

HOW TO ANSWER COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT CHRISTIANITY

Week 3 Handout 19 March 2021

INTRODUCTION

Recap “6 Points on Methodology”

VIDEO (15 MINS)

PARTICIPANT NOTES: “DOES GOD EXIST?”

Different permutations

1. Why doesn't God just appear now and prove himself?
2. Isn't belief in God blind faith? Religion is merely a psychological crutch.
3. Science makes sense. Faith doesn't.
4. I am an atheist.

Identify the Question behind the Question [Point 3 - “Methodology”]

While there are variations of this question – the question behind the question usually surrounds lack of proof or evidence of God's existence. If we cannot see, feel, touch, hear God with our senses, how can we be sure at all that he exists? Can God be proven?

Now it is worth noting that there may be different types of people who ask this question.

Personal Struggle

“I'm going through depression and God seems non-existent”

Intellectual Struggle

“It is not logical to believe in God that we cannot see.”

For some, personal suffering may be the reason why they are asking this question. In this case, the approach to your answer might be similar to Session 2 - “Why is there suffering, evil and death in this world if God is good?”

For others, this may be an intellectual struggle - how someone can logically believe in something that cannot be proven. This intellectual struggle is what we will tackle today for the purposes of this session.

Bad Responses / Responses that can go bad

1. Personal testimonies/experiences

“I believe in God because I have had a special encounter of Him”

Problem: What about other religions - folks who claim personal experiences of God? Is faith just psychological?

2. Creation

“I believe God exists because of creation! It’s complexities, intricacies, and beauty proves intelligent design and therefore a Creator God!”

Problem: While the bible says that God does reveals himself partly through his creation (e.g. Psalms 19; Romans 1:20) – there are limitations to becoming overly reliant on the argument of intelligent design for the following reasons:

- The argument of intelligent design can be a slippery slope. One may ask “What about earthquakes, tidal waves, children born deformed? What about God making the world in 7 days? Science proves that isn’t true.”
- The argument of intelligent design may only go so far as to “prove” God’s existence, as in other monotheistic religions (e.g. Islam, Judaism), but does not show us in sufficient clarity who God really is – at least not sufficiently in a way that saves!
- God chooses to reveal himself most clearly in the person of Jesus (Col 1:15; John 1).

Good Reponse

1. Do it with gentleness and respect [Point 6 - “Methodology”]

Remember to show gentleness and respect by empathizing with the questioner’s thoughts, feelings and responses.

“Indeed, it is hard to believe in something we cannot see or feel - and it may come across that Christians are practising “blind faith”. Science and logic tells us that we should rely on our senses and empirical evidence - rather than delving around with “fluffy ideas of God”. Moreover, if God exists, why doesn’t he just show himself?

As a result, many do not believe that God exists.”

2. A good response understands the limitations of our answers

Now we may not know why God chooses not to reveal himself today in the way that we want (e.g. in a spectacular show of power, or appear in front of us right now). However, Christians believe that God has chosen to reveal himself most clearly through his son, Jesus.

3. A good response points to Jesus as the evidence for God’s existence [Point 1 - “Methodology”]

“I believe God exists because of Jesus.”

Why?

The bible tells us that Jesus lived in Palestine 2000 years ago. During his life, Jesus claimed to be the Son of God in a unique way. He did many miraculous signs and miracles - which things never seen before in the history of the world. He healed the sick, made the paralysed/lame walk, opened the eyes of the blind, and even raised the dead - such spectacular miracles that only God can do. But most importantly, Jesus who was crucified, rose from the dead 3 days later.

Answer by asking questions [Point 3 - Methodology]

What have you heard of Jesus? Who do you think Jesus is - a liar, lunatic or really God?

But can I trust the Bible? Is Jesus the real deal?

Unlike myth / legend / visions / philosophy, Jesus is a real historical figure. In fact, it is undisputed that Jesus really existed. The new testament gospels in the bible is a compilation of eye-witness accounts of Jesus and his life on earth. It was written very close to the time of Jesus’ and could have been easily disputed if it was not true. In fact, the huge crowds/number of witnesses and the consistency of their eye witness accounts - tell us that these records of Jesus life, death and resurrection can be historically trusted.

Moreover, the sheer number of copies of the gospels that were made from very early on, makes it easy for historians to do cross-referencing and to determine what the original text says.

Answer by asking questions [Point 3 - Methodology]

Do we always have to see in order to believe?

Must I see before I can believe in God?

While many of us feel that it would be so much easier to believe if Jesus just appeared today to us now, it is not unreasonable to believe even when you haven't seen him. In fact, there are lots of things today that we believe even though we don't see. We believe many things about historical figures such as Napoleon, Aristotle, Alexander the Great, given reliable historical records – and it isn't blind faith.

Likewise, many today who have not seen Jesus are still able to believe in Him. And the reason for this is because we have access to very reliable written records of Jesus' life, death and resurrection today. We are able to read it, study it, assess its claims carefully - and many Christians after doing so, have come to see the trustworthiness and reliability of the gospels, and of Jesus' claims.

In fact, the gospels (e.g. Gospel of John) was written with the purpose to prove that "Jesus is the Son of God - and that by believing we may have life in his name" (c.f. *John 20:24-31*).

Summary:

1. Know the question behind the question: Can God's existence be proven?
2. Show gentleness/respect by empathizing with the questioner - "It is indeed hard to believe without evidence".
3. Lay out the limitations of our answers: We may not know why God doesn't choose to reveal himself today in ways we want!
4. Point to Jesus as the answer to this question: The best proof / evidence for God can be found in a historical investigation of the person of Jesus!
5. Point out that there are many things we believe happened in history even when we don't see it personally.

DISCUSSION (15 MINS) - "DOES GOD EXIST?"

1. Why do you think people doubt God's existence? What are the common objections to God's existence?

2. What did you think about the video presentation? Do you have any additional points to add?

QUESTION & ANSWER (15 MIN)

VIDEO (15 MINS)

PARTICIPANT NOTES: "IS JESUS THE ONLY WAY?"

Different permutations

1. Isn't it close minded to say there's only one way to God?
2. Don't all religions teach the same thing?
3. Why is Christianity so intolerant of other views?
4. Are you saying all Muslims/Buddhists etc. are in hell now?

Identify the Question behind the Question [Point 2 - "Methodology"]

Why is Christianity so exclusivist; isn't it arrogant to say that others are wrong?

Good Responses

1. Refute the idea that we're all climbing up the same mountain
 - a. "Religions say contradicting things, how can they all be right?"
 - b. How different faiths view Jesus
 - i. Islam says that Jesus is a prophet, and he did not die
 - ii. Judaism says that Jesus is a deceiver, he died and did not rise
 - iii. Christianity says that Jesus is God, he died and rose again
 - c. These statements cannot all be true at the same time, and therefore, one has to be right and one has to be wrong.

2. Distinguish between a statement of opinion versus a statement of truth
 - Opinion statements are based on one's subjective tastes and preferences
 - Truth statements are based in objective facts and history
 - It's possible to be intolerant of an opinion because you hold an opposing one
 - On the other hand, it's not possible to be intolerant of a truth statement, because it either is or isn't correct
 - So it then boils down to whether you believe the statements made by Jesus, as documented in the gospels

3. Jesus rules out multiple ways to God
 - a. **John 14:6** I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the father except through me
 - b. **Acts 4:12** Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved

4. Invite the questioner to explore the claims of Jesus as documented in the gospels
 - a. establishing that Jesus really existed
 - b. establishing that the gospels are an accurate record of what Jesus said
 - c. establishing that the gospels have been accurately transmitted to the modern day
 - d. evaluating the claims that Jesus made and studying the evidence to support them (e.g the resurrection)

Summary:

1. Religions cannot all be correct because they believe in contradictory things
2. In the bible, Jesus makes the claim that He is the only way to God. It's not offered as an opinion, it's offered as a statement of truth. If you want to dispute this claim, you need to investigate the facts (and the person of Jesus)

Bad Responses / Responses that can go bad

- Avoid any response that minimizes the differences between Christianity and other faiths
- Avoid being overly critical of other faiths or attacking their beliefs
 - If someone forces the issue, de-escalate by switching from "you" to "the bible"
 - "I don't decide who does or does not go to heaven. God does. God has said in the bible that Jesus is the only way to Him, and those who reject Jesus reject Him too (1 John 2:23, Luke 10:16)"
 - All of us need Jesus, and all who call on His name will be saved, regardless of what background you come from. The message of salvation is for all people, Buddhists, Muslims, Taoists, everyone.

DISCUSSION (15 MINS) - "IS JESUS THE ONLY WAY?"

1. What are some common objections you've heard to the belief that Jesus is the only way?

2. What did you think about the video presentation? Do you have any additional points to add?

QUESTION & ANSWER (15 MIN)