1. What is Apologetics?
2. What difference does it make if God Exists?

Sunday, February 17, 2013, 10 to 10:50 am, in the Parlor
Leader: David Monyak

St. John in the Wilderness
“Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.”

- 1 Peter 3:15-16 (NSRV)
Reference

Series Outline
On Guard. Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision

- **Week 1**: Feb 17
  - 1. What is apologetics?
  - 2. What difference does it make if God exists?

- **Week 2**: Feb 24
  - 3. Why does anything at all exist?
  - 4. Why did the universe begin?
  - 5. Why is the universe fine-tuned for life?

- **Week 3**: Mar 3
  - 6. Can we be good without God?
Series Outline
On Guard. Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision

■ **Week 4:** Mar 10
  ■ 7. What about suffering?

■ **Week 5:** Mar 17
  ■ 8. Who was Jesus?

■ **Week 6:** Mar 24
  ■ 9. Did Jesus rise from the dead?

■ **Not covered:**
  ■ 10. Is Jesus the only way to God?
Almighty God, in whom we live and move and have our being, you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until in you they find their rest. Grant us purity of heart and strength of purpose, that no selfish passion may hinder us from knowing your will, no weakness from doing it; but that in your light we may see light clearly, and in your service we may find our perfect freedom; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

- Augustine of Hippo, 354-430
“Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.”

- 1 Peter 3:15-16 (NSRV)
Questions, Challenges
“I’m spiritual, not religious. Why should it matter whether there’s a God or not?”
“The sooner we get rid of this superstitious fantasy of some Big Daddy in the sky, the better. Then, science can take its proper place as the true savior of humanity.”
“Loving kindness is my religion. Just be good to others and don’t worry whether there’s a God.”
“If there really is a God, he doesn’t care how much we suffer.”
“I used to go to church, but when I didn’t get anything I prayed for, I realized that there wasn’t any God listening.”
“How can you believe that this guy that lived two thousand years ago came back to life from the dead?! Do you expect anyone else to do that? It doesn’t make any sense!”
“Christians are ignorant, bigoted, fascists! They think their religion is the only one that’s right!”
What is Apologetics?
What is Apologetics?

Definition

- Christian Apologetics is not about “apologizing” for Christianity or Christian doctrines (doctrines = that which is taught)
- Apologetics comes from the Greek word *apologia*, which means a defense, as in a court of law.
- Christian apologetics involves making a case for the truth of the Christian faith.
What is Apologetics?

Definition

First Peter 3: 15 says, “Always be prepared to make a defense [*apologia*] to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect”

- Good apologetics involves “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15).

- We must be prepared to provide:
  - arguments and good reasons for what we believe,
  - answers to an unbeliever’s questions or objections.

- Apologetics does *not* mean we should be pumped up to quarrel or quick to get hot under the collar when confronted with disbelief.
What is Apologetics?

Is Apologetics Biblical?

- Jesus appealed to miracles and to fulfilled prophecy to prove that His claims were true (Luke 24: 25–27; John 14: 11).
- Apostles, in dealing with other Jews, used fulfilled prophecy, Jesus’ miracles, and especially Jesus’ resurrection to prove that He was the Messiah.
  - For example: Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost in the second chapter of Acts.
What is Apologetics?
Is Apologetics Biblical?

- Apostles, in dealing with non-Jews, tried to show the existence of God through God’s handiwork in nature (Acts 14:17).

- Paul in Romans 1:20: “Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made.” (NRSV)
What is Apologetics?

Why is Apologetics Important?

• Apologetics is important in:
  • 1. Shaping Culture
  • 2. Strengthening Believers
  • 3. Winning unbelievers
What is Apologetics?

Apologetics Can Shape Culture

- The gospel is never heard in isolation. It is always heard against the backdrop of the culture in which you’ve been born and raised.
  - If a person who is thoroughly secularized, you may as well be telling him or her to believe in fairies or leprechauns.
- American society has already become “post-Christian.”
  - Belief in a sort of generic God is still the norm, but belief in Jesus Christ is now politically incorrect.
Among some segments of American culture, certain Christians are curiosities – potentially dangerous curiosities – to be gawked at by normal people.
What is Apologetics?

Apologetics Can Shape Culture

- Western Europe has become so secularized that it's hard for the gospel even to get a fair hearing.
  - Christianity is for old women and children.
- If the gospel is to be heard as an intellectually viable option for thinking men and women today, then it's vital that we as Christians try to shape American culture in such a way that Christian belief cannot be dismissed as mere superstition.
What is Apologetics?

Apologetics Can Shape Culture

- Arguments and evidence will help to create a culture in which:
  - Christian belief is a reasonable alternative for people to embrace.
  - people will be open to the gospel.
  - Christians are seen as thoughtful people to be taken seriously rather than as emotional fanatics or buffoons.
What is Apologetics?

Apologetics Strengthens Believers

1. Knowing *why* you believe as well as *what* you believe will make you more confident in sharing your faith with others.
   - It will help to make you a bold and fearless witness for Christ.
2. Can help you to keep the faith in times of personal doubt and struggle.
   - When you’re going through hard times and God seems distant, apologetics can help you to remember that our faith is not based on emotions, but on the truth, and therefore you must hold on to it.
   - We fail our youth if, rather than provide them training in the defense of Christianity’s truth, we focus only on emotional worship experiences, felt needs, and entertainment – making them sittings ducks for that college teacher or professor who rationally takes aim at their faith.
What is Apologetics?

Apologetics Strengthens Believers

3. Study of apologetics can make you a deeper and more interesting person.
   - American culture is appallingly superficial, fixated on celebrities, entertainment, sports, and self-indulgence.
   - Studying apologetics takes you beyond all that to life’s deepest questions, questions about:
     - the existence and nature of God,
     - the origin of the universe,
     - the source of moral values,
     - the problem of suffering and evil …
What is Apologetics?

Apologetics Can Win Unbelievers

- Only a minority of unbelievers will respond to rational argument and evidence.
- Like a missionary called to reach an obscure people group, the Christian apologist is burdened to reach that minority of persons who will respond to rational argument and evidence.
What is Apologetics?

Apologetics Can Win Unbelievers

- We must nonetheless try, for:
  - because every person is precious to God, a person for whom Christ died.
  - The group of persons who will respond to rational argument and evidence, though relatively small in numbers, may be huge in influence.
What is Apologetics?

Apologetics Can Win Unbelievers

- Example: C. S. Lewis (1898–1963), the “Apostle to the Skeptics”
  - Rejected Christianity as a teenager for both personal and intellectual reasons.
  - Working as an English professor at Oxford in his 20’s and early 30’s, writers and friends offered him convincing reasons, first for theism, and eventually for Christianity.
  - Lewis became a Christian and began to use his intellectual and literary talents to articulate and defend a Christian view of the world, becoming one of the most influential Christian apologists of his generation.
What Difference Does It Make if God Exists?
“I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and again, all was vanity and a chasing after wind and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

- Ecclesiastes 2:11 NRSV
So What if God Exists?  
The Absurdity of Life Without God

- The question of God’s existence is an issue that lies at the very center of life’s meaning. It touches each of us at the core of our beings.
- Many philosophers, such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, have argued that if God does not exist, then life is absurd.
- The absurdity of life without God does not prove that God exists, but it does show that the question of God’s existence is the most important question a person can ask.
  - No one who truly grasps the implications of atheism can say, “Whatever!” about whether there is a God.
So What if God Exists?

The Absurdity of Life Without God

- To say life is absurd if God does not exist, means life has *no* ultimate meaning, value, or purpose.

- These three notions— meaning, value, and purpose— though closely related, are distinct:
  - **Meaning:** has intrinsic significance or importance; weight, substance, or heft.
  - **Value:** is good (or evil), right (or wrong)
  - **Purpose:** has a goal, a culminating endpoint, a defining destination
So What if God Exists?
Meaninglessness of Life Without God

- Our lives without God have no more meaning,
  - No more intrinsic significance,
  - No more intrinsic importance,
  - No more “meta”-physical weight,
  - No more “meta”-physical substance,
  - No more “meta”-physical heft,

- Than does:
  - a swarm of mosquitoes, or
  - a barnyard of pigs …
So What if God Exists?
Meaninglessness of Life Without God

- For both we and the universe still face nonbeing, the stark reality:
  - That we will die and cease to exist.
  - That the universe will die:
    - in a cold, lingering death, all structure dissipating, all information dissolving, or
    - In intolerable heat, all structure and information consumed in an unimaginable inferno,
Some atheists such as Sartre have argued that we may “create” meaning for our lives by freely choosing to follow a certain course of action, joining a certain cause (for Sartre, Marxism).

- But can we really “create” significance and importance for our lives by such a choice? Aren’t we just choosing a label (“Marxist”) to help us “pretend” we have significance and importance?

- And we certainly are not “masters” of the universe with the power to grant meaning and significance to the cosmos.
So What if God Exists?

Valuelessness of Life Without God

- If life ends at the grave, then it makes no ultimate difference whether you live as a Stalin or as a Mother Teresa.

- Since your destiny is ultimately unrelated to your behavior, you may as well just live as you please.
  - As the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky put it: “If there is no immortality … then all things are permitted.”
Atheists have argued a kind of morality could be built on the idea it’s in our best self-interest to adopt a “moral” lifestyle: “You scratch my back, and I’ll scratch yours!”

Such a “morality” admits there is no objective reason why we should be moral, unless morality “pays off” somehow in our social life.

Such a “morality” is just a strategy to “maximize our pleasure,” our sense of “feeling good.”

Those with power, people such as Hitler or “Papa Doc” Duvalier, can afford to adopt a different “strategy.”
More profoundly, if there is no God, then there is no objective standard of right and wrong.

All we’re confronted with is, in Sartre’s words, “the bare, valueless fact of existence.”

“Moral values” are either just:
- expressions of personal taste, or
- The “by-products” of biological evolution and social conditioning.
This means it’s impossible to condemn war, oppression, or crime as “evil.” Nor can you praise generosity, self-sacrifice, and love as “good.”
- To kill someone, or to love someone, is morally equivalent.

For in a universe without God, “good” and “evil” do not exist — there is only the “bare, valueless fact of existence,” and there is no one to say you are “right” and I am “wrong.”

The atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell admitted that he could not live as though ethical values were simply a matter of personal taste, and that he therefore found his own views “incredible.”
- “I do not know the solution,” he confessed.
So What if God Exists?

Valuelessness of Life Without God

- Richard Wurmbrand, a pastor who was tortured for his faith at a Soviet prison, wrote:
  - The cruelty of atheism is hard to believe when man has no faith in the reward of good or the punishment of evil. There is no reason to be human. There is no restraint from the depths of evil which is in man. The Communist torturers often said, “There is no God, no hereafter, no punishment for evil. We can do what we wish.” I have heard one torturer even say, “I thank God, in whom I don’t believe, that I have lived to this hour when I can express all the evil in my heart.” He expressed it in unbelievable brutality and torture inflicted on prisoners.
So What if God Exists?

Purposelessness of Life Without God

- If death stands with open arms at the end of life’s trail, then how can there be any ultimate goal for our lives?
  - Aren’t our lives ultimately then all for nothing?
  - How could there be any ultimate purpose, any defining destination for our lives, if only non-being awaits us at death?
- And what of the universe? Isn’t it utterly pointless?
  - If the destiny of the universe is a cold grave in the recesses of outer space, the answer must be, yes—it is pointless.
So What if God Exists?

Purposelessness of Life Without God

- If there is no God, then our lives are not qualitatively different from that of an animal. As the ancient writer of Ecclesiastes writes:
  - … the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and humans have no advantage over the animals; for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. (Ecclesiastes 3:19-20 NRSV)

- Pleasure, wealth, education, political fame, and honor in a life are but vanities in life doomed to end in death.
  - “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity” (Ecclesiastes 1: 2).
So What if God Exists?

Dilemma of Modern Man

- Human beings reside in a two-story universe:
  - In the lower story is the finite world without God; here life is absurd
  - In the upper story are meaning, value, and purpose.
So What if God Exists?

Dilemma of Modern Man

Upper Story

GOD MEANING

Value Purpose

Lower Story

MAN

Physical World
The dilemma of modern man trying to live without God:

- He lives in the lower story because he believes there is no God.

- But he cannot live happily in such an absurd world; therefore, he continually makes leaps of faith into the upper story to affirm meaning, value, and purpose, even though he has no right to, since he does not believe in God.
So What if God Exists?

Dilemma of Modern Man

- British philosopher and atheist Bertrand Russell suggested modern man had no choice but to build lives upon “the firm foundation of unyielding despair.”
In an address before the American Academy for the Advancement of Science in 1991, Dr. L. D. Rue suggested modern man has 3 options:

1. “madhouse option:” pursue self-fulfillment regardless of social coherence.

2. “totalitarian option:” let the state impose social coherence at the expense of people’s personal fulfillment.

3. the “Noble Lie” option. The people embrace a “Noble Lie” that will inspire them to live beyond selfish interests, and so voluntarily achieve social coherence.
So What if God Exists?

Dilemma of Modern Man

- The “Noble Lie” said Dr. Rue, is a lie that deceives us, tricks us, compels us beyond self-interest, beyond ego, beyond family, nation, [and] race.”

- It is a lie because:
  - it tells us that the universe is infused with value (which is a great fiction),
  - it makes a claim to universal truth (when there is none),
  - it tells me not to live for self-interest (which is evidently false).

- “But without such lies, we cannot live.”
So What if God Exists?
The Christian Alternative

- Christianity challenges this worldview of modern man.

- For according to the Christian worldview:
  - God *does* exist, and
  - life *does not* end at the grave.

- Christianity therefore provides the two conditions necessary for a meaningful, valuable, and purposeful life:
  - God and
  - immortality.
So What if God Exists?

The Christian Alternative

- Now none of this shows that Christianity is true.
- The atheist might smugly say that we have simply embraced a Noble Lie and are self-deceived.
- We will be making the case for Christianity in the coming weeks.
- What we have tried to show today is that it makes a huge difference whether God exists. If God does not exist, then life is futile and absurd.
Questions for Discussion
Questions for Discussion

- What signs of cultural deterioration do you see as a result of denial of God’s existence?
- What are the benefits of knowing that your life has meaning? How does it affect your attitude toward other people?
- If atheists, such as Sartre and Russell, believe that moral values and duties aren’t real, then how do they arrive at the values that they want to pretend are real?
- Imagine a world where everyone believed that moral values and duties aren't real, but are just subjective illusions. How would it affect:
  - Our legal and judicial systems?
  - Countries involved in warfare?
  - Our social relationships?
  - World business and commerce?