

Apologetics Lecture Series

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**Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone
who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.
— 1 Peter 3:15**

I. Introduction

What is apologetics?

Apologetics seeks to give a defense of the truth of Christianity. It is a branch of Christian theology which seeks to provide a rational justification for the claims of the Christian faith.

Can we know that Christianity is true even if we can't give good arguments for it?

There are a number of very good reasons for believing that Christianity is true. However, we can know that Christianity is true even if there aren't any good arguments for its truth. The Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga points out that there are many beliefs that seem to be rational even though we may not have any good arguments for them:

- Other minds besides my own exist
- The external world exists and is not an illusion
- My memory about the past is reliable
- Inductive inferences are a reliable way of learning about the world

No one has been able to provide a very good argument for any of these claims. But we surely take ourselves to be rational in believing them. So why should it be any different with the existence of God?

How do we know that Christianity is true?

By the self-authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit:

- John 6:44: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."
- John 14:26: "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send...will teach you all things."
- John 14:16-17: The Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of truth" who "dwells with you and will be in you."
- John 16:7-11: "And when [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world concerning sin...righteousness...[and] judgment."
- Matthew 16:17: When Jesus asks his disciples who they say he is, Simon Peter answers: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus replies: "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven."

The witness of the Holy Spirit is the basis for our belief. We don't need arguments or evidence.

Why study apologetics?

(a) Having a sound apologetic can confirm the witness of the Holy Spirit in our lives and increase our confidence in the truth of the gospel.

(b) Those who don't believe Christianity is true may need reasons for believing its truth. When we present reasons for them to have faith, we are working with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works through rational argumentation (just as He does through preaching). (See for example Acts 17:2-3, 17; 19:8; 28:23-4.) But it is only through the Holy Spirit that anyone ever becomes a Christian. Left to himself, no one would ever come to God. The Bible says that...

- Natural (unregenerate) man does not even seek God (Rom. 3:10-11).
- He cannot understand spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:14).
- He is hostile to God (Rom. 8:7).

William Lane Craig:

“[W]hen a person refuses to come to Christ, it is never just because of lack of evidence or because of intellectual difficulties: at root, he refuses to come because he willingly ignores and rejects the drawing of God's Spirit on his heart. No one in the final analysis really fails to become a Christian because of lack of arguments; he fails to become a Christian because he loves darkness rather than light and wants nothing to do with God.” (*Reasonable Faith*, p. 47)

Recommended Resources

(B = Beginner; I = Intermediate; A = Advanced)

Campbell-Jack, W. C., McGrath, Gavin, and Evans, C., eds. (2006). *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*. (B)

Copan, Paul (2011). *Is God a Moral Monster?: Making Sense of the Old Testament God*. (B)

Craig, William Lane (2002). *Philosophy of Religion: A Reader and Guide*. (A)

* _____ (2008). *Reasonable Faith, 3rd Edition*. (I)

_____ (2010). *On Guard*. (B)

_____. *ReasonableFaith.org* (website). (B)

Craig, William Lane and Copan, Paul, eds. (2009). *Contending with Christianity's Critics*. (I)

Craig, William Lane and Gorra, Joseph (2013). *A Reasonable Response: Answers to Tough Questions on God, Christianity, and the Bible*. (B)

Keller, Timothy (2009). *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*. (B)

*Lewis, C. S. (1952). *Mere Christianity*. (B)

Moreland, J. P. and Craig, William Lane (2017). *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview, 2nd Edition*. (I)

Plantinga, Alvin (2011). *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism*. (I)

Sire, James (2009). *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog, 5th Edition*. (B)

Strobel, Lee (1998). *The Case for Christ*. (B)

_____ (2000). *The Case for Faith*. (B)

_____ (2004). *The Case for a Creator*. (B)

Wright, N. T. (2003). *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. (A)

II. Does an all-powerful all-good personal creator of the universe exist?

1. The Cosmological Argument

Video: The Kalam Cosmological Argument (reasonablefaith.org)

Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CulBuMCLg0>

- (1) Whatever begins to exist has a cause.**
- (2) The universe began to exist.**
- (3) Therefore, the universe has a cause.**

Support for (1)

It's absurd to think that things can simply pop into existence. Think about what nothing is. It isn't anything. It has no powers or properties. It can't generate anything!

Support for (2)

(a) The Standard Model (the "Big Bang" Model) implies that the universe had a beginning. The model was corroborated by Edwin Hubble's discovery in 1929 that light from distant galaxies is systematically shifted toward the red end of the spectrum, indicating that the universe is expanding. Many alternative theories have been offered and they have all failed. Moreover, in 2003 Borde, Guth, and Vilenkin published a theorem establishing that our universe cannot be past eternal.

(b) The second law of thermodynamics states that processes taking place in a closed system always tend toward a state of equilibrium. However, if our universe is past eternal, then the universe would be in a state of equilibrium (called "heat death"), a state in which no further change is possible.

(c) If the universe didn't have a beginning, then the number of past events would be infinite. But the existence of an actual infinite number of things is impossible. Why? Subtracting an infinite number of objects from an infinite number of objects results in contradictory answers.

What must this cause of the universe be like?

- (4) The cause of the universe is an uncaused, changeless, timeless, immaterial being which created the universe.
- (5) Either this immaterial being is an abstract object (e.g., the number 7) or is an unembodied mind.
- (6) Abstract objects cannot cause anything (e.g., the number 7 can't cause anything).
- (7) Therefore, this being is an unembodied mind.

Support for (4)

The cause of space and time must exist timelessly and non-spatially. So it must be changeless and immaterial. And since there cannot be an infinite regress of causes, it must be uncaused.

Common Objections

Objection 1: In quantum physics, we seem to have quantum particles that come into existence from nothing. So premise (1) is false.

Reply: In quantum physics, the vacuum isn't nothing, but rather a sea of fluctuating energy. Moreover, it's not clear how we should interpret the equations of quantum physics and it remains possible that a deterministic account will prevail.

Objection 2: It's nonsensical to talk about causes that occur outside of time. What does it mean for something to cause something timelessly? The causes we are familiar with precede their effects in time. But God's creative actions are supposed to not precede their effects in time because he transcends time.

Reply: Causes don't always precede their effects. There can be simultaneous causation. E.g., a person sitting in a chair is simultaneously being upheld in the air, a long moving train with connected cars has each car simultaneously causing the next to move, an eternal foot in the sand is the cause of an eternal footprint but neither occurred before the other. The moment at which God causes the big bang is the moment at which the big bang occurs. God's decision to create the universe is the decision to enter into temporal relations with the universe.

Objection 3: What caused God? If the universe needs a cause, why doesn't God?

Reply: First, premise (1) applies only to beings that begin to exist. The universe began to exist, but God didn't begin to exist. Second, we already saw that there cannot be an infinite number of causes. There must be some first cause. And this is what God is.

Objection 4: The argument doesn't show that the Christian God exists. It doesn't show that there is only one being instead of a plurality. And it doesn't show that the cause is good.

Reply: True. But that's not the point of the argument. The goal is just to show that there is at least one unembodied mind that created the universe. Our third argument will argue that God is good. Moreover, Ockham's Razor (i.e., do not multiply entities beyond what's necessary for explanation) gives us reason to limit it to just one.