



ANSWER ME THIS
Small Group Guide
Session 1: How Can I Be Sure That God Exists?

WARM UP

1. Considering the many and various arguments for God's existence, which argument is most persuasive for you, personally?
2. As you think about giving an answer to someone questioning God's existence, which approach would you most likely use: logos (reason), pathos (feeling/experience), or ethos (authority/integrity)?

READ

1. Read Psalm 19:1.
*The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the earth proclaims his handiwork.*
 - Where in creation do you especially see God's hand at work?
 - What is glorious about God's creation, that is, what shines with the sustaining, beautiful presence of God?
2. Read Psalm 139:7
*Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?*
 - How frequent is your awareness of God's presence?
 - Evaluate the winsomeness of this argument for the existence of God: "I know God exists because I just talked with Him."
3. Read the words of Jesus in John 14:8-11.
⁸ Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." ⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his

works. ¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves."

- Share what you know for sure about God because of the witness of Jesus Christ.
- In what sense is Jesus' revelation of God the most convincing?

REFLECT

Reflect on his excerpt from C.S. Lewis' little book, *The Problem of Pain*:

Those who have not met this term (the *Numinous*) may be introduced to it by this device. Suppose you were told there was a tiger in the next room: you would know you were in danger and would probably feel fear. But if you were told, "There is a ghost in the next room," and believed it, you would feel, indeed, what is often called fear, but of a different kind. It would not be based on the knowledge of danger, for no one is primarily afraid of what a ghost may do to him, but of the mere fact that it is a ghost. It is "uncanny" rather than dangerous, and the special kind of fear it excites may be called Dread. With the Uncanny one has reached the fringes of the Numinous. Now suppose that you were told simply, "There is a mighty spirit in the room," and believed it. Your feelings then would be even less the mere fear of danger; but the disturbance would be profound. You would feel wonder and a certain shrinking—a sense of inadequacy to cope with such a visitant and of prostration before it—an emotion which might be expressed in Shakespeare's words, "Under it my genius is rebuked." This feeling may be described as awe, and the object which excites it as the *Numinous*.

1. When have you experienced a profound sense of the Numinous?
2. How significant is this experience in your repertoire of tools for defending the existence of God?

RESPOND

1. Take an inventory of your family members, friends, work associates, and neighbors. Who among them especially needs to hear a witness to God's presence in their lives? Begin to plan your approach to addressing their need to believe more strongly in God.
2. Prepare a brief two-minute response to the question, "Why do I believe in God?"

PRAY

Pray for courage to defend your faith when the opportunity next surfaces.
How can your small group support you and be in prayer for you?





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Small Group Guide

Session 2: How can a loving God allow good people to suffer?

WARM UP

Share with your group a time when God shaped your soul through suffering.

READ

1. Read Romans 8:35-39:

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:

*"For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Discuss the thought that the confidence in God's love expressed in this passage is only forged in the crucible of actual suffering. In other words, is it true that it is only in our experience of pain and loss that we are blessed with greater trust in God's goodness?

2. Read Romans 8: 18-21:

¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

- Where in God's creation today do you see evidence of its "bondage to decay?"
- How often does the thought of a new heaven and new earth free from suffering enter your mind and heart?

REFLECT

Reflect on this excerpt from C.S. Lewis' little book, *The Problem of Pain*:

When Christianity says that God loves man, it means that God *loves* man: not that He has some "disinterested," because really indifferent, concern for our welfare, but that, in awful and surprising truth, we are the objects of His love. You asked for a loving God; you have one. The great spirit you so lightly invoked, the "lord of terrible aspect," is present: not a senile benevolence that drowsily wished you to be happy in your own way, not the cold philanthropy of a conscientious magistrate, not the care of a host who feels responsible for the comfort of his guest, but the consuming fire Himself, the Love that made the worlds, persistent as the artist's love for his work and despotic as a man's love for his dog, provident and venerable as a father's love for a child, jealous, inexorable, exacting as love between the sexes . . . His love, must, in the nature of things, be impeded and repelled by certain stains in our character, and because He already loves us He must labor to make us lovable. - C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*. [Macmillan, 1962, 46-48]

- How is God's love like that of an artist toward his work? Like a master toward his dog? Like a mother toward her child? Like a spouse toward her husband?
- Have we watered down the love of God? If so, in what way(s)?
- How does this response to the theodicy problem work for you? Evil and suffering exist in the world so that we can be more fully loved by God.
- Share an experience of God's "tough love" from your own life story.

RESPOND

- Take time to journal your response to this session's question, "How can a loving God allow good people to suffer?"
- Write a note to a friend going through a tough time. In the note, use these words, "As you navigate this tough time, may you see the love of our Lord more clearly than ever."

PRAY

- Pray for courage to defend your faith when the opportunity next surfaces.
- Pray for someone who needs greater faith in the power of God's love to shape us through suffering.
- Let your small group know how they can support you and be in prayer for you.





ANSWER ME THIS

Small Group Guide

Session 3

How can I be sure that the Bible is inspired by God and completely reliable?

WARM UP

Agree or disagree? The Bible's truthfulness is matter of faith, not rational argument. Explain your response.

READ

1. Psalm 119 is an acrostic psalm proclaiming love and trust in God's Word. The psalm has 22 sections of eight verses each. In Hebrew the eight verses in each section start with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet in succession, and the psalm uses eight synonyms for "word:" word, promise, rule, law, precept, testimony, commandment, and statute.

Read Psalm 119:159-160:

¹⁵⁹ See how I love your precepts; / preserve my life, Lord, in accordance with your love.

¹⁶⁰ All your words are true; / all your righteous laws are eternal.

- How does one get to the point of loving God's Word?
- Why do you think the psalmist is so confident that all of God's words are true?

2. Read Isaiah 55:10-11:

¹⁰ As the rain and the snow / come down from heaven, / and do not return to it / without watering the earth / and making it bud and flourish, / so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, / ¹¹ so is my word that goes out from my mouth: / It will not return to me empty, / but will accomplish what I desire.

- What are some of the purposes God intended for His Word?
- Share how one of those purposes has been fulfilled in your life experience.

3. Read Hebrew 4:12:

¹² For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

- Paraphrase “the word of God is alive and active.” What does this mean to you?
- What verses from the Scriptures have lately been penetrating your heart? Explain why.

REFLECT

Reflect on this statement of Biblical scholar F.F. Bruce regarding the reliability of the Bible:

*“The evidence for our New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical authors, the authenticity of which no-one dreams of questioning. And if the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt. It is a curious fact that historians have often been much readier to trust the New Testament than have many theologians.” (F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* 1949, p. 15.)*

- Do you think it is fair that the Bible is put to a stricter test regarding its reliability than secular documents? Explain your response.
- Beyond genuine scientific inquiry, what other motivations might someone have for questioning the Bible’s reliability?

RESPOND

Take a moment to write an “elevator speech” (50 words or less) defending the Bible as the inspired and completely reliable Word of God.

PRAY

- Pray for courage to defend your faith when the opportunity next surfaces.
- Pray for someone who needs the Word of God in their life right now.
- Let your small group know how they can support you and be in prayer for you.





ANSWER ME THIS

Small Group Guide

Session 4

How can I be sure that Jesus rose from the dead?

WARM UP

Read and talk about this statement from N.T. Wright on the meaning of the resurrection of Christ? What's new here for you? Anything disturbing? Put Wright's statement into one sentence of your own.

"Here, then, is the message of Easter, or at least the beginning of that message. The resurrection of Jesus doesn't mean, 'It's all right. We're going to heaven now.' No, the life of heaven has been born on this earth. It doesn't mean, 'So there is a life after death.' Well, there is, but Easter says much, much more than that. It speaks of a life that is neither ghostly nor unreal, but solid and definite and practical. The Easter stories come at the end of the four gospels, but they are not about an 'end.' They are about a beginning. The beginning of God's new world. The beginning of the kingdom. God is now in charge, on earth as in heaven. And God's 'being-in-charge' is focused on Jesus himself being king and Lord. The title on the cross was true after all. The resurrection proves it."

— N.T. Wright, *Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters*, 2011

READ

1. Read Philippians 3:20-21:

²⁰ *But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,* ²¹ *who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

- How does Paul use Jesus' power and lordship here to explain the resurrection?
- In what specific ways do you think your glorified body will be "like his (Christ's) glorious body?"

2. Read Luke 24:9-12:

⁹ When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. ¹² Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

- Why do you think Luke wants us to know that the first witnesses to and proclaimers of the resurrection of Jesus Christ were women?
- For what reasons might one consider the news of Jesus' resurrection to be "like nonsense" (v 11)?
- Why do you think Peter (and John [John 20:3-4]) ran to the tomb after hearing the women's news?
- In what ways will the resurrection of Jesus always be a wonder?

REFLECT

Reflect on this painting by Caravaggio, depicting the moment at supper when the disciples from Emmaus recognize Jesus as alive after dying (Luke 24:30-31).

1. Describe the face of Jesus in the painting. In what ways is Caravaggio's depiction of Jesus unique among artists?
2. What emotions do you see in the painting?
3. Why do you think the disciple in the foreground is getting up from his chair?
4. Put words into the mouth of the disciple to the left of Jesus with his arms extended.



Caravaggio, *Supper at Emmaus*, 1601

RESPOND

Decide which will be stronger in your defense of the resurrection – your heart or your mind.

PRAY

- Pray for courage to defend your faith when the opportunity next surfaces.
- Pray for a deeper understanding of the resurrection of Jesus and its place in your personal witness.
- Let your small group know how they can support you and be in prayer for you.





ANSWER ME THIS

Tough Questions for Christian Apologists

Session 4: How can I be sure that Jesus rose from the dead?

1 Peter 3:15 (NIV), *But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer (Greek, apologia) to everyone who asks you to give the reason (Greek, logos) for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness (Greek, prautes) and respect (Greek, phobos).*

1. THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST AS A CENTRAL BIBLICAL TEACHING

1 Corinthians 15:17-19, ¹⁷ *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.*

From the earliest times of the church, the resurrection of Christ and his post-resurrection appearances have been central to the witness of the Christian faith. An embryonic Christian creed appears in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, showing the primacy of the resurrection in the church's first witness.

1 Corinthians 15:3-8, ³ *For what I received I passed on to you **as of first importance**: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.*

2. ARGUMENTS SUPPORTING THE HISTORICITY OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

- **Jesus' Prediction of His Own Resurrection**

Mark 8:31, *And he (Jesus) began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and be killed, and after three days rise again.*

Jesus' put His integrity as a teacher and prophet on the line with His prediction of His own death and resurrection. Had He not risen He would be discounted as a lunatic or a liar.

- **The Empty Tomb**

Mark 16:4-6, ⁴ *But when they (the women) looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. ⁶ "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! **He is not here.** See the place where they laid him.*

All four gospels present an empty tomb. Jewish leaders pushed the lie that Jesus' disciples had come and stolen His dead body. Others said the disciples went to the wrong tomb. No remains of a dead Jesus have ever been found and no tomb serves as a place of commemoration. Those who visit the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem worship a living Christ.

- **Jesus' Many Post-Mortem Appearances**

1 Cor 15:3-8 (above); John 20:27-28, ²⁷ *Then he (Jesus) said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."* ²⁸ *Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"*

Following His crucifixion, burial, and death, the four gospels and Paul's letters record Jesus appearing physically alive often and to many people (at one point to over 500) – men, women, family, friends, enemies, individuals, and groups. Though His body was in a glorified state, it was *His* body, wounded and scarred, but recognizable. The fact that the record has Jesus appearing first to women strengthens its veracity since women were not called as witnesses. One would not invent a false story and support it with the testimony of women.

- **Jesus' Resurrection Changed and Emboldened His Followers**

Acts 17:6, *"These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also."*

Thomas, James, Paul, and the apostles were transformed by seeing and hearing the risen Lord. Thomas went from doubt to belief. James, the brother of our Lord, moved from embarrassment to bold leadership in the early church. Paul went from persecuting followers of Jesus to becoming one himself. The apostles went from frightened losers to bold witnesses who "turned the world upside down." They were willing to die for the truth of the resurrection as were the martyrs who followed.

- **Emergence of Sunday as The Day of Worship**

Acts 20:18, ***On the first day of the week*** when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them. . .and he prolonged his speech until midnight.

The day of resurrection, "the first day of the week," moved the first Christians to worship on Sunday rather than "the seventh day" of rest in Judaism.

- **Uniqueness of Biblical Resurrection Accounts**

John 20:12, *Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord.*

The apostolic reports of Jesus' resurrection are early, plentiful, and very different from other so-called resurrection accounts. The Biblical narratives of Jesus' resurrection involve his physical body being raised and empirically examined, not merely rising as a spirit as in later apocryphal stories of subjective religious visions.

- **The New Testament proclamation, with Jesus' resurrection as the bedrock foundation, is that of a new creation. (N.T. Wright)**

Revelation 21:5, *"And he who seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."*

"Jesus' resurrection is not an absurd event within the old world of science and history, but the symbol and starting point of the new creation where one-time miraculous events happen and change everything."

John Updike, from "Seven Stanzas at Easter" . . . *Make no mistake: if he rose at all / It was as His body; / If the cell's dissolution did not reverse, the molecules / reknit, the amino acids rekindle, / The Church will fall.*



ANSWER ME THIS

Tough Questions for Christian Apologists

Session 5: Is Jesus really the only way to God?

1 Peter 3:15 (NIV), *But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer (Greek, apologia) to everyone who asks you to give the reason (Greek, logos) for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness (Greek, prautes) and respect (Greek, phobos).*

1. THE DOMINANCE OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

- In 2009 the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life published a major study on religious affiliation, beliefs, and practices in the United States. Significant findings include the following: was that
 - 70% of all Americans believe that many religions can lead to eternal life, including 65% of all self-identifying Christians.
 - 56% of all evangelical Christians believe that there are many paths, other than faith in Christ, to God and to eternal life.
 - Among all Americans who are affiliated with a religion, 52% believe that Islam leads to eternal life with God, 53% believe that Hinduism leads to God, and 42% even believe that atheism leads to God.
- Other more recent studies have affirmed the high value most Americans place on religious pluralism.

2. THREE KINDS OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM (Donald A Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*, 1996)

- **Empirical Pluralism.** America is a country of many languages, ethnicities, religions, and worldviews. This is simply a fact.
- **Cherished Pluralism.** Cherished pluralism goes beyond the fact of pluralism to its value. To cherish pluralism is to appreciate it, welcome it, and approve of it. It says that pluralism exists, and it is a good thing.
- **Philosophical Pluralism.** Empirical pluralism is a fact. Cherished pluralism values that fact. Philosophical pluralism demands it. It refuses to allow any single religion or worldview to claim that it alone is true. It insists that all religions and worldviews be seen as equally valid.

3. THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRISTIANITY

Christians, since the beginning of the church, have addressed pluralism with tolerance, defending the right of people to believe what they believe. They have also celebrated the fact that people “from every nation” will “stand before the throne” (Rev 7:9). At the same time, however, Christians have refused to compromise the following basic beliefs underpinning the Christian gospel:

- Truth is absolute, not relative.

- In the inspired Scriptures, Jesus Christ is the only way to God and to eternal salvation.
- The problem with humanity is its sin.
- The only solution to the problem of sin, provided by God, is the atoning work of Jesus Christ, God in human form.

4. EXPLICIT SCRIPTURAL ARGUMENTS FOR JESUS AS THE ONLY WAY TO GOD

- Jesus declared Himself as the only way to God.
John 10:9, Jesus said, *"I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture."*
John 14:6, Jesus stated, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*
- The apostles Peter and Paul, inspired writers of Scripture, both saw Jesus as the only one who could mediate salvation between God and humanity.
Acts 4:12, The apostle Peter declared, *"And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*
1 Timothy 2:5, The apostle Paul wrote that there is *"one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."*

5. THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS FOR JESUS AS THE ONLY WAY TO GOD

- Sin is the world's problem – death-causing sin. God addressed humanity's death sentence once and for all by sending his only Son, Jesus Christ.
John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."*
Romans 5:17, *For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.*
- Only Jesus, the Son of God, truly human, truly divine, and without sin, fulfills the Old Testament sacrificial system, qualifying as a one-time atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world in all of its history.
Hebrews 10:14, *For by a single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.*
- Only Jesus has conquered death by rising from it, never to die again. No other founder or religious leader has ever accomplished this.
1 Corinthians 15:21, 26, *For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. . . The last enemy to be destroyed is death.*

6. IMPLICATIONS OF JESUS BEING THE ONLY WAY TO GOD.

- We need to present our faith from a posture of humility.
- Every other world religion has "hooks" for the Christian gospel (Acts 17).
- If Jesus is the only way to God, the mission of reaching those who do not know Him is urgent. "Circling the wagons" is not an option.

*All religions and philosophies say, "This is the way."
Only Jesus says, "I am the Way." - Tim Keller*



ANSWER ME THIS

Small Group Guide

Session 5

"Is Jesus Really the Only Way to God?"

WARM UP

Which is more accurate to say? "There is no salvation apart from Jesus Christ." Or "God has not revealed another way of salvation apart from Jesus Christ."

Share your responses. Then talk about the difference between these two statements and why it matters.

READ

1. Read these two Scripture passages and respond to the questions which follow:

John 10:9, *(Jesus said,) "I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture."*

John 14:6, *(Jesus said,) "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

- What do you think motivated Jesus to make these exclusive claims?
- What do you think motivates people to deny Jesus' claims of exclusivity?
- In what ways are Jesus' claims actually "inclusive?"

2. Read these two passages and respond to the questions which follow:

Acts 4:12, *(The apostle Peter declared,) "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

1 Timothy 2:5-6, *(The apostle Paul wrote,) "There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time."*

- Put into your own words why Jesus has to be the only way of salvation.
- What negative responses are sure to follow such an exclusive statement?
- In what ways are these two statements freeing truths?

REFLECT

1. In a television interview, there was this exchange between actress Jane Fonda and the Archbishop of Canterbury:

Archbishop of Canterbury: "Jesus is the Son of God, you know."

Fonda: "Maybe he is for you, but he's not for me."

Archbishop: "Well, either he is or he isn't."

- Do you agree with the archbishop? Explain your response.
 - How does subjective or relative truth work against objective faith?
2. Reflect on this excerpt from an essay by Philip Graham Ryken in *Modern Reformation*, titled, "How Can Jesus Be the Only Way?"

Authentic, biblical Christianity has always been an exclusive religion. Just to be safe, the Roman Emperor Alexander Severus added an image of Jesus Christ to the other gods he worshipped in his private chapel. The Romans could not understand why Christians refused to reciprocate. If the emperor could worship Christ, why couldn't Christians worship the emperor? The Romans wished Christians would place their God beside all the other gods in the pantheon. But Christians insisted that in order to worship Christ at all they had to worship Christ alone. And they were willing to stand up for their conviction by playing Christians and lions at the Coliseum.

Jesus Christ refuses to have any colleagues. This is why Christianity has always seemed like such a scandalous religion (from the Greek *skandalon*, meaning "that which gives offense or arouses opposition"). Insisting that Jesus is the only way is an especially unpopular stance in a culture based on freedom of choice. If you can go to the school of your choice, root for the team of your choice, watch the cable channel of your choice, and eat the yogurt of your choice, why can't you pray to the god of your choice? Why can't religion be like the Mall of America? It is a fair question. If Christians are going to insist that their religion is true and that all other religions are false, they have some explaining to do.

- What are Christians up against in maintaining Christ as the only way of salvation?
- Does our stance mean we are intolerant of other religions?
- Agree/disagree? Jesus is the only way because He is the only solution to humanity's problem – sin.

RESPOND

Put into a single sentence why Jesus is the only way, not just one way among many.

PRAY

- Pray for courage to defend your faith when the opportunity next surfaces.
- Let your small group know how they can support you and be in prayer for you.
- Pray for someone you know who struggles with absolute, objective truth.





ANSWER ME THIS

Small Group Guide

Session 7: Is there really a Last Judgment?

WARM UP

Talk about the emotions we Christians have as we contemplate facing Christ as our Judge. What are the feelings we attach to the Last Judgment?

READ

1. Read Revelation 20:11-15, John's vision of the Last Judgment.

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. ¹³ And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

- From today's lecture, how should we understand the phrase, "the books were opened," in vs. 12?
- Explain the meaning of the words, "and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done," in vs. 13. What does it not mean?
- How did your name get into "the book of life" (vss. 12 and 15)?

2. Read Matthew 25:31-36 from Jesus' teaching on the Last Judgment:

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a

stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me."

- A pre-Christian friend shows you this passage and asks, "This reads like the people who have been charitable toward those in need will make it into heaven because of their charitable acts! Am I missing something?" How do you respond?
- Will the record of our works of love count in the Last Judgment? Explain.
- Look at these words in vs. 34: "...inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Share with your group your feelings when you read that your place in the new heaven and the new earth was set from the very beginning of creation. What does the fact that you are chosen or predestined for eternal life mean to you? (See Romans 8:28-30 for Paul's celebration of predestination.)

REFLECT

1. Read the following quote from C.S. Lewis' *The World's Last Night and Other Essays*, 1998

For it will be infallible judgment. If it is favorable we shall have no fear, if unfavorable, no hope that it is wrong. We shall not only believe, we shall know, beyond doubt in every fiber of our appalled or delighted being, that as the Judge has said, so we are: neither more nor less nor other. We shall perhaps even realize that in some dim fashion we could have known it all along. We shall know and all creation will know too: our ancestors, our parents, our wives or husbands, our children. The unanswerable and (by then) self-evident truth about each will be known to all.

- What new thought on the Last Judgment do you see here?
 - Why is Lewis' perspective on the Last Judgment so important?
2. Which of these seven questions addressed in this class is, in your opinion, most timely right now in our culture? Explain your response.
 - How can I be sure that God exists?
 - How can a loving God allow evil and suffering in His creation?
 - How can I be sure that the Bible is inspired by God and completely reliable?
 - How can I be sure that Jesus rose from the dead?
 - Is Jesus really the only way to God?
 - Why do you believe in miracles?
 - Is there really a last judgment?

RESPOND

Consider writing a legacy letter as a gift to your loved ones, explaining what you believe is ahead of you after death because of God's grace. Celebrate your eternal future with those you love.

PRAY

- Pray for courage to defend your faith when the opportunity next surfaces.
- Let your small group know how they can support you and be in prayer for you.
- In the light of the Last Judgment, pray for someone you know, whose lack of Christian faith deeply concerns you.





ANSWER ME THIS

Tough Questions for Christian Apologists

Session 7: Is there really a last judgment?

1 Peter 3:15 (NIV), *But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer (Greek, apologia) to everyone who asks you to give the reason (Greek, logos) for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness (Greek, prautes) and respect (Greek, phobos).*

1. THE LAST JUDGMENT DEFINED

The last judgment refers to the eschatological (end times) judgment that will take place when Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead, bringing believers to eternal life with Christ in a new heaven and a new earth and unbelievers to eternal punishment in hell.

2. KEY BIBLICAL PASSAGES ON THE LAST JUDGMENT

- Daniel 7:9-10
- Daniel 12:1-3
- Matthew 25:33-36, 41-43
- Romans 2:5
- Revelation 20:11-15

3. THE JUDGMENT IN OUR CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS

- Apostles Creed (Second Article): *"He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead."*
- Nicene Creed (Second Article): *"And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. And He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom will have no end."*
- Augsburg Confession (Article XVII): *"It is also taught that our Lord Jesus Christ will return on the Last Day to judge, to raise all the dead, to give eternal life and eternal joy to those who believe and are elect, but to condemn the ungodly and the devils to hell and eternal punishment."*

4. SEQUENCE OF LAST JUDGMENT EVENTS

- 1) Physical Death >
- 2) Believer's soul to rest with Christ in Paradise /Unbeliever's soul to Hades/Sheol until resurrection >
- 3) Physical resurrection of believers and unbelievers at the return of Christ in glory >

- 4) White throne, two-book judgment of both living and resurrected believers and unbelievers, believers whose name is in the Book of Life receiving everlasting life in the new heaven and the new earth; unbelievers whose name is not in the Book of Life condemned to eternal punishment in hell.
- 5) Based on their life of faith (as recorded in "the books"), Christians receive degrees of glory in the new heaven and new earth (Dan 12:3; Mt 16:27; Lk 19:12-17; Rom 2:5-6; 1 Cor 15:41-42). Unbelievers may receive degrees of punishment based on their record in "the books." (Mt 10:15; 11:22-24; Heb 10:29)

5. RESPONSES TO VARIANT VIEWS OF THE LAST JUDGMENT

- Eternal Salvation by Works or by Faith + Works
- Universalism (Theosis = each person ultimately absorbed into the fellowship and beauty of the Trinity)
- Annihilation of the Damned
- Rehabilitation of the Damned
- Last Judgment as Apocalyptic Metaphor, Not Event
- Last Judgment as Process of New Creation / Transformation
- Last Judgment as Outside of Time; in an "Eternal Moment"

There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, "Thy will be done."
 — C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 1945

SOME LAST THOUGHTS ON CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

1. Questions are the primary tools and entry paths of Christian apologists.
2. The questions apologists seek to answer can reflect a genuine, personal faith struggle, an intellectual curiosity; a rebellious animosity toward Christ and His followers; a lack of confidence in the Biblical witness; or years of spiritual dormancy. Getting to the "Why do you want to know?" is crucial for apologists.
3. Christian apologists respond to questions regarding their faith with a deep reverence toward Christ; adequate preparation; a balance of cognitive and affective responses; humility, gentleness, and respect toward the questioner; and a focus on their personal hope in Christ (1 Peter 3:15).
4. Christian apologists do not run from science, history, reason, or philosophy.
5. The beauty of the Christian faith in its art, poetry, and music is among its most winsome qualities. Christian apologists know and use the power of word and image in their defense of Biblical truth.
6. Christian apologists are not afraid to say, "That's a very good question, and I don't think I can give you a very good answer. Give me a few days, and I'll get back to you."
7. Key Scripture passages for Christian apologists to know and memorize include Genesis 1:1; Job 19:26; Psalm 19:1; Matthew 19:26; John 1:1-4,14; 3:16; 5:39; 14:6; 17:17; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21; Revelation 20:11-15.