

MIND MATTERS

I. The purpose of this course.

Over the next nine months we will examine six of the biggest questions that have caused many to stumble in their faith or not come to faith at all!

- Does God exist?
- Can we trust the Bible?
- Where did it all begin?
- Why pain?
- One way?
- What about other religions?

Three goals are envisioned for each man who follows the course of study prepared for this year:

A. PERSONAL GOAL - He will discover honest answers to some of his own honest questions.

God gives an unequivocal promise to all who honestly seek the truth. *You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.* (Jeremiah 29:13).

This course of study has potentially a double application:

- 1) Unbelievers and skeptics will be challenged to doubt their doubts!

The One who called himself The Truth (John 14:6) always gave a warm welcome to honest seekers. God's people should do the same! The climate of Christ's church should be such that honest questions are always welcome.

- 2) Believers will be challenged to be intellectually honest.

Don't deny your doubts. Face them! Even among the apostles we find those who struggled with doubt (Mark 16:8, 11, 13, 14; Luke 24:11, 25, 37, 41; John 20:24-29).

A faith without some doubts is like a human body without any antibodies in it. People who blithely go through life too busy or indifferent to ask hard questions about why they believe as they do will find themselves defenseless against either the experience of tragedy or the probing questions of a smart skeptic. (Timothy Keller. The Reason for God.p. xvi.).

B. SPIRITUAL GOAL - He will better obey the Great Commandment.

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. (Matt. 22:36-38).

For too long evangelicals have been tainted with anti-intellectualism and notions of spirituality that somehow leave out the mind! It is time to once again join together what man has separated: heart and head.

C. EVANGELISTIC GOAL - He will be equipped to be a more effective witness for Christ.

In a multi-cultural, relativistic, secularized world, our witness will simply be ineffective if all we can do is quote Bible verses and talk about our "personal experience" with Christ. We must be ready to give reasons for our hope. Much witnessing today must be considered pre-evangelism. Before we expect someone to become a Christian, we must first convince them that Christianity is plausible.

Most apologetics throughout Christian history have been directed at the issue of credibility: "Is it true?" Nowadays, however, we are faced with the prior question, the question of plausibility: "Might it be true? Is Christian argument something I should seriously entertain even for a moment?" (John Stackhouse. Humble Apologetics. p. 38).

II. Worlds Apart.

To answer life's biggest questions involves more than answering questions. We must also address worldviews. One of the major goals of DMM this year is to enable men to think worldviewishly.

The church's singular failure in recent decades has been the failure to see Christianity as a life system, or worldview, that governs every area of existence. Genuine Christianity is more than a relationship with Jesus, as expressed in personal piety, church attendance, Bible study, and works of charity. It is more than discipleship, more than believing a system of doctrines about God. Genuine Christianity is a way of seeing and comprehending all reality. It is a worldview. (Charles Colson. How Now Shall We Live? p. xii and 14-15).

A. What is a worldview?

A worldview is a mental map. It is that filter in our perception of reality that helps us make sense out of life. A worldview is

a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic make-up of our world." (James Sire. The Universe Next Door. p. 17).

B. Basic assumptions.

A worldview is composed of basic assumptions about life and reality that are held intuitively. We know we are dealing with worldview matters when we find it difficult to explain something we just know is true: love is better than hate, God is good, marriage is between a man and a woman, the sun will rise tomorrow morning, the chair on which I sit is really there, I'm awake and not dreaming.

An illustration: A son asked his father, "Daddy, what holds up the world?" The father, thinking that his son would be satisfied with a child's answer said, "Well, a camel holds up the world." The boy looked a little puzzled but ran off to play. The next day he was back. "But Daddy, what holds up the camel?" Feeling a bit frustrated, the father tried again. "Well, son, a turtle holds up the camel." The boy walked away mulling over the answer but was soon back again. "But Daddy, what holds up the turtle?" By this point the father was desperate. Thinking of the largest animal he could imagine, he replied, "Son, an elephant holds up the turtle." By this point the boy was as frustrated as his dad. "Come on, Dad. What holds up the

elephant?" In near total exasperation, the father shouted, "Son, it's elephants all the way down!" (told in James Sire, *Discipleship of the Mind* p. 36).

You know you are dealing with worldview assumptions when you reach that point beyond which you don't know how to go. The only thing left is to **shout**, "Because! Just because!"

C. Looking at what we look through.

A worldview is like a pair of **eyeglasses**. We don't usually look **at** them. Yet we see everything **through** them.

Worldviews function much like eyeglasses. The right eyeglasses can put the world into clearer focus, and the correct worldview can do something similar. When people look at the world through the wrong worldview, reality doesn't make sense to them.... (Ronald Nash. Life's Ultimate Questions. Zondervan. 1999. page 14).

This course intends to help us examine our own worldview. We will be asked to take off our eyeglasses and examine them, that is, to look at what we look through. Perhaps they need to be cleaned... or adjusted... or **exchanged!**

D. Life's most basic questions.

There are a few questions that concern every human being. Everyone asks (and answers!) these questions (consciously or unconsciously). These answers determine our worldview.

- 1) What is really real? What is the ultimate ultimate?
God? gods? Personal? Impersonal? Energy? Nothing?
Welcome to **Philosophy, Metaphysics, Theology**
- 2) What is the nature of the external world?
Created? Result of chance? Orderly? Chaotic? Knowable? An illusion?
Welcome to **Science**.
- 3) What is a human being?
Evolved animal? A god? Person in image of God? Machine? Accident?
Welcome to **Antropology, Sociology, Psychology**.
- 4) What happens when we die?
Extinction? Reincarnation? Absorbed into cosmic ocean? Heaven/Hell?
Welcome to **Religion, Spirituality**.
- 5) How do we know right and wrong?
Intuitive? Consensus? Might makes right? God's moral law? Education?
Welcome to **Ethics, Politics**.
- 6) What is the meaning of time?
No meaning? God is working out His purposes? Cyclical? Linear?
Welcome to **History**.

E. The examined life.

George Barna and others have discovered that while many Americans claim to be born-again Christians, most do not have a consistent, biblically informed worldview. But warm hearts and uninformed heads make for a dangerous combination! Without a biblical worldview, followers of Christ may:

- Live a life contrary to what God desires... and not even know it.
- Be easily shaken when challenged by another worldview position.
- Live in spiritual frustration because life just isn't "working" the way it ought to work.
- Be ineffective in their witness for Christ.

Socrates said *the unexamined life is not worth living*. This course aims to help Christian men examine their most fundamental assumptions about life and God.

TABLE TALK

1. Describe a time when your worldview clashed with someone else's.
2. Describe a personal experience when lack of worldview training in the church produced a negative result (abandoning the faith, missed opportunity, paralyzed by doubt, anti-intellectualism, etc.).
3. Has the church been a safe place for you to wrestle with intellectual questions? With doubts?
4. Do you believe most Christians are intellectually honest? Explain.
5. What do you think Socrates was trying to say when he said the unexamined life is not worth living? Do you agree?

III. Habits of the Mind.

If we are going to keep our head and heart together and be effective witnesses in a post-modern world, we must learn to practice the intellectual virtues. (See James Sire, *Habits of the Mind* (pp. 106-125) and *A Little Primer on Humble Apologetics* (pp. 94-97).

A. A Passion for Truth.

The truth is many people are not interested in truth! Rather, they are interested in ideology, life styles, values, preferences or politics. But the Christian worldview claims to be based in the truth. In making decisions about the great questions of our day, the big question is not *Do I like it?* but rather *Is it true?* Jesus made a bold statement when he said to Pilate, "Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." (*John 18:37*).

A passion for truth will cause the Christian to be:

- Inquisitive.
- Teachable.
- Persistent.
- Humble.

B. A Passion for **Holiness**.

It may sound strange, but a pure heart is indispensable for clear thinking! In biblical psychology, we think with our hearts. And herein lies the problem. Our hearts (and minds) are corrupted by sin. We think wrongly!

*¹⁸ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who **suppress** the truth by their wickedness... For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools... They **exchanged** the truth of God for a lie... Since they did not think it worthwhile to restrain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a **depraved** mind... (Romans 1:18, 21, 22, 25, 28).*

Many who reject God do so not because of intellectual reasons but because of **moral reasons** (reasons of the heart). Many don't **want** Christianity to be true! Atheistic philosopher Thomas Nagel was at least honest enough to admit it.

...I want atheism to be true... It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a god: I don't want the universe to be like that... (Quoted in The Reason for God by Timothy Keller. P. 119).

This study will help us to understand that the great goal in life is not to conform the truth to our desires but rather to conform our desires to what is true.

A passion for holiness will cause the Christian to:

- Live a life of moral purity.
- Study and learn as expression of love for God.
- Obey the truth he discovers.
- Bring all of life under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

C. A passion for **Consistency**.

Truth cannot be compartmentalized. God's truth will apply to all of life. It cannot be regarded as only an "academic pursuit" that has no implications for his lifestyle and moral choices. The Christian will follow truth wherever it leads him. He will see connections between one area of his life and another.

A passion for consistency will cause the Christian to:

- Persevere.
- Be tenacious.
- Be patient.
- Be courageous.

D. A **compassion** for others.

The goal of Christian witnessing is not just to win the argument. It is to **win the person!** The motivation for intellectual debate must never be the love of debate alone. The motivation must be love for others. **Love** is the ultimate apologetic.

A compassion for others will cause the Christian to:

- Listen respectfully to the opinions and beliefs of others.
- Be patient when others disagree or are slow to understand.
- Express himself clearly and appropriately.

E. **Humility**.

Sadly, more arguments are probably lost by **arrogance** than by poor reasoning! John Stackhouse in his book *Humble Apologetics* (pp. 227-232) explains that the way we communicate the truth must be congruous with the truth we are promoting! In our conversation with the world, Christians should be humble in at least three respects:

1) Humble in **what we know**.

Just because we know God doesn't mean we know everything! Even Paul was quick to say, *Now I know in part...* (I Cor. 13:12). As Francis Schaeffer was quick to point out, we can know something truly without knowing it exhaustively.

2) Humble in **how we speak**.

Bearing witness to the truth should never be done with triumphalism. It's best to avoid cockiness and an air of superiority that pretends the evidence you are sharing demands a verdict (!). Show respect for others: their intelligence, their moral integrity and their spiritual interest.

3) Humble in our **spiritual experience**.

Our arguments ultimately count for little. Only the Spirit of God can change the heart and transform the mind! Paul wanted those converted through his ministry to have their faith grounded *not on human wisdom but on the power of God* (I Cor. 2:1-5). If, indeed, Christians know something that others need desperately to know,

...it is not because we are smarter, or holier, or humbler than other people are. It is just because (we believe) God has, in his mysterious generosity, given us this privilege. (Stackhouse, p. 232).

IV. Apologetics 101.

A. What is apologetics?

"Apologetics" is not telling someone, "I'm sorry I'm a Christian" (as in "I apologize"). Rather, apologetics is the name of that discipline of study that aims to **defend** and **commend** the faith.

Christian apologetics lays before the watching world such a winsome embodiment of the Christian faith that for any and all who are willing to observe there will be an

intellectually and emotionally credible witness to its fundamental truth. (James Sire. A Little Primer on Humble Apologetics. p. 51).

The word "apologetics" is derived from the Greek word *apologia* which originally described a legal defense, or a speech given in reply to a question or accusation. The classical example is Socrates' defense (*apologia*) when he was charged with preaching strange gods. The term occurs in this sense several times in the New Testament. For example:

- *Brethren and fathers, here is my **defense**...* (Acts 22:1).
- *My **defense** to those who examine me is this...* (I Cor. 9:3).
- *I am appointed for the **defense** of the Gospel...* (Phil. 1:16).
- *At my first **defense** no one supported me...* (II Tim. 4:16).

B. What does apologetics accomplish?

There are four main functions that Christian apologetics hopes to accomplish:

- 1) **Defending** the faith from attacks and misconceptions.
- 2) **Developing a case** for the faith so that Christianity becomes plausible.
- 3) **Refuting** opposing beliefs and exposing their weakness.
- 4) **Persuading** people to make a decision and put their faith in Christ.

C. Defending the faith in the Book of Acts.

The Book of Acts helps us to understand how the Gospel was communicated in the first century. Preaching was only one means of communicating the Gospel. For a good illustration of first century apologetics, see:

- Acts 17:2-4 (In Thessalonica).
*² As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he **reasoned** with them from the Scriptures, ³ **explaining** and **proving** that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. ⁴ Some of the Jews were **persuaded** and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.*
- Acts 17:17-18 (In Athens). The only substantial example of an apologetic directed at a non-Jewish audience (cf. Acts 14:15-17).
*¹⁷ So he **reasoned** in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to **dispute** with him.*
- Acts 18:4, 11 (In Corinth).
*⁴ Every Sabbath he **reasoned** in the synagogue, trying to **persuade** Jews and Greeks.... ¹¹ So Paul stayed for a year and a half, **teaching** them the word of God.*

- Acts 19:8-10 (In Ephesus).
*⁸ Paul entered the synagogue and **spoke boldly** there for three months, **arguing** persuasively about the kingdom of God. ⁹ But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had **discussions** daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. ¹⁰ This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.*
- Acts 28:23-24 (In Rome).
*From morning till evening he **explained** and **declared** to them the kingdom of God and tried to **convince** them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. ²⁴ Some were **convinced** by what he said, but others would not believe.*

D. Reasons for Unbelief.

There may be multiple reasons why someone doesn't believe. An effective witness will work to understand the **root problem** so he can make a sound diagnosis of what is hindering faith.

1. **Inadequate or incomplete** information.

Many people who reject Christianity are not really rejecting Christianity. They are rejecting a caricature or an impression they have of Christianity. It may be helpful to respond to someone who says they don't believe in God by saying, "So, tell me about this God you don't believe in. Perhaps I don't believe in him either!"

The problem: The mind - intellectual misconceptions or lack of information.
The remedy: Education, explanation, accurate information.
The goal of apologetics: To **clarify** and **explain** what the Christian worldview really affirms.

2. **Emotional wounds.**

Many find it difficult or impossible to believe because of some painful life situation. For example:

- How can I call "Father" when my father abused me?
- If God is good and powerful, why did my baby die?
- How can I trust a God Who didn't answer my prayer in my time of need?
- Why is the church full of hypocrites?

The problem: The emotions - emotional wounds and trauma.
The remedy: Healing.
The goal of apologetics: To **understand** the trauma and extend love, comfort, affirmation, personal involvement.

3. **Unwilling** to believe.

Many don't believe because they have chosen not to believe. It is not that they can't believe. They won't believe. Perhaps they don't like what the Bible says. Perhaps they don't want the Bible to be true because it would demand a change in their lifestyle. Perhaps acknowledging the truth of the Gospel would just be too costly.

The problem: The will.

The remedy: Confrontation with the truth.

The goal of apologetics: To **expose** the real cause of their unbelief. Further debate is a waste of time until the real problem has been addressed (see John 3:19-21).

V. I Peter 3:15. The Classic Text.

A. A Reasonable Hope.

The name chosen for our DMM focus this year is "A Reasonable Hope." This title comes from the words of I Peter 3:15.

*Always be prepared to give an answer (apologia) to everyone who asks you to give the **reason** (logos) for the **hope** that you have. (NIV).*

B. Text in context - I Peter 3:13-16.

¹³ Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." ¹⁵ But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. 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. ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

This passage gives the most fundamental essentials for understanding what Christian apologetics is all about:

1. The context for apologetics: **persecution**.

For the early Christians, defending the faith was not an amusing past-time. Debating theology wasn't done for the fun of it. No. Christians were hated and vilified. They were persecuted. Defending the faith was a matter of life or death.

2. The mandate for apologetics: **do it!**

Defending the faith is not something reserved for specialists and those with "higher education." Peter is addressing all believers. Being unprepared to defend one's faith is comparable to going into battle without armor or weapons.

3. The scope of apologetics: **everyone, everywhere, all the time**.

Peter is commanding all believers to “always” be ready to defend their faith to anyone and “everyone” who honestly seeks to understand what the Gospel is really about.

4. The tone of apologetics: **worshipful and respectful**.

- **Worshipful.** *But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord... (v. 15).*
Apologetics, like everything we do, should be done to the glory of God. Defending the Gospel is an expression of devotion and enables us to love the Lord with our minds. If Christ is not glorified as Lord in my life as I seek to defend the faith, then I should just keep quiet.
- **Respectful.** *But do this with gentleness and respect... (v. 16).*
The goal in apologetics is not just to win the argument. Rather, it is to win the person... to Christ and to His body. Defending the faith should never involve demeaning or belittling those who hold opposing opinions. We are called to love our neighbor, and this includes those who have different worldviews.

5. The life-style of apologetics: **holiness**.

Christians are to be “eager to do good” (v. 13), to keep a “clear conscience” and to maintain “good behavior” (v. 16). Christian apologetics is about much more than having a good argument. It is about having a good life, a holy life (1 Pet. 1:15). Sometimes our **actions** and our **attitudes** speak so loudly that others simply cannot hear what we are trying to say.

TABLE TALK

1. Look again at the five “intellectual virtues” mentioned on pages 5-8. Which virtue is most missing in your life?
2. Think about the obstacles you had to surmount to come to faith? Was it a lack of information? Emotional wounds? Unsundered will? Explain.
3. What is the most important thing you have learned today?
4. What do you believe God most wants to do in and through your life as a result of this year’s DMM focus on apologetics?

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