

## General Introduction to ‘Handling Objections’

“How do you know God even exists?” “The Bible is just a collection of fables.” “How can God be good if he allows evil and pain?” “Surely Jesus is only one way to God. All religions can’t be wrong.” “The church is filled with hypocrites.” “Religion makes no difference in my life.”

My father, who was an airline pilot, passed a book on to me called “Handling the Big Jets.” It was recognized that flying large aircraft required extra skills. Facing the challenge of big jets, though, wasn’t a mystery because there was a manual. Similarly, when we are confronted with challenging (and common) objections to belief in the Lord Jesus, we need to equip ourselves with skills that will help us to handle them. The kinds of questions (or statements or objections) we face today are not new, nor are the responses. We have pulled together some resources from thoughtful Christians, along with Biblical texts, to help think through these things, and reinforce your ability to “give an answer for the hope that is within you.”

Our goal in this short series is not to give you a script or polished answers to tough questions, but to give confidence that the Bible does speak to these things, that there are things that we can say in response, and to give an opportunity in your small groups to think and talk about some of the objections. These studies are a starting point. They are not exhaustive, and so we hope you will take note of the ideas generated in your group from your own experiences and background.

The questions or challenges that the world present to the gospel are not new, and we have discovered a little book written exactly 100 years ago that offers very clear responses to many of the questions, and your leaders will have some quotes from R.A. Torrey to help focus and conclude your discussions.

In our Evangelism Study we addressed 5 of 6 ways we ‘speak’ the gospel to others.

- 1) We speak the gospel daily as we openly talk about God in our lives
- 2) We speak the gospel daily through our lifestyle and the choices we make
- 3) We speak the gospel when we have opportunity to share the gospel message
- 4) We speak the gospel when we have opportunity to share our personal testimony
- 5) We speak when we ask people to events, invite them to respond to the gospel, or ask them ‘probing’ questions

The sixth way we must speak the gospel is to handle the objections and questions people have about the Christian faith. Many of our reservations about talking to our friends about Jesus centre on our fears that we won’t be able to do this. We fear we

will do a bad job defending our beliefs either by saying something that is wrong or harmful or not being able to come up with an answer at all.

Over the next 4 weeks, we want to examine the most common objections people have with the Christian faith. They fall into eight main categories and we will address two of them each week.

1. Proof
2. Relevancy
3. Exclusive Claims of Christianity
4. Exclusive Claims of Jesus
5. Suffering
6. Judgment
7. Issues with the Church
8. Issues with the Bible

All these may look challenging but we are reminded by Luke to place our confidence in God's Spirit in the moment of challenge:

<sup>8</sup>"I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. <sup>9</sup>But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God. <sup>10</sup>And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. <sup>11</sup>"When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, <sup>12</sup>for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say." (Luke 12:8-12)

Our task in handling objections is both *assertive* and *defensive*. Assertive, because we need to question assumptions. Behind each of these objections are one or more assumptions that are either logically untenable, or contradictory to the Biblical evidence. Defensive, because the Bible has chosen the ground we are to defend: the gospel. The good news is that means there are lots of things we *don't* have to defend. We don't have to defend the Spanish Inquisition or the Crusades, any denomination, televangelists, the foreign policy of any so-called 'Christian nation', the false assumptions people may have about Christianity, or human 'religion'.

## **GENERAL PRACTICAL TIPS FOR HANDLING OBJECTIONS**

People often make statements about God, faith, and Christianity without actually asking a question. It is helpful to ask questions in response to their statements to initiate a spiritual conversation. Their statements become an open door for us to 1) figure out what they believe by asking them question 2) to expose fallacies in their thinking and ultimately 3) bring the conversation to the true gospel story (God created, Man sinned, Jesus saves, God re-creates).

Ask more questions than you answer. Don't lecture. Use simple terms to explain – like a Sunday school teacher. Ask people to define their terms – God, salvation, Jesus, worship, prayer, sin, etc

Ask people what *they* think before you tell them what you think.

Pray. Love. Be persistent and patient. Apologize. Ask other Christians for help.

Avoid arguing about controversies. *“Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.” 2 Timothy 2:22-24*

Know what is unique about Christianity – namely Jesus. Talk about Jesus and you will get to the core of the gospel. Sin is also an important entry to the gospel message.

Express your delight at thinking and answering these types of question. Be open rather than dogmatic in order to invite more questions at a future date.

QUOTE “This is what I would call a very common discussion: 90 percent of the time is spent asking questions, attempting to work out the persons world view. Then I aim to help them see that the facts about Jesus may be at odds with their belief framework. I want to stir their curiosity – to get them thinking, “Huh?”, “Really?”, or “Are you sure?” It doesn't always happen, but if you spend the bulk of your time listening, rather than speaking, you are more likely to give your friend an “Aha!” moment.” Ben Pfahlert, The Briefing Feb 2009, p 13.

You need to consider your audience as you answer. The three main types of persons who will be asking you questions are 1) The non-religious - those who do not have any religious faith (agnostics or atheists). 2) The religious - those with faith in another religion, 3) Those who have some exposure to Christianity but do not profess belief or commitment.

Remember that some people *need* to argue in order for them to consider something new. Argument is a process which assists many people to come to faith. But remember also that some people hate to argue about these things and would do better to hear about your personal experience.

## SOME GENERAL RESOURCES FOR HANDLING OBJECTIONS AND ANSWERING HARD QUESTIONS

- Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* (Dutton 2008)
- Lee Strobel, *Case for Faith* (Zondervan Publishing House 1998)
- Kenneth D. Boa and Robert Bowman Jr., *20 Compelling Evidences that God Exists* (RiverOak Publishing 2002)
- Dave Hunt, *In Defense of the Faith: Biblical Answers to Challenging Questions* (Harvest House Publishers 1996)
- R. A. Torrey, *Practical and Perplexing Questions Answered* (The Bible Institution Colportage Association of Chicago, 1908)
- Stephen Barr, *Modern Physics and Ancient Faith* (Notre Dame 2003)

## Week 2 :: Suffering and Judgment

### **Objection #3: The Problem of Evil and Suffering**

**STATEMENTS:** People say, “I can’t believe the God Christians say is so loving and powerful would allow such terrible things to happen in the world” “Why doesn’t God just stop all the evil in the world.” “Christianity itself has added to all the pain in this world.” “Where is God in all my suffering? Doesn’t he care?”

Terms of the problem:

1. A God who is good and loving would not want to allow evil and suffering in his world
2. A God who is all powerful could remove evil and suffering if he so desired
3. Therefore, if God is both good and powerful, there should be no evil or suffering
4. But undeniably there is evil and suffering. So God (at least a good and powerful God) does not exist

**RESPONSE:** We must defend the gospel here by considering the following:

- The one who claims there is no God because there is evil must also account for the existence of *good* in this world.
- The unbeliever must also explain on what basis he judges the world to be wrong and unjust, if there is no holy God. It could be argued that the mere fact he recognizes that there is “bad and good things” is evidence for his belief God and his absolute moral standard.

The Bible is thoroughly realistic about evil, sin and suffering. It says:

- God is good. God does not create evil.
- Humanity’s rebellion against God is one of the causes of evil. Pain and suffering can either be a direct result of our sin (personal sin) or someone else’s sin or an indirect result of a world gone wrong (systemic sin).
- The Bible also stresses the malign influence of Satan, the Deceiver, who hates God and wants to destroy his creation and creatures.
- God allows sin to enter his perfect creation. Our love for him requires freedom; we are free to choose him or not.
- God does not eliminate all evil because he does not wish that anyone should perish. He has, however, done something about all the evil in the world (the cross) and will in the end bring about justice.
- The Christian God is a God who suffers along side of us.
- Evil is used by God to bring about his purposes (i.e., Joseph’s story in Genesis 37-45, see 45:4-7 in particular, and the Cross itself is the ultimate triumph of good being brought out of evil).

**SCRIPTURE:** Look up the following verses to see how the Bible addresses the problem of evil and suffering. Try to write down the main points from each set of verses.

Job 1:13-22

Job 19:25-27

Job 38:1-7

Isaiah 53:3-4

Revelation 21:3-5

1 Corinthians 15:21-26

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** How has God used suffering in your life?

How would you compassionately share the gospel with someone who is suffering?

**CONCLUSION:** Leaders may choose to read from R.A. Torrey *Practical and Perplexing Questions Answered*.

p. 54; How can God permit evil to exist in the world?

p. 73; If God is a God of mercy and love and the director of the universe, why does he send earthquakes, tidal waves and other phenomena when thousands of lives are lost almost instantly?

#### **NOTES AND QUOTES ON EVIL AND SUFFERING:**

Just because evil looks pointless to you, it does not necessarily mean it must be pointless. Keller, *Reason for God*, p. 23

“My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not 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?” C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 31

The problem of evil (the root) and suffering (the effect) is felt as a problem today because most people assume:

- A trouble-free, painless life in this world is our natural right
- Richness of life in this world (rather than righteousness) is what matters supremely. Happiness now (not holiness) is what matters.

Jesus is not philosophical about suffering but is deeply engaged with it: God through Jesus attacks the problem of evil that leads to suffering. He suffers for us, delivers us, and promises the end of suffering and the ultimate incineration of evil. God through Christ has taken responsibility for re-ordering and re-creating individuals and the cosmos, and has the power to do so.

#### *What does Jesus do when faced with the evil and suffering of this world?*

- ❖ He takes pity on those who suffer and heals them. (i.e., see Mark 5:33-38)
- ❖ Jesus casts out evil demons. (Mark 1:21-34)
- ❖ In the story of Lazarus (John 11), Jesus allows something bad to happen so that God Son may be glorified through it. Jesus weeps over the death of his friend Lazarus and then raises him from the dead.
- ❖ Hebrews 2:17-18 tells us that Jesus suffered in every way so that he could become our great high priest and help us when we suffer. (2 Corinthians 1; Matthew 28:20)
- ❖ In his own death and resurrection Jesus is able to conquer death – the final enemy.
- ❖ And finally Jesus is the one who will come to make all things right again.

“I believe that there will be no type of affliction or suffering that someone has not lived through with victory supplied on the basis of the shedding of the blood.” Edith Shaeffer *Affliction*, p. 75. Shaeffer goes on to describe “victory” as either the delivery from our suffering by the answering of prayers or that we continue to praise God

*despite* our sufferings. For every person healed of cancer who praises God, God will be able to show another who dies of cancer yet still praises Him.

“None of us can know which shock or illness (headache or operation, disappointment, or disillusionment with a friend, criticism or other human attack, loss of job or loss of house and land, news of a close ones loved one’s death, or totally destructive earthquake) will turn out to be one of the most important opportunities we are ever going to have to honestly love God and truly trust Him in a way which will bring Him joy and defeat Satan.” Edith Shaeffer *Affliction*, p. 77.

“The abortion of affliction, the refusing to face hard things, the constant murmurings against the blows and complaining, “I can’t see why God could do that to me!” means we miss the reality of the battle and see that we are falling into Satan’s trap in that way. But it is also the surest way of missing all the things which God tells us will flow out of the times of difficulty.” Edith Shaeffer *Affliction*, p. 219

“Moral maturity and holiness, wrought out through the battling with evil in God's service, are life's supreme values.” (J.I. Packer)

#### **Other Good Books on Suffering**

C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (MacMillan Publishing Co., 1978).

Edith Schaeffer, *Affliction; A compassionate look at the reality of Pain and Suffering* (Raven’s Ridge Books, 1978)



## Objection #4: The Problem with Judgment

**STATEMENTS:** People say, “The God of the Bible is so judgmental angry and mean.” “My God is a God of love. I just can’t believe he would send anyone to hell.” “God loves us all and he just wants us to do the best we can.” “I wouldn’t want to go to heaven if my loved ones aren’t going to be there.”

**RESPONSE:** We must defend the gospel here by considering the following:

- God loves all his creation. God is loving but he is also just.
- God is wrathful *because* he loves! God’s anger flows from his love and delight in his creation. He is angry at evil and injustice because it is destroying the peace and integrity of his creation and creatures. It is a good thing that God is angry at the evil of this world and will punish it.
- We are all condemned to death and bound for hell. No one is deserving of eternal life with God on the basis of our own righteousness. We are rescued by God through Jesus.
- God does not send us to hell, we choose in this life to follow God or not. God respects that choice even into eternity.

**SCRIPTURE:** Look up the following verses to see what the Bible says regarding Judgment and Hell

Psalm 5
John 3:16-21
2 Thessalonians 1:6-10

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:**

Discuss how God’s love and justice are satisfied in the cross.

**CONCLUSION:** Leaders may choose to read from R.A. Torrey *Practical and Perplexing Questions Answered*.

p. 78; What must one do to get to heaven

p. 76; How is God going to judge the heathen

p. 79; Can a person be happy in heaven if he knows his loved ones are in hell

## NOTES AND QUOTES ON JUDGMENT:

C.S. Lewis, "There are only two kinds of people – those who say "Thy will be done" to God or those to whom God in the end says "Thy will be done". All that are in Hell choose it. Without that self-choice it wouldn't be Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it."

C.S. Lewis, "It is not a question of God 'sending us' to hell. In each of us there is something growing, which will BE hell unless it is nipped in the bud.

"All descriptions of hell and heaven in the Bible are symbolic and metaphorical. Each metaphor suggests one aspect of the experience of hell (For example, "fire" tells us of the disintegration, while "darkness" tells us of isolation) Having said that does not at all imply that heaven or hell *themselves* are "metaphors." They are very much realities. Jesus ascended (with his physical body, mind you) into heaven. The Bible clearly proposes that heaven and hell are actual realities, but indicates that all language about them is allusive, metaphorical and partial." Tim Keller, *Reason for God*, p. 260.

"I found no other religious text outside of the Bible that said God created the world out of love and delight. Most ancient pagan religions believed the world was created through struggles and violent battles between opposing gods and supernatural forces.... Buddhism did not believe in a personal God at all and love is the action of a person...Muslim friends told us that it was disrespectful, in their view, to speak of anyone knowing God personally....I must conclude that the source of the idea that God is Love is the Bible itself. And the Bible tells us that the God of love is also a God of judgment who will put all things in the world to rights in the end." Tim Keller, *Reason for God*, p.82-83

### *What does Jesus say about hell?*

Jesus definitely teaches about heaven and hell (eternal life and eternal punishment). Here are a few examples:

~Luke 13:5 "unless you repent you too will perish."

~Luke 13:22-30 "make every effort to enter through the narrow door....away from me, all you evildoers! There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth..."

~Luke 16:24-31 The Rich Man and Lazarus

~John 5:28-29 The inevitability of resurrection either to life or judgment

~John 10:25-30 Jesus and eternal life

~Matthew 25:31-46 The Sheep and the Goats

2 Peter 3:8-10 "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare."

## Week 3 Exclusive Claims of Christ and Christianity

### **Objection #5 The Exclusive Claims of Christianity**

STATEMENTS: People say, “All religions lead to God” “How can one religion be ‘right’ and the others ‘wrong’? “How can you say what is right for me?” “There can’t be just one true religion” “Each religion sees part of the truth, but none can see the whole truth.” “Religious belief is too culturally and historically conditioned to be ‘truth’” “It is arrogant to think your way is the right way and try to convert everyone else to it. Surely all religions are equally good and meet the needs of their particular followers.”

RESPONSE: We must defend the gospel here by considering the following:

- All religions are not the same. Simple comparisons of basic beliefs will prove that.
- Christianity best explains the beauty and goodness we find as well as explaining what is wrong with this world.
- The Bible says there is only one way to obtain eternal life and that is by faith in Jesus.
- It is not arrogant for Christians to make such an exclusive claim since we are only relaying what Jesus taught and we are being faithful to what Jesus told us to do (Matt. 28:19) by telling others the good news.

COMPARE: See the appendix ‘A Matrix of Worldviews’ to compare the beliefs of Christians and the other major world religions. Discuss in your small group your general observations and what strikes you as being so unique about Christianity.

SCRIPTURE WORK: Look up the following verses to examine the uniqueness of Christianity (the Biblical worldview centered on God and his purposes) and its claim to be the truth.

Isaiah 45:18-25
<b>John 14:5-11</b>
Acts 4:12

**1 Timothy 2:1-6**

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Consider how being a “good person” (religious or not) is not the way to God. (Reflect on the story of the Pharisee and Tax collector in Luke 18:9-14)

CONCLUSION: Leaders may choose to read from R.A. Torrey *Practical and Perplexing Questions Answered*. p 103 What difference does it make what religion a man professes provided he does the best he can? or p. 78. What must one do to get to heaven?

**NOTES AND QUOTES ON EXCLUSIVE CLAIMS OF CHRISTIANITY:****Absolute Truth Arguments:**

- You can't say “There is no such thing as absolute truth” because the statement itself is an absolute truth statement.
- You can't say all claims about religions are historically conditioned except the one I am making right now.”
- Nor can you say “I believe every religion knows only part of the truth” because it implies that you can see the whole truth.
- Remember it is no more narrow to claim that one religion is right than to claim they are all equal, or all wrong.

“Some people use the idea of all paths leading to God as an excuse not to take any path at all.” Boa, p. 289

“Given that we have a limited amount of time in this life to study religions, we can dispense with those that offer us a second chance in the afterlife, or which reincarnate us if we make a mistake in this life, or which promise us all will be well eventually no matter how we live now. Prudence dictates that we first ought to consider the claims of those religions which say that everything depends upon the decisions made and lived by this life.” John A. Bloom, “Truth Via Prophecy” in *Evidence for Faith: Deciding the God Question*, (Dallas: Probe Books, 1991) p. 175.

Christianity is fundamentally different from other religions in that God comes to us rather than us having to work our way towards him. Eternal life is a gift, not something we earn. God intervenes in history to save us from sin and evil.

There is a legend that a man was caught in a bed of quicksand. Confucius saw him and remarked, “There is evidence men should stay out of such places.” Buddha came by and said, “Let that life be a lesson to the rest of the world.” Mohammed said about the man, “Alas, it is the will of Allah. The Hindu said to him, “Cheer up friend, you will return to earth in another form. But when Jesus saw him He said, “Give me your hand, brother, and I will pull you out.” Charles L. Allen, *Touch of the Master’s Hand*

#### **SOME RESPONSES TO COMMON OBJECTIONS**

##### **Objection #1: Christianity is too narrow**

Just because something is narrow and exclusive does not make it wrong. Life is full of things that are narrow and true. For example, we want the airplane pilot to land on the runway, not the highway; to land right-side up, not upside down. Truth is always exclusive of error. Two plus two equals four is very narrow, but it is still right.

The problem comes if people are *insensitive* about saying that Jesus is the only way. It is unfortunate that this sometimes happens, but just because the *presentation* was wrong does not make the *message* itself wrong. If someone went around killing people in the name of love, we wouldn't conclude that love was wrong, would we?

We must also understand that Christianity is not the only religion that makes exclusive claims. Judaism and Islam, among other religions, also make exclusive claims. All religions cannot be true because they disagree with each other on major issues, such as how to be saved. For example, Christianity says that salvation is a free gift from God. Every other religion says that salvation is not a gift, but that we must earn it. How can salvation be free and earned at the same time? So this leads to the question, "Why should one believe Jesus' claims and not the others?"

**Objection #2: Truth changes from person to person**

Sometimes people say "It may be true for you, but it is not true for me." But simply believing something cannot make it true. We believe something because it is true, not to make it true. People used to believe that the earth was flat, but that did not make it flat; it was still round. Jesus' statement in John 14:6, "No one comes to the Father, but through Me," is a universal truth. It applies to everyone, even if they do not believe it. And since Jesus is God and rose from the dead, He has the authority to say this.

**Objection #3: It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere**

A common belief today is that God will accept people no matter what they believe, as long as they are sincere. Sincerity, however, cannot determine whether something is true. It is possible to be sincerely wrong, because faith is only as good as its object. Several years ago a nurse in a large hospital changed an oxygen tank for one of her patients. She sincerely believed that there was oxygen in that tank, but the next nurse to check on the patient found him dead. The tank had been wrongly labeled at the warehouse and contained nitrogen, not oxygen. This nurse was sincere and had a lot of faith in that tank, but the nitrogen still had terrible consequences for her patient.

<http://www.geocities.com/athens/delphi/8449/only.html>

“Christianity does not dictate a particular culture over another. Cultural diversity is built into the Christian faith. In Acts 15, the new Gentile Christians did not have to enter Jewish culture. The new converts had to work out a Hellenistic way of being a Christian. There is no “Christian Culture” the way there is an “Islamic culture” which you can recognize around the globe. The Bible is translated into other languages, unlike the Koran.” Timothy Keller, *Reason for God*, p. 44-45

## Objection #6. The Unique Claims of Christ

**STATEMENTS:** People say, “Jesus wasn’t God.” “Jesus was just a great moral teacher.” “Jesus was only a prophet.” “The resurrection just couldn’t have happened.”

**RESPONSE:** We must defend the gospel here by considering the following:

- Jesus claims to be God. He is part of the Trinity – fully god and fully man.
- Jesus claims to be one with the Father. He accepts worship. He does miracles on his own authority (i.e. he does not pray to God for the miracle like prophets and apostles do.)
- Jesus fulfills the attributes of God. He is sinless, loving, compassionate, wise, and powerful. He heals, forgives sins, he knows what is in people’s hearts, he has authority (power) over nature, demons and death.
- Jesus is the Messiah who fulfills all Old Testament prophecies (hundreds of them!).
- The resurrection is the ultimate vindication of his identity. Historical proof of the empty tomb and eyewitnesses report the resurrection really happened. The remarkable growth of the church cannot be explained if Jesus never rose from the dead.

**SCRIPTURE WORK:** Look up the following verses to see what the Bible says regarding the uniqueness of Christ:

**Mark 8:27-31**

**Matthew 26:63**

**Romans 10:9**

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Why are *you* convinced that Jesus is God?

**CONCLUSION:** Leaders may choose to read from R.A. Torrey *Practical and Perplexing Questions Answered* p. 41 How would you prove that Jesus Christ is really the Son of God?

NOTES AND QUOTES ON THE UNIQUENESS OF JESUS:

Many books address the question of Jesus' actual existence as an historical figure and the historical accuracy of the Bible. Boa, *20 Compelling Evidences the God Existed*, Ch 9, 10, 14. Strobel, *The Case for Christ* Ch 1-6 are a good start.

"If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all he said; if he didn't, then why worry about any of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teachings but on whether or not he rose from the dead. ... If Jesus rose from the dead, it changes everything." Tim Keller, p202

We can believe what Jesus said because He gave evidence that validates His claim. Jesus not only claimed to be the only way to God, but He also claimed to *be* God (John 5:18; 10:30-33). He then rose from the dead, proving that what He said was true. There is more evidence for Christ's resurrection than any event in ancient history. Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed and all of the other religious leaders of the past are still in their tombs, but not Jesus. Who would you believe?

**Jesus' claim to be God can be explained 5 ways: He is either a legend, a 'lama', a lunatic, a liar or the Lord.**

- ~ If Jesus never really thought he was God but His disciples made it up after the fact
  - Then He is a legend.
- ~ If Jesus claimed to be God, but meant it only mystically – in the sense 'I am god because we are all god.' ➤ Then He is lama (similar belief to the Dali Lama)
- ~ If Jesus claimed to be God and he meant it literally, and he knew it was not true
  - Then He is a liar.
- ~ If Jesus claimed to be God and he meant it literally, and he didn't know it was *not* true
  - Then He is a lunatic.
- ~ If Jesus claimed to be God and he meant it literally, and it is true
  - Then He is Lord.

He cannot be simply a good moral teacher, because good moral people don't claim to be God when they are not.

**Consider each of these possibilities:**

- Legend? Read what Jesus says of himself. He claims to be God *in fact*. Would his disciples die for a myth?
- Lama? Read what his enemies thought of him and why they killed him. He was crucified (among other reasons) for claiming to be God.
- Liar? Read the stories of his miracles. What he says is true because he backs it up by performing miracles. His words and actions show he came to serve. He has integrity. He is flawless and unmatched.
- Lunatic? Read his teachings. He is sane, wise and authoritative.
- Lord? Read Jesus' whole story. See how prophesy is fulfilled in him. See his authority over demons, nature, sickness and death. See how he dies and hear the centurion say "Surely this man was the Son of God." Read the story of the resurrection and know he has conquered death. Read about the fearfulness of the disciples before the resurrection appearance of Jesus and the tremendous growth of the church afterward.



## Week 4 :: Issues with the Church and the Bible

### **Objection #7 Issues with the Church**

STATEMENTS: People say, “I’m a private person when it comes to my faith. I’m not into organized religion.” “I don’t really like church” “I went to church once but ‘something happened’ and I never went back.” “The church is so corrupt and the people who go are so hypocritical.” “I could never go to church – I’d never be that perfect.”

RESPONSE: We must defend the gospel here by considering the following:

- The Church is established by God and is central in his plans to spreading the gospel. To be a Christian means that you *are* an essential part of the church.
- The Church is full of sinners who fail but that doesn’t necessarily mean the Church fails or Christianity is wrong.
- Christianity is worked out in community not in isolation.

SCRIPTURE WORK: Look up the following verses to see the picture that Scripture paints of what the Church should look like and what its purpose is.

Ephesians 2:19-22
Acts 2: 42-47
Hebrews 10:23-25
Ephesians 3:7-12

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Consider how being involved in the church has helped you personally.

CONCLUSION: Leaders may choose to read from R.A. Torrey, *Practical and Perplexing Questions Answered*, p 28. What do you think of the institutional church? Is it not detrimental to the real work as set forth in the New Testament?

NOTES AND QUOTES ON ISSUES WITH THE CHURCH:

“God’s purpose, which was conceived in a past eternity, is being worked out in history, and will be perfected in the eternity still to come, is not to save individual souls in isolation from one another and so perpetuate our loneliness, but to build a church, to gather together into one a people of his own drawn from every nation and every culture. The New Testament portrays this divine society by many vivid metaphors. We are sisters and brothers in God’s family, citizens of his kingdom, and stones in his temple. We are also sheep of Christ’s flock, the branches of his vine, and members of his body. We belong irrevocably to one another because we belong irrevocably to him.” John Stott, *Christian Basics: An invitation to discipleship*, (Baker Book House, 2003) p 98.

“To turn Christianity into a solitary religion is to destroy it.” John Wesley

[In C.S. Lewis’s, *Screwtape Letters* (Letter II, p. 11-13), the senior devil writes to the junior about “your patient”, a young Christian]:

“My dear Wormwood, I note with grave displeasure that your patient has become a Christian...There is no need to despair; hundreds of these adult converts have been reclaimed after a brief sojourn in the Enemy’s camp and are now with us. All the *habits* of the patient, both mental and bodily, are still in our favour. One of our great allies at the present is the Church itself. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean the Church as we see her spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners. That, I confess, is a spectacle which makes our boldest tempters uneasy. But fortunately it is quite invisible to these humans. All your patient sees is the half-finished, sham Gothic erection on the new building estate. When he goes inside, he sees the local grocer with rather an oily expression on his face bustling up to offer him one shiny little book containing a liturgy which neither of them understands, and one shabby little book containing corrupt texts of a number of religious lyrics, mostly bad, and in very small print. When he gets to his pew and looks around him he sees just that selection of his neighbours whom he hitherto avoided. You may want to lean pretty heavily on those neighbours. Make his mind flit to and fro between an expression like “the body of Christ” and the actual faces in the next pew. It matters very little, of course, what kind of people that next pew really contains...provided any of those neighbours sing out of tune, or have boots that squeak, or double chins, or odd clothes, the patient will quite easily believe their

religion must therefore be somehow ridiculous. At his present stage, he has an idea of “Christians” in his mind which he supposes to be spiritual but which, in fact, is largely pictorial....Never let him ask what he expected them to look like.”

“My dear Wormwood, Surely you know if a man can’t be cured of churchgoing, the next best thing is to send him all over the neighbourhood looking for a church that “suits” him ... the search for a “suitable” church makes a man a critic where the Enemy wants him to be a pupil.” C.S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, Letter XVI, pp 72-73.

“The typical criticisms by secular people about the oppressiveness and injustices of the Christian church actually come from Christianity’s own critique of itself. The shortcomings of the church can be understood historically as imperfect adoption and practices of the Christian gospel... What is the answer, then, to the very fair and devastating criticisms of the record of the Christian church? The answer is *not* to abandon the Christian faith, because that would leave us with neither the standards nor the resources to make correction. Instead we should move to a fuller and deeper grasp of what Christianity is. The Bible itself taught us to expect abuses of religion and it has also told us what to do about them.” Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*, participation 61-62.

“I realize that so many people’s main problem with Christianity has far more to do with the church than with Jesus....I will grant that on the whole, churchgoers may be weaker psychologically and morally than non-churchgoers. That should be no more surprising than the fact that people sitting in a doctors office are on the whole sicker than those who are not there. Churches rightly draw a higher proportion of needy people. They also have a great number of people whose lives have been completely turned around and filled with the joy of Christ...I realize how risky it is to tell my readers that they should seek out a church. I don’t do it lightly, and I urge them to do so with great care. But there is no alternative. You can’t live the Christian life without a band of Christian friends, without a family of believers in which you can find a place.” Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*, participation 61-62.

“There is always a danger in an institutional church. The danger is that the institutions get to be the main thing and the Gospel put in a secondary place, or altogether lost sight of.” R.A. Torrey, *Practical and Perplexing Questions Answered*, p 28. Torrey goes on to say the three main purposes of the church are seeking and saving the lost (Luke 19:10; Matthew 28:19-20), feeding the sheep (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2) and training its members for intelligent service (Ephesians 4:1-13).

## **Objection #8. Issues with the Bible**

**STATEMENTS:** People say, “The Bible is just myth and legend.” “I have a problem with how people take the Bible so literally” “The Bible is historically unreliable, scientifically impossible and culturally regressive and obsolete.” “I tried reading the Bible but it is just way too complicated”. “I disagree with so much of what the Bible says” In other words, the three common issues are: The Bible is *untrue*, it is *confusing*, or it is *offensive*.

**RESPONSE:** We must defend the gospel here by considering the following:

- People often have never read the Bible but just assume they know what it says. Challenge them to read it for themselves.
- God chooses to relate to his creation and his creatures by his word.
- Jesus himself, as well as the Apostles, were convinced of the truth of Scripture as ‘the very words of God’, and, as such, *authoritative* for belief and practice, as well as *effective* to bring people to a knowledge and personal trust of God's salvation.
- The Bible itself claims to be trustworthy, clear, and effective, but human sin clouds our ability to understand and receive it.
- Reading the Bible from a platform of skepticism will not help us to understand it the way its Author intended. The Bible “does not yield its secrets to the irreverent and censorious” (J.I. Packer, *God Has Spoken* p.44)

**SCRIPTURE WORK:** Look up the following verses to see what the Bible says regarding itself:

2 Timothy 3:16

*“Jesus accepted the Old Testament Scriptures as the word of his Father. The evidence for this is compelling. First, he obeyed them in his own life and countered each temptation of the devil with an apt Biblical quotation. Next, he believed that the Scriptures testified to him and were fulfilled in him, and he interpreted his mission in the light of their teaching. Third, he quoted them, in debate with religious leaders, as the ultimate authority, the final court of appeal. It would be very anomalous for us to have a lower view of the Old Testament than he had....” (John Stott, Christian Basics p. 88)*

Luke 24:44-48

1 Corinthians 2:7-13

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Why do you think the Christian faith requires belief in the Bible?

CONCLUSION: Leaders may choose to read from R.A. Torrey, *Practical and Perplexing Questions Answered*, p. 13-17

#### NOTES AND QUOTES ON THE BIBLE:

##### Is the Bible untrue?

“The Old and New Testaments enjoy far greater manuscript attestation in terms of quantity, quality, and time span than any other ancient documents. There is no reason to question the substantial accuracy and integrity of the texts of the Old and New Testament books as they have come down to us.” (Boa and Bowman, *20 Compelling Evidences that God Exists*, p. 131.

##### What about the gospels?

The gospels' form precludes their being legends. The Biblical gospels are not legends but historically reliable accounts about Jesus' life. Why? 1) Their timing is far too early for them to be legends. The gospels, however, were written 30-60 years after Jesus' death – and Paul's letters, which support all the accounts, came just 20 years after the events. 2) Their content is far too counter-productive to be legends. The accounts of Jesus crying out that God had abandoned Him, or the resurrection where all the witnesses were women – did not help Christianity in the eyes of first century readers. The only historically plausible reason that these incidents are recorded is that they happened. 3) The literary form of the gospels is too detailed to be legend. (Paraphrase from Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*, Chapter 7)

##### Is the Bible confusing?

“God-inspired Scripture, writes Paul, ‘is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16)’; but we cannot reap this profit till the Scripture quickens our minds and consciences to measure and judge ourselves by Scripture ...Here, again, the decisive qualification is not academic scholarship but rather a praying, humble, teachable heart...it is only as we obey God up to the limit of our present insight into His will that our insight will be deepened and our vision enlarged.” J.I. Packer *God Has Spoken* p.101.

Is the Bible offensive?

“The 'offensiveness' of the Bible is often culturally relative. Texts you find difficult and offensive are 'common sense' to people in other cultures. And of the things you find offensive because of your beliefs and convictions, many will seem silly to your grandchildren just as many of your grandparents' beliefs offend you. Therefore, to simply reject any Scripture is to assume your culture (and worse yet, your time in history) is superior to all others. It is narrow-minded in the extreme.” (Tim Keller, *Reason for God*)

“Now, what happens if you eliminate anything from the Bible that offends your sensibility...If you pick and choose what you want to believe and reject the rest, how will you ever have a God who can contradict you? You won't! You'll have...a God, essentially, of your own making, and not a God with whom you can have a relationship and genuine interaction. Only if your God can say things that outrage you and make you struggle (as in a real friendship or marriage) will you know that you have gotten hold of a real God and not a figment of your imagination. So an authoritative Bible is not the enemy of a personal relationship with God. It is the precondition for it.” (Tim Keller, *Reason for God*, p.114)

What do we do with the Bible if it is true?

“Many who declare the Bible to be unreliable are very ignorant of its teaching. But they are very sure that they do not want to take the costly step of giving in to Jesus Christ of whom the Bible speaks. It is not what they can't believe in the Bible which is the trouble, as Huck Finn once said, it is what they can believe! That is quite enough to face us with a massive moral hurdle. If the Bible is true, are we going to receive its truth? (Michael Green and Gordon Carkner, *Ten Myths about Christianity* p.55)

The final evidence for the truth of the Bible

“The final evidence that it is the word of God is that God speaks personally to us through it.” (John Stott, *Christian Basics* p. 89)