

STANDING ON THE PROMISES

Preparing to Make a Defense
for Our Faith



Participant's Book One

Why Christians Need to Defend Their Faith

Sessions One to Six of Eighteen

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Heritage Lutheran Church

Go Make Baptize Teach

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Session One:

The Rise and Fall of Militant Atheism

Psalms 14 & 111

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious Father, help us to begin our wisdom in our awe-filled respect for you and our faith in your word. Protect us from foolish ways like those who claim that you do not exist. Strengthen our faith against the world's lies. Secure us in your promises of life and salvation through Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen



The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." (Psalm 14:1)
The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10)

SECULAR SOCIETY IN THE SCIENTIFIC AGE

We live in a scientific age. The scientific method shapes nearly every aspect of life. Science produces technology and services that shape our lives. Oddly, Christianity itself, because of its interest in truth and creation, is largely responsible for the rise and power of today's science. But the Christian men and women who laid the foundation for our modern scientific culture did not anticipate the use that would be made of science to deliberately assault Christian faith.

Our secular culture assumes that today's science proves that there is no God. Atheists claim that science has demonstrated that the Bible and Christian faith are false. Today's atheists are no longer content to let the march of modernity diminish faith. They have gone on the attack, asserting that Christian faith is actually dangerous. Modern atheists are actively seeking to undermine the faith of Christians. (Try a Google search on Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, or Christopher Hitchens) Christians today

need to respond! We need to be ready to meet the rise of militant atheism head on.

We must not leave the defense of faith to theologians and pastors. This is everyone's job. All Christians need to know the basics of what we believe. Every believer needs to know how to turn back atheism with clear reason and to explain how the Bible is true. It is also vital that everyone learn what science is actually saying about the truth so that we can end centuries of false assumptions. We need to confront the false assumptions that secular culture insinuates about faith in God. This will be our task as we take up the challenge to "Stand on the Promises." We will look closely at how to defend our Christian Faith.

WHAT THE FOOL SAYS

Currently atheists are having a heyday. They intimidate Christians by insisting that faith is only a matter of outdated values and emotions. They argue that true reason and science reveal faith in God to be false. They are openly working to undermine faith in God so that secular thinking will come to dominate the world.

Unfortunately for them, God is real. And faith in God continues to increase sharply in the world. Against the reasoning of atheism, awareness of God and faith in Him is growing everywhere. This is especially true in the southern hemisphere which is afire with new faith in God. Former strongholds of atheism, China and the former Soviet Union, are showing signs of rapidly awakening faith.

Modern atheists hoped that the increasingly secular nature of post-modern society would bring people to their perspective. So it seems likely that the current militancy is a response

to the rapidly increasing religious faith around the world. It explains why atheists' message has become publicly strident. (Billboards, etc.) Have western Christians forgotten how to fight for their faith? Have we become so dismayed about the rise of militant atheism that we are giving up? No, Christians need to stand and fight. Especially since the current militant atheism may actually be a response to growing faith on our planet. Psalm 14 promises success for the faithful in the days ahead: *they are in great terror, for God is with the generation of the righteous.*

Read Psalm 14:1-7

1.1 Why is Atheism foolishness? How is their reasoning foolish?

1.2 In vs. 7, the Psalmist looks to God for “salvation” and “restoration.” How does that speak to our day and age?

THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM

In the West, Christians live in a culture that has reinforced faith in God for two millennium. Now we fight for times to worship God. We feel embarrassed to speak openly about our faith. We are uncertain about what we can say in public forums about God. We feel shocked by the way our culture has betrayed us. We may even feel abandoned by God.

But shouldn't we use the intelligence God has given to us to face into the secular erosion in our society? We must face our times with wisdom. As the psalmist teaches us, wisdom begins in the fear of the Lord. And it is precisely in the emotional, rational, moral discovery of God that we become the thinking people God intends. Only rational, wise individuals can meet the challenge of our age.

Read 111:1-10

1.3 How is “fear of the Lord” the real beginning of wisdom?

1.4 What does this psalm suggest about faith in the study of science, history, and civil affairs?

1.6 How does God's perspective of time affect our understanding of his work in the world?

PREPARING A DEFENSE - DINESH D'SOUZA

A group of prominent atheists—many of them evolutionary biologists—has launched a powerful public attack on religion in general and Christianity in particular; ... A new set of anti-religious books—*The God Delusion*, *The End of Faith*, *God Is Not Great*, and so on—now shapes public debate. This is not a time for Christians to turn the other cheek. Rather, it is a time to drive the money-changers out of the temple. The atheists no longer want to be tolerated. They want to monopolize the public square and to expel Christians from it. ... They want to discredit the factual claims of religion, and they want to convince the rest of society that Christianity is not only mistaken but also evil. They blame religion for the crimes of history and for the ongoing conflicts in the world today. In short, they want to make religion—and especially the Christian religion—disappear from the face of the earth.

(D'Souza, Dinesh (2008-11-04). *What's So Great About Christianity* (Kindle Locations 113-118). Regnery Publishing. Kindle Edition.)

1.7 What fears do we have in trying to meet the challenge of militant atheism?

1.8 What practical steps do we need to take to prepare ourselves to meet the challenge of militant atheism today?

SUPPORTING TEXTS FROM SCRIPTURE

◇ *1 Peter 3:13-17*

◇ *John 2:13-22*

◇ *Exodus 14:10-14*

◇ *Isaiah 46:8-11*

Session Two:

Faith Worth Defending

Psalm 25

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious God, In the midst of our modern confusion we need your guidance more than ever. Lead us in your ways and teach us your truth. Make our faith worth defending. Be the God of our salvation. In Jesus name we pray, Amen



*Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.
Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of
my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.
(Psalm 25:4-5)*

TRUTH MATTERS

We live our lives in a world of opinions. Most people believe truth to be relative, meaning it depends on the context. If you hold an opinion fervently enough then it is true for you. This is part of the secular ideology that calls all absolute truth into question. It grows naturally out of secularism. Secularists see life as purely accidental, a random event in an equally random universe. To the secular world nothing is absolute. All beliefs, values, and morals are purely arbitrary. They are determined, like all of life, by pure chance. Further more they are as susceptible to evolutionary change as anything else.

For Christianity, truth, absolute truth, is the foundation of creation and life. God who creates the world, establishes the very nature of truth. Our love for God and our respect for him as creator stems from our recognition that he

determines the absolute nature of truth.

The secular world plays with truth like a mad mathematician. The relative truth of the secularist is like pretending that two plus two sometimes equals four, but it can also equal five if you feel like it. For this reason they have lost their way into spiritual confusion and fad driven morality. Secularists claim to be the only ones who possess reason. Furthermore they claim that their religious opponents cling to unreasoning faith. But by making truth relative they have undermined the very foundation of reason and put their faith in blind ego.

This is the place Christians must take their stand. They must stand on the promise that God is the truth, the way, and the life. They must insist that truth matters above all. Without it their opponents will simply bend their version of reality into a vortex of despair. Real faith builds itself up through love of truth. Without truth, reason is useless and faith is impossible.

GOD'S PURPOSE IS TRUTH

When atheists deny the existence of God they also deny the reality of truth. Truth by its nature requires an external source beyond the human mind. To be true, truth must be objective and absolute. The only reasonable source for truth is a being we call God. For logic and reason to work, God must be at the heart of truth. Therefore we can safely assert that God is truth. And as we seek truth we turn to God who will establish his truth in us. We believe this is God's primary purpose in the creation of the world and humanity. The pursuit of truth is the foundation of all religious faith.

A “Free thinking” secularists insists that truth is a matter of opinion. This is like someone who is sitting on branch, sawing it off to be free of the tree. It is logically impossible to argue that “relative, opinion-based truth” is absolutely true. In the pure light of reason this perspective withers into irrational subjectivism. In short, it is shear nonsense. And yet many Christians today seem to cower in the face of secular arguments for relative truth hoping to be more inclusive or at least avoid a fight. But isn’t truth worth a fight?

Read Psalm 25:1-10

2.1 How do verses 1-3 recognize the conflict that faith brings? How might this reflect the need to defend faith in Christ in the face of atheism?

2.2 Verses 4-5 point out that we do not have the resources in ourselves to face the challenge to our faith. How does it suggest we proceed?

2.3 What evidence is there that the psalmist understands God to be like a mind? What impact would this make on our relationship with Him?

TRUTH’S PURPOSE IS SALVATION

Intellectually, the concept of salvation is meaningless to an atheist. Without God or truth there is no context for sin, righteousness, or eternal consequences. An atheist is like a man who has jumped off a cliff because he doesn’t believe in gravity. They ignore salvation because they believe there is nothing to be saved from.

But Christians believe that this irrational behavior is the outgrowth of the sinful rebellion. This rebellion makes salvation the gravest necessity for everyone. Truth is the only antidote to this dire situation. Truth is what produces salvation, not only salvation for our eternal destination, but salvation in daily life. God’s truth is meant to shape the days of this life that we

might walk in his salvation now and forever.

Read Psalm 25:11-22

2.4 How does the psalmist portray the human predicament? Why does the psalmist need salvation?

2.5 How is the psalmists perception of the human condition at the heart of the conflict with atheism? How does it lead us to respond to atheists?

PREPARING A DEFENSE - DINESH D’SOUZA

“Instead of engaging this secular world, most Christians have taken the easy way out. They have retreated into a Christian subculture where they engage Christian concerns. Then they step back into secular society, where their Christianity is kept out of sight until the next church service. Without realizing it, Christians have become post-modernists of a sort: they live by the gospel of the two truths. There is religious truth, reserved for Sundays and days of worship, and there is secular truth, which applies the rest of the time.”

(D’Souza, Dinesh (2008-11-04). What’s So Great About Christianity (Kindle Locations 89-93). Regnery Publishing. Kindle Edition.)

2.6 What kinds of problems do Christians create for themselves when they function with two different kinds of truth?

2.7 What practical steps might Christians take to better learn God’s saving purpose in truth?

SUPPORTING TEXTS FROM SCRIPTURE

- ◇ *1 Timothy 2:3-4*
- ◇ *John 14:5-7*
- ◇ *Proverbs 23:23*
- ◇ *Isaiah 49:14-19*

Session Three:

The Christian Mind: Reason

Psalm 19 & Romans 1:18-23

OPENING PRAYER

Father of Creation, Clear our minds of the foolishness of this world and guide our logic by the power of your spirit. Help us to think like Christians that our reasoning may be persuasive in maintaining our faith and in bringing others to Christ. In Jesus name we pray, Amen



For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. (Romans 1:20)

THE CHRISTIAN MIND

We live in a world that suggests Christians need to check their minds at the door when it comes to matters of faith. Nothing could be further from the truth. God expects his Christians to think. From what we know, God himself is more like a “mind” than anything else. Faith in Him requires clear reasoning as much as warm feelings, maybe even more so. Furthermore, we must learn the art of reason and logic to be convincing witnesses to Christ.

Our secular opponents claim that pure reason demonstrates the futility of faith. We must learn to call this bluff. To do this we must develop what can be called the Christian mind. That is we need to learn to think like the great defenders of the faith. In every age the world has launched this very same attack on Christianity. It suggests that a thinking mind will soon see the futility of blind faith. We need to be able to respond thoughtfully. We must be

able to show the logical fallacies of the secular perspective and the rational foundation of faith.

Christianity cannot be left to blind faith. Blind faith is simply blind. Christians were never meant to believe blindly. God has filled the world and His word with evidence that fuels reason to create the Christian mind. It is a mind that believes, but also thinks for itself. A Christian mind is able to apply reason to the evidence in order to know about God and his truth.

RATIONAL THOUGHT

In the last verse of the 19th Psalm, the psalmist uses the expression, “words of my mouth and meditation of my heart.” We have often heard this verse used to begin sermons, but have we really thought about what it is saying. What must words and meditations be in order to be acceptable to God? Certainly meaningless emotional babbling is not what we are talking about. Rather the psalmist is making a plea for rational, logical expressions of faith.

The meditation of the heart that pleases God is never blind feelings. It is clear thought and understanding of the clues God has put into the world to lead us into finding him. Words that please God are well reasoned arguments that lay out the logical path for seekers to come to the Lord. The psalm itself sets out the two cornerstones of rational faith. First the evidence for God in the natural world in verses 1-6, and then in verses 7-13, the clear testimony God makes to himself in his revealed word.

Read Psalm 19:1-14

3.1 In what ways does the created order furnish a reasonable argument for God?

3.2 How is human morality and the written word of the Bible a reasonable argument for God's existence?

3.3 Can science furnish evidence that reason can use as rational arguments for God's existence? How so?

THE NARCISSIST'S IDOL

The word "narcissistic" comes from Greek mythology where a person named Narcissus was so entranced by his own reflection in a pool that, unable to do anything but stare, he starved to death. This is the shape of today's most prevalent type of idolatry. Today's idolatry doesn't worship graven images of wood or stone. It worships the self. This is what lies at the very heart of the current secular thinkers.

Our culture has focused all its energy on self-worship in the emergence of the "me" generation. Today's idolatry is the restless search for self-fulfillment in money, property, power, and sex. It takes very little observation in our corner of the world to see how totally consumed our culture is with personal self-fulfillment.

God's law and precepts directly oppose this modern trend. For this reason, secular society has a powerful motivation to ignore God or get rid of Him altogether. The powerful motivation behind this is our fascination with our selves. Our self-worship makes us into our own idols. Our culture claims that this is a new modern way. It tries to get us to believe that it is the natural outcome of scientific progress. But the error is ancient. It is only ancient idolatry in a new disguise. When we understand this we can see how Paul's words to the Romans ring as true today as when they were first written.

Read Romans 1:18-23

3.4 Claiming the wisdom of science, secularists argue that humans are no more than complicated animals who have arisen by chance. In what way have they "exchanged the glory of the im-

mortal God for the images of animals?" (vs 23)

3.5 How do modern secularists suppress the truth and thereby reveal the wrath of God? (vss. 19-20)

PREPARING A DEFENSE - C. S. LEWIS

I was assuming that if the human mind once accepts a thing as true it will automatically go on regarding it as true, until some real reason for reconsidering it turns up. In fact, I was assuming that the human mind is completely ruled by reason. But that is not so. For example, my reason is perfectly convinced by good evidence that anaesthetics do not smother me and that properly trained surgeons do not start operating until I am unconscious. But that does not alter the fact that when they have me down on the table and clap their horrible mask over my face, a mere childish panic begins inside me. I start thinking I am going to choke, and I am afraid they will start cutting me up before I am properly under. In other words, I lose my faith in anaesthetics. It is not reason that is taking away my faith: on the contrary, my faith is based on reason. It is my imagination and emotions. The battle is between faith and reason on one side and emotion and imagination on the other.

Lewis, C. S. (2009-05-28). *Mere Christianity* (C.S. Lewis Signature Classics) (pp. 138-139). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

3.6 In what ways do faith and reason work together to help us face our irrational fears?

3.7 How is irrational fear the foundation of atheism, not scientific reason?

SUPPORTING TEXTS FROM SCRIPTURE

◇ *Psalms 106:19-23*

◇ *Luke 2:46-49*

◇ *John 3:1-14*

◇ *Acts 19:8-10*

Session Four:

The Christian Mind: Tradition

Psalm 119 & The Apostle's Creed

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious Father, we give thanks for the Christian tradition you have given us through your Church on earth. Continue to shelter and shape our faith by its wise guidance. Send your Holy Spirit to empower its teaching that we may be rooted in your Word. In Jesus name, Amen



Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord! (Psalm 119:1)

THE TWILIGHT OF CHRISTENDOM

“Christendom” is a term that refers to the deep intertwining of the Christian Church with western culture. For instance the practice of closing businesses on Sunday is a function of Christendom. It favors Christians by respecting their day of worship. But the convention is not actually Christian in itself since it permits secular recreation as well as it does Christian worship.

The strength of Christendom was that it supported Christian tradition at a cultural level. At the height of Christendom many aspects of Christianity were practiced by nearly everyone in the culture whether they were Christian or not. People tended to consider themselves Christian by default with no actual commitment to the core understandings of the faith.

But widespread secularization and the growing militancy of atheism has swept Christian prayer from our schools and Christian moral values from public life. Modern Christians tend to lament these changes and sometimes make hasty judgements about God's will.

Does God want us working to return our society to Christendom? Or is God's will about finding new ways to support true faith in a secular culture?

Many modern Christians are discovering new power in Scripture and the teachings of the church in the face of our culture's rejection of Christianity. Arming ourselves with right teaching and carefully training our youth has taken on a whole new meaning in the face of the twilight of Christendom. One has to ponder carefully where God is leading us and what may be his purpose in our time and place.

KEEPING THE FAITH

In the long, formally organized 119th Psalm, God's word repeatedly points out the vital nature of law, testimonies, precepts, rules, and statutes for maintaining the blessings of faith. For Christians we can group all of these together in what we call tradition. Tradition has a vital role to play in the formation of a Christian mind capable of standing amidst the rampant secularization of our day.

The Bible remains the central core of this tradition, guiding and anchoring it in God's word. However, individuals and Christian communities supply the critical interpretation and practical application necessary to the development of an active and effective Christian mind capable of keeping the faith in today's world.

Read Psalm 119:1-8

4.1 How do we understand the Lord's law, testimonies, precepts, statutes, and rules as Christians? How does this tradition help our minds?

Read Psalm 119:57-64

4.2 What does this psalm suggest about the relationship between right thinking and faithful action?

Read Psalm 119:105-112

4.3 What role does God’s word play in developing our mental capabilities for faith? How do we make this happen?

WHAT WE BELIEVE

Vital to the Christian mind is a clearly stated framework of core beliefs that all Christians believe. This is the purpose of the Church’s three creeds, The Apostle’s Creed, The Nicene Creed, and The Athanasian Creed. Even though none of these are not actually Scripture themselves, each of them concisely organizes what the Bible teaches about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. The creeds are simply the best statement of what each Christian should know and believe about the tradition of their faith.

A careful understanding of the Creeds arms Christians to quickly detect false teaching and to confidently witness to the central teaching of Scripture. They also help Christians to determine what matters are important for debate and where reason, science, and logic can be brought to bear in the service of the Gospel. Memorization of a Creed is only the starting point for lifelong study of their teachings in light of the broader tradition of the Church.

Confess The Apostle’s Creed (Appendix)

4.4 How does the Creed work to develop human minds that are consistently Christian down through the ages?

4.5 How does the Creed help to prevent the teachings of the Church from becoming stagnated in any given age?

PREPARING A DEFENSE - C. S. LEWIS

I have explained why I have to believe that Jesus was (and is) God. And it seems plain as a matter of history that He taught His followers that the new life was communicated in this way. In other words, I believe it on His authority. Do not be scared by the word authority. Believing things on authority only means believing them because you have been told them by someone you think trustworthy. Ninety-nine per cent of the things you believe are believed on authority. I believe there is such a place as New York. I have not seen it myself. I could not prove by abstract reasoning that there must be such a place. I believe it because reliable people have told me so. The ordinary man believes in the Solar System, atoms, evolution, and the circulation of the blood on authority— because the scientists say so. Every historical statement in the world is believed on authority. None of us has seen the Norman Conquest or the defeat of the Armada. None of us could prove them by pure logic as you prove a thing in mathematics. We believe them simply because people who did see them have left writings that tell us about them: in fact, on authority. A man who jibed at authority in other things as some people do in religion would have to be content to know nothing all his life.

Lewis, C. S. (2009-05-28). Mere Christianity (C.S. Lewis Signature Classics) (pp. 61-62). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

4.6 To what extent is believing things “on authority” essential to creating a Christian mind that can have faith? How does this work?

4.7 How is the assertion that people must “think for themselves” (i.e. “free thinkers”) a self destructive pattern in the matters of faith?

SUPPORTING TEXTS FROM SCRIPTURE

- ◇ *Joshua 24:14-18*
- ◇ *Proverbs 22:6*
- ◇ *John 22:30-31*
- ◇ *Ephesians 4:11-16*

Session Five:

The Bible is True: External Evidence

Psalm 105

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious Heavenly Father, We thank you for the gift of the Holy Bible. By its light, we learn about you. In its pages, you reveal yourself to us. In the words of Scripture we hear your promises for life together with you forever. Help us to find faith in you by its power and trust in you for eternity. In Jesus name we pray. Amen



He remembers his covenant forever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations (Psalm 105:8)

AUTHENTIC AUTHORITY

The Bible's authority can be easily demonstrated to anyone who will look carefully at the evidence with an open mind. Some of Christianity's best defenders today are people who have done just that. In an effort to show the foolishness of Scripture, C. S. Lewis and Lee Strobel, for example, attempted to prove the Bible false and ended up converted to Christianity. The Bible can stand on its own. But today's Christians need to know what evidence shows the authentic authority of Scripture.

There are two general kinds of evidence that verify the authentic authority of the Holy Bible. We will refer to these as "external" and "internal" evidence. In this lesson we will deal with external evidence that arises outside of the Bible itself. In the next lesson we will look more closely at the internal evidence coming from the pages of Scripture itself.

The first kind of external evidence, we will mention, is the process of transmitting ancient text from the original events to today. Before printing presses, books were copied by hand making them rare and valuable. Very few ancient books contemporary to the Bible actually exist. Of those that do, none of them exist with the quantity or quality of manuscripts we have for the Bible. Neither do they demonstrate the incredible accuracy with which the Bible was copied over the years. These factors contribute to a transmission history that is truly miraculous. The Bible's very existence, especially with the high level of transmission accuracy, is clear evidence for its authentic authority.

The second kind of external evidence has happened literally thousands of times. Archeologists, using scientific methods to study history, have found evidence supporting many aspects of Scripture. For instance, generations of scholars were unsure about the existence of an ancient culture called the "Hittites" in the Bible. But during the early part of the 20th century, archeologists conclusively proved that there was an ancient extinct civilization called the Hittites closely related to the Canaanites just as the Bible says. This is one small example among thousands. When archeological science continues to verify the Bible's historical record isn't the Bible's spiritual authority equally authenticated?

PEOPLE OF THE COVENANT

It is easy to forget that God's word was first written, not on paper, but into the human family God chose to bear witness to him. It's like the true language of God was the genetic code replicating itself down through the generations in Abraham's family. It was this family that

received the promise of descendants and land that shaped the nature of God's story among humans. Members of the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob actually wrote of the Bible itself. Hebrews wrote the Old Testament and Jews wrote the New Testament. Psalm 105 recounts the beginnings of this family's role to transmit God's word down through the ages to us. This purpose is clearly set out for us in verse 8:

He remembers his covenant forever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations

Read Psalm 105:1-15

5.1 How can God choose a family to be the living means of the transmission of his word to the world? What does this mean for God's purpose in the Hebrew people?

5.2 How would being God's chosen people set the stage for developing Scriptures? How can this carry the true Word of God down through thousands of generations?

PROMISE FULFILLED

God did more than transmit his word through the generations of his covenant people. He also rooted his word in history. Psalm 105 recounts God's salvation of his people from their slavery in Egypt in order to fulfill his promise to give them a land of their own. This was not just a spiritual liberation, but it was a historical act that directly affected actual geographic, cultural, and political aspects of this world. The Bible's story roots itself in history in a way that exposes it to archeological, sociological, and cultural study in the same way we can look at other real life events. That's because God's word is played out across the stage of Israel's history as a real life event that can actually be verified by scholars. This makes the Bible not only God's word to the faithful, but also the single best historical resource for the eras it addresses.

Read Psalm 105:16-45

5.4 How does the historical nature of God's word assist in bringing believers to faith?

5.5 How does the psalmist's way of portraying the story illustrate both the historical and spiritual message of God's activity in the world?

PREPARING A DEFENSE - LEE STROBEL

There have been thousands—not hundreds—of archaeological finds in the Middle East that support the picture presented in the biblical record. There was a discovery not long ago confirming King David. The patriarchs—the narratives about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—were once considered legendary, but as more has become known these stories are increasingly corroborated. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was thought to be mythological until evidence was uncovered that all five of the cities mentioned in Genesis were, in fact, situated just as the Old Testament said. As far as their destruction goes, archaeologist Clifford Wilson said there is 'permanent evidence of the great conflagration that took place in the long distant past.'

Strobel, Lee (2009-05-18). The Case for Faith: A Journalist Investigates the Toughest Objections to Christianity (p. 128). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

5.6 How is Archeology an example of how science can actually help to verify the Christian faith?

5.7 How might the external evidence be used effectively in conversations with unbelievers?

SUPPORTING TEXTS FROM SCRIPTURE

- ◇ *Genesis 1:1-3*
- ◇ *John 1:1-5*
- ◇ *Hebrews 4:11-13*
- ◇ *2 Timothy 3:14-17*

Session Six:

The Bible is True: Internal Clarity

Psalms 2 & 22

OPENING PRAYER

Dear God, Make your Word alive in our hearts through our encounter with Holy Scripture. As you breathed out the sacred writings to instruct us in faith and righteousness, breath into us the Holy spirit so that we might learn and obey your Word. Grant us the confidence that comes with deep understanding of your purpose in Jesus and the World. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.



The Lord said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you." (Psalm 2:7)

JESUS SHOWS THE BIBLE TO BE TRUE

Jesus Christ is crucial to our confidence in the Bible's truth. Jesus is like the key that unlocks all the mysteries of the Bible bringing them into focus. Even though the Bible was written over hundreds of years by many different human authors, in Jesus, all of Scripture speaks with power and authority as a single voice of God.

In Jesus we see the amazing, miraculous internal clarity of the Bible as it lays out God's plan for salvation. When examined closely readers find that the Bible does not contradict itself, but rather enhances its message with layers of meaning. Critics who glibly accuse the Bible of inconsistencies have failed to study it carefully. The incredible internal unity of its message across the many ages, authors, and cultural settings is one of the most convincing evidences for its divine origin.

In its pages the Bible records prophecies, issued

at separate times and separate places, that clearly reach their fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. Throughout its pages, Bible consistently and faithfully records miracles that verify the action of God marking his presence in the world. This is all brought to a resounding conclusion in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The actual literary evidence makes a compelling case for the truth of Scripture as God's Word for humanity.

Martin Luther's life and ministry was a transformative event for our understanding of the Bible's truth through internal clarity. He taught two important principles that help us to understand this. First, that Christ is everywhere present in Scripture, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. And second, Scripture is meant to interpret itself.

INTERNAL CLARITY

The internal clarity of a book is its ability to explain its central message without self contradiction. When a book is written by a single author we expect a high degree of internal clarity. When there is internal clarity in a book written by many different authors over a long period of time, we must assume that either it has been doctored or miraculously guided. Since the actual literary content of the Bible does not give evidence of doctoring we must assume that the Bible is divinely inspired.

Christians believe that the internal clarity of the Bible is one of the most convincing arguments for Scripture being the true word of God. Through a variety of literary forms, it consistently addresses the most fundamental questions of life. It directs and focuses the moral sense that all humans find instinctive. It re-

veals the heart of God whose compassion envelops his creation in a daring plan to rescue it from self-corruption. In our hearts, the close harmony of the Word across the diversity of its pages is an incredibly convincing testimony for its divine origin.

Read Psalm 2:1-12

6.1 How does the psalmist envision God's reaction to humanity's foolish ignorance?

6.2 What does the psalmist predict God will do to meet human ignorance? How is this consistent with the Bible's overall message?

6.3 How does this psalmist find its fulfillment and power in the person of Jesus?

PROPHECY FULFILLED

Throughout its pages, particularly in the Old Testament Scripture sets out predictive prophecies which are later fulfilled. Stories that show how these prophecies are fulfilled are also recorded in the pages of Scripture. A careful study of the literary evidence clearly demonstrates that these are authentically presented. They have been handled honestly and forthrightly by the community which has supported the writing and the transmission of the Bible.

In particular the New Testament spends a great deal of effort demonstrating how Jesus Christ is the chief fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies concerning the promised Messiah of God. It also demonstrates the true power of God in revealing himself through the Word by showing how God has revealed himself more fully in Scripture than any of its human authors anticipated. For God himself fulfills Scripture's central prophecies in a way that brings divine grace to bear on human rebellion, creating the promise of salvation for all who believe.

Read Psalm 22:1-31

6.4 What are the evidences that this Psalm is prophecy fulfilled by Jesus on the cross?

6.5 How does your understanding of this Psalm and the events of Good Friday reinforce your faith that the Bible is true.

PREPARING A DEFENSE - LEE STROBEL

(From an interview with Norman Geisler, PH.D.)

Geisler: "When you add this up—the historical reliability of the Bible as authenticated by archaeology, the miraculous fulfillment of clear predictive prophecies, and the performance of documented miracles—you get a supernaturally confirmed book unlike any other in history."

Strobel: I wanted to clarify something. "What you're not saying is, 'I believe the Bible is divinely inspired because it says it is.'"

Geisler: "That's right. That's a circular argument. No, the argument goes like this: the Bible claims to be the Word of God and the Bible proves to be the Word of God."

Strobel, Lee (2009-05-18). *The Case for Faith: A Journalist Investigates the Toughest Objections to Christianity* (pp. 136-137). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

6.6 How do the various evidences, external and internal work together to make the case for the Bible's truth?

6.7 How should Christians respond to those who want to claim that the Bible is less than the Word of God?

SUPPORTING TEXTS FROM SCRIPTURE

- ◇ *Proverbs 30:1-6*
- ◇ *Isaiah 40:6-9*
- ◇ *Mark 7:1-13*
- ◇ *Revelation 22: 18-21*

Appendix 1:

The Three Great Creeds

Apostles, Nicene, and Athanasian

The Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord, He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, The Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in ac-

cordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to Judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the prophets. We Believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church. We acknowledge on Baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen

The Athanasian Creed

Whoever wants to be saved should above all cling to the Christian faith. Whoever does not guard it whole and inviolable will doubtless perish eternally. Now this is the Christian faith:

We worship one God in trinity and the Trinity in unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the divine being. For the Father is one person, the Son is another, and the Spirit is still another. But the deity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, equal in glory, coeternal in majesty. What the Father is the Son is, and so is the Holy Spirit. Uncreated is the Father; uncreated is the Son; uncreated is the Spirit. The Father is infinite; the Son is infinite; the Holy Spirit is infinite. Eternal is the Father; eternal is the Son; eternal is the Spirit: And yet there are not three eternal beings, but one who is eternal; as there are not three uncreated and unlimited beings, but on who is uncreated and unlimited. Almighty is the Father; almighty is

the Son; almighty is the Spirit: And yet there are not three almighty beings, but one who is almighty. Thus the Father is God; the Son is God; The Holy Spirit is God; And yet there are not three gods, but One God. Thus the Father is Lord; the Son is Lord; the Holy Spirit is Lord: And yet there are not three lords, but one Lord. As Christian truth compels us to acknowledge each distinct person as God and Lord, so Christian religion forbids us to say that they are three gods or lords. The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten; the Son was neither made nor created, but was alone begotten of the Father; the Spirit was neither made nor created, but is proceeding from the Father and the Son. Thus there is one Father, not three fathers; One Son, not three sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Spirits. And in this Trinity, no one is before or after, greater or less than the other; but all three persons are in themselves, coeternal and coequal; and so we must worship the Trinity in unity and the one God in three persons. Whoever wants to be saved should think thus about the Trinity.

It is necessary for eternal salvation that one also faithfully believe that our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, is both God and man. He is God, begotten before all worlds from the being of the Father, and he is man, born in the world from the being of his mother-- existing fully as God, and fully as man with a rational soul and a human body; equal to the Father in divinity, subordinate to the Father in humanity. Although he is God and man he is not divided, but is one Christ. He is united because God has taken humanity into himself; he does not transform deity into humanity. He is completely one in the unity of his person, without confusing his natures. For as the rational soul and body are one person, so the one Christ is God and man. He suffered death for our salvation. He descended into hell and rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. At his coming all people shall rise bodily to give an account of their own deeds. Those who have done good will enter eternal life, those who have done evil will enter

eternal fire. This is the catholic faith. One cannot be saved without believing this firmly and faithfully. Amen.

Appendix 2:

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The logo consists of a thick black cross symbol. The vertical bar of the cross is positioned to the left of the text. The horizontal bar of the cross is positioned above the text. The text "Heritage Lutheran Church" is written in a bold, black, serif font, with "Heri" on the left, "age Lutheran Church" on the right, and the vertical bar of the cross acting as a separator between "Heri" and "age". Below the main text, the words "Go Make Baptize Teach" are written in a smaller, italicized, black, serif font, with "Go Make" on the left, "Baptize Teach" on the right, and the vertical bar of the cross acting as a separator between "Go Make" and "Baptize Teach".

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Go Make Baptize Teach

