



Defending Your Faith

A six-week study.

LESSON 1 – THEODICY: THE PROBLEM OF EVIL – PART I

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Spring 2022

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DEFENDING YOUR FAITH – OUTLINE OF LESSONS

Defending Your Faith with Noel R. Vincent, M.A. in Christian Apologetics			
<i>Week</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Issues & Questions Addressed</i>
1	23-Mar	Theodicy: The Problem of Evil Part I	Did God create evil? Understanding the Skeptic's #1 Argument Why does God allow evil?
2	30-Mar	Theodicy: The Problem of Evil Part II	Can any good come from pain and suffering? Why do bad things happen to good people? Why do we suffer for Adam's sin?
3	06-Apr	Doctrine of Hell & Eternal Punishment	What exactly is hell: Divine Principle or Brutal Reality? Can a good God really punish people forever? What about people who have never heard the Gospel?
4	13-Apr	Arguing for God's Existence	Big Bang Cosmology: Why does anything exist at all? C. S. Lewis's Moral Argument Intelligent Design: Theory or Evidence of a Divine Creator?
5	20-Apr	Doctrine of the Trinity	Can anyone really understand trinitarianism? Defending the Triune Godhead Defeating False Gods
6	27-Apr	The Historical Jesus: Nature & Existence	Hypostasis: Understanding the God-Man Refuting False Resurrection Hypotheses Do credible, non-biblical, historical accounts of Jesus exist?

LESSON 1: THEODICY: THE PROBLEM OF EVIL – PART I

INTRODUCTION: Good evening everyone. Thank you for joining us tonight. Pastor Dustin and I have three goals for our 6-week study: 1). That your faith will be strengthened in a tangible measurable way as we take a pick-axe and a shovel down into the deep caverns of the doctrines of our faith; 2). That you will be equipped with a newfound confidence to gently and respectfully respond to honest questions and to refute skeptics; and 3). That you'll become the go-to person in your circles of influence to impact lives with the Gospel. This will take some work, but if you're willing, it will pay big dividends. You'll need to learn a few new words and concepts, develop the skills of gentle argumentation, and we suggest you build a library of resources to expand your knowledge and understanding of our marvelous Lord, Jesus Christ. If you're like me, you can listen or take notes, but not listen and take notes. My complete notes will be available for each session after the session. I can email to you, or a link will be provided for the audio and notes.

SESSION 1.1 – INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

A. Definition:

1. *Apologia* – (Gr. - *defense*) An *apologetic* is a "defense" and means to explain away a false claim. In biblical times, it described a defendant's response to a legal charge.
2. *Christian Apologetics* is the theological discipline concerned with presenting the rational basis for Christianity. It employs logical argumentation drawn from archaeology, ethics, history, literature, mathematics, philosophy, and the sciences - astronomy, physics.

B. Objectives: Apologetics seeks to –

1. Remove obstacles to faith in Christ by demonstrating the validity, rationality, and strength of Christianity and the invalidity, irrationality, and weaknesses of other belief systems.
2. Refute skeptics/disarm persecutors who aim to damage/discredit the faith.
3. Strengthen the church by equipping the saints to know **why** we believe.

C. Biblical Basis:

1. Jesus' Commands:

- a. Mt 22:37 (...*love the Lord your God... with all your mind...*) – The intellectual apprehension of the nature and character of God; an avenue of loving Him.
- b. Mt 28:18-20 (Great Commission) – Christian apologetics is an effective tool in dismantling false belief systems, making a way for the gospel to proceed.

2. Paul's Example:

- a. Ac 17 (Reasoning with the Jews in Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens)
- b. Ro 1 (Argument against unbelievers)
- c. 2 Co 10:5 (Attacking arguments against the knowledge of God)
- d. Ph 1:7 (Defense of the gospel); 1:16 (Paul was appointed an apologist)

3. Peter's Instruction: 1 Pe 3:15 (...*always being ready to make a defense...*) – Peter was encouraging persecuted Christians to have a ready defense for their faith in Christ.

4. Jude's Epistle: Jd 1:3 (*contend earnestly for the faith*).

D. Method of Conduct:

1. **Cogent:** Every believer should master the best responses to the most common objections to Christianity.
2. **Gentle:** 1 Pe 3:15 (yet with gentleness and reverence) – in humility.
3. **Courteous:** Avoid *ad hominem* arguments, sarcasm, anger, and disrespect.
4. **Evangelistic:** 1 Co 3:6-8 (plant, water, God gives increase) pre-evangelism.

A. An Introduction to Evil:

1. Three Major Worldviews of God (sic) and Evil (not good and evil):
 - a. Atheism (the insistence/claim that no god exists, which is no actual belief as all humans have a measure of faith in God's existence – Rom 1:1-32, 12:3) – *affirms the existence of evil, but denies the existence of god* (includes Buddhism).
 - b. Pantheism (the belief that the universe is god, and the two are undifferentiated) – (Hinduism, Confucianism, Sikhism, Taoism, Greek and Roman Mythologies) – *affirms the existence of god, but denies the existence of evil* (mere illusion).
 - c. Theism (the belief in the existence of a God distinct from the universe) – *affirms the existence of both God and evil*. As Christians, we are monotheists (one God).
2. Other forms of religious belief include polytheism (belief in many gods), which sometimes overlaps with pantheism; panentheism (everything is in god, who is more than the universe); folk and syncretistic religions (Voodoo, Santeria, Chinese Folk).

B. What exactly is the nature of Good?

1. We must first start with, What is God? The Bible is God's revelation of Himself. Everything we know of, and about, God we learn from, or through, Scripture.
 - a. *Is God Simple or Complex?* Complex things are divisible into parts. Complexity increases with the number of divisible parts. When we say, "This thing has a lot of moving parts.", we are describing something with complexity. Simplicity, on the other hand, regards things that are not divisible into parts. God is simple ("one" – Deuteronomy 6:4). He is not made up of, or divisible into, parts. If God were made up of parts, He would require a maker. Not even the trinity is divisible. See Lesson #5 on the trinity.
 - b. *Attributes of God* – (not an exhaustive treatment)
 - Attributes regard notions that are attributable to a thing, but are not composite parts of the thing. God's attributes are not His parts, but rather facts (observations/deductions/conclusions) about Him.
 - The attributes of God are divided into two categories: moral and natural (non-moral).
 - God's moral attributes (regard character/conduct) are shared with human beings. However, God possesses His moral attributes to the highest degree possible, and far higher than human comprehension, and they flow from God's love.
 - God's natural attributes (regard essence) are those unique characteristics possessed by Him, which no other being can possess (else it would also be God).
 - *Examples of Moral Attributes:* Gracious (charity, unmerited favor, loving-kindness, gives what is not earned), faithful (utterly reliable, will keep His Word), merciful (prevents/removes suffering, withholds punishment or consequences one otherwise deserves), just (discerns right from wrong, *not fairness*), righteous (performs only right acts, does not lie), and holy (wholly other, set apart, untainted by evil/sin, can't be damaged). Greek root word is "hagios". There are three New Testament forms of *hagios*: "saint" (noun: the title of one set apart for God), "sanctify" (verb: God's act of setting apart), "holy" (adjective: describes what is set apart).

- *Examples of Natural Attributes:* Aseity (self-existence, non-dependence), immanence (knowable, perceivable, present in the universe), immutable (unchanging, perfect – different is better or worse), providential (causing the universe to continue to exist each moment), transcendent (outside the time/space/matter domain, and distinct from His creation,), and the omnies (always everywhere, all-power, all-knowledge,), of course.
- c. *Attributes vs. Ontology:*
- There are many others (eternal, immaterial, infinite, perfect, personal, supreme, truth, etc.), but you get the general idea. God possesses these attributes (characteristics), but in contradistinction to His ontology.
 - Think of the attributes of a 1969 Cutlass convertible – fast, sleek, handsome, desirable, handles well, is a pleasure to drive, and very cool. Now, think of its ontology – its substance: metal, rubber, glass, plastic, and its divisible parts: nuts and bolts, engine, transmission, bumpers, glove box, seats, steering wheel, tires. Attributes are things about it. Ontology is what it actually is.
- d. *Ontology of God – branch of metaphysics dealing with the nature of being.*
- The Ontology of God refers to the nature of His existence; the form in which He exists; His metaphysical (non-material) substance.
 - Scripture tells us that **God is spirit** (Jn 4:24). He is a non-embodied (the attribute of incorporeality), thinking, acting, person (being without physical properties – *setting aside discussion of Christ's incarnation for now* – see Lesson #6 on the nature of Christ).
 - God does not possess spirit in the way He possesses immutability or transcendence; spirit is the nature/substance of His existence. Immutability and transcendence are facts/observations about Him.
 - Scripture also reveals that **God is love** (1John 4:16). He does not possess love; He is love, ontologically in Himself, and He is the source of all love. God also loves as an action, and He hates as an action - "There are 6 things the Lord hates..." (Pr 6:16-19), but He is not hate ontologically in His being. Love is what God is, but hate is not what God is.
 - Finally, Scripture explains that **God is good** (Ps 100:5).
2. What is "good"? At the outset, I want to quell any notions that good is the opposite of evil – it is not. We must be careful not to fall into clichés about God, or good, or evil, but to be circumspect in our examination, always relying on Scripture for ultimate truth. We will need to consider "good" from at least three vantage points philosophy, theology, and history to flesh out the contours of the nature of good.
- a. *Philosophically*, good is a source from which goodness flows. A good restaurant, for example, produces food whose goodness may be described as aromatic, tasty, nourishing, healthy, in-expensive, or gluten-free.
 - b. *Theologically*, God is good in His being (ontologically), in the same way He is love and spirit. God not only loves, but He also is love in His being, and thus, He is the source of all love. God not only does good, but He also is good in His being, and thus, He is the source of all good; the source from which all good flows, including moral goodness. God is spirit, and He is the only source of spirit, which he imparted to human beings.

c. *Historically*, God created man in *His own image* (Lat. - *Imago Dei*). God has no head, torso or extremities. We were created in His spiritual image – good, love, spirit. Also, with a soul (mind, will, emotions: personality). Our bodies were not of *Imago Dei*.

- God declared man “**very good**” (Gen 2:26-27, 31). As He created the universe and everything in it, God declared each of the first 5 days to be "good". But when He created man the 6th day, He declared it *very good*. Man was given a good nature by God, who is the source of all good.
- At the Fall, man disobeyed God through sin (wanting to be more like God than he already was). In his pursuit to be more like God, man lost what he was of God – the Imago Dei – he became corrupt, evil – *"Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of mankind was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually."* (Gen 6:5). *"The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?"* (Jer 17:9).
- God (the source of all good) withdrew from intimacy with man, and in His withdrawal, man's good was forfeited, lost. His ontological nature changed from good to evil since good was taken away; it was removed.
- The Imago Dei is only restored in Christ – *"that, in reference to your former way of life, you are to rid yourselves of the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you are to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth."* (Eph 4:22-24) *"since you stripped off the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self, which is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created it—"* (Col 3:9-10).
- At conversion, we receive a new nature, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, and God's righteousness (Php 3:9). What we don't get is a new flesh. That comes at the Resurrection (1 Co 15:52). This is why we continue to sin, until we are set free from the body of this death - *"Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin."* (Rom 7:24-25).

A. The Definition of Evil:

1. What is the Ontology of Evil?

- a. *Riddle: How can a flat, empty, pants pocket still have something in it? Don't say air, because then it would not be empty. How can a flat, empty, pants pocket still have something in it? It can have a hole in it.* A hole is not a thing that exists within itself. Holes exist only in hosts (e.g. – a pocket, the ground, one's head). A hole doesn't exist until you take something away (e.g. – fabric, dirt, flesh and bone). A donut can have a hole, but a donut hole is no hole at all. It is a tasty ball of fried, sugar-coated, dough that was removed from a donut to leave a hole.
- b. *Evil is not a thing.*
 - It does not exist within itself; evil exists in hosts.
 - It has no substance of its own, nor any form of personhood
 - It is not a force in the universe (dualism – the belief that good and evil are at odds as co-eternal forces).
 - It is not metaphysical (it lacks the properties of being), and has no other existential properties.
 - Evil does not exist until something good that God has created or given is rejected or removed.
 - Evil does not have ontology (a nature of actual existence). Evil is ontologically neutral.
- c. *Thermal Physics Oversimplified: Scientifically, cold is the state that exists in the absence of heat. Heat is a form of energy (kinetic) that is produced by moving particles (vibrational motion) of matter (atoms). The slower particles of matter move, the less heat energy produced. When all particles of matter cease to move, absolute zero is reached (-459.67 °F). Cold is not energy. Rather, it is the condition that occurs as vibrational motion in matter declines.*

2. Concept of Evil Oversimplified:

- a. *Philosophically*, evil is the state that exists in the absence of good. Evil is not the opposite of good.
- b. *Theologically*, evil is the state that exists when something good that God made is lacking. Evil is a deprivation of some particular good.
- c. *Conceptually*, evil may be compared to the rust on vehicle or the rot of an armadillo roadkill. When a protective barrier (e.g. – paint, dry air) is removed from the iron particles in steel to expose the particles to oxygen, rust occurs. When a protective barrier (e.g. – an active, healthy immune system) is removed from animal flesh (e.g. – at injury or death) exposing the flesh to bacteria and/or fungi, decomposition occurs.

3. The Privation of God's Goodness:

- a. Where God, who alone is good (Mark 10:18), is absent in higher order conscious beings (corrupt angels and fallen humans), a state of evil exists.
- b. Where there is suffering, God's mercy is absent. Where there is offense, God's justice is absent. Where there is lawlessness, God's righteousness is absent. Where there is revenge, God's forgiveness is absent. Where there is deceit, God's truth is absent. Where there is indifference, God's love is absent. Where there is evil, God's good is absent. Why? Because everything was corrupted in The Fall.

B. Introduction to the Argument from Evil:

1. Under the *The Argument from Evil*, two false claims are made about God:
 - a. God is the creator/author of evil.
 - b. Since evil exists, there is no all-powerful, all-loving God.
2. **Did God create evil?** (Is God the author of evil?) **Skeptics Argue:**
 - a. (F) God created everything. (*not Himself, not evil*)
 - b. (F) Evil is a thing. (*it isn't – it's what remains when good is removed*)
 - c. (F) God created evil. (*He didn't – evil is not a created thing*)
3. **The Argument from Evil:** Atheists and skeptics of monotheism, the belief in one god, (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) largely agree that the best argument against monotheism, and thus Christianity, is the existence of evil and suffering in the world.

There are two versions:

- a. Simplified Version: (wrongly assumes what God would/would not do)
 - (F) God would not allow evil and suffering in the world.
 - (T) There is evil and suffering in the world.
 - (F) Thus, there is no god.
- b. Common Version: (wrongly assumes who and what God is and is not)
 - An all-loving/powerful god would not allow evil and suffering.
 - There is evil and suffering in the world.
 - Thus, there is no all-loving/all-powerful god.

C. Evil Evident in the Animal Kingdom: This section was not covered due to time.

1. Do animals have souls?
 - a. The *soul* is the mind, will, and emotions. Animals have souls – a mind, a will, and emotions. Anyone with a dog knows that their personalities differ from one to another, even among siblings.
 - b. Since animals are not made in God's image, they are differentiated from humans in at least two ways:
 - First, animals are not capable of *reflective or abstract thought*. Animals have thoughts, desires, and emotions – a mind. But humans have thoughts, desires, and emotions about their **E**motions, **T**houghts, and **D**esires. "I am afraid of suicidal thoughts that make me angry." or "I hate (E) worrying (T) that I won't get the job I really want (D)." (*emoting over thoughts about desires*), and so on.
 - Second, animals lack a spirit. Animals do not continue to exist after death, as there is nothing beyond the animal's body and soul. Humans are body, soul, *and spirit*. Death separates the body (which is destroyed or disintegrates on its own) from the soul and spirit.
 - c. The soul is the human's personality, the spirit is its nature of existence or substance (ontology), and the body is its physical form (Heb 10:5), which is the only component not required for one to be human.
 - "For You created my innermost parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, because I am awesomely and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You When I was made in secret, And skillfully formed in the depths of the earth; Your eyes have seen my formless substance; And in Your book were written All the days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them." (Ps 139:13-16).
 - We're human, known by God before He gives us a body "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you." (Jer 1:5)

- You can amputate my leg (change my body's physical form), but I am still Noel. You can cremate me after death (destroy my body's physical form), but I am still Noel because my soul and spirit live on. *"I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He is not the God of the dead, but of the living."* (Mt 22:32).
2. Evidence of the Fall: Since animals have souls, even the animal kingdom is corrupt and evil. We see selfish behavior among animals, and discontent, jealousy, hoarding, covetousness, theft, predation, and death. All of these are evidence of the corruption of the Creation that resulted from The Fall.

Questions & Answers

Closing Prayer