

APOLOGETICS 28 – WHICH GOD? – PART 1

OVERVIEW OF DEITIES OF THE WORLD

INTRODUCTION

Apologetics - ἀπολογία apologia

The definition of Christian Apologetics is “the information that enables a believer to provide a defense for why a doctrine is believed.”

1 Peter 3:15 – But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.

We are through two of five topics in our classes of Apologetics.

1. Philosophical
2. Evidential / Scientific
3. Theological
4. Christological
5. Bibliology

Philosophical apologetics approaches the question of God's existence from a theoretical standpoint. In the Scriptures, God has provided answers to some of these questions, specifically the cosmological, teleological, and moral arguments. Other arguments seem to be well thought out, such as the ontological, presuppositional, and Pascal's Wager, but they are not sourced in Scripture and are subject to logical failure.

The evidential (scientific) apologetic is the counterargument to the naturalistic atheistic worldview. We have used both scriptural and scientific evidence to refute the faulty pseudo-science of evolution and to defend the biblical record from a scientific perspective as well.

With these two topics established, we can see that there is a supernatural, unseen creator. But which creator is God? Is there more than one god? How can we determine this question? Is this a matter of choice, or is there objective, factual truth?

THE DEITIES OF THE WORLD

As believers in Jesus Christ, most hold to an exclusive view that Jesus and the God that is revealed in the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures is the One True God. But there is a small but significant group within Christendom that does not hold to exclusivity in Jesus Christ. Here are some examples of what they say:

What really is Christianity? How does it relate to other faiths? How is it similar or different from other religions or faith traditions?

If a Christian takes the Bible literally, the Old Testament and New Testament, he or she would be hard-pressed to be an inclusivist among world religions. If a Christian does not take the Bible literally but as a record of humankind's perception of the sacred in the world in which we live, and of experiences of relationship with a perceived power of becoming which we call God, then it becomes possible to

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embrace one's own religious traditions while still respecting the religious traditions of other cultures in other places throughout the world. A good chaplain is trained to do this. Just as two witnesses to the same event will see and describe two differently, each from the perspective of that observer, the experiences of the sacred or divine will also appear within the frame of the experience, intellect, reasoning, and emotional life of each witness.

The Christian fundamentalist or literalist has often argued that if the Bible is not literally true, and if Jesus Christ is not literally the Son of God, sacrificed for the salvation of humankind and bodily resurrected, then Christianity is a fraud. One scripture which is used to support such a position is 1 Corinthians 15, "If Christ be not raised, then your faith be useless, and you are still under condemnation for your sins. If we have faith in Christ, only, in this life, then we are the most miserable people in the world."

To take the Bible literally as God's own Word directly from Him to us is, from my perspective, tantamount to a view of nature which limits all knowledge to that which appears to the senses, i.e. from the object's surface or exterior. The notion that humankind was made in the image of God, *Imago Dei*, necessarily implies God's activity in the lives of all people and in the world surrounding each, whatever their religion, their faith, or their "lack thereof."

Even in the world's largest group in Christendom, Roman Catholicism, there is a growing perception that God is not exclusive and that "God opens heaven's doors to non-believers who obey their conscience." Now, they would still claim that the God of the Bible is the one true God, but they are increasingly open to a non-exclusive view.

Among other groups, there is a growing number who believe that the various deities are just various names for God or different expressions of God. Therefore, all gods are legitimate, and an exclusive view of Jesus is an error.

The purpose of our lessons in apologetics is for the believer to be able to withstand these types of questions/statements and not waiver. To be able to answer why the God of the Bible is the one true God. And if desired be able to express this truth to those who need to hear it.

Acts 17:16-29 – Paul, in this account, gives a clear example of refuting false deities while giving a description of the One True God. Today, society has refined its view on god(s). Most people have come to reject the Greek, Roman, and Norse gods, but many believe in a different god other than the One True God.

In future classes, we will use Paul's example of how the One True God is contrasted to the many false deities of the imagination of man. For this lesson, we will begin with an overview of the major deities of the world.

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Hinduism teaches that each soul goes through an endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. Rebirth, called reincarnation, is driven by the law of karma, which mandates the punishment of bad deeds regardless of the number of lifetimes required. It means karmic punishment, death, and rebirth can cycle for eternity.

Salvation through the Way of Knowledge comes from the realization that mental error, not moral transgression, is the root of human misery and evil. The Way of Knowledge teaches that the physical world is an illusion, and our preoccupation with it binds us to endless cycles of birth, death, and rebirth. Once we overcome our ignorance, usually through yoga meditation, we are freed from karmic illusion, lose our separate identity, and merge with the spiritual state.

Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha Gautama. He found Hinduism's beliefs unacceptable and its claims unsubstantiated. Moreover, he rejected the existence of an immortal soul. From his Hindu upbringing, Gautama kept two beliefs: karma and reincarnation. He believed karma, the driving force behind the universe, functioned automatically to create a reality tailored to each person to reward or punish them according to their acts.

Gautama believed souls cease to exist at death, but their karmic energy remains and goes through endless cycles of suffering associated with birth, death, rebirth, and karmic retribution. Gautama agreed with Hindu teachings that salvation occurs when karmic energy stops cycling but parted ways on how to achieve salvation. Neither prayer nor sacrifice brought redemption, but only knowledge.

Taoism was founded by Lao Tzu. He rejected belief in the survival of a personal soul and dismissed a heavenly kingdom. Taoism morphed into a system of ritual, magic, and alchemy. Philosophical Taoists were indifferent to death, while religious Taoists feared death and sought physical immortality.

Islam was founded by an Arab merchant named Muhammad, who secluded himself in a cave where he claimed to receive revelations from the angel Gabriel in a dream. Over the next twenty-three years, the angelic communications continued. From them, Muhammad announced there was one true God, Allah. Muhammad claimed that Jews and Christians corrupted God's word, and it was his mission to correct those errors. To reach a true spiritual state (heaven) one must be found worthy through dedication, sacrifice, and good works as defined in the Quran.

Judaism is primarily based on the Hebrew Scriptures, but the theology and principles of Judaism are based on the Talmud and other Rabbinic writings. Modern Judaism does not and cannot perform animal sacrifices and has since adopted a view of contrition and dedication as a form of sacrifice that atones for sin.

How do these religions compare/contrast to Biblical Christianity? How can we be sure that Jesus is the One True Way to the One True God?