

AIM INSTITUTE
Introduction to Christian Apologetics
Study Guide

COURSE: *Introduction to Christian Apologetics*

Course Term: Tuesdays at 7:00 PM (EST) | January 30 – April 16, 2024

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This class is a general survey of Christian apologetics, which is the discipline of how to defend and advance the Christian faith. We will discuss the need for apologetics, develop some apologetic tools and learn how to use those tools in our interaction with others. We will study the best arguments for the existence of God, the reliability of scripture, and the person and work of Christ. Other topics include creation, the resurrection of Christ, miracles and the “problem” of evil. The students will choose an apologetic issue which interests them, and use the tools learned in class to develop a convincing argument for the truth in that issue.

COURSE VIDEOS [CLICK HERE](#)

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will become familiar with the primary arguments against the existence of God. and will learn how to respond to those arguments in a convincing manner.

2. Students will become familiar with the primary arguments against the authority of scripture and will learn how to demonstrate that the scriptures are reliable, authoritative and divine in origin.

3. Students will become familiar with various arguments against the divinity and uniqueness of Christ and will learn how to explain the gospel clearly to skeptics.

4. Students will develop the tools to identify and research new arguments for and against the teaching of the scriptures and the Christian faith so that they can build their apologetic “toolbox” on an ongoing basis.

5. Students will become skilled in various tactics that enable them to reason effectively with unbelievers. Tactics include "Columbo," recognizing self-contradictory ideas and discerning logical fallacies.

INSTRUCTOR: James Ruark

James likes to quote Augustine of Hippo-- "Faith seeks to understand." He has spent most of his life learning and teaching what Christians believe and why they believe it. He received his bachelor's degree in history from Calvin College and his master's degree in Christian apologetics from Liberty University. He has worked as a middle school teacher and social worker before taking his current job as clinical director at Servants Center, a Christian ministry that provides help to persons who are chronically homeless or who have severe psychiatric disorders. He has been an elder at River of God Church in Byron Center, Michigan since 2005. He and his wife, Lori, have been married since 1992. They have four adult daughters and four grandchildren.

COURSE FORMAT

This directed study format enables you to receive college level instruction while studying at home. (Note, AIM Institute does not offer accredited college credits.) Course elements include:

- Watch weekly video assignments.
- Contact time with the instructor and classmates by means of a weekly Zoom debrief classroom.
- Study questions for your personal benefit as well as preparation for the weekly debrief.
- The course will be graded as pass or fail. Bear in mind your weekly preparation will have a direct bearing on how much you gain from the course.

COURSE FLOW

- You will receive a Zoom invite by email for each debrief.
- Preparation, including watching the lecture videos, can be done at any time before the debrief.
- Completion of the course requires a project in which you are able to put forth a compelling argument to defend an aspect of the Christian faith that you choose. The instructor will provide guidance on your project.

REQUIREMENTS

- This is an intensive course; students should plan to participate in all class sessions.
- Complete all course reading, watch videos, and writing assignments.
- Complete course project on week 12.

TEXTS

- Holy Bible (Translation of your choice)
 - Koukl, Greg. *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 2009.
 - A bibliography with additional books and resources will be provided in the Bibliography at the end of this document.
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January 30 | Session 1

Introduction

Watch Video: [CLICK HERE](#)

Reading: "Tactics" Chapter 1-2

A. What are Christian Apologetics?

1. The attempts to defend the truths and truth of Christianity against objections.
2. Apologia: "Apo" = "away", "logia" = "speech"
3. Apologia was originally a legal term for the defense that an accused person would make in court.

B. Apologetics involves ...

1. Theology- What is the truth?
2. Philosophy- Why do we believe it is the truth?
3. Evangelism- Is the ultimate goal to win arguments or people?

C. Apologetics is biblical

1. I Peter 3:14-16: Always be ready to give a reason for what you believe.
2. Acts 7:1-53: "This is why I am preaching that Jesus is the Messiah."
3. Acts 17:22-31: Compare to #2. How are they the same or different?
4. Acts 22:1-22, 24:11-22, 26:1-29: Paul gave apologia for himself and for the faith that he preached.

D. The direction of apologetics is...

1. Toward unbelievers outside of the church.
2. Toward believers inside the church.
3. Toward false believers/false teachers who identify as Christians.
4. Responsive/Defensive- "Be careful that no one deceive you." --Jesus
5. Proactive/Offensive- particularly when evangelizing or setting the stage for it.

E. The scope of apologetics needs to be...

1. Broad enough to address the numerous kinds of arguments we face.
 2. Narrow enough to major on majors and minor on minors.
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February 6 | Session 2

Tools

Watch Video: [CLICK HERE](#)

Reading: "Tactics" Chapter 3: The Columbo Method

Article: [16 Common Logical Fallacies and How to Spot Them](#)

- A. Prayer- this is not just your fight or your work. It is the Lord's fight and work.
- B. Reason- the ability to think clearly and discern logical cohesiveness or fallacies is essential to persuasive discussion about anything. (See *Logical Fallacies*)
- C. A firm foundation in Christ. We have faith in a personal God, not just ideas.
- D. Resources of information:
 1. Books such as those recommended at the beginning of the syllabus. Read everything that you can regarding the reasons we believe.

2. Apologetics groups such as CAA (Christian Apologetics Alliance) or Apologetics Press. You can problem-solve with others and have access to a lot of resources in these groups.

3. There is some great teaching on YouTube and other venues. You can listen to the likes of Stephen Meyer, Sean McDowell, coldcasechristianity.com, William Lane Craig and The Apologetics Guy just to name a few.

4. Web sites and YouTube channels that address *specific* issues such as reliability of scripture (fleetwd1), evolution (Discovery Science, evolution.com), or the problems with Islam (Acts17 Apologetics). Stay away from clickbait with titles such as “Joe Shmoe disproves evolution in 5 minutes” or “Bob shreds atheist’s arguments.” We want honest scholarship and respectful dialogue.

E. History of the arguments you are addressing.

1. This is an overlooked but important tool. If you want to understand something, study the history of it.

2. Example- In order to respond to Islamic objections to Christianity, it is helpful to understand Islamic history, Mohammed thought that “son of God” meant that God procreated a child through Mary, and that the Holy Spirit is the angel, Gabriel.

F. Good theology. When you know what the Bible teaches and what you believe, you have something to offer those who are confused. They often do not really know what they believe.

1. Example: If you know that God is infinitely powerful and not bound by time and space, you will be able to respond to Richard Dawkins’ question, “Why the God of the Bible and not the Flying Spaghetti Monster?”

G. The ability to learn, relearn and unlearn what you already believe you know. When in doubt, refer to C and F above.

Quiz questions:

- Why are prayer and good theology important tools for apologetics?
 - What is the best way to research a topic for apologetics?"
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February 13 | Session 3

There is a God

Watch Video: [CLICK HERE](#)

Reading: "Tactics" Chapter 4: Columbo Step 2

A. We have to start here. We cannot start with creation, because we cannot have creation without a creator. We cannot believe that the Bible is the word of God if we do not believe that God exists.

B. We know that God exists. We walk and talk with him every day. But how do we respond to someone who is convincing others that God does not exist?

C. Different general arguments for God's existence:

1. Cosmological- nothing comes from nothing
 - i. Kalam
 - ii. Contingency
 - iii. Singularity- time and space
2. Ontological- the necessary God
3. Teleological/ Intelligent Design- the design of creation means there must be a designer
 - i. Irreducible Complexity
 - ii. The Privileged Planet
 - iii. The Goldilocks universe- "just right"
4. Moral- without God, there is no evil or good, only strong or weak
5. Mind- minds are nonmaterial, and therefore there is a nonmaterial aspect of reality
 - The human mind and the great mind- Plantinga
6. Miracles- documented miracles- evidence a power that exists beyond nature

7. Fulfilled Prophecies- no one knows the future. A nonmaterial entity must know it.

8. Fine Tuning (distinct from teleological)- "Someone has monkeyed with the physics."

9. Presuppositional- God is the presupposition, not the conclusion.

10. Relational/Emotive- Nonrelational/nonemotive cosmos cannot create relationships & emotion.

11. Human Death- The instinct to believe in life after death comes from somewhere

12. Cumulative Case- All of the arguments for God's existence together provide preponderance of evidence.

Quiz questions:

- Why do you think the cosmological argument is the most common and important of all of the arguments for God?
- Why is it impossible to have a moral code without God?
- Why has intelligent design become an essential part of Christian apologetics in our time?

February 20 | Session 4

Identifying and Responding to the Arguments Against God's Existence

Watch Video: [CLICK HERE](#)

Reading: "Tactics" Chapter 5: Leading with Columbo

A. Scientific Naturalism (or scientism)- religion was a way to explain phenomena before we had progressive science to understand them.

1. "Soft" atheism- allows for process thought or mystical force of sorts

2. "Hard" atheism- does not allow for any supervenient force or entity

-Response:

3. Deism- making a comeback. God created, then left creation alone.

-Response:

B. The Problem of Evil- if God is good and almighty, he would not allow evil to happen.

1. Examples from human experience: holocaust, murder, child abuse, etc...

2. Examples taken directly from scripture: killing an entire city, etc...

-Response:

C. The Contradictory Views About God- if God existed, there would not be so many different beliefs about him.

-Response:

D. The Hiddenness of Truth – If God existed, he would make it more obvious to everyone.

-Response:

E. The Evil Committed by Theists- So much evil is done by people because of their belief in God that it could not be true.

-Response:

Quiz Questions:

- What is an effective way to respond to 'the problem of evil'?
 - Why do so many people in the western world adhere to scientific naturalism?
 - How can we 'turn the tables' on the argument that atrocities have been done in the name of religion?
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February 27 | Session 5

Who is the God that We Believe In?

Watch Video: [CLICK HERE](#)

Reading: "Tactics" Chapter 6: Perfecting Columbo

A. Who is the God that we do NOT believe in? Misconceptions about God make it hard for some people to believe in him.

B. Some unbelievable conceptions about God:

1. God is limited.

The fact that Dawkins compares the God of scripture to the FSM is based on a view of God that is limited to time and space.

2. God is an impersonal force.

3. God's infinite attributes are only love and power

4. God is harsh, cruel or egotistical.

C. The God we can believe in

1. All powerful and infinite- God is not bound by time, space or circumstance. Nothing surprises him. He is infinitely greater than the universe.

2. Personal/relational- not an impersonal force or process; he loves, hates, rejoices

3. Not self-contradictory- no need to ask if he can make an unstoppable force collide with an unmovable object. He cannot sin or do what is against himself.

4. Is able to limit himself. This is really important when discussing problem of evil.

5. Can be incarnate- very important for Christian apologetics

D. The implications of C

1. God does not dwell in space somewhere. He is not in a room above us from which he comes out sometimes.
2. He is nowhere- there is no place that you can go in which God is not present (except maybe Hell). He is present in the atheist's bedroom!
3. He is everywhere.
4. The spiritual realm is not a physical place. It overlaps our space.
6. If he is relational, it follows that he wants to relate to us and vice-versa.
7. He is a mystery. I cannot believe in a God that I can fully understand. Just as life can be confusing and hard to understand, so the ways of God.

Write a paragraph: explaining who God is to a person who knows nothing about him.

March 5 | Session 6

Defending the Real Jesus

Watch Video: [CLICK HERE](#)

Reading: "Tactics" Chapters 7-8: Identifying and Addressing Suicidal Viewpoints

A. Who is Jesus?

- I. Fully God and fully human (not half God, half human)
- II. The savior and redeemer of the world, particularly those who believe.
- III. The king of the kingdom of God
- IV. Common misconceptions about Jesus
 1. A prophet (Islam) or great teacher (Hinduism, New Age)
 2. A special human, but not God (Arius, Jehovah's Witnesses)
 3. Messiah only for Gentiles (some contemporary forms of Judaism)

4. A social revolutionary (liberation theology, apostate Christianity)

5. Nice to everyone except religious leaders, did not hold people to high standard

V. Fulfillment of prophecies in the Torah- Job 19:23-27, Psalm 45, Isaiah 9:6-7, 53:1-6, Micah 5:1-2, Isaiah 11:1-9, Daniel 7:9-14 to name just a few.

B. Responding to arguments that deny Christ's bodily resurrection.

I. Fraud I- the disciples deliberately lied and hid the body. Near impossible to do in a Jewish cemetery, they died affirming the truth of it, witnesses saw him.

II. Fraud II- the disciples wanted Jesus alive so much that they deluded themselves.

- Delusions are contained inside the brain, not shared. Would they die for them?

III. The wrong tomb- J of A's tomb was easy to identify, 12 men not that dumb

IV. Mass hallucination - no such thing. Hallucinations are contained inside the brain.

V. Apparent death theory- impossible in light of flogging + crucifixion; witnesses

VI. Legend developed after Jesus died. Actually, the church formed around the event.

VII. Scientific certainty: we need 100% proof that the resurrection occurred. Most of what we believe and live every day is not based on 100% certainty. What creates certainty?

VIII. Something happened, but we don't know what it was. Early believers knew. Either they were right, or they were wrong. They knew.

C. The uniqueness of Jesus.

- How does he compare to all of the other religious leaders in history?

Quiz Questions:

- If someone asks you during a casual conversation who Jesus was, what will you tell him?
 - Practice giving your answer in 30 seconds. How do we know that Jesus is the only way to God?
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March 12 | Session 7

The Reliability of Scripture

Watch Video: [CLICK HERE](#)

Reading: "Tactics" Chapter 9: Identifying and Addressing Sibling Rivalry and Infanticide

A. Our presupposition about the Bible is that it is the word of God. Why?

- I. The God we believe in has communicated to humans throughout history.
- II. The message of scripture is too compelling to dismiss it as anything else.
- III. We believe in scripture because we believe in the Jesus that it presents. We believe in scripture because we can trust the divine author of scripture.

B. The incarnate nature of scripture

- I. Just as Jesus is both human and divine, so scripture is both human and divine.
- II. The fact that the human authors were flawed does not preclude the God-breathed nature of scripture. In fact, that is the wonder and beauty of it. Almighty, holy God used finite, sinful people to communicate his word. Yes, it is messy. Perfectly messy.
- III. Scripture was written in a cultural and historical context, not in a vacuum.
 1. Do not be afraid to embrace the cultural differences and offences which are expressed in scripture. Those differences verify the dual nature of the Bible.
 2. Even if critics are right about various contradictions, historical inaccuracies and textual issues (they are not), it does not change the fact that it is God's word.

C. Common criticisms of the Bible

I. It was written for a barbaric, patriarchal culture and is not relevant for us in our time.

Response:

II. It is full of contradictions.

Response:

III. It changed so much over time due to copying that we do not know what was written.

Response:

IV. It contains commands to commit genocide, buy women and allow slavery.

Response:

V. It is contradicted by science. Science has disproven many claims of scripture such as miraculous creation, Adam and Eve, "Flat earth," demonic causes of disease, etc...

Response:

Quiz Questions:

- Scripture is both _____ and _____.
- Why is this balance so important to understanding the reliability of scripture?
- Also, What logical fallacies can you find in the arguments against the reliability of scripture?

March 19 | Session 8

The Reliability of the Old Testament

Watch Video: [CLICK HERE](#)

Reading: "Tactics" Chapter 10: Taking the Roof Off

A. How Do We Approach the Old Testament?

I. It is still part of the word of God. You cannot understand the NT without it.

II. Yahweh revealed himself to specific people in a specific situation to set the stage for the full revelation and new covenant in Christ.

B. Common Attacks on the OT

I. Criticism #1: All of the OT was written between 400-200 BC because that was the only time that the Hebrews had the capacity to compose formal literature, and the written style was more in keeping with that era.

Response: Hebrew writing has been found from at least 1,000 BC, and Paleo-Hebrew has been found dating from at least 1,400 BC. If it was redacted and updated later, that does not make it less divine. What we have as canon is God-breathed.

II. Criticism #2: The history of the OT is incorrect. For example, archaeological evidence “proves” that there was no sudden occupation of Canaan by Israel.

Response: The archaeology is not compelling in either direction. Actually, the biblical history and archaeology is much more believable than other primary sources.

Quiz Questions:

- How do we approach the Old Testament as the word of God, even though "the rules have changed" in the New Testament?
- How do we account for OT atrocities?

March 26 | Session 9

The Reliability of the New Testament

Watch Video: [CLICK HERE](#)

Reading: “Tactics” Chapters 11-12: Steamroller and Rhodes Scholar

- A. Beware of “experts”- Bart Ehrman, Elaine Pagels, “youtube experts”
- B. Sometimes evangelicals with a high esteem for scripture can be dangerous if they compromise the divine nature of scripture to accommodate its humanness, or vice-versa.
- C. Common attacks on the New Testament
 - I. The manuscripts are very different from each other, so we cannot know which is original.

Response:

2. Some of Paul's writings were plagiarized

Response:

3. Contradiction between the gospels

Response:

4. Contradictions between the gospels and Paul

Response:

5. Earliest Christian writings indicated no belief in Christ's divinity.

Response:

April 2 | Session 10

Single-ancestor Evolution and False Religions

Watch Video: [CLICK HERE](#)

Reading: "Tactics" Chapter 13: Just the Facts, Ma'am

A. Creation and evolution: what are the issues, what hills do we die on?

I. The creation is an essential theology.

II. The seven days are an important theology.

III. Adam and Eve are essential to Christian theology.

IV. Comparing Young Earth Creationism (YEC), Old Earth Creationism (OEC) and Theistic Evolution (TE).

B. Responding to Islamic attacks on Christianity.

I. The deity of Christ

II. The "corruption" of scriptures

III. Comparing Mohammed to Jesus

C. Responding to Buddhism and Hinduism

I. Pivotal question: Is there one, almighty, personal God?

II. Sin, forgiveness and eternal life

Quiz Questions:

- In the creation/evolution discussion, what are the most important issues?
 - What are the less important issues?
 - What are unimportant issues?
 - What topic should you start out with when talking about God with a Muslim?
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April 9 | Session 11

Watch Video: [CLICK HERE](#)

Responding to False Forms of Christianity

I. LDS/Mormons- using Christian terms, meaning pagan concepts.

- Go back to the core: Who is God, who is Jesus, what has Jesus done?

II. Jehovah's Witnesses- modern-day Arians.

- Jesus created all things and God purchased the church with his blood.

III. "Progressive" Christianity- identify the counterfeit by knowing the real thing.

- Progressive Christianity is perhaps the greatest challenge facing the true church in our lifetime.

IV. Cults

- they tend to focus on superiority of group more than Christ or Christians

V. New Age and Occultic beliefs and practices-

1. Astrology, divination, fortune-telling
 2. Enneagram
 3. Psychobabble versus legitimate mental health talk
 4. False forms of healing and “supernatural” activity
- If it is not in Christ done Christ’s way, it is false and possibly demonic.
6. Yoga? Ask Indian Christians what they think.

Quiz Questions:

- How do we discern false forms of Christianity from true?
 - What is the best way to address false or occultic practices that occur within the church?
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April 16 | Session 12

Review, Application and Projects

Reading: “Tactics” Chapter 14: More Sweat, Less Blood

- A. Sorting out what is most important
- B. Using your skills every day
 - I. The Columbo Method
 - II. The fruit of the spirit- be a happy warrior
 - III. Using “I” statements and personal stories
 - IV. Using skills on social media- it is a battlefield with a lot of land mines.
- C. Preparing for the future; taking on new apologetic challenges

Assignment:

- Practice using Columbo, recognizing logical suicide/infanticide, taking the roof off. etc...
- Be prepared to tell the group about what you learned from your projects.