

Chapter #14

Conclusion: Review, Response and Application

Throughout this study we've had one primary objective: to remove stumbling blocks to faith. As Christians, we are commanded to share the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ with a lost world. Too often, though, when our sincerely held religious beliefs are challenged, we immediately become defensive and either attack or retreat. It is difficult for us to imagine that anyone would disbelieve what seems so obvious to us. And on some level their doubt shakes our own belief. Maybe we've never even thought about any of the questions posed and feel completely inadequate to propose an answer. We mumble something about needing "faith" and then avoid mentioning the subject again. But the questions people are asking are valid ones. And their souls are precious enough to deserve thorough, well thought out answers. Hopefully this course has provided you with some of those answers. Our goal in learning all this information is not to be armed to win an argument or to chastise those with honest questions, but to break down barriers to belief. Some people simply can't believe unless their questions are answered. For those people, we offer an apologetic, a defense, of the Christian faith.

We began our study by examining the claims of Christianity so we could better understand why it is being attacked with such ferocity. Jesus' claim to be the only way to heaven is repugnant to a society that prizes eclecticism and tolerance. It is generally not a lack of evidence that keeps people from believing the Bible, but a determination to run their own lives and follow their own pleasures. But for those who truly want to know the truth we set out first to prove the possibility of the existence of God through various philosophical and moral arguments. Next, we looked at historical, secular evidence for the claims of Christianity and other evidence for its truthfulness, such as the testimony of martyrs and Christianity's answers to the human predicament. We offered these arguments as a means of making an apologetic apart from the use of Scripture, as a starting point. But the ultimate goal in our witnessing is to open the Bible so the skeptic can read what God says. Remember that God's Word is powerful and God reaches the hardest of hearts through it. Its wisdom is vastly superior to our own. Most people who discredit Christianity or disbelieve the Bible have never even read the Bible, so it's vital that we introduce them to its claims. We discovered that, when judged by the same standard as any other ancient manuscript, the Bible is more reliable and accurate than any other ancient writing and can't be dismissed as unhistorical or mythological. Once we proved our present text is a reliable copy of the original and that it is historically reliable, we examined evidence for its inspiration. Its uniqueness and prophetic accuracy and advanced medical knowledge point to the Bible's divine origin. Our conclusion was that any thinking person should at least consider what it has to say.

Then we switched gears a bit and turned our attention to the chief claim of the New Testament, the resurrection of Christ. We noted that, since it is a verifiable truth claim on which our entire religion rests, proving it true would validate all the claims of Christianity. We examined the eyewitness testimony recorded in the Bible and determined that the witnesses were indeed credible. Alternate explanations for the resurrection were not feasible given the circumstances or they were incapable of explaining the recorded facts. It was our conclusion that the only theory that sufficiently explained all the facts was that Jesus did in fact rise from the dead. Since His resurrection was the crowning attestation to all Jesus taught, and Jesus claimed to be God and to be the only way to heaven, Christianity is proved true and all other religions are, by logical corollary, false. Even using deductive logic, our conclusion about who Jesus was remained the same. He was (and is) God. Any reasonable person who objectively examines the evidence would have to come to the same conclusion.

We've covered a wealth of knowledge, citing many knowledgeable authors, historians and lawyers. We've looked intently at many Scripture passages. So, what do we do with all this information. The temptation is to do nothing, to simply place this book on a shelf alongside other recently read books until it catches your attention again a couple years from now. Please don't let that be the case.

What do I do now?

1. Share with a Christian friend.

The best way to cement information in your mind is to share it with someone else. By sharing the information you learned in this course with another Christian, you'll gain confidence in handling the material and maybe even bolster someone else's faith in the process. If your Christian friend will challenge you with questions, you'll be even better prepared to share in a potentially hostile situation. The more you "practice" confrontation the easier it will be when you have the opportunity to witness to a skeptic.

2. Rely on the Holy Spirit.

Remember that it is the Holy Spirit who convicts the lost of their need of Christ and convinces them of His reality. In a witnessing situation, don't fret that the other person's eternal destiny depends on your ability or inability to articulate a clear apologetic. Although God may use you as a vehicle, salvation doesn't depend on you.

1 Corinthians 3:5-7 *What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.*

Your responsibility is to be obedient. You must submit yourself to the control of the Holy Spirit and allow Him to work through you. That means being sensitive to the Spirit's leading and recognizing that He will give you the right words to say. He will help you remember what you've learned and to share it in a way that is relevant to another's needs.

Luke 12:11-12 *“When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.”*

Mark 13:11 *“Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit....”*

Acts 1:8 *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

3. Live a consistent Christian Life.

Your life is the ultimate apologetic. Before you ever open your mouth to proclaim the Gospel you have witnessed to those around you by your life. If others see in you a transformed life, a commitment (to the death) to Jesus Christ and His Word, and strong convictions to do what is right, they'll be convinced that you really have had an encounter with the risen Christ. And they may be a little more interested in hearing what you have to say.

John 17:21-23 *...May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

John 13:35 *By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

Titus 2:9-10 *Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.*

Romans 12:9-18 *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*

4. Be open to opportunities to witness.

The Bible tells us we have a responsibility to tell others the glorious message of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Mark 16:15 *He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."*

2 Corinthians 3:2-3 *You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.*

2 Corinthians 5:19b-20a *... And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.*

Romans 10:13-14 *... "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?*

God wants His people to be available to share Christ with unbelievers, even skeptical ones. If you determine in your heart that you will allow Him to use you in this way, you can be sure He will. God will open doors for you to witness and bring people to you if He knows He has a willing proclaimer of truth. The harvest is plentiful and the workers are few. God will use you if you are available.

5. Know how to present a clear, simple plan of salvation.

Our goal in apologetics is to lead unbelievers to belief in Christ (John 20:21). If you are faithful in sharing, you will probably have an opportunity to lead someone to Christ. So, you need to be prepared. Keep witnessing tracts (such as *The Four Spiritual Laws* or *Peace with God*) with you or be prepared to share your personal testimony. The following Scripture passages might prove helpful:

Romans 3:23 *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*

Romans 6:23 *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Acts 3:19 *Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,*

1 John 1:9 *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

Romans 10:9 *That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

John 1:12 *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—*

What are some objections I may encounter?

If you attempt to share your faith with a coworker, fellow student or family member, no doubt at some point you'll encounter opposition or serious questioning. Many of those questions are found in the pages of this book, and we've sought to address them one by one. Most people, however, will not even ask a question, they'll simply make a blanket statement of belief designed to let you know they're not interested in hearing about Christianity. How should you respond?

1. I don't believe in God.

As we've already noted, most people who claim to be atheists are really agnostics. No one can prove there is no God, since it's impossible to prove a negative. Most "atheists" would concede that if there is a God, there is no way we can know anything about Him (making them technically agnostic). It's difficult to know where to start in witnessing to such a person. Sometimes just asking, "So, what brought you to that conclusion?" will reveal a great deal. Perhaps a tragedy caused the person to disbelieve in the loving God proclaimed by Christianity. Your strategy for witnessing to a person who has an erroneous picture of God would be much different than for the person who believes it's intellectual suicide to believe in a God. With the former, you would point out the cause of sin (Genesis 3) and the effects of sin and a sinful world (Romans 1). You would point to the wisdom and love of God who redeems us from a world of sin. Such a person doesn't really disbelieve in God, he or she is just disappointed with God or disillusioned because God doesn't act the way he thinks He should.

The true agnostic or atheist, though, needs a different approach. How does he answer your question, "So what brought you to that conclusion?" Most will mention something about there being no evidence, which opens a wide door for you to share some. Don't begin with the proofs for the existence of God (chapter 2), unless you feel compelled to. Remember the ultimate proof of the existence of God: Jesus Christ. We have ample evidence of a historical Jesus who lived, died and rose from the dead. And He claimed to be God. Always start with the Gospel and answer other questions as they arise.

It should be noted here that you don't need to have all the answers to people's questions at your fingertips. No one is offended if you offer to find answers for them, as long as you share in a concerned and gracious way.

2. I don't believe the Bible.

Some people you encounter are sincerely religious people, but they're not Christians. They don't believe the Bible. You should always respect the sincerely held religious beliefs of others, but that doesn't mean you can't have respectful dialogue with them. The simplest response to the assertion, "I don't believe the Bible," is "Oh really, why not?" Questions always work better than statements. If the person to whom you're witnessing holds to another religion, they'll probably be more than happy to tell you about it. As long as you keep asking questions, such as "How does your religion deal with the problem of sin?" or "What is the eternal value of your beliefs?" you'll have opportunities to share your beliefs as well.

Often, though, when someone states that they don't believe the Bible, they have no reason for it. You can continue the conversation by asking, "What would it take for you to believe the Bible is true?" Then you can offer suggestions. "What if we applied the same tests to the Bible that historians apply to any other piece of ancient literature?" etc. As long as the other person is willing to continue the conversation, you can share a good deal of what you've learned in this course. If they're not interested, a simple "Why not?" might reveal the reason. Chances are they don't want to hear (i.e. obey) what the Bible has to say. The Bible claims to have all the answers to the most profound questions of all humanity; why else wouldn't someone want to at least consider it?

3. All religions are equally valid.

In an age of tolerance and the celebration of diversity, most people bristle at the thought of an exclusive religion like Christianity. They much prefer to believe all religions are an avenue to God. You might respond to this objection by stating, "All but Christianity, you mean, right?" The other person might be perplexed, since he just stated that ALL religions are equally valid. But you would point out that if all others are valid, Christianity isn't, because it claims to be the only way to God and eternal salvation. If you're not pushy, you might be able to share a good deal of the claims of Christianity. You might need to explain that this is what the Bible teaches

and Christians *should* believe, since not all who claim to be Christians nowadays hold to the central truths of Scripture. Once you've established that either Christianity is true and all others false, or Christianity is wrong and all others are viable options, you come to the question of chapter 9, "How can you prove the truth of a religion?" And you can continue on from there, if possible. You might also use the rationale of Pascal's wager (chapter 2): "What if you're wrong?" If you wager on Christianity being true and it is, you've gained everything. If you're wrong, you lose nothing. If you wager on some other religion and you're right, you gain nothing (or very little). If you're wrong, you lose everything.

4. I don't need religion.

Most people who think they don't need religion really don't want it, or they haven't thoroughly thought about their real needs. You might want to simply agree with such a person: "I'm so glad to hear you say that; the last thing we need is another religion." That should set the person's mind at ease a little. The point you want to express is that Christianity isn't a religion, it's a relationship. A religion is man trying to reach up to God in an attempt to appease or please Him. Christianity is God reaching down to man through Jesus Christ. Christianity is not just another religion. The person who "doesn't need religion" is also likely to mention all the hypocrites in the church. "Jesus felt the same way," is a good response. We read a lot of verses in our last lesson about Jesus' condemnation of hypocrisy. Hopefully, you'll be able to share with such a person what Jesus really taught and expected. Sometimes you just need to wait for a better opportunity. Many times difficult circumstances will turn a person's attention to eternity, providing a perfect opportunity for you to witness. They might not think they need Christianity now, but what about for eternity?

No doubt you'll encounter many other objections as you begin to share Christ with others and make a defense for the claims of Christianity. Be confident. The Holy Spirit will always help you to say the right words if you're depending on Him and not on your own wisdom. Keep this verse close to your heart:

1 Peter 3:15 *"But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...."*

If the only result of this course is that your knowledge is increased, I've only accomplished half my purpose. This information was meant to be shared. I want you to be so thoroughly convinced of the truth of the Gospel that you feel as compelled as Paul when he wrote, "Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:16). The Gospel is too great to be hidden inside the church or to be placed on a shelf. There is too much at stake. Take the information you've learned in this course and use it. May the Kingdom be increased and God be given all the glory as you do so.

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