



DEFEND

FOLLOWING JESUS

DEFEND

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INTRODUCTION

From the earliest days of the church, Christians have faced attacks against what they believe. Jude wrote saying, “I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (**Jude 1:3**).

Peter wrote to a suffering church, facing opposition, saying, “Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (**1 Peter 3:14-17**).

This plan introduces some of the best and most ancient defences for belief in God, and belief in Jesus. Each step has a Bible passage to read, teaching to make you think, points to discuss with a friend, which could also be used in conversation with unbelievers, a Bible verse to memorise, and a guide on how to pray. With the Holy Spirit’s help, you can use these defences, alongside your personal testimony, whenever your faith is questioned.

Grace, mercy and peace.

HOW TO DEFEND

#1 LISTEN WELL

READ

Proverbs 18:1-24; James 1:2-26

THINK

It's tempting, when we have learned something exciting, to throw it into the next conversation we have. At dinner with friends, their young daughter suddenly ran into the room and announced, "You should never go on your phone when you are driving!", then ran out giggling. She is absolutely right, and that lesson can save lives. But, rather than take her seriously, in the moment we all laughed, because what she had learned was delivered completely out of context. It was comically random. It was irrelevant to the conversation we were having.

We need to remember this as we learn how to defend the hope in us. When answering questions, the answer is only helpful if it fits the question. For example, $4 + 4 = 8$. But if the question is 12×2 , the answer 8 is no longer appropriate. It is an answer, but not the answer we need in that moment.

Proverbs tells us, "If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame." James tells us, "let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger". Using personal testimony and the ancient defences explained in this plan, we can remove obstacles in the way of our friends and family coming to faith. But only if we listen well.

DISCUSS

- What random fact have you been waiting to tell someone?
- When did someone listening well mean something to you?
- When did you fail to listen well, what happened?

MEMORISE

“If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.” Proverbs 18:13

PRAY

Father God, who always hears me, help me to listen well. Help me to honour others with my ears, being patient and not considering my time more valuable than their story. Thank you for your Holy Spirit, who will always give me the words I need.

#2

SPEAK KINDLY

READ

Proverbs 15:1-7; 1 Peter 3:8-17;

Ephesians 6:10-12; 2 Corinthians 10:3-6

THINK

Pride and arrogance are ugly. It's possible to have the right answer, but share it in a way that puts people off. Our battle is not with flesh and blood. Our enemies are the spiritual forces of evil at work in people's minds and hearts. We destroy arguments, not people. The people we speak to are prisoners. Some willingly, others unwillingly. But, as prisoners, we do not blame or attack them, we simply want to set them free.

Remember, you don't have to attend every argument you are invited to! Proverbs tells us, "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." We need to avoid sounding angry when answering the questions of those wrestling with or fighting against coming to Jesus. When Peter encourages us to defend our hope, he tells us to do it with a tender heart and a humble mind, with gentleness and respect. People should experience the kindness of God when talking to us. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to convict them, our job is to speak the truth in a loving way.

So follow the advice Paul gave the Colossians, "Walk in wisdom towards outsiders ... Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person."

DISCUSS

- What is a gentle answer to, “I don’t believe in God”?
- How easy do you find it to forgive others?
- How did you respond to them?

MEMORISE

Walk in wisdom towards outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.”

Colossians 4:5,6

PRAY

Great God, merciful Father, I have so much to be humble about! Without you I am nothing. Only by your grace and mercy can I share your good news with others. Let me not forget. Help me to show others the same patience and love you have shown me.

#3

USE TESTIMONY

READ

Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 105:1-6; Psalm 145:1-7; John 15:26,27

THINK

Sometimes, we are looking for that one great proof that is the proverbial round house kick to the head! The knockout punch. However, it normally takes the careful and patient use of various proofs to dismantle the years of wrong thinking that cloud people's minds. Jesus Himself took forty days, and many proofs, to help His disciples understand the gospel after His resurrection. And they had already walked with Him for three years! He then told them to wait till they had received the Holy spirit before they became witnesses. How much more will preaching the gospel and sharing our testimony teach us patience and dependence on the Holy Spirit.

In this plan we explore defences for belief in God and Jesus. But, we must not assume that with one argument we can prove the existence of God, and that Jesus was God, and that He died for our sins and rose again. Each of these elements requires separate proofs. That is why it is good to understand them each and learn how to use them together.

Remember, the single most compelling argument for the gospel of Jesus will always be your own testimony. Share personal experiences of Him at work in your life. These other defences provide context and support for your testimony, but can never replace it.

DISCUSS

- How did you come to receive Jesus as your saviour?
- How did you receive the Holy Spirit?
- When did you last tell someone your testimony?

MEMORISE

“... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8

PRAY

Father God, thank you for your Holy Spirit. Please give me great boldness in sharing your good news. Use me to stretch out Your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of Your Son Jesus. You are wonderful!

DEFENCE OF BELIEF IN GOD

#4 FIRST CAUSE

READ

John 1:1-5; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 11:1-3

THINK

Since ancient times, philosophers have known “nothing comes from nothing”. This is foundational to science, as is the rule that everything with a beginning has a cause. Today, most scientists agree the universe had a beginning. So where did the universe come from and what was its cause?

There’s an old brainteaser, “What came first, the chicken or the egg?” We know chickens come from eggs, and we understand that eggs come from chickens. For there to be a ‘first chicken’, one special chicken, or one special egg, must have broken this rule. And history confirms it was a non-chicken, a Red Jungle Fowl, that laid the first chicken egg.

For the universe too, the cause must lie outside the thing being caused. It is no good to say the universe made itself, or laws within the universe created it. No natural process can explain the first cause of the universe. We must look beyond the created realm. Our cause must exist beyond the universe. It must have sufficient power, sufficient substance, and the will to bring about the universe.

The Bible describes the uncreated God, as the one by, through and for whom everything was created. He is not bound by time, space or matter. God is not just a sufficient explanation for creation, He is the best explanation.

DISCUSS

- What does “nothing comes from nothing” mean to you?
- How would you explain the origin of everything around us?
- How does belief in the creator God encourage you?

MEMORISE

““For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.”

Colossians 1:16

PRAY

Father God, You made all things. The heavens and the earth and all that is in them. To You my God, without beginning and without end, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever.

#5 DESIGN

READ

Romans 1:18-23; Ephesians 1:3-14

THINK

Imagine walking on a beach. As your bare feet kick the sand a glint of silver catches your eye. It is a pocket watch. Had the sunlight caught a wet seashell, you would assume it had arrived there by natural forces. But the watch is clearly designed, not swept together by the sea. Yet, as the philosopher William Paley pointed out, “every manifestation of design, which existed in the watch, exists in the works of nature”.

Our ability to recognise design in nature is often hampered because we are told repeatedly that nothing and no one created the world we see. But, the way two seashells fit together, the arrangement of feathers on a bird, the way the water cycle operates, all show intricate design. Our DNA, with its coded language that tells every cell exactly how to behave, is evidence of design. And where there is design, there is a designer.

The Bible describes God as the one who created the earth with His hands. It describes a God who plans everything out before time began and then does it. The appearance of design is over-whelming in creation. It was not random processes that caused the wonderful design we see around us. It is not a coincidence. It is evidence of the designer. It is the fingerprint of God.

DISCUSS

- How do you explain the evidence of design in everything around us?
- What have you learned about God from creation?
- What do you understand is God's plan for your life?

MEMORISE

“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.” Romans 1:20

PRAY

Our Father, God of heaven and earth, seas and rivers. God of the sun and moon, of all the stars, God of the mountains high and valleys low, God of heaven, I praise You! Marvellous are your works, my soul knows it well!

#6

FINE TUNING

READ

Job 38:1-41

THINK

The Earth is positioned within a habitable zone in our galaxy, outside of which life as we know it could not exist. Our large neighbouring planets keep us from being bombarded from space. The tilt of earth's orbit gives us seasons. Earth's moon determines the ocean tides.

Our relative size and distance from the moon and sun are why we can see perfect solar eclipses. This distance effects the water cycle. Any closer to the sun and most water would boil. Any further away and most water on earth would freeze. Remarkably, unlike most liquids, freezing water expands. This means ice floats on top of lakes and rivers, allowing life to continue beneath.

In 2009, NASA launched the Kepler Space Telescope to discover other planets similar to earth. They expected to find a huge number. But, while several thousand candidates planets were identified, only a small handful come close to being Earth-like, and none are the same. Our planet is truly unique in the universe.

Sir Isaac Newton, the father of modern science, would sometimes sign his work with a Latin phrase, "God created everything by number, weight and measure". He understood, the earth is not only designed and created, it is also fine-tuned by its Creator. The Bible confirms this view. As the Psalmist wrote, "Marvellous are Your works!"

DISCUSS

- Where were you when God laid the foundation of the earth?
- What would it take to command the morning to appear?
- How would you explain the incredible fine-tuning of our solar system?

MEMORISE

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

Genesis 1:1

PRAY

God incredible, who created everything by number, weight and measure, You are wondrous and your works are majestic. I thank you for the creation that surrounds me, the water that quenches my thirst and the bountiful food that comes forth from the earth.

#7

IRREDUCIBLE COMPLEXITY

READ

Isaiah 40:12-17; Hebrews 1:10-12;
Psalm 139:13-16; Romans 1:18-20

THINK

When something is composed of the smallest number of parts needed to function, that is called irreducible complexity. A watch with half the cogs missing has no function at all. Each cog serves a purpose in the watch's design. It needs its complete mechanism to operate, even if that mechanism is very simple or small.

This is the same in nature. Even the "simplest" living cells are in fact remarkably complex, complete with moving parts, interacting components, and all sorts of chemistry going on. Each part fulfils a purpose. Purpose is everywhere in creation. This purpose is evidence of design.

Just as design points to a designer, the presence of evident purpose suggest purposeful design. For a designer to have formulated the universe they must exist outside the universe. Therefore, the evidence of purposeful design present in the universe suggests a thinking designer who exists beyond the limits of the universe. An intelligent, supernatural designer.

This defence is called the teleological argument. Telos, in Greek, means "purpose" or "goal." The teleological argument says a "purposer" is required to explain evidence of purpose. While some may argue that everything happened without purpose, the Bible describes a God who, before time began, made a plan, and then executed His plan, for His purpose. This is the true God, the God we worship.

DISCUSS

- Did you ever take apart something to mend it? How did it go?
- How have you noticed evidence of design or purpose in creation?
- How would you explain the evidence of design and purpose in creation?

MEMORISE

“In love he predestined us for adoption to him-self as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.”

Ephesians 1:5

PRAY

Thank You, Father God, that You have known from before the beginning Your plan for the world, and Your plan for my life. Help me to see Your plan in everything around me, and to obey Your will with my life, for Your glory.

#8 NATURAL LAW

READ

Jeremiah 5:21-23; Proverbs 8:1-31

THINK

In the history of science, it was belief in God that pushed people forward in discovery. The Christian apologist C.S. Lewis wrote, "Men became scientific because they expected law in nature and they expected law in nature because they believed in a law giver."

The Bible speaks of God setting boundaries for the oceans, being responsible for weather patterns and seasons, like seedtime and harvest. This is the reason creation makes sense. Because it works according to certain patterns that we call the laws of nature.

If the universe was purely a product of random coincidence, there is no logical reason for it to make sense or follow laws. In our universe, even accidents follow the laws of nature: a falling apple always falls down, car crashes obey Newton's laws of motion. But if the whole universe was just a cosmic accident, what produced the laws that the cosmic accident followed? The laws we see in nature suggest a Lawgiver. This defence is the Transcendental Argument applied to natural law. Something 'transcendent' is above all. We can demonstrate God exists, by pointing to the fact that our universe follows natural laws. Therefore, it must be the result of a logical, reasonable and understandable Lawgiver. God, who is transcendent in nature, is the source of the law we see in nature.

DISCUSS

- What natural laws have you seen in action?
- What accident have you witnessed that followed natural law?
- How do you explain the appearance of natural law?

MEMORISE

“Let us fear the LORD our God, who gives the rain in its season, the autumn rain and the spring rain, and keeps for us the weeks appointed for the harvest.” Jeremiah 5:24

PRAY

Awesome Father, I fear You and stand in wonder. You alone know the inner workings of the universe. You alone created all things. You alone set laws in motion that would govern tides and seasons and climate and life itself. I praise you!

#9

MORAL LAW

READ

Romans 2:13-16; Exodus 20:1-21; Matthew 7:21-29

THINK

Just as we see laws in nature, we also see moral laws amongst mankind. Many of these laws are believed universally; not originating from any specific culture or religion. We all know murder is wrong. We all know you should not steal, even if we argue how to define stealing. Where does this sense of objective morality come from?

Some claim moral law evolved as whatever is best for humanity. This fails to explain why our morality changed so little throughout history. If morality has evolved, was there a time when murder was morally right? Or, perhaps in the future, will it become morally right? How is that better for humanity? And if it is better, why not embrace it now? As the writer G.K. Chesterton said, “What on earth is the current morality, except in its literal sense—the morality that is always running away?”

A better explanation is that God gave us moral law. Whether we acknowledge Him or not, the presence of objective morality indicates an authority higher than mankind. He is the benchmark for right and wrong. This defence is the Transcendental Argument applied to moral law. Transcendent, because the law is above man, not man above the law. Mankind can never be the source of objective morality. If right and wrong exist, so does God.

DISCUSS

- Name some moral standards most of your friends would agree on.
- What if one friend didn't agree, would they be right or wrong?
- Where do our common sense and moral standards come from?

MEMORISE

“Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” **Matthew 7:21**

PRAY

Thank You, Father God for placing your law in my hearts. Thank You that I cannot escape the conscience You have given me. Help me to listen to Your Spirit and follow in Your ways. Not as one who only hears, but as one who hears and obeys.

#10

PASCAL'S WAGER

READ

Hebrews 9:11-28; James 4:12; Matthew 25:31-46

THINK

The philosopher Blaise Pascal has been called a pragmatist. This is probably unfair. A pragmatist feels believing what 'works' is more important than believing what is true. Whereas, Pascal truly believed in God and wanted others to believe in Him too. But Pascal did have a pragmatic argument for faith in God, now known as *Pascal's Wager*.

If the God of the Bible is real and good, then following Him leads to ultimate fulfilment and eternal life, and not following Him leads to a lost eternity, judgement and death. On the other hand, if God is not real, following Him leads to nothing, just as not following Him leads to nothing too. In other words, you are never worse off following God, but you could be worse off not following Him. Of four possible outcomes, there is only one that is entirely negative: the folly of not following the God who is truly there.

Taken alone, *Pascal's Wager* does not defend belief in our God with evidence in the same way the *Teleological* or *Transcendental Arguments* do. Some have criticised it because it could work equally well for any religion or any god. However, when combined with the other defences we have already looked at, it is a solid argument for why it is worth taking the leap to faith.

DISCUSS

- What convinced you following God was the wisest plan?
- How has following God benefitted you in this life?
- When did you last share that testimony with someone?

MEMORISE

“The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good.”

Psalm 14:1

PRAY

Father God, you alone are wise. Allow me to walk in Your wisdom, may I never rely on my own. I trust You, You are my Lord and my God. Thank You, that following You leads to ultimate fulfilment and eternal life. You are so good.

DEFENCE OF FAITH IN JESUS

#11

JESUS' LIFE

READ

1 Corinthians 15:3-7; Acts 2:22-41

THINK

Did Jesus Christ really exist? Some non-scholars have claimed Jesus was just made up in the Bible. If that's true, Christianity serves no purpose and everything we believe is a lie. But, Jesus did exist, and there is evidence from non-Christian sources, besides the Bible.

Roman lawyer and author, Pliny the Younger (61-113AD), wrote about Christ, and Christians worshiping Him as God. Rome's greatest historian, Tacitus (56-120AD), wrote about Christ and the early Christians, confirming Jesus was executed by Pontius Pilate, Roman governor of Judea during Tiberius' reign, exactly as the Bible says.

Lucian (125-180AD), a Greek satirist, does not mention Jesus by name. But His description of the founder of the church, as a man crucified in Palestine, now worshiped as God, matches the details the Bible gives about Jesus. The Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus (37-100AD), writes of Jesus as a historical figure, a wise man and worker of 'startling deeds'. He says Jesus was a teacher of truth, condemned by leading Jews. He also connects Jesus with the name Christ, and credits Him with founding the 'tribe' of Christians.

When we see all this evidence, we must agree with atheist Bart Ehrman, who says, "Jesus did exist, as virtually every scholar of antiquity, of biblical studies, of classics, and of Christian origins ... in the Western world agrees".

DISCUSS

- How real is Jesus to you in your everyday life?
- Who do you know who claims Jesus wasn't really real?
- What led them to conclude Jesus Christ was not a historical person?

MEMORISE

“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.” Acts 10:38

PRAY

Thank You, Jesus, that you are really real! Thank You, Father, for sending Your Son to live for me, to die for me and to rise again so I can experience fullness of life! Jesus, You are wonderful. Your compassion is incredible.

#12

JESUS' DEATH

READ

1 Corinthians 15:3-7; Mark 15:1-47

THINK

Did Jesus really die? From what we know about crucifixion and the forensic evidence given in the Bible, there is no doubt, yes, Jesus really died.

Before His arrest, Jesus was already sweating blood. This rare condition, Hematidrosis, is caused by extreme physical or emotional stress. At trial, He had a crown of thorns rammed on his head and was beaten with a leather whip containing fragments of metal or bone. This caused massive bruising and lacerations.

Next, He carried a 30-50kg wooden beam the 600m from Fortress Antonia to Golgotha. He was already too weak and needed help. At Golgotha His clothes were torn off, reopening wounds that had clotted to the fabric. He refused the offered analgesic, wine mixed with myrrh. Then, He was nailed to the cross through His feet and wrists. As His muscles shut down, He struggled to exhale. For six hours He suffered cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, and searing pain as His lacerated back rubbed against the rough wood. Then a crushing pain in His chest, as a build-up of fluid squeezed the life from His heart.

When the soldier drove his spear through Jesus' pericardium into His heart, blood and water flowed. This was post-mortem evidence of pericardial effusion, in other words, compression of the heart leading to heart failure. Yes, Jesus died.

DISCUSS

- What do you know about the death of Jesus?
- What do the events of Jesus death mean to you?
- What confidence does the historical death of Jesus give you?

MEMORISE

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10:45

PRAY

Thank You, Jesus, that You came to die for me, so my sins could be forgiven. Help me to honour Your death with my life. Help me live a life that speaks to others of the life you bought me with Your blood. You are so very great.

#13

JESUS' RESURRECTION (EARLY TESTIMONY)

READ

1 Corinthians 15:3-7; 1 John 1:1-10

THINK

Soon after Jesus' crucifixion, the disciples began to claim He had risen from the dead. The earliest recorded creed of the church, found in **1 Corinthians 15:3-7**, says, "Christ died for our sins ... was buried ... [and] was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." This creed dates to less than a decade after Jesus' crucifixion. Biblical historian James Dunn says, "This [creed], we can be entirely confident, was formulated as tradition within months of Jesus' death". That means stories of Jesus' resurrection did not develop as legend, over time. They were the testimony of eyewitnesses.

This early creed also states the eyewitnesses were still alive at the time the message began to be preached. Paul and the apostles expected those who heard them to check their story out. They were confident the gospel would survive under scrutiny. John writes, "that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you..." (**1 John 1:3**).

Luke, in introducing his gospel, says, "those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us" (**Luke 1:2**). This is no appeal to blind faith. The gospel writers believed themselves to be eyewitnesses and were confident the facts would confirm their story. Our hope in the resurrection is based on eyewitness testimony that Christ rose.

DISCUSS

- Is the testimony of an eyewitness more or less convincing?
- What work of Jesus or act of God are you an eyewitness to?
- When did you last share that testimony with someone?

MEMORISE

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...” 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

PRAY

Thank You, Jesus, that Your death was the fulfilment of scripture.
Thank You, that your resurrection was too. Thank You, that
eyewitnesses saw You after You rose, so I can have confidence that
You are alive.

#14

JESUS' RESURRECTION

(CHANGED LIVES)

READ

Mark 14:66-73; Acts 2:1-16; Acts 7:54-8:3; Acts 9:1-19

THINK

At the time Jesus died, His followers deserted Him. But, having witnessed the empty tomb and encountered the risen Christ, they began to preach boldly. We know from history, preaching the gospel resulted in persecution and death. Peter had denied Jesus, but became a leader in the church and was later crucified for his faith. James, Jesus' brother, did not believe He was God during His lifetime. But, after encountering the risen Jesus, he believed. Because of his faith, he was thrown from the temple roof in Jerusalem, stoned and struck with clubs until dead. John, another disciple, was boiled alive in oil, survived, and continued to preach the love of Christ. After all these incidents, the disciples continued to preach.

The most stunning transformation was Saul of Tarsus. An enemy of the church, he hunted down Christians. Then he met the risen Jesus. Transformed, he committed to preaching the gospel, enduring terrible hardship and ultimately suffering execution, under Nero in Rome.

Why were these men so dramatically changed if their encounters with the risen Jesus never happened? Some have claimed their testimony was the result of a mass hallucination. But hallucinations don't work that way. People hallucinate individually, not as a crowd. These were eyewitnesses, who were willing to endure suffering and death defending the truth of Jesus' resurrection.

DISCUSS

- How has believing in Jesus changed your life?
- How confident are you in sharing the gospel with others?
- How do you explain Jesus' early followers being willing to die for their beliefs?

MEMORISE

"If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ" Galatians 1:10

PRAY

Jesus, You lived and died for the Kingdom of God. Your early disciples lived and died for the Kingdom of God. Help me, by your Holy Spirit, to be someone who lives for Your Kingdom, and, if Your require me, would die for the sake of Your gospel.

#15

JESUS' RESURRECTION (THE EMPTY TOMB)

READ

Matthew 27:57-28:15; Luke 24:1-12

THINK

When Jesus died, only John and some of the women stayed with Him to the end. After He died, two men who had followed him secretly asked the authorities for His body. With official consent, they buried Him in an exclusive garden tomb. But, three days and nights later His body was gone.

After Jesus' resurrection, the gospel was preached first in Jerusalem, the very city where He was buried. This makes the empty tomb incredibly significant. A tomb shut with a large stone and sealed with an official seal. A tomb guarded by ruthless soldiers. A brand-new tomb, that belonged to a well-known member of the supreme court, the Sanhedrin. If the apostles lied about the empty tomb, it would have been easy to uncover. But, in the city where all these events took place, the disciples preached that Jesus' had risen.

The tomb was certainly empty, which leaves the question, why? If Jesus did not rise, how did His body disappear? Those who loved Him would not have desecrated His final resting place. Those who opposed Him would not have provided evidence for resurrection claims. And if the authorities took the body, why did they not present it, to disprove the gospel preached by the disciples?

The evidence best supports one truth: Jesus was raised from the dead!

DISCUSS

- What do you think happened to Jesus' body?
- If Jesus was raised, what does that mean for you?
- When you tell people about Jesus, what can you say about the resurrection?

MEMORISE

“... if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”

Romans 6:5

PRAY

Father God, thank You, that by Your divine power You raised Jesus from the dead. Thank You, that opens for me a new life and a resurrection just like His. Help me, by Your Spirit, to walk in that new life, and leave behind the old.

#16

JESUS' RESURRECTION

(SUNDAY WORSHIP)

READ

Mark 16:1-8; John 20:1-31; Romans 10:5-13

THINK

The first members of the early church were all God-fearing Jews. These were not men trying to escape religious duties; Jesus had taught them, “unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” ([Matthew 5:20](#)). So, why did devoted monotheists, who only had one God, worship a man as the Son of God, equal with His Father? Why did Jews, who’s God-given day for worship was the sabbath, Saturday, change their day of worship to Sunday? Already faced with persecution, why did they not try to blend in and stick to the Jewish day of worship?

The early church began to call Sunday “The Lord’s Day”, because it was the day He rose again. That change happened very early, so early in fact, that John already used the phrase when writing the book of Revelation ([Revelation 1:10](#)).

This change occurred because they had met the risen Jesus, and understood that He rose on Sunday, the first day of the week. They were eyewitnesses to these things. So, despite religious and government persecution, they made the change. Sunday worship is evidence of the conviction of these eyewitnesses. As agnostic atheist Bart Ehrman says, “Their conviction on this matter eventually turned the world on its ear. Things have never been the same since”.

DISCUSS

- What do you do on Sundays?
- How often do you think about the resurrection?
- How has the resurrection changed your life?

MEMORISE

“if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Romans 10:9

PRAY

Father God, thank you that you did not leave Jesus in the grave, or allow His body to experience corruption. But you raised Him up, as the first harvest of a new life. Thank You my life comes from His life, because He is alive.

#17

JESUS' GOD CLAIMS

READ

John 1:1-18; Matthew 26:57-68; John 10:22-39

THINK

Jesus existed in history, He really died, and the evidence points to His resurrection. But was Jesus God? Some suggest this idea came from His followers, not Jesus Himself. Nowhere does the Bible record Jesus explicitly saying, “I am God, worship Me”. But Jesus made it clear He was God.

In **John 10:30**, Jesus says, “I and the Father are one”. The Jews who heard wanted to stone Him. When asked why, they said, “because You, being a man, make Yourself God”. Similarly, in Mark, the earliest gospel, they accuse Jesus of blasphemy, because He forgives sins, and only God can forgive sin (**Mark 2:1-12**).

Talking to the Jews, Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (**John 8:58**). “I Am” is an Old Testament name for God. Jesus was claiming to have existed, before Abraham, as God. Again, during Jesus trial, in Mark’s gospel, when asked if He was the Christ He responds, “I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (**Mark 14:62**).

In **John 1:1**, it says of Jesus, “In the beginning was the Word [Jesus], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”. There is no doubt that Jesus said He was God.

DISCUSS

- How important is it to know if Jesus was God?
- How confident are you that Jesus was God??
- What do you think about the miracle Jesus did?

MEMORISE

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.”

John 1:1,2

PRAY

Thank You, Jesus, for giving up the splendour of Heaven to come and die for my sin. Thank You, that though you were God, still You humbled Yourself, even to death on a cross. I will live forever, because of the life you gave. Thank You!

#18

JESUS: MAD, BAD OR GOD

READ

Acts 10:34-43; Luke 11:14-23; Mark 14:53-65

THINK

Theologian, John Duncan, once said, “Christ either deceived mankind by conscious fraud, or He was himself deluded and self-deceived, or He was Divine. There is no getting out of this trilemma. It is inexorable.” Like C S Lewis years later, Duncan was addressing the claim that Jesus was only a good teacher, not God. The argument goes, either Jesus said He was God to deceive the world, which would make Him a bad man. Or He said He was God because He believed it, but was wrong, which would make Him a mad man. Or else, He said He was God because He was. Lewis said, “let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us”.

Jesus was not a bad man. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil. No one really believes Jesus was evil. And Jesus was not mad. He taught with remarkable wisdom and morality.

As G K Chesterton wrote, “No modern critic in his five wits thinks that the preacher of the Sermon on the Mount was a horrible half-witted imbecile”.

We know Jesus wasn't a legend. So, if Jesus wasn't mad or bad, our only response to His claim to be God, is to worship Him.

DISCUSS

- What arguments have you encountered against Jesus being God?
- Who do you say Jesus was, and what does that mean to you?
- How does Jesus being God impact your life?

MEMORISE

“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.” Acts 10:38

PRAY

Thank You, God, for sending Your Son. Not a mad man, deceived into believing He was God. Not a bad man, deceiving the world with a performance as God. But the true image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. Jesus, Son of God, and God.

DEFENCE OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

#19

ONE WAY TO THE FATHER

READ

John 14:1-11; John 10:7-18; Acts 4:1-12

THINK

Postmodern thinkers like to imagine that truth is subjective. They say, what is true for me may be different from what is true for you. The logical conclusion of this belief is nothing is true and you are welcome to whatever fantasy you concoct for yourself. However, we know, from experience, that time, space and matter follow patterns and laws. Some things are true, others false. I cannot be both in Devon, Cornwall, and sat on a beach in the Seychelles. Equally, the God of the Bible cannot be the only true God, and at the same time, one of many equally powerful gods.

Every religion makes exclusive truth claims, all religions claim they are true. But, while all religions can be wrong, it is impossible for all religions to be right. The exclusive truth claim of Christianity is that Jesus is the only way to God the Father. Jesus Himself set this up. He said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”.

This may be an uncomfortable truth, when many of our friends and family hold different views to us about religion and morality. But if God is real (and He is), He must surely be the final authority for truth. We do not get to decide.

DISCUSS

- How do you know your faith in God is true?
- How would you share the truth of the gospel with others?
- If Jesus is God, and the only way to heaven, what does that mean for you?

MEMORISE

“... there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Acts 4:12

PRAY

Father, You alone are wise. You provided a way to approach You, through Your Son, Jesus. Help me to walk in His way, help me to share His ways with others who I meet. Lead me, Lord, and please use me to expand Your Kingdom on Earth.

#20

TEST OF CORRESPONDENCE

READ

Acts 3:1-16; Acts 5:17-32; Acts 10:34-43

THINK

The authors of the Bible included many details that could be tested. They mention witnesses by name, included cities and places of residence, and the dates of events mentioned in the gospel accounts. They welcomed having their claims examined, preaching boldly in the same century in which Jesus ministered on Earth. What's more, the historical information contained in the gospels checks out against other historical records from the time. The Bible is not a fantasy book. It is not a tall tale. It is an eyewitness account of true events; the accounts correspond to facts.

This is important, because correspondence is one of the tests for truth. Any belief that does not correspond to facts, may be regarded as fantasy. For example, the Islamic Quran claims Jesus did not die. However, every historical source we have, Roman, Greek, Jewish and Christian, says He did. In this case, the supposed history in the Quran, written 600 years after the events, does not correspond to established facts. Again, some religions claim men are inherently good. But the Bible's claim that humans are sinful and unable to change alone, better corresponds to the reality we see around us.

Because all that can be tested in scripture corresponds to truth, we can reasonably conclude that the Bible's offer, salvation through Jesus, is also true.

DISCUSS

- How do you separate facts from fiction?
- What are some of the facts that led to your salvation?
- If the gospel of Jesus is true, then what does this mean for you?

MEMORISE

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8

PRAY

Thank You, Jesus, that just as the early disciples were witnesses to your resurrection, so I am a witness to Your goodness and grace. Lord, please continue to show me Your favour, and fill me with Your Spirit, so I can be a witness for You.

#21

TEST OF COHERANCE

READ

Isaiah 9:6,7; Isaiah 11:1-5; Isaiah 61:1-4; Luke 4:16-22

THINK

For a belief system to work, it must have internal coherence. For example, the Christian claims about Jesus not only correspond to history, His works and message were also consistent with the scriptures that prepared the world for His arrival. The New Testament directly references the Old Testament over 280 times. Jesus' life and ministry fulfilled over 50, some say over 300, Old Testament prophecies. These range from things Jesus could control, like riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, to things He couldn't control, like where He was born, or that His mother was a virgin. He performed miracles, as you would expect God to do. The Jews expected a Messiah, Jesus came as that Messiah. This is why the apostles followed Him; He was the fulfilment of God's promise.

Contrast that to the foundational subjectivism of the postmodern worldview, where we immediately find a lack of coherence. The idea that what is true for you may not be true for me, can only be true if it is true for everyone! It's like saying "words have no meaning", this can only be true if words have meaning.

Whatever people choose to believe about Jesus and Christian faith, the system of belief established in orthodox Christian doctrine has internal coherence unrivalled in any other world religion or secular human philosophy.

DISCUSS

- What Old Testament prophecies about Jesus do you know?
- How does Old Testament prophecy encourage your faith
- How would you share the coherence of your faith with others?

MEMORISE

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” 1 Corinthians 15:3,4

PRAY

Thank You, Father God, that faith in you is not intellectual suicide! Thank You, that we can know the truth about You. Thank You for the many confirmations of scripture, and the fulfilment of prophecies in Jesus' life and ministry. You are amazing!

HOW TO DEFEND

#22

KNOWLEDGE PUFFS UP

READ

1 Corinthians 8:1-3; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Ephesians 4:1-16

THINK

At the end of this short plan, the most important lesson remains: people don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care. Paul says, if I understand all mysteries and all knowledge, but don't have love, I am nothing. He doesn't mean this the way a romance novel would mean it: 'my life is meaningless without being loved'. No! He means my knowledge is worthless and my life amounts to nothing, if, in demonstrating my knowledge, I am not acting out of love towards others.

Knowledge puffs up. Often people who know a lot look down on others. If knowledge is currency, they are rich and others are poor. But just as it is wrong to think less of the poor simply because they are poor, so it is wrong to think less of those who lack knowledge.

Love builds up. We should not use knowledge to score points over others. Our battle is not with flesh and blood. We love others when we use what we have learned to build them up in holy faith. If we can complete a gap in their knowledge, do it graciously. If we can correct their thinking and align it to the truth of Christ, do it kindly. Always use the knowledge you have for the good of others.

DISCUSS

- What is the most interesting thing you have learned from this plan?
- How could you communicate that lovingly?
- How can you show love to someone who disagrees with you?

MEMORISE

“... we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up.” 1 Corinthians 8:1b

PRAY

Father, let me have the same attitude as Jesus, who, even though He was God, humbled himself to live amongst sinful people and love them. Help me always love others, with patience and compassion, the same way You have loved me.

The journey continues in ...

