

Introduction to Apologetics-Part VII

Course modeled after Frank Turek and Norman Geisler's *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* curriculum, with additional materials from William Lane Craig, J.P. Moreland, Hugh Ross, Stephen Meyers, John Lennox, Douglas Groothuis, N.T. Wright, Ravi Zacharias, Andy Bannister, Paul Copan, and Rodney Stark.

Course Outline:

- I. ——— ~~The Four Questions Everybody Needs to Ask of Their Belief System~~
- II. ——— ~~Can You Handle the Truth?~~
- III. ——— ~~The Big Bang of Science and Theology~~
- IV. ——— ~~Watchmaker, Watchmaker, Make Me a Watch~~
- V. ——— ~~The Herd and the Gut~~
- VI. ——— ~~All We Need is a Miracle~~
- VII. ——— ~~Can Somebody Give Me a Testimony?~~
- VIII. ——— ~~Books of Myth or Books of Truth?~~
- IX. ~~Who is This Jesus Guy?~~
- X. ~~The One Answer to the Four Questions~~

Can You Handle the Truth?

1. Truth about reality is knowable. ✓
2. The opposite of true is false. ✓
3. It is true that the theistic God exists. ✓
4. If God exists, then miracles are possible. ✓
5. Miracles can be used to confirm a message from God. ✓
6. The New Testament is historically reliable. ✓
7. The New Testament says Jesus claimed to be God. ✓
8. Jesus' claim to be God was miraculously confirmed by His fulfillment of prophecies, His sinless life and miraculous deeds, and His prediction and accomplishment of His resurrection.
9. Therefore, Jesus is God.
10. Whatever Jesus (who is God) teaches is true.
11. Jesus taught that the Bible is the Word of God.
12. Therefore, it is true that the Bible is the Word of God (and anything opposed to it is false).

By this point, you should be able to discern self-defeating statements, establish that truth is knowable, explain that absolute truths do exist, the four basic questions every person needs to ask about their humanity, the basic cosmological arguments for the existence of God, show that Intelligent Design is not unscientific, show that there is a universal moral law, explain about the Big Bang miracle, and the veracity of the New Testament. This class focuses on the Resurrection and who Jesus really is.

What We Can Demonstrate So Far...

1. By means of the Cosmological Argument, we can demonstrate that the universe and all that is in it was caused by an intelligent being outside of space, time, and matter, which is immensely powerful and personal.
2. By means of the Teleological Argument, we can demonstrate that this being is not just intelligent, but supremely intelligent since he designed life and the universe with incredible complexity and precision, evidenced by the constant emerging of the Anthropic Principle.
3. By means of the Moral Argument, we can demonstrate that there is a moral law, which provides the means by which we can delineate between good and evil, and that this law must have been created by a moral law giver, it is universal, and that the definition of good in its fullest meaning is only found in God and His attributes, and that goodness must be attached to purpose.
4. By means of the agreement of the Big Bang, we can demonstrate that supernatural events, events that defy our understanding of natural laws, have happened. Because this major miracle happened, then those that are described in the Bible are possible.
5. By showing that the New Testament is qualified based on substantially answering the historical test questions that historians ask any historical document from antiquity, we can show that the New Testament has been transmitted extremely accurately over time and that the historical events described are very likely to have happened.

So, how would the resurrection story look if it was devised by humans? Point out the divergent details.

Jesus came to save the world, and he needed our help. That's why we were there for him every step of the way. When he was in need, we prayed with him. When he wept, we wept with him. When he fell, we carried his cross. The gates of hell could not prevent us from seeing his mission through!

So, when that turncoat, Judas, betrayed Jesus to the Romans (we had always suspected Judas), and they began to nail Jesus to the cross, we laughed at them. "He's God! The grave will never hold him! You think you are solving a problem, but you're really creating a much bigger one!"

Although we assured the women that everything would turn out all right, they couldn't handle the crucifixion. Squeamish and afraid, they ran to their homes and hid behind locked doors. But we men stood steadfast at the foot of the cross, praying for hours until the very end. When Jesus finally took his last breath and the Roman centurion confessed that Jesus was God, Peter blasted him. "That's what we told you before you nailed him up there!" (Through this whole thing, the Romans and the Jews just wouldn't listen!)

Never doubting that Jesus would rise on the third day, Peter announced to the centurion, "We'll bury him and be back on Sunday. Now go tell Pilate to put some of your 'elite' Roman guards at the tomb to see if you can prevent him from rising from the dead!" We all laughed and began to dream about Sunday.

That Sunday morning, we marched down to the tomb and tossed aside those elite Roman guards. Then the stone (the one that took eleven of us to roll into place) rolled away by itself. Jesus emerged from the tomb and said, "I knew you would come! My mission is accomplished." He praised Peter for his brave leadership and congratulated us on our great faith. Then we went home and told the women the good news (Frank Turek, *IDon't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*).

Just the facts!

Learn these! These are the facts that both Christian and non-Christian scholars agree upon regarding the events surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection (from Gary Habermas, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope*):

1. Jesus died by Roman execution.
2. He was buried, most likely in a private tomb.
3. Soon afterwards the disciples were discouraged, bereaved, and despondent, having lost hope.
4. Jesus' tomb was found empty very soon after his internment.
5. The disciples had experiences that they believed were actual appearances of the risen Jesus.
6. Due to these experiences, the disciples' lives were thoroughly transformed. They were even willing to die for their belief.
7. The proclamation of the Resurrection took place very early, from the beginning of church history.
8. The disciples' public testimony and preaching of the Resurrection took place in the city of Jerusalem, where Jesus had been crucified and buried shortly before.
9. The gospel message centered on the preaching of the death and resurrection of Jesus.
10. Sunday was the primary day for gathering and worshiping.
11. James, the brother of Jesus and a skeptic before this time, was converted when he believed he also saw the risen Jesus.
12. Just a few years later, Saul of Tarsus became a Christian believer, due to an experience that he also believed was an appearance of the risen Jesus.

Can you make it simpler?

You bet! Let's reduce it down to four points:

1. The death of Jesus by crucifixion.
2. The empty tomb.
3. The post-resurrection appearances.
4. The origin of the Christian faith.

I object! (the major objections to the four points as per Aaron Blake, et al)

1. Jesus did not actually die (the Swoon Theory):

- A. First, the Swoon Theory does not take seriously what we know about the horrendous scourging and torture associated with crucifixion. As an expert team from the *Journal of the American Medical Association* concludes, “Accordingly, interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge.”
- B. Second, Jesus faking His own resurrection goes against everything we know about His ethical ministry.
- C. Third, a half-dead, half-resurrected “messiah” could hardly serve as the foundation for the disciples’ belief in the resurrection. German theologian David Friederick Strauss explains:

It is impossible that a being who had stolen half-dead out of the sepulcher, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment, who required bandaging, strengthening and indulgence, and who still at last yielded to his sufferings, could have given to the disciples the impression that he was a Conqueror of death and the grave, the Prince of Life, an impression which lay at the bottom of their future ministry. Such a resuscitation could only have weakened the impression which He had made upon them in life and in death, at the most could only have given it an elegiac voice, but could by no possibility have changed their sorrow into enthusiasm, have elevated their reverence into worship.

- D. Fourth, this theory is anachronistic in postulating that the disciples, upon seeing Jesus in his half-comatose state, would be led to conclude that He had been raised from the dead within history, in opposition to the Jewish belief in one final resurrection at the end of time. On the contrary, seeing Him again would lead them to conclude *He didn’t die!*
- E. Fifth, Roman soldiers were professional executioners and everything we know about the torture and crucifixion of Jesus confirms His death, making this theory physically impossible.
- F. Sixth, no early evidence or testimony exists claiming Jesus was merely wounded.
- G. Finally, this theory cannot account for the conversion of skeptics like Paul who also testified to having seen the risen Lord and willingly suffered and died for his belief in the resurrection.

2. The disciples stole the body.

- A. First, this theory does not explain well the simplicity of the resurrection narratives nor why the disciples would invent women as the primary witnesses to the empty tomb. This is hardly the way one gets a conspiracy theory off the ground.
- B. Second, this also doesn’t explain why the disciples would perpetuate a story that they stole the body (Matt. 28:11-15) if in fact *they stole the body!* Propagating an explanation which incriminates oneself is again at odds with a conspiracy theory.
- C. Third, as will be discussed below, this theory does not account for the fact that the disciples of Jesus had genuine experiences in which they believed they saw the risen Christ. So convinced were these men that their lives were transformed into committed followers willing to suffer and die for their belief. *Liars make poor martyrs.*
- D. Fourth, this theory runs opposite to everything we know about the disciples. As J. N. D. Anderson states, “This would run totally contrary to all we know of them: their ethical teaching, the quality of their lives, their steadfastness in suffering and persecution. Nor would it begin to explain their dramatic transformation from dejected and dispirited escapist into witnesses whom no opposition could muzzle.”
- E. Fifth, this theory is completely anachronistic. There was no expectation by first century Jews of a suffering-servant Messiah who would be shamefully executed by Gentiles as a criminal only to rise again bodily *before* the final resurrection at the end of time: “As Wright nicely

puts it, if your favorite Messiah got himself crucified, then you either went home or else you got yourself a new Messiah. But the idea of stealing Jesus' corpse and saying that God had raised him from the dead is hardly one that would have entered the minds of the disciples."

- F. Finally, this theory cannot account for the conversion of skeptics like Paul who also testified to having seen the risen Lord and willingly suffered and died for his belief in the resurrection.

3. The disciples experienced hallucinations (grief-induced hallucinations)

- A. First, the testimony of Paul along with the Gospel writers is that the appearances of Jesus were physical, bodily appearances. In fact, this is the *unanimous* consent of the Gospel narratives. This is an important point because if "*none* of the appearances was originally a physical, bodily appearance, then it is very strange that we have a completely unanimous testimony in the Gospels that *all* of them were physical, with no trace of the supposed original, non-physical appearances."
- B. Second, hallucinations are private experiences (as opposed to group experiences). A group of people "may be in the frame of mind to hallucinate, but each experiences hallucinations on an individual basis. Nor will they experience the same hallucination. Hallucinations are like dreams in this way." Therefore, hallucinations cannot explain the group appearances attested to in 1 Cor. 15, the Gospel narratives, and the book of Acts.
- C. Third, ironically, the Hallucination Theory cannot explain the origin of the disciples' belief in Jesus' resurrection! Just like in today's modern world, "for someone in the ancient world, visions of the deceased are not evidence that the person is alive, but evidence that he is dead!" This is a crucial argument to grasp:

Hallucinations, as projections of the mind, can contain nothing new. Therefore, given the current Jewish beliefs about life after death, the disciples, were they to project hallucinations of Jesus, would have seen Jesus in heaven or in Abraham's bosom, where the souls of the righteous dead were believed to abide until the resurrection. And such visions would not have caused belief in Jesus' resurrection.

- D. In other words, a hallucination of the resurrected Jesus presupposes the proper frame of mind which the disciples simply did not possess.
- E. Finally, hallucinations cannot explain such facts as the empty tomb, the conversions of skeptics like Paul, nor the multiple and varied resurrection appearances which defy a purely psychological, naturalistic explanation. "To be perfectly candid," concludes Craig, "the only grounds for denying the physical, corporeal nature of the postmortem appearances of Jesus are philosophical, not historical."

4. Christianity borrowed from pagan religions (the Copycat Theory)

- A. First, pagan mythology is the wrong interpretive context considering that "Jesus and his disciples were first-century Palestinian Jews, and it is against that background that they must be understood."
- B. Second, the Jews were familiar with seasonal deities (Ezek. 37:1-14) and found them detestable, making it extremely improbable that they would borrow mythology from them. This is why no trace of pagan cults celebrating dying and rising gods can be found in first-century Palestine.

- C. Third, the earliest account of a dying and rising god that somewhat parallels Jesus' resurrection appears at least 100 years later. The historical evidence for these myths is non-existent and the accounts are easily explained by naturalistic theories.
- D. Fourth, the Copycat Theory begs the question. It *assumes* the accounts of Jesus' resurrection are false (the very thing it is intending to prove) and then attempts to explain how these accounts originated by appealing to supposed parallels within pagan mythology. *But first it must be shown that the accounts of Jesus' resurrection are false!* In other words, even if it could be shown that parallels exist, it does not follow that the resurrection of Jesus is not a historical event. The evidence for Jesus' resurrection must be judged on its own merit because "the claims of resurrections in other religions do not explain the evidence that exists for Jesus' resurrection."

What about Osiris?

One of an atheist's favorite tactics is to reference how Christ's Resurrection is an embellishment on the Egyptian tale of Osiris. This was made very popular with the viral video *Zeitgeist*.

Dr. William Lane Craig says, "Many of the alleged parallels to this event [Jesus' resurrection from the dead] are actually apotheosis stories, the divinization and assumption of the hero into heaven (Hercules, Romulus). Others are disappearance stories, asserting that the hero has vanished into a higher sphere (Apollonius of Tyana, Empedocles). Still others are seasonal symbols for the crop cycle, as the vegetation dies in the dry season and comes back to life in the rainy season (Tammuz, Osiris, Adonis). Some are political expressions of Emperor worship (Julius Caesar, Caesar Augustus). None of these is parallel to the Jewish idea of the resurrection of the dead. David Aune, who is a specialist in comparative ancient Near Eastern literature, concludes, "no parallel to them [resurrection traditions] is found in Graeco-Roman biography" ("The Genre of the Gospels," in *Gospel Perspectives II*, ed. R. T. France and David Wenham [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981], p. 48). In fact, most scholars have come to doubt whether, properly speaking, there really were any myths of dying and rising gods at all! In the Osiris myth, one of the best known symbolic seasonal myths, Osiris does not really come back to life but simply continues to exist in the nether realm of the departed." (From online article by William Craig, "Jesus and Pagan Mythology")

Dr. Norman Geisler, author or coauthor of more than 80 books, writes, "The first real parallel of a dying and rising god does not appear until A.D. 150, more than a hundred years after the origin of Christianity. So if there was any influence of one on the other, it was the influence of the historical event of the New Testament [resurrection] on mythology, not the reverse. The only known account of a god surviving death that predates Christianity is the Egyptian cult god Osiris. In this myth, Osiris is cut into fourteen pieces, scattered around Egypt, then reassembled and brought back to life by the goddess Isis. However, Osiris does not actually come back to physical life but becomes a member of a shadowy underworld...This is far different than Jesus' resurrection account where he was the gloriously risen Prince of life who was seen by others on earth before his ascension into heaven....even if there are myths about dying and rising gods

prior to Christianity, that doesn't mean the New Testaments writers copied from them. The fictional TV show Star Trek preceded the U.S. Space Shuttle program, but that doesn't mean that newspaper reports of space shuttle missions are influenced by Star Trek episodes!" (*I Don't Have Enough Faith to be An Atheist*, 2004, p. 312).

One Solitary Life

Here is a man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village. He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty. Then for three years He was an itinerant preacher.

He never owned a home. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never put His foot inside a big city. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place He was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but Himself...

While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied Him. He was turned over to His enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed upon a cross between two thieves. While He was dying His executioners gambled for the only piece of property He had on earth – His coat. When He was dead, He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Nineteen long centuries have come and gone, and today He is a centerpiece of the human race and leader of the column of progress.

I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that were ever built; all the parliaments that ever sat and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life (Dr. James Allan Francis).