

Week 8: Answering Common Questions (Atheism, Science, Evil)

Objective: Equip Christians to respond biblically, thoughtfully, and compassionately to three major challenges to faith: atheism, science, and the problem of evil and suffering.

Theme: Every objection to God ultimately concerns authority, meaning, or trust. Apologetics is not about winning arguments, but about faithfully explaining the Christian worldview with truth and love.

A. Introduction – 5 minutes

- Ask: What's a tough question you've heard about God or Christianity?
- Today we'll examine three common objections and learn how to respond with clarity, humility, and grace.
- Illustration: Most objections to Christianity aren't neutral investigations - they're more like courtroom cases where a verdict has already been decided, and the evidence is interpreted accordingly. (confirmation bias)
 - **Proverbs 18:13** "To answer before listening - that is folly and shame."
- Frame the lesson:
 - Atheism: "I don't believe anyone is ultimately in charge."
 - Science-only worldview: "I trust only what I can measure."
 - Problem of evil: "I struggle to trust God's goodness."
- Illustration: Imagine two people looking at the same world - one wearing red-tinted glasses and one wearing blue-tinted glasses. They see the same facts but interpret them differently. The disagreement isn't about the facts - it's about the lenses.
 - Atheism, scientism, and the problem of evil aren't just questions - they are lenses through which people interpret reality.

B. Challenge 1: Atheism – 15 minutes

Claim: "There is no evidence for God."

Clarification: Most atheists don't mean 'there is absolutely no God'; they mean 'I don't see enough reason to believe.'

Responses:

- Cosmological Argument:
 - Everything that begins to exist has a cause.
 - The universe began to exist (Big Bang).
 - Therefore, the universe has a cause beyond itself.

- **Hebrews 11:3** “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”
- Illustration: Books and buildings do not appear without authors or builders.
- Moral Argument:
 - Objective moral values exist.
 - Objective morality requires a moral lawgiver.
 - Ask: “Is something like child abuse actually wrong, or just socially disliked?”
 - **Romans 2:14-15** “Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.”
 - Atheism can explain why we feel moral outrage, but not why it’s justified.
- The Argument from Reason
 - Many atheists trust reason deeply. (Does reason itself make sense in a purely material universe?)
 - If our thoughts are the result of non-rational physical processes alone, why trust them as true?
 - Christianity explains reason because a rational God made us in His image.
 - Scripture:
 - **Colossians 2:3** “Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”
 - **Isaiah 1:18** “Come now, let us reason together.”
 - If my beliefs are just chemical reactions aimed at survival - not truth - why should I trust my belief that atheism is true?
- Design / Fine-Tuning:
 - The universe’s physical constants are precisely calibrated for life.
 - Scripture:
 - **Psalms 19:1** “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”
 - **Psalms 147:4** “He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name.”
 - **Isaiah 45:18** “For this is what the Lord says - he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited - he says: “I am the Lord, and there is no other.”
 - Illustration: Finding a universe fine-tuned for life is like finding a safe whose combination just happens to open.

Teaching Point: Worldviews are judged not only by evidence, but by explanatory power.

Key Question to Ask: “What worldview best explains reality as we experience it?”

Romans 1:20 “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.”

Remember, though:

- Some people reject God not because of arguments, but because of disappointment, hypocrisy, or pain.
- Don’t let atheism become a ‘caricature’
 - Psalm 73 (Asaph’s struggle)
 - John 6:66-69 (belief vs. offense)

Summary: So atheism isn’t rejected because Christians are afraid of questions - but because it struggles to explain why anything exists, why reason works, and why morality matters.

Transition: Once someone accepts that God might exist, the next question is often: ‘But haven’t science and progress made Him unnecessary?’

C. Challenge 2: Science Disproves Faith – 15 minutes

Claim: “Science has made God unnecessary.”

Clarification: This claim often assumes scientism - the belief that only science can determine truth.

Responses:

- Science explains how; faith explains why.
- Scientism is self-defeating (it cannot be scientifically proven).
- Laws of nature describe behavior but do not explain their origin.
- Scripture:
 - **Proverbs 25:2** – God delights in discovery.
 - **Psalm 111:2** – God’s works are to be studied.
 - **John 1:1-3** – Christ as the rational Logos behind creation.
- Science excels at studying how the universe operates now; Christianity addresses why anything exists at all
 - **Hebrews 1:3** – Christ sustains all things
 - **Acts 17:28** – “In Him we live and move and have our being”
 - Illustration: Explaining how a car runs doesn’t explain why it exists or who designed it.
- Historical Note: Many founders of modern science were Christians who believed creation was orderly because it was designed. (EX: Newton, Pascal, Francis Collins (former head of the Human Genome Project))
- What about evolution?

- Christians sometimes disagree on the mechanism of creation (some believe in evolution), but agree on *the meaning*: God is the Creator, humans are made in His image, and creation is purposeful.

Point: Science works because the universe behaves as if it was designed by a mind.

Illustration: Science is like reading sheet music. Faith asks who wrote the song and why

Teaching Emphasis: Faith and science are complementary, not competitors.

D. Challenge 3: The Problem of Evil and Suffering – 20 minutes

Claim: “If God is good and powerful, why is there suffering?”

Clarification: Distinguish:

- Logical problem (philosophical) - “God and evil can’t coexist”
- Emotional problem (personal pain) - “I can’t reconcile God with my pain”

Biblical Responses:

- Human freedom allows for love but also the possibility of evil (**Genesis 2-3**).
- God can redeem suffering for good purposes (**Genesis 50:20; Romans 8:28**).
- God does not delight in suffering (**Lamentations 3:31-33**).
- Jesus entered fully into human suffering (**Hebrews 4:15**).
- God’s nearness to the brokenhearted (**Psalms 34:18**)
- God promises final restoration (**Revelation 21:3-5**).
 - Christianity doesn’t just explain suffering; it promises its end.
 - Contrast:
 - Atheism: suffering ends... but so does meaning (for many people this isn’t theoretical; it’s deeply personal)
 - Christianity: suffering ends and justice is done
 - **Romans 8:18** “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”
 - **2 Corinthians 4:16-18** “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

If God eliminated all evil immediately...

- He would also eliminate human freedom
- And, eventually, us
- Scripture support:
 - **2 Peter 3:9** - God’s patience

- **Matthew 13:24-30** (parable of the weeds)
- A world with no possibility of evil would also be a world with no possibility of real love.

Central Truth: Christianity does not explain away suffering - it confronts it at the cross (it absorbs it).

- Other worldviews say suffering is illusion, karma, or meaningless
- Christianity says suffering is tragic *and* redeemable

Key Point: The cross proves God is not indifferent to evil.

Two things to remember:

- God doesn't always give explanations - He gives Himself.
- The answer to suffering is not an argument; it's a Person.

Be cautious: Do not lead with arguments when someone is hurting. Presence often precedes explanation (Job's friends, before they spoke).

- Try to avoid saying:
 - "Everything happens for a reason" (too soon)
 - "God won't give you more than you can handle" (misquote/incomplete version of **1 Cor. 10:13**)
- Instead, say:
 - "I'm sorry."
 - "God is near."
 - "I'm here with you."

Transition: Because suffering is so personal, *how* we respond can sometimes matter more than what we say.

E. Responding in Truth and Love – 10 minutes

Key Verse: **1 Peter 3:15** "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,"

Conversation Framework:

1. Listen – "Help me understand."
2. Clarify – "What do you mean by that?"
3. Affirm – "That's a real concern."
4. Respond – Share truth gently.

Supporting Scriptures:

- **James 1:19** “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,”
- **Proverbs 18:13** “To answer before listening - that is folly and shame.”

Warning: Winning arguments but losing people is not apologetics - it's pride.

Key Point: Apologetics works best when it's done from within relationships, not debates.

F. Application and Encouragement – 10 minutes

- These objections are common but not insurmountable.
- God invites us to love Him with heart and mind.
- Encourage confidence rooted in Christ, not cleverness.

Assignment:

- Read Job 1–2 and Romans 8.
- Write down:
 - One objection you personally struggle with.
 - One biblical truth that strengthens your faith.

Optional Memory Verses: 1 Peter 3:15; Romans 1:20; John 20:31

G. Class Discussion – 10 minutes

1. Which challenge do you encounter most often?
2. Which objection challenges you personally?
3. How should our response differ between skeptics and those who are suffering?
4. How does the cross shape the way we answer these challenges?

Next Week...

Christian Morality – Objective Truth