowhere else in the universe, we would need complete knowledge of the entire cosmos in all possible dimensions. Therefore, we cannot logically make a positive assertion like that since our knowledge is only partial. We would have to be God to declare for certain life exists nowhere else.

The error committed here is called *the fallacy of universal negatives*. Simply, it means we cannot make positive universal statements about the non-existence of something unless we know enough about the circumstance or place where it *could* exist, if it *did* exist.

That’s the problem with atheism. It embodies that fallacy.

Of course, proving that atheism is irrational does not prove the existence of God. Making a positive assertion about the existence of something supported with evidence is not the same as claiming its non-existence without adequate data.

David, a Christian friend of mine, was talking with an acquaintance who declared, “I’m an atheist. I do not believe in God.”

My friend replied, “I’m delighted! I would like to talk to an atheist because I haven’t met one in a long time. If I understand correctly, you are certain there is no God on the moon. Is that correct?”

“Yes,” his friend replied, “I am certain of that.”

David continued, “Then you are certain there is no God anywhere in the solar system?”

“Yes, I am convinced of that also.”

“Then I assume you are sure there is no God anywhere in our galaxy or any other?”

The atheist replied, “I don’t think there is.”

David said, “Then how did you acquire absolute knowledge of the entire universe to know for certain that there cannot be any God anywhere in any possible place or dimension?”

The man replied, “Well, I mean that I don’t know if there is a God anywhere else.”

David said, “Oh, I’m so disappointed. I was hoping to talk to a genuine atheist. You are not an atheist at all. You are an agnostic. You simply don’t know whether there is a God or not. Now let’s talk about some evidence for his existence.”

Although David did not use the term *fallacy of universal negatives*, he deftly exposed it.

In my experience, atheists who switch to agnosticism upon realizing this fallacy rarely change their attitudes. They frequently resort to condemning all religion by pointing out some of the horrors religion has practiced throughout history.³⁴ This presents another problem. If they claim they don’t know whether God exists, then on what basis can they declare all religion to be false?

This commits the same fallacy all over again but in another domain. To assert that all religion is false, they would need to possess all the knowledge and all the experience of every human being that ever lived. How did they get such a vast store of knowledge?

Further, how does the conduct of any religion prove the non-existence of God? Would God choose to remove himself from the universe because of the behavior of any religious movement on our planet? Such attacks on religion in general are irrelevant to the issue.

Does pointing this out convince the atheist? Not on your life! This only proves another dynamic is in play that has nothing to do with logic: the suppression of truth to maintain one’s sinful autonomy. However, exposing the fallacy as debris on the onramp can open the opportunity leading to *repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ*.

From this chapter we learn...

- Atheism commits the fallacy of universal negatives, asserting the universal non-existence of God without universal knowledge.
- Atheists may resort to criticizing all religion and thus commit the same logic fallacy.
- Exposing the fallacy may gain a hearing for the gospel.

Part 4: Conscience

For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them... Romans 2:14, 15

Chapter 13: Conscience, the second main evidence

In a college course in anthropology, the study of mankind, my professor mentioned how anthropologists compared the ethical standards of human societies and were puzzled.

The professor said the scientists were surprised to discover two things: The ethics of all societies, including the most primitive, were remarkably alike. Second, none of them follow their own ethics consistently. To the present day, he said, anthropologists have not found an adequate explanation for that phenomenon.

The Apostle Paul or any other Christian with a minimal knowledge of God and his word could have predicted that.

*For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.
Romans 2:14*

Pagans do not have the Ten Commandments... or do they? Paul says they do, at least in its general essence. So does the unbeliever on a college campus.

They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them ... Romans 2:15

Everyone has a conscience regardless of economic, geographic, or social conditions. God's law is written on it and people know they are accountable for it.

...on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. Romans 2:16

One way to paraphrase Paul's argument when we are talking to unbelievers is to say that God's law has been written everywhere, so it is impossible to miss it. He wrote it in our consciences, in reason and common sense, in the laws of civilized societies, in most philosophies and religions, in the Ten Commandments, and finally in the perfect life of Jesus Christ. We have no excuse for ignoring it.

If moral law is written in our conscience, then there must be a moral lawgiver. Further, this moral law must be universal and absolute to have meaning. By *universal* I mean common to all humanity and *absolute* in its application.

If we try to deny the existence of absolute and universal moral law, then we deprive ourselves of the right to pass judgment on anything, including on God for allowing injustices. We can scarcely criticize anything as wrong if absolute moral law does not exist.

In his classic on the moral argument, **MERE CHRISTIANITY**, C.S. Lewis³⁵ illustrated this universal and absolute nature of conscience. He pointed out that nations squabble and sometimes go to war over questions of social justice. Even atheistic societies, such as communists, claim their system meets the requirements of social justice better than others.

Yet none of these seem willing to stop and ask from where they got the concept of justice in the first place. The argument is always over what is true justice and how it should be applied, not whether it exists.

Worse than that, both nations and individuals criticize others for wrongdoing and then do the same things themselves. Paul notes this in Romans 2:1, 2.

Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things.

It seems God judges people by the standard they themselves set in condemning others. This shows they recognize absolute moral law. When they do the same things themselves, this exposes hypocrisy. Result? ...*no excuse, O man...*

I was witnessing to a man who claimed, “There is no justice in the world today.” I told him I might agree with him in some respects, but it must exist somewhere, or the concept would not be in his mind in the first place. That stumped him. He had not thought of that. I was able to continue with the gospel.

It doesn't take a profound philosopher to see that only one source of moral law would fit our reality, and that is God. This in turn highlights his attribute of holiness.

We can ask a person, “Have you obeyed the laws written in your conscience?” This is a springboard to get into the gospel of *repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ*.

From this chapter we learn...

- Conscience is the second main evidence for the existence of God. If there is a moral law, there is a moral lawgiver.
- God's moral law is written everywhere, not just in the Ten Commandments, so no one can escape it or avoid responsibility for not knowing and obeying it.
- The ability to ask moral questions, even ones about God and injustice, shows moral law written in our conscience. The question itself confirms the conscience.
- People reveal that the moral law exists in their conscience by passing judgments on others.

Chapter 14: Fact and faith

Not fact versus faith.

In the foreword to a *National Geographic* article on Christianity, the editor defined faith as “a firm belief in something for which there is no proof.”³⁶

The editor, an otherwise educated man, was simply reflecting the ignorance of the culture as to the meaning of *faith*. The definition he gave is *not* Judeo-Christian. It is, in fact, quite anti-Christian.

The Christian definition of faith is simply *trust*, in the sense of trusting someone to keep his promise. This is reflected in Romans 4:21 *...fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.*

If we trust someone to keep a promise, it presumes knowledge and understanding about the person we are trusting. That knowledge, assuming we are acting sensibly, is based on fact acquired through acquaintance with that person. Our faith in that sense is fact-based.

If we use the word “faith” in our witness, it helps to define the term with the simple statement, “by *faith*, I mean trusting God to keep his promises.” I do not mean a blind leap.”

Our entire culture today is based on what we call a faith-fact dichotomy. This means people today view *faith* as a personal experience or a non-rational opinion disconnected from evidence. They assume faith and fact are mutually exclusive.

When we present the evidence for God’s existence as Paul did, it frequently does not compute because in today’s view, it is impossible for faith to have any connection with fact-based logic. Some people show distinct discomfort at this because it strikes at the heart of their secularist worldview.

I recall the late Dr. Francis Schaeffer discussing this point at L’Abri years ago when a student asked, “What if they reject the facts?” Schaeffer replied, “Give them the facts anyway and leave it with God.”

The Holy Spirit can break through that. One of my favorite phrases in teaching Christians or non-Christians is, “I stand on the evidence.” We state the facts regardless, making it clear we have no personal perspectives or opinions when it comes to fact-based truth. We have truth, not perspectives, based on evidence.

Provable faith

Certain elements of Christian doctrine have strong historical evidence behind them, such as the resurrection of Christ, his life and works, and the reliability of Scripture. We must use these with discretion because the historical facts on these points do not bring people to the conviction of sin that would motivate them to repentance. To defend the faith, we need minimal knowledge of the evidence while being careful to avoid letting ourselves be sucked into a labyrinth that avoids *repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*.

From this chapter we learn...

- Many today consider faith to be separate from fact and therefore view the gospel as a matter of personal perspective.
- It helps to express that we have evidence to stand on for what we believe, and people are accountable for responding to that evidence.
- Though certain Christian doctrines have strong historical evidence, we must be careful to state the facts and then get back to the gospel as soon as possible.

Chapter 15: Why injustice, part one

C.S. Lewis, probably the greatest Christian apologist of the twentieth century, said that while he was an atheist, “My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I gotten this idea of just and unjust? A man cannot call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?”³⁷

This caused him to reconsider his position, which eventually led him to Christ. It also led to one of his best works, **THE PROBLEM OF PAIN**³⁸ in which he deftly destroys the atheistic objection to the existence of God on the grounds of injustice in the world.³⁹

Ironically, this is the most popular argument for atheism while at the same time the easiest to refute. More ways exist to refute it than any other argument against Christianity.

The argument goes something like this: If God existed and were good, he would not allow evil in the world. Therefore, God does not exist.

Most of the time, this is brought up in the form of a question: “If God is good, why does he allow so much evil in the world?”

People hurting

The way we respond to the question depends a lot on the person asking. We may find ourselves talking to a hurting individual facing illness or dealing with the loss of a loved one. In that case, the approach is more pastoral and may require counseling outside the limits of this particular book.

Speculating on the why of specific events in the lives of people makes us judges, and Jesus discourages that. No necessary connection exists between the sins of an individual and a disagreeable event in his life. It might be so but maybe not, as Jesus pointed out in the healing of a blind man in John 9.⁴⁰

Sometimes we can only say, “I don’t know why such-and-such happened. I only know that God will square the accounts at the end of time and will wipe away the tears of his people.”

What follows below is more along the lines of people with intellectual doubts about God because evil exists. The tone in which we answer depends on our discernment of the person with whom we are dealing.

First Bible answer: God is patient

I have a favorite initial response to lead into a discussion of God's moral laws and how the objector himself is breaking them: "In your opinion, what do kings owe to rebels?" Another way to say it is, "In your opinion, what does our government owe to traitors?"

Kings and governments owe nothing but justice to rebels and traitors. No benefits whatsoever are owed.

So if mankind is in rebellion against God, we can reverse the question: "Why have we not been destroyed off the face of the planet?" Answer: Because God is patient.

Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

Romans 2:4

The Bible exposes an aspect of God's kindness that causes him to delay judgment. It is the virtue of patience. His delay in "doing something about it" is to give room for repentance.

So ironically, the answer as to why a good God permits evil to continue in the world is precisely because he is good. We can make this particular to the person by pointing out that the reason why he or she is still alive is because God is patiently giving them the opportunity to get right with him.

John Gerstner, in his booklet, **THE PROBLEM OF PLEASURE**⁴¹ takes another approach from C.S. Lewis. He asks, if mankind is as corrupt as the Bible says it is, then why do we have so many blessings? "Hell, I can understand," he says. It is heaven I can't understand.

The answer is the same: God is good. His kindness is an invitation to repentance.

The Apostle Peter put it as,

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. ... And count the patience of our Lord as salvation... 2 Peter 3:9, 15

Another approach to the same point is to show that if God were to cause everything to go well for sinful and unrepentant mankind, what would that say about his holiness? That would be a glaring injustice, for it would cause everyone to assume that God was pleased with humanity. That would make God the greatest deceiver in the universe.

The primary biblical answer to the question as to why a good God allows evil in the world is precisely because he is good. That goodness is expressed in the virtue of

patience to grant people the opportunity for *repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ*.

From this chapter we learn...

- The Bible itself gives adequate answers to the common question as to why a good God allows evil to continue in the world.
- God allows evil to continue precisely because he is good. He is patient, giving people the opportunity to repent.
- We must be careful to avoid passing judgments in particular cases of injustices because we may be dealing with hurting people.

Chapter 16: Why injustice, Part Two

...because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man [Jesus] whom he has appointed (Acts 17:31).

The second Bible answer: Final judgment

One answer as to why a good God permits injustice is that God has an appointment calendar. One of the appointments is for mankind in general, as in the verse above.

Romans chapter two starts with the concept of judgment. If there will be a final judgment that squares all the accounts of injustice in the world, that fact answers the question.

Although there will be a final judgment for mankind in general, each individual will face his own particular judgment at death.

*...it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment,...
Hebrews 9:27*

Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? Romans 2:3

From the concept of final judgment, we can lead the person into a discussion of his own readiness to be judged by God.

The third Bible answer: Good may result from bad

An air conditioning repairman was in my apartment working on a defective machine. When I attempted to engage him in conversation about the Lord, he mentioned his war experiences in Vietnam and how that caused him to question the goodness and existence of God. He asked, “Why does a good God allow bad things to happen?”

I asked him if he had ever seen any good come out of a bad incident. He replied, “Yes, last year I had a car accident with my pickup truck, and it was totaled. I was devastated because it was the vehicle I needed for my work. When I got the check from the insurance company, I was shocked to see it was much more than expected. From that, I was able to buy a better truck than the one before.”

I asked, “So you recognize that it is possible for good to come out of bad events?” He agreed.

I said, “Then isn’t it possible that God can bring good out of the bad things in the world?”

He was a bit hesitant, so I continued, “Let me explain about a serious injustice done to a good man that resulted in amazing blessings for millions.” Then I talked about Jesus and how his sacrifice on the cross, unjust and awful as it was, resulted in the offer of eternal salvation for all those who put their trust in him.

I then explained that God planned all that. It was not an accident. If we can trust him in that, then perhaps we can trust him to square all the accounts of injustice at the close of history.

This is precisely what the apostles were saying in their prayer.

...for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. Acts 4:27, 28

From this chapter we learn...

- Ignorance or unbelief regarding a final judgment generates the question about why God permits injustice.
- As with the crucifixion, God can bring good out of injustice. This also helps address the question.

Part 5: Christ

*Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which he **promised beforehand through his prophets** in the holy Scriptures, 3 concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh 4 and was declared to be the Son of God in **power** according to the Spirit of **holiness** by **his resurrection** from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,...*
Romans 1:1-4

Chapter 17: Jesus is God and here is the proof, part one

*...the gospel of God, which he **promised beforehand through his prophets** in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son,... Romans 1:2*

The first four verses of Romans present evidence for the deity of Christ:

- Prophecies fulfilled
- Power to heal
- Holiness
- His resurrection

This evidence serves primarily to confirm the faith of Christians. As an apologetic, their significance is limited. To most unbelievers, these proofs seem remote in time and place, irrelevant to their reality, and the exclusive domain of religious people.

Occasionally, however, someone asks, “How do you know Jesus was divine?” Or, “How do you know Jesus was who he said?” It is worthwhile to keep these proofs in mind and apply one or more briefly without elaboration before continuing with the gospel.

This reminds the unbeliever that our faith in Christ is rational, grounded in evidence. We can say that plainly. Elaborating too much may entangle the conversation in details. That might hinder us from getting around to the message of *repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ*.

In practice, when a person is under conviction for sin, he will normally not resort to such questions.

Since extensive volumes have been written on each of these three pieces of evidence, we will limit ourselves to a few striking points.

Fulfilled prophecies

We can keep in mind four or five of the key prophecies about Christ from the Old Testament and mention them in a couple of sentences. Simply explain that hundreds of years before Christ’s coming certain events of his life were predicted to prove his identity as the Son of God, the Messiah.

For example: the place of his birth, his manner of death with hands and feet pierced by nails, his betrayal for 30 pieces of silver, his rejection by his people, his burial in the tomb of a rich man, and his resurrection. All of these and more were events over which he had no control as a mere human.

Below is a list of references to the above prophecies

Place of birth

(Circa 750 B.C.)

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Micah 5:2

Jewish scholars in the first century had no doubt as to where the Messiah was to be born. When King Herod heard from the wise men in Matthew chapter two that the Messiah had been born, he inquired of the chief priests where that was. The priests quoted the above verse.⁴²

Manner of death

(Circa 1100 B.C.) *Psalms 22*

This Psalm, written by King David, is called *the Crucifixion Psalm* because it describes the sufferings of the Messiah in remarkable detail: His hands and feet pierced with nails; his bones will not be broken, although this was usually done in crucifixions; the soldiers cast lots for his clothing.

Betrayal for 30 pieces of silver

(Circa 500 BC)

So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD, to the potter. Zechariah 11:13

Judas took the betrayal money and threw it into the temple and then hanged himself. The priests took the money and bought a field from a potter to use as a cemetery. Matthew 27:3-7

Rejection by his own people

(Circa 700 B.C.)

He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief... Isaiah 53:3

Burial with the rich

(Circa 700 B.C.)

And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death,... Isaiah 53:9

Resurrection

(Circa 1100 B.C.)

...because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. Psalm 16:10 (NIV)

Other prophecies

We can mention that many more prophecies of this type exist in Scripture, and an honest study of them will convince a person not only about Jesus but also about the veracity of the word of God in general.

For Jewish people or skeptics interested in seeing this for themselves in Scripture, Isaiah 53 is helpful. With Jewish people, we like to have them read it for themselves without telling them it is from the Old Testament and ask them who they think it is talking about. They frequently will agree it is talking about Jesus. It surprises them to hear it is from the prophet Isaiah in the Torah (Old Testament), 700 years before Jesus.

From the New Testament we can mention that Jesus himself predicted he would be betrayed, killed, and resurrected after three days. Nobody understood him at the time, probably because they thought he was speaking figuratively. (Mark 9:30-32)

From this chapter we learn...

- In Romans one, we find three proofs of the deity of Christ: fulfilled prophecy, his holiness, and his resurrection from the dead.
- Generally people are disinterested in proofs about the identity of Christ because it seems remote to them. Occasionally someone will ask, and it is important for the Christian to have some evidence in mind.
- Old Testament predictions about the coming of the Jewish Messiah are adequate proof of his deity.

Chapter 18: Jesus is God and here is the proof, part two

*...and was declared to be the Son of God in **power** according to the Spirit of **holiness** by his **resurrection** from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,...*

Romans 1:1-4

His power

Without the incredible miraculous healings performed by Jesus, the people would have paid no more attention to him than any other teacher. Even his most vehement enemies acknowledged his power.

The Pharisees criticized him for doing miracles on the Sabbath and occasionally attributed his works to demonic power. They never denied the reality of the healings.

Holiness

If I were to pose the question to my siblings that Jesus posed to his detractors in John 8:46, it would result in laughter, along with a recounting of youthful mischief of which I was the instigator.

The question Jesus asked was, “Has anyone ever seen me commit a sin?” Answer: No one.

Imagine traveling by foot in close company with a man for three years, walking the same roads in the hot sun, eating the same food, and sleeping on the same ground. After three such years with Jesus, the Apostle John concluded that Jesus could only be God in the flesh (John 1:1-5).

No one accompanying me on such a trip, not even for three days, would conclude that I am divine.

The absolute moral perfection of Christ in every aspect of word and deed from birth to death is one of three pieces of evidence Paul brings out. In our witness, we can mention this as a platform to ask the unbeliever, “What about you? Are you a good person?” From here we can lead into the message of *repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ*.

Resurrection

A friend who is a qualified historian⁴³ told me that the criteria for accepting events as fact consists of three categories of evidence: eyewitness accounts, written documentation, and archeological discoveries. The resurrection of Jesus Christ meets all three of these criteria.

Eye witnesses

Not only the disciples but over 500 eyewitnesses testified to the resurrection of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:16). Many died as martyrs rather than retract what they claimed to have seen.

Documentation

The four gospels recount events surrounding the crucifixion and resurrection. Written by eyewitnesses,⁴⁴ these documents contain specific verifiable elements: customs, locations, and ruling authorities, to name a few. The gospels overlap, sometimes including or omitting details, along with very different styles that preclude any reasonable possibility of collusion. Multiple documentation of this nature constitutes evidence in any domain of historical study, religious or other.

Archeological evidence

The empty tomb of Jesus is visited by thousands of tourists yearly. No adequate explanation has ever been given to explain the disappearance of the body. The enthusiasm of the disciples over the resurrection, especially considering they did not believe it at first, along with the commitment of their lives to testify as to what they had seen, gives credence to the event.

Philosophy versus fact

This evidence establishes the fact. If a historian rejects the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the reason is philosophical, not historical. If he assumes God does not exist or that God does no miracles, then it follows logically that Jesus did not rise from the dead.

However, that assumption is philosophical only and has nothing to do with evidence. The presupposition itself may be a form of suppressing the truth.

Historians who insist on excluding the miraculous from consideration of historical events must also exclude the creation of the universe as historical. Was that a miracle?

If God exists and created the universe, then he can also raise the dead. At this point, the question of the resurrection is removed from the domain of philosophy, religion, or faith. It becomes a matter of historical inquiry.

With unbelievers who suggest that our belief in the resurrection is merely a matter of faith, I like to say, "I stand on the evidence." I do this to show that faith and fact are not mutually opposed, as explained in Chapter 14. We present the facts anyway and proceed to *repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ*.

From this chapter we learn...

- The perfect holy life of Christ is a proof of his deity.
- The miraculous power of Christ for healing lends proof to his deity.
- The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is proof of his deity. The proof of the resurrection consists in:
 - Eye witnesses
 - Written and credible historical documents
 - Archeological evidence: The empty tomb
- Those who reject the resurrection do so for philosophical reasons, disregarding the evidence.

Part 6: Useful tools

Chapter 19: Effectiveness of Scripture

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

While chatting with a young man, I was holding my New Testament. He pointed at it and asked with disdain, “Do you base your beliefs on *that*?”

How should we respond in such a case? I replied, “No, I base my beliefs on everything.” He looked puzzled and said, “What do you mean?”

I continued, “The evidence for Christianity is found in creation, conscience, and other sources. The Bible simply reflects reality as it is.” My intent was not to minimize the importance of Scripture but to short-stop his strategy for evading moral responsibility.

Unbelievers frequently suppose we base our faith entirely on the Bible itself. We have met people who criticize the Bible before we even mention it. When an unbeliever does so, it is normally with an antagonistic intent to avoid accountability and obedience to God that the Bible requires.

One way to respond is to ignore the criticism and go directly to the moral law. “Do you think the Ten Commandments are good or bad?” Then proceed with the approach as mentioned in Chapter 21.

Although enough objective proofs exist to show the divine inspiration of the Bible, disputing this with unbelievers is rarely effective. Convincing them of the authority of Scripture does not in itself motivate them to submit to its message.

Use it anyway

God uses his Word regardless of what anyone thinks of it. Therefore, use it. Paraphrasing is good enough. The person need not know it is Scripture you are speaking. The truth spoken may be a time bomb God uses later to bring the listener to Christ.

Evidence

Occasionally an unbeliever may ask about the authority of Scripture with honest inquiry. In most cases, it is enough to share a brief piece of evidence or two, then

address his conscience with the kind of moral issues the Bible portrays in order to bring conviction of sin. Here's a couple of pieces of evidence we can use:

Miraculous perfection

The Bible was written over a period of 1600 years by some 35 writers from different languages, customs, occupations, and geographical locations. Most of the writers lived hundreds of years apart, which made collaboration impossible. Yet the end result is a detailed, self-consistent system of theology with a message of salvation that would normally be unexpected. This is inexplicable without divine intervention.

Prophecy

We can use the prophecies about Christ mentioned in Chapter 17 of this book for double duty. They prove the inspiration of Scripture as well as lead directly into a discussion of the person of Christ.

In a more prolonged conversation, we can mention the fate of nations and empires predicted throughout the Bible, like the four empires in Daniel or the nations surrounding Israel in Zephaniah and other prophecies.

Paul himself had great confidence in the authority of Scripture when he said the gospel is *the power of God for salvation*. (Romans 1:16)

From this chapter we learn...

- Unbelievers may challenge the authority of the Bible to avoid its convicting message. In that case, we can go directly to the moral issues to strike at the conscience.
- We should use the word of God regardless of whether the hearers accept its authority or not because God can use it later to affect them.
- Occasionally people ask about the authority of Scripture as an intellectually honest inquiry. In such cases, we can mention a couple of pieces of evidence and then go on to the moral questions.
- Good evidence to use is the Bible's perfection and the prophecies of Christ. This leads into the gospel itself.

Chapter 20: Pint-sized armor, Apologetics for kids

...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,... 1 Peter 3:15

Society is brainwashing our children in relativistic, anti-Christian presuppositions. From school, TV, literature, and friends, they hear truth is relative to the individual, belief in God is non-rational, morality is a question of personal taste, and it does not matter what we believe as long as we believe in something.

Nonsense like this will become part of the very fabric of a child's being if not refuted early.

Most catechisms were written before relativism became the politically correct religion of the culture. Our children need to be taught to counter these ungodly thought forms with rational and biblical presuppositions.

Below are sample questions based on Romans chapters one and two. Young children can learn these biblical defenses.

QUESTION 1: What are three ways we know God exists?

ANSWER: Creation, conscience, and Christ.

QUESTION 2: How does creation show there is a God?

ANSWER: If there is a creation, there must be a Creator.

QUESTION 3: What is a conscience?

ANSWER: Conscience is our minds telling us what is right and wrong.

QUESTION 4: Why does our conscience prove there is a God?

ANSWER: If we know right and wrong, moral law, there must be a moral lawgiver.

QUESTION 5: What do we mean when we say Christ proves God exists?

ANSWER: His miracles, his perfect holiness, and his resurrection from the dead show God exists.

QUESTION 6: Is it clear to everyone that God exists?

ANSWER: Yes. It is very clear to everyone.

QUESTION 7: Why do we say it is clear to everyone?

ANSWER: Because everyone is a part of creation and everyone has a conscience. So everyone sees the proof.

QUESTION 8: Why do some people say God's existence is not clear?

ANSWER: Because they do not want God to rule over them.

QUESTION 9: Why do some people not want God to rule over them?

ANSWER: Because they love their sins.

QUESTION 10: What do we mean when we say something is true?

ANSWER: We mean it really exists.

QUESTION 11: Can truth be just a matter of opinion?

ANSWER: No. A thing is true whether anyone thinks it is or not.

QUESTION 12: What do we mean when we say "have faith in God"?

ANSWER: We mean trust his promises.

Chapter 21: Way of the Master Evangelism Program

A delivery boy sat next to me on a bench in Mexico waiting for the airlines office to open. His name was José and he was there to drop off a package.

After a few minutes of getting acquainted and mentioning I was a missionary, I engaged him about the Lord with the question, “José, do you consider yourself to be a good person?”

“Yes,” he replied. “I’m not perfect, but in general I think so.” He then expressed some details about his good character: nice guy, doesn't harm anybody, etc.

“Do you remember hearing about the 10 Commandments?” I asked.

“I recall some of them from catechism.”

“Let’s see how you are doing as a good person relative to the 10 Commandments. Have you ever lied?”

He thought a second and said, “Yes, I have.”

“The 10th Commandment says, ‘You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor,’ which is a form of lying. Have you lied?” He replied, “Yes.”

“What about taking God’s name in vain, that is, using his name in with swear words, for example? Have you ever done that?”

“Well, yes. Occasionally.”

“That is called blasphemy. It breaks the third commandment.”

I continued, “The 8th commandment says, ‘You shall not steal.’ I assume you have not robbed a bank or such because you would be in jail. What about small things?”

He thought a bit and mentioned a couple of times he had stolen some things of small value.

I concluded, “So then, why is a person who has lied, blasphemed, and stolen consider himself a good person?”

José was quiet for about half a minute and then said, “I am speechless.” I then asked, “If you were to stand before God tonight, how would you plead? Guilty or innocent?”

He agreed that *guilty* was the right answer. I then asked, “Do you know what God has done for your so that you do not have to suffer his judgment?”

I then explained the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. José listened intently and expressed how some Christian friends had been telling him the same things but he

had paid little attention. With a serious tone and attitude, he said he was going to talk more with his friends about this and go to their youth meetings to which they had invited him.

The approach I had used caused José to reconsider that he had a need he had not perceived before. I never saw José again, but it was clear the gospel had begun its work.

This tactic is the method used in the [Way of the Master](#) program with evangelist Ray Comfort. The approach is biblical because it attacks what I call *the good guy delusion*.

Most people view themselves as basically good with a few excusable faults. This is a one of Satan's favorite delusions to put on people and contradicts what God says about humanity in Romans Chapter 3.

Relative to society's standards, most people may consider themselves good enough for heaven. Relative to God's standards, they are lost and going to hell, with nothing about them that God accepts as righteousness.

Until the *good guy delusion* is burst, the unbeliever will feel no need of a Savior. The purpose of the Law, such as the 10 Commandments, is to burst that delusion, expose sin and reveal his need.

Ray Comfort brings out superbly how God gave the Law as the device for preparing people to be evangelized.

We highly recommend the reader peruse the "Way of the Master" program. It is not the only good evangelism approach, but we find it one of the easiest to use.

All of the evidence for the Christian faith in this book can be used not only to remove the debris from the on-ramp but also as a platform for the question, "Do you consider yourself a good person?"

Another gentle approach

Another favorite approach of ours is to ask the question, "How can we pray for you?" We may ask this after we have shared the gospel and sense that the discussion is coming to a close. This displays our concern for their needs as people and provides a positive closure to the conversation. Most people accept this offer graciously and usually thankfully.

From this book we learn...

Belief in God is not a matter of blind faith. It is a matter of intellectual and moral integrity. The evidence for God's existence and attributes, namely his eternal power and deity, are clearly revealed by the things created, so that no sentient human being has an excuse for unbelief.

In addition to creation, there is the evidence of conscience, which has moral laws written on it. These laws are universal, showing the existence of a universal lawgiver who can only be the God revealed in creation.

These two evidence, creation and conscience, constitute a general revelation given to everyone. Therefore mankind is as morally culpable for its unbelief as it is intellectually inexcusable.

The person of Jesus Christ as God incarnate sums up the above evidence in himself through his control over nature and his perfect holiness. Christ is a third proof of God's existence and character.

Humanity in its corruption suppresses this evidence to maintain a sinful autonomy from God. The primary devices for such suppression are philosophy and idolatry.

These evidence are not relative to any individual but is absolute, universal, and eternal. Every human being will stand accountable to God for the way they respond.

The term "faith," in view of the evidence, means "trust" and does not mean belief without proof. Knowing God exists is not necessarily accompanied by trusting him.

These evidence alone are insufficient to bring people to repentance. The gospel message is necessary to break through the inward corruption in human nature to cause them to repent, trust in Christ, and receive God's mercy.

Christians must maintain an attitude of compassion toward others when presenting the gospel, knowing they themselves were once in the same willfully blind and lost condition.

Yes, you can!

...our competence comes from God. 2 Corinthians 3:5 (NIV)

Few of us are trained apologists, called to debate college professors. All of us, in the context of our personal world, are called to defend the gospel to anyone who may ask us *for a reason for the hope* that is in us... 1 Peter 3:15

We need to know the answers, though we realize the answers alone do not persuade. Only *the Spirit gives life*. 2 Corinthians 3:5

However factual our apologetic, most people will suppress it to maintain their sinful autonomy except for those *whom the Lord our God calls to himself*. Acts 2:39

That was Paul's experience with the Athenians. Most rejected his perfectly sensible argument, and some even mocked. A few, however, believed and were saved.

This is normal Christian ministry. *But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise.* (1 Corinthians 1:27) His chosen are out there. He wants to use you to find them. Now take what you know and go get them.

For free books, essays and study guides, see: <https://espanol.visionreal.info>

For Amazon ebooks and voice books see:

<https://www.amazon.com/author/rogersmalling>

Acknowledgements

At the ripe age of 22, it was clear to me that I knew everything necessary for future ministry, having recently graduated from missionary training. Shortly after, I met Dr. Francis Schaeffer, who graciously revealed to me that my clarity of mind was really a thick fog and that I had a lot to learn. His personal humility, combined with an incredible intellect, left an impression on me too deep for words.

I was studying French in Geneva, Switzerland, at the time. Schaeffer had his teaching center at L'Abri not far away, and I would take interested unbelievers whom I felt needed his lectures. I became personally acquainted with Dr. Schaeffer to the degree that he invited me to call him by his first name, which I declined to do. His reliance on Christ, even more than his own intellect, generated in me an immense sense of respect, preventing me from doing so.

Shaffer showed me I need not abandon my intellect to be conservative. Through his lectures on Romans, I gained a sharper understanding of biblical apologetics. Although the 3 "C's" of this book are mine, the concepts of human accountability in the face of clear evidence for God's existence were milestones in my thinking.

Shaffer's personal influence, supplemented later by the works of C.S. Lewis, were the groundworks for apologetics in a simplified framework, commensurate with the missionary work I do.

Bibliography

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Shows how DNA is actually a language imposed on chemicals that results in living structures. Collins abandoned his atheism upon realizing this. Somewhat technical but comprehensible by laymen. Good personal testimony at the end.

Flew, Anthony. **THERE IS A GOD**. HarperOne: San Francisco, CA, 2008.

Explains why Flew abandoned atheism after fifty years as President of the British Atheist Society. Very philosophical and difficult for those unfamiliar with complex discourse.

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A small booklet that takes the opposite approach from most studies on the problem of injustice by asking why so much good exists in the world.

Lewis, C.S. **MERE CHRISTIANITY**. HarperOne: San Francisco, CA, 1980.

Based on the moral argument, Lewis intended this book to be evangelistic. Good to share with intelligent skeptics.

Lewis, C.S. **THE PROBLEM OF PAIN**. Harper Collins: New York, NY, 1996

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Astronomer Ross explains the existence of God from the concept of time by showing an eternal dimension must exist as the source of time. This supports the concept of God as inhabiting eternity.

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Barrow, John; Tipler, Frank. **THE ANTHROPIC COSMOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE**. Oxford University Press: New York, NY, 1986.

Highly technical scientific treatise that suggests the universe appears designed to accommodate life of our sort.

Endnotes

¹ The term *apologetics* comes from the Greek word *apologia*, which means a defense of a viewpoint. It has nothing to do with the word “apology.” We have nothing to apologize for.

² This illustration is not original. It comes from evangelist Ray Comfort, the author of The Way of the Master evangelism program.

³ Acts 20:21

⁴ This is dealt with in Chapter 13.

⁵ All Scripture quotes are from the English Standard Version, except when indicated otherwise.

⁶ The retreat in Switzerland where Schaeffer received intellectuals from around the world.

⁷ For example, astronomers have discovered the existence of planets around distant stars, though there is no telescope yet strong enough to see one. How do they do it? By measuring the *perturbations* of the star, slight movements caused by the gravitational force of an object in orbit around it. Astronomers not only infer the planet’s existence, they deduce mass, speed of rotation, distance from the star and whether the star has other planets. That is the nature of scientific inferences. Though the planets are not visible to us yet, scientists consider their existence an established fact because nothing else can account for it.

⁸ The other philosophy he mentioned was *existentialism* which the professor said asserts that everything changes and therefore nothing is eternally true or valid. I disagreed based on the question, “When are existentialists going to change their minds?”

⁹ I recall hearing that even some anti-Christian philosophers, like George Bernard Shaw, have admitted that Christianity is logically self-consistent given the premises on which it is based.

¹⁰ They evolve too slowly to be observed directly. Their development is observable by inferences.

¹¹ I took a college class in Cosmology to satisfy the science requirement for a teaching degree. Cosmology is the study of the universe and naturally we studied the Big Bang, the expansion of the universe dated at about 14 billion years ago. A student asked the question, “Doesn't the existence of the universe out of apparently nothing indicate the existence of God?” The professor answered, “That is a valid inference but not scientifically testable. Personally, I am an agnostic.” I thought about it later and saw a contradiction in the professor’s agnosticism. He deduces the certainty of the Big Bang itself on the basis of inferential data. Why then is the Big Bang not a sufficient inference for the existence of God as a certainty? Astronomer Hugh Ross asserts that it is sufficient and describes this in his book **THE CREATOR AND THE COSMOS**.

¹² In a college course I attended, a professor commented, “After all, everything is relative.” I raised my hand and asked, “Is that absolutely true or is that just relative to you?” The professor got the point immediately and backed off with the statement, “Well, some things are absolute but others are not.” This in itself is contradictory because it assumes an absolute criteria could exist to determine the difference between absolute and relative truth.

¹³ I recall in a college philosophy course the professor saying that no philosopher has yet found a way to reconcile relativism with theism. Though many relativist believe in God, they do so inconsistently.

¹⁴ See my essay on this point at my website: <http://smallings.com/spanish/Ensayos/rel.htm>

¹⁵ First formulated by the Greek philosopher Parmenides in the sixth century B.C. and later put into Latin by Roman scholars.

¹⁶ If we ask why it must be unmovable, we get into the logic fallacy of *infinite regression*. If God were movable or changeable, then we would ask what moved him? How ever long the chain of movers is, we are still left with the problem that at the beginning of the line of movers, something unmoved must be there to start off everything else.

¹⁷ As far as we know, the Greek philosopher Aristotle in the fourth century B.C. was the first to elaborate on this, although he used the term *prime mover* and then expressed that it must be *unmoved*. The concept was developed 800 years later in the fourth century A.D. by Saint Augustine and then amplified 800 years after that by Thomas Aquinas in the twelfth century.

¹⁸ Sometimes called the Cosmological argument. I avoid that term because it confuses people into thinking that we are focusing on astronomy as an argument and that is not the case.

¹⁹ Flew, Anthony. **THERE IS A GOD**. HarperOne: San Francisco, CA, 2008

²⁰ A very good summary of Aquinas’ views is his **SUMMA DE SUMMA**, a synopsis of his monumental Summa Teológica. It’s a booklet about 35 pages long. The Latin title means Summary of the Summary. It’s treatment of the prime mover idea is excellent.

²¹ The colleague’s name is Chandra Wickramasinghe, Sri Lanka-born British mathematician. <https://www.buckingham.ac.uk/directory/professor-chandra-wickramasinghe/>

²² Hoyle and company did not invent the idea of panspermia. The term comes from Greek philosophy, fifth century B.C. <http://www.panspermia-theory.com/>

²³ This is not intended as an endorsement of Collin’s current theistic evolution. It is there to illustrate that some professions in the life-sciences are unwilling to declare themselves atheists because of the complexity issues, though many chose to remain neutral with the term *agnostic*.

²⁴ Barrow, John; Tipler, Frank. **THE ANTHROPIC COSMOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE**. Oxford University Press: New York, NY, 1986.

²⁵ A YouTube lecture: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxOPRWbNc2U>

²⁶ An example of this is the revered Aristotle. He deduced the existence and certain attributes of God rather accurately and called him *prime mover*. A good explanation of this is found at <http://www.logicmuseum.com/ontological/aristotleontological.htm>

²⁷ Acts 17:18-28

²⁸ Louw and Nida. **GREEK LEXICON**, number 32.60, United Bible Societies, New York, NY. 1988.

²⁹ Louw and Nida, **GREEK LEXICON**, number 31.12

³⁰ Louw and Nida, **GREEK LEXICON**, number 12.43

³¹ The term *doublethink* was invented by George Orwell in his science fiction book **NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR**, published in 1949.

³² Probably Epimenedes of Crete, about 600 B.C. Possibly the poet Paul quoted as saying “Cretans are always liars.” (Titus 1:12)

³³ Taken from Arastus’ poem *Phainomena* – “Appearances,” 240 B.C.

³⁴ Pointing out the horrors that some religions have committed is legitimate. Addressing the atrocities committed by atheistic movements such as communism, is also legitimate. Atheists seem to overlook the latter.

³⁵ Lewis, C.S. **MERE CHRISTIANITY**. HarperOne: San Francisco, CA, 1980

³⁶ National Geographic. Chris Johns, Editor note, first page, “A Matter of Faith.” March, 2017

³⁷ Lewis, C.S. **MERE CHRISTIANITY**, end of chapter one

³⁸ Lewis, C.S. **THE PROBLEM OF PAIN**. Harper Collins: New York, NY, 1996

³⁹ The theological term for the problem of injustice in the world is *theodicy*, from two Greek words, theos- “God” and dikaios- “just; righteous.”

⁴⁰ The disciples assumed the man was blind because of his own sin or that of his parents. Jesus clarified this was not the case. God had a plan in it for his own glory. With this incident, Jesus mitigated our right to assume that people suffer bad things because they are bad. That might be true in some cases but it was not true in this blind man nor was it true in the case of Job in the Old Testament.

⁴¹ Gerstner, John. **THE PROBLEM OF PLEASURE: WHY GOOD THINGS HAPPEN TO BAD PEOPLE.** Soli Deo Gloria Publishers: Morgan, PA, 2002.

⁴² It is significant that today's Rabbis are ambiguous as to where the Messiah is to be born. Is this a suppression of truth?

⁴³ Dr. Michael Woodham earned his doctorate from the University of Alabama in 1966 year. He is currently director of Alive Again Ministries in Miami, Florida.

⁴⁴ Except for Luke who interviewed eyewitnesses.