

24-0925wc - Transcript

24-0925wc - *Christian Apologetics, Tom Freed*

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24-0925 Wed. Class - Christian Apologetics

Transcript (0:04 - 24:19)

Transcript:

Teacher: Tom Freed

See everybody? We're plugging away at our study. So, I might finish up with this chapter tonight, and then there's one left. But the chapters are kind of locked.

I don't know if there will be another month or two or what. We're finishing up here. We're on Defeater 7. So, the Bible... The Defeater number 7 is, the Bible is unreliable and cannot be taken seriously.

Have you ever heard that? The Bible is unreliable. Yeah, that's a big one. In giving a short response to this objection, it is best to focus on the New Testament Gospels, since they provide the earliest account of Jesus' ministry.

We recommend this approach, not because the reliability of the rest of the Bible cannot be defended, but rather for the following reasons. One, our intent is to give you succinct yet substantial answers to common objections. Two, Jesus is at the center of the Bible and the heart of the Gospel story.

Critics, well aware of the importance of Jesus to Christianity, often take aim at the Gospel accounts. Finally, these accounts of Jesus can be a strategic place to start. Jesus, in a sense, vouched for the legitimacy of the Old and New Testaments.

He held the Hebrew Scriptures in high regard and personally commissioned the Apostles, who were central in the formation of the New Testament writings. If we trust Jesus as Lord, then we will certainly wish to agree with his high view of the rest of the Scripture. So that's a great point.

Jesus affirmed both the Old and New Testaments. He fulfilled the Old Testament. He quoted Scriptures from the Old Testament.

So he believed in it, and he also was the foundation of the New Testament. So we also recommend using a positive track rather than a defensive one. After listening carefully to the concerns of

someone who was skeptical of the Bible's reliability, the following points provide an outline for a response.

The Gospel writers relied on eyewitness testimony and careful research. In the early part of the 20th century, a group of scholars made critical mistakes that flattened many people's view of the

Gospels. These scholars believed the Gospels to be folk literature, analogous to the old German fairy tales.

They asserted that stories of Jesus were passed down orally by way of anonymous community traditions, and that over time the stories took on a life of their own, independent of the actual historical events they originated from. Though it was Jesus' disciples and other eyewitnesses to his mystery who communicated the original Gospel traditions, when these eyewitnesses eventually died, the original traditions were altered. This theory is roughly comparable to the telephone game.

Someone starts off by telling a secret to one person. It is then passed down through a chain of participants until the last person repeats the secret out loud. That's what some critics believe the Bible is.

I'm sure you've all played a telephone game where one person tells the original thing and it's passed through. The humorous part of the game is that the last person normally utters something that vaguely resembles what was originally spoken. In the same way, by the time the Gospel traditions were written down, they only vaguely resembled the original accounts of what actually happened.

That's what these critics say. That's what some people believe. A major problem with this theory is that many of the eyewitnesses to the events in Jesus' life were alive and active in the early church until the Gospels were written.

In *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, the New Testament scholar Richard Buckham argues that these eyewitnesses would have functioned as authoritative sources for and guardians of the oral Gospel tradition. It was common in oral societies for people to serve such a role. Returning to the telephone game analogy, it would be as if the person telling the secret listened in each time the secret was passed on from person to person, making sure it was passed on correctly.

Skilled historians who lived in that period when the Gospels were written relied on as much as they could on eyewitness testimony. We see this in the opening of Luke's Gospel, where he purposefully appeals to eyewitness testimony. And uses historiographical language of the day.

Luke 1, 1-4. This points to the great care that was taken in the book's composition. A 2nd century pastor by the name of Papias also provides information concerning the eyewitness nature of Gospels.

Papias identifies three generations of people. One, the eyewitnesses themselves. Two, the elders who sat at their feet.

And three, the disciples of the elders. Papias writes that when he was younger, in the 80s at the latest, many members of the three generations were still alive, including the eyewitnesses. By that time Mark had been completed, and Matthew and Luke had either been written or were in the process of being written.

This evidence suggests that Gospels are not only oral traditions that were passed down, that they were not simply oral traditions that were passed down and altered during the various stages of transmission. Rather, they were oral history that had been guarded by eyewitness testimony. It's a great point.

It wasn't passed down. The Bible wasn't written. A lot of these books weren't written after these people died.

They were still alive. Another important point, Buckman argues that the names present within the Gospels themselves are meant to assure the readers of their accuracy. Throughout the Gospels, figures are distinguished by their proper names.

These people were meant to serve as living guardians of the tradition. A simple but important example that can be illustrated, that illustrates this point is found in Mark 15-21. Then they can tell a certain man, Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by to bear his cross.

Here, Mark, in what is most likely the earliest Gospel written, specifically names not only Simon of Cyrene, but also his two sons, Alexander and Rufus. None of the other Gospels keep the names of the sons. They only mention Simon.

It appears Mark expects his readers to know both of these sons. But even so, why reference them by name? The best explanation is that Mark, in referencing Simon's testimony by the way of his sons, who were known figures in early Christianity, Matthew and Luke, who wrote their Gospels later, had no reason to include Alexander and Rufus's names, because they would no longer have been well known. This suggests that Mark mentioned Simon's two sons in order to point out living eyewitnesses who would collaborate to his account.

Consider also the identification of the primary witness at the beginning and end of each Gospel, sometimes called an *inclusio* of eyewitness testimony. In Mark's Gospel, we can see quite clearly that this primary witness is Peter, Mark 1, 16, 16 and 7. And this corresponds with the early tradition that Mark was dependent on Peter's eyewitness experience. Peter's name also occurs with remarkable frequency throughout Mark's Gospel.

To summarize a major point in this section, the Gospels are written too soon after the Gospel events happen. Eyewitnesses to Jesus' life were still alive and prominent in the church to be missed. That's a great point.

Most of these eyewitnesses are still alive. You know, the Gospel wasn't written hundreds of years later. It was written pretty early on.

So if anybody brings that up, that it's just passed down in our old tradition, they're completely wrong. Another point is the Gospels are too counterintuitive to be a hoax. The negative portrayal of the disciples in the Gospels, when Jesus tells the disciples that he would be killed, they don't understand.

You read through the Gospels, they don't understand a lot of things. In fact, they regularly portray the disciples as misunderstanding. As Jesus attempts to teach them humility and the importance of serving others, they argue over which of them would be the greatest.

Some of the disciples fall asleep when Jesus needs them most. At one point, Peter so misjudges Jesus that he refers to him as Satan, Matthew 16, 23. This is an odd way to portray the leaders of the movement whose message you are promoting.

Can you imagine a campaign for a movement intentionally portraying its own leadership as dim-witted and even satanic? There does not seem to be any advantage to the authors writing the stories of the Gospels like this, unless, of course, their goal is to be faithful to the way things actually happen. The Gospels seem to prize truth even at the expense of the early leaders' own reputations. Another thing is the role of women.

In the first century, women were not allowed to testify in court, and the court allowed because it was believed that they could not give trustworthy testimony on important matters. It is remarkable then that all Gospel traditions not only depict women as playing an important role in Jesus' ministry, but also as the first eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection. It would be counterintuitive to invent a story in such a way.

In the myth model for understanding Gospel formation, it would have been easy to change the details of the story to fit the first century norms, refashioning the account so that women were not featured so prominently, especially at the resurrection. However, this did not happen in any of the Gospels. The prominent role of women in the Gospels is best explained by the commitment of the early church to be faithful to the eyewitness accounts of Jesus' life.

Also, the differences are not smoothed out. The differences between the Gospels are actually an apologetic for their veracity. If the Gospel writers were colluding to deceive others, they would have sought to smooth out anything that could be perceived as conflicting.

But this isn't what we find in the Gospels. While the basic story is the same across all four Gospel accounts, the details often vary one Gospel to another. So you can read the first four Gospels and they all tell the same story, but there's a lot of different information in each.

If they were making up a false story, weren't the early Christians recognizing that such differences would fuel skeptics' questions, try to smooth them out? So differences in precision in the Gospel accounts point to the veracity of the events. Such differences are not the same as contradictions. There's a divergence between contradictions and legitimate diversity, which is what you would expect, for instance, when each individual in a family recounts events of a vacation they go on together.

So each family member would give an overlapping detail, location, transportation, major occurrences. They would provide that they were not colluding. Each tell the story of their vacation with legitimate differences in perspective.

Whether in the events they choose to share, how they summarize those events, or the order in which they arrange the events. We see and even expect this kind of legitimate diversity when people reliably recount historical events today. It is also the sort of thing we find in the accounts of Jesus in the New Testament.

We can see that there's a lot of reasons why the New Testament's legit. You know, there's a lot of good reasons for how it was written. And it was written early on by eyewitness testimony, so it is reliable.

We got this last Defeater short, so I'll finish up with that. As a Defeater, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is confusing and illogical. To the many skeptics, the Trinity doesn't seem rational.

How could three persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each be fully God, and yet there only be one God? To them, the Trinity, far from being a reason to believe in Christianity, is a reason not to believe in it because it is confusing and illogical. Though the rationality of the Trinity might not work within the hard, rationalistic framework of the Enlightenment, it is not illogical. A helpful example to consider is Alistair McGrath's account of attempting to get his mind around things such as wave-particle duality of quantum theory while still thinking with the old construct of classical Newtonian physics.

Physicists with a classical Newtonian background find quantum theory counterintuitive, yet those who are used to working with quantum theory understand its rationality even at an intuitive level. So in a similar way, the Christian Trinity will not appear rational if one presupposes the hard rationality of the Enlightenment. But within Christian theology, the Trinity makes sense and illuminates life.

The doctrine of Trinity grounds our understanding of love and relationships with the very being of God. A Trinitarian God is personal, relational, and a communal God each person of the Trinity shares in a life of the other. A belief in this Trinitarian God who created the world we all inhabit encourages an ethic of self-giving love.

Because if we're going to live in accord with the shape of things, we need to adopt a stance of availability, of openness to others and willingness to enter when others open to us. The very logic of the universe is love, grounded in self-giving love of the Trinity. The Trinity and its rationality actually illuminate our understanding of the world.

In the words of C.S. Lewis, I believe in Christianity as I believe the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because I see it in everything else. We might say that belief in the Trinity illuminates the world we live in. Most people intuitively recognize that what makes life worth living is loving relationships.

Moreover, when many unbelievers imagine what God would be like if he existed, they tend to assume he is loving. These institutions make best sense with a Christian picture of God and a personal being whose very essence is communal love. This notion of eternal love as essential to God's being differentiates the Christian conception of him from the Muslim conception.

Muslim theology emphasizes the absolute oneness of Allah. He does not exist in Trinity. In eternity past, before Allah created anything, he was entirely alone.

Because love requires an object and a relationship between two persons or more, Allah could not have been a loving, relational being before he created the universe. He had no one to whom to relate with. In order to be a loving being, Allah needed his creation.

In contrast, the Christian God, because he has always existed in Trinity, has always been a loving, relational being. His love is not contingent on creation. He is an eternal communion of self-giving, deeply intimate love.

The Christian God is eternally loving. Allah is not. It is not just other religions that the Christian conception of love contrasts with.

It also differs substantially from secular materialistic viewpoints. For if, as materialists assert, there is no God and we are simply a result of natural process, then love is nothing more than a chemical in the brain. Love is just a chemical condition passed down from our ancestors to help us survive.

In advancing a Trinitarian conception of God, the Christian view of the world offers a much stronger basis for love than any other view. Love is an ultimate reality found in God himself. And

because we are made in the image of a selfless, loving God, we are also in our very nature designed to be selfless and loving.

But we are self-centered. Instead of selfless, we act against our very nature. In our fallen, broken state, we find it difficult, if not impossible, to truly love others as we were designed to do.

But amazingly, Christ has made it possible for humankind to enter once again into the eternal reality of God's love. And extending God's love to us, he enables us to truly love others. In a world created by a triune God, love is at the very center of reality.

Trinitarian love is the logic of the universe. That's another great point, you know. And I think with Dale Tackett and one of his things, he has certain things on the Trinity and things in three, like the family.

A lot of other things in the world are based off the Trinity. But we can see that the Trinity, if you're a Christian, does make sense. You know, maybe if you're going off of the Enlightenment and their theories, it doesn't.

But the Christian, you can't, it doesn't. There's different examples, you can have three people in one. I just saw something online where it showed an egg, which has a shell, a yolk, you know.

With an egg, it has three parts. It's all an egg, but even if you separate it, it's still an egg. They come together and it's one.

But there's other good examples. You know, somebody else brought up before, like a board of trustees where you have different people. You know, all coming together and making decisions that act as one person.

I think of a car where you have like a transmission, a motor, and you know, the body of the car, you have three different things and it's one car. So, logically it can still make sense, even though it is a difficult concept. Well, moving beyond defeaters.

Of course, these eight defeaters are not the only challenges leveled against Christianity. Nevertheless, they are some of the most common objections. They can be used as examples to help you think through interacting with other defeaters.

So, Billy on chapters 10 and 11, this chapter is equipped you with trajectories for responses that you can expand on and personalize as you interact with unbelievers. Now we turn to the final chapter, where we will offer a model for making a positive case for Christianity. The last chapter is making a case.

Like I said, the chapters are kind of long, so it might be another, I don't know, it might be another six weeks. I'll let you know, I think Scott wants to do the class next. I'll let him know a few weeks out maybe.

Finish up, if there's any questions or comments. Finish with a prayer. Thank you, Lord, for this time to get together, this time to study about apologetics.

Thank you for everybody that made it here tonight. Watch over those who couldn't make it. Watch over the sick and suffering.

Everybody on our prayer list, especially Bob Jordan and his family. Watch over those on the West Side that are sick and suffering. You know all our problems and all our troubles.

Help us through them. Help us be bold and speak to others about you. Help us get back here safely at the next appointed time.

In Jesus' name, amen.