

An Introduction to APOLOGETICS:

(Encouraged by What Is Ours)



**Bible Studies Taught during the Wednesday Evening
Midweek Services in the Fall of 2006**

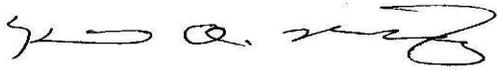
by

Pastor Kevin Redig

Author's Note: An Introduction to Apologetics

Author's Note in the works

In His grace,



Kevin Redig, Pastor
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Introduction

Individually, our confidence in the Lord and his plan of salvation runs the gamut from the rock solid certainty of years of walking with Him, to the fragile hope of the new convert. However, irrespective of our degree of maturity, all of us have been relentlessly pressured by a *world-view* in direct opposition and thoroughly antagonistic to Biblical Christianity. In a seemingly endless onslaught we are told:

- The advances of science have superseded the value of faith.
- Technology is a more visible (and reliable) savior.
- You can be personally religious, but it is unacceptable to bring it into the public arena, i.e. the secularization of our society.
- To claim to be “religious” is acceptable, but no really intelligent person would make it his or her foundation.

The list does indeed go on and on. After years of relentless attack, Christianity has been thoroughly ridiculed, and relegated to irrelevancy as a legitimate world view—first in other parts of the world, and then in this country. Now, I don’t for an instant mean that either the Gospel message, or the sovereign plan of God has become irrelevant.



Rather, I am painting what I believe to be an accurate picture of the results of spiritual warfare and unbelief.

Do you think I state my position too strongly? Let me give you one simple example, which will underscore the validity of what I am saying. The United States was founded upon a philosophical, intellectual and rational basis which is laid out in just a few concise and powerfully worded documents. Certainly, the Declaration of Independence would have to be considered one of these documents. Consider for a moment just

the first (after an opening statement) and last sentences of the Declaration.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among them are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. . .

I have taken the liberty of underlining three words in the above sentence. In today’s society they are both problematic and probably illegal for a government document. Would you not agree that in today’s post-modern society, there are no self-evident (absolute) truths to which we can appeal. Furthermore, the idea that men have been created by a creator is considered passé—not even legal to teach in our public schools—having been replaced by the more *scientific* and *naturalistic* explanation of accumulated mutation plus an expanse of time in the billions of years.

Now consider the last sentence in the Declaration of Independence:

And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, Fortunes and our sacred honor.

Again, we have a reference to the God who will protect—the framers of this grand document would certainly have rejected today’s mantra of *separation of church and state* which has been used as a muzzle and not the protector of freedom it pretends to be. I find the very last two words to be the most telling of all, i.e. the concept of *sacred honor*. Neither of these words has any real meaning among the *movers and shakers* in the day in which we live. Of course sacred has no real meaning apart from a Christian, or at least a religious viewpoint. And how about the word honor? Would you consider it to be acting upon a pledge of sacred honor for the man tasked to lead our nation in the fulfillment of this document to be involved in an inappropriate sexual relationship in the White House itself?

It is not the violation of this pledge that I find so telling, but the response. Was there recognition of sin? Can you not see the eyes rolling that I would even mention such a word? Even to this day, the mockery of this concept continues. Consider Joseph Lieberman’s loss in the recent primary for Senator from the state of Connecticut. Senator Lieberman has been a liberal democrat’s democrat for many years, and in fact one time his party’s vice presidential candidate. What happened? During his recent primary bid, the party’s support, including the very public comments of Hillary Clinton’s, was given in support of his opponent. The reason is widely held to be his failure to rally behind President Clinton during his impeachment proceedings. You see not only is the concept of sacred honor completely foreign to us, but those who reject such archaic notions will go to great lengths to punish those who still draw any line of honor.

I think I have proved my point. The source from which the greatest country of all human history was founded has been nearly silenced in the public arena in the day and age in which we live. This is of course the way of evil which ever attempts to thwart the plan of God. The question I now wish to pose to you—have we as Christians begun to believe the lie? Have we let this relentless pressure silence our mouths and keep us from proclaiming the truth? Listen, I have a secret to share with you:

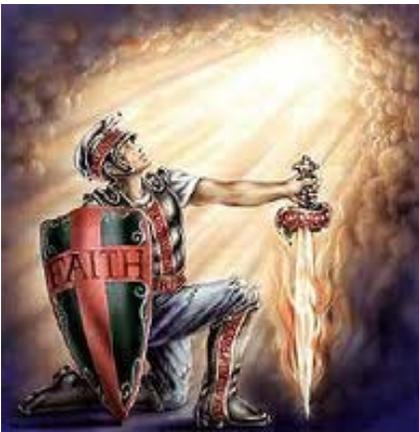
The more apostate this world becomes, the more the Christian way of Life glitters like the jewel of all jewels. That is because the darker this world becomes, the more the light stands in stark contrast!



This brings us to our topic of apologetics. The word means to give a defense or explanation for something. Within the realm of theology, it refers to the process of giving a defense and/or proof of Christianity. Apologetics is certainly meant to target the lost; however, it can also be of tremendous encouragement for the believer as it reminds us of the great treasure we have in the person of Jesus Christ. What's more, it can help stir up the boldness that we should have by virtue of knowing Him who is above all else, to that in contrast all else is just a shadow in the presence of the blazing sun! So then, the specific goal of this introductory approach to apologetics is to encourage and stimulate the believer in Jesus Christ. Brief though this introduction might be, I would prefer not to be timid, and so let's plunge right in. Here is my apologetic to you:

Christianity is Attractive, Compelling, and True

It is attractive in that it appeals above the alternatives. It is compelling in that, as we investigate and understand it, we will feel our hearts drawn to respond. It is true in that



when compared to the inherent exclusivity of all philosophical and religious systems, Christianity alone appears trustworthy as an absolute anchor for the soul.

It is extremely important for us to realize that we must be able to state a defense of the faith in a way similar to the above. For if we cannot explain what makes Christianity attractive, compelling, and true; than we cannot defend it. If we do not feel like we can defend it, why would we even bother proclaiming it! Although the apologetic is my own, I have been challenged to think like this by one of my favorite apologists, Ravi Zacharias, and so I would like to give him the credit for the

need to connect the quality of the “ready answer for the hope we profess” with zeal for proclaiming it.

We certainly have something that is ultimately defensible, and therefore logically, very worthwhile to proclaim.

I. Christianity is Attractive!

Christianity is attractive because it answers our deepest needs! As human beings, we of course, have many needs. For the sake of our discussion, let's focus on just one, our need for relational love. This is a good place to begin, as there is remarkable agreement regarding the need for love within both the secular and Christian world views. Psychologists have emphasized the role of loving physical contact during infant development; in fact wasn't it the Beatles who told us, “All we need is love!”? The Bible too is replete with examples of the foundational need to be loved.

So then let's start with the question, what does the prevailing world view of materialistic-evolution have to offer. The predominant world-view in the west can be termed as either materialistic-evolution or secular-humanism. Although I am sure their proponents would argue, they are in essence two sides of the same coin. Materialistic-evolution says that the only reality is the material universe in which we find ourselves, and thus science is the means of uncovering reality. It then follows that science's answer to the origin and diversity of life as we know it is the theory of evolution. Secular-humanism is a view which 1) Denies the existence of God; and 2) Places the responsibility for improving his lot and solving all his problems squarely on man.

Will we find this materialistic-evolution world view to be in some way superior to the Christian perspective? Let's turn first to the quiet and contemplative writer/philosopher.

"Most of us live lives of quiet desperation."

Henry David Thoreau

Well perhaps the outspoken atheist/philosopher has something more hopeful to say.

"My deepest longing is to be loved"

Bertrand Russell (a longing he admitted was never fulfilled.)

Is this it? Is this truly the depth of the materialistic world view—the spirit of our age—on complete display? In summary, the answer is "Yes!" Oh there are many coping mechanisms to deal with this plainly unlivable position, but in the final analysis this is all there is within the framework of this world-view to address your need to be loved.

Now let's see what we find within Biblical Christianity. Our only difficulty is in knowing where to begin. We could go into great detail within the Christian context of love within the marriage, family, and church relationship. However, in order to introduce the topic of love, let's look at the love of God for his children in the context of three simple questions: When does God's love for us start? What is the Scope of God's love for us? What can separate us from the love of God?



When does God's love for us start?

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in you book before one of them came to be.

(Psalm 139:13-16)

God's love is clearly portrayed as something personal and intimate in nature. He is personally and intimately involved with each one of us from conception until he calls us home to be with him. I know some of you are even thinking of Scripture which declares that God knows each one that belongs to him from eternity past. You are right, and the concept is contained in the last verse of the passage which I quoted. So God's love starts for us before we ourselves could even be aware or comprehend such a thing. He loved us before we ever thought of loving him!

What is the scope of God's love for us?

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:18-19

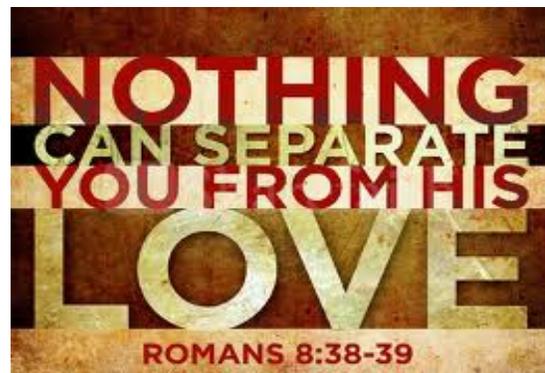
The scope of God's love for us almost defies comprehension. For, his love is: wide enough to cover every circumstance and difficulty we will face in life; long enough to cover the entire length of our lives—moment by moment; deep enough to be there even in our lowest moments of failure; high enough to include us in Him in the heavenly places. We are an object of God's love—everywhere and all the time.

What can separate us from the love of God?

As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 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. Romans 8:35-39

After providing a list of items that might challenge God's love for us, Paul concludes by saying, "nor anything else will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus." From the time we are being "knit together" in our mother's womb, through every circumstance of life, nothing can separate us from the love of God! Does this sound like a longing unfulfilled? Is this not wonderfully attractive in contrast to a life of quiet desperation?



II. Christianity is Compelling!

I would like to suggest that Christianity is compelling on two counts:

- By Virtue of the Startling Contrast!
- By virtue of an answer beyond human ingenuity.

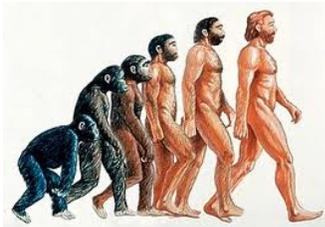
Let's investigate these concepts one at a time.

Christianity is Compelling By Virtue of the Startling Contrast!

Let's continue with the individual whom we have discovered is loved by God—from the time his/her body was being formed in the womb; through every difficult circumstance of this life; and finally in a face-to-face relationship for all eternity. What does the predominant world-view of our day, materialistic/evolution, have to say about this same individual?

What About Origin? On the one hand, the Christian claims to be known by a personal God even before birth:

"All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." Psalm 139:16



On the other hand, the evolutionary view leaves no room for a Creator-God, but dogmatically proclaims that we are the result of nothing but the impersonal forces of natural selection and mutation operating over the course of millions, in fact billions, of years. These are the words of two of this position's outspoken advocates:

"Man is the result of a purposeless and natural process that did not have him in mind." George Gaylord Simpson

"Every single event in the universe has a materialistic explanation. There is no such thing as the supernatural and you had better just get used to it." Stephen J. Gould

Let's be sure we understand the two vectors purported to be the source for the entire range of life—both as we know it and as it has been over the eons. Mutation is that occasional mistake which shows up in the genetic material of a specific organism and natural selection is that which acts to preserve the mistake through the concept of *survival of the fittest*. Thus, as the highest current form of life, we are a collection of those mistakes, which have been able to survive across the millennia. I really, really want to respond to the factual accuracy of this viewpoint. However, since that is not the topic of this investigation, I will hold to the topic at hand with nothing more than a touch of cynicism here and there.

What About Beginning? I have used the term *origin* in the above paragraph to refer to the origin of the human race, and now am using *beginning* as a reference to the personal beginning of each one of us.

You are, of course, familiar with the decade-old series of court battles on this very subject. Is the beginning of life after the first trimester, after the second? Partial birth abortion advocates would require it to be very late indeed. The current political debate over stem cell usage has not made clear the fact that a growing embryo—that which would become a human being in the proper environment—will have to be destroyed in order to harvest the coveted stem cells.

Gone is the concept of “*every day which was written before one of them came to be*”—a beginning in the mind of God that gives us a kind of intimacy associated with worth. Instead, it has been replaced by a beginning that requires the passing of some kind of test of timing, convenience, usefulness, etc.—a test that countless millions never pass. A beginning not so much of worth, but chance.

What About Flaws? If we are indeed known by God in eternity past and knit together by him in our mother’s womb, then in some way our personality, characteristics—in fact the very nature of our soul is somehow related to His creative power. In fact, even our flaws and blemishes in some way become marks of ownership and part of our nature as “jars of clay” through which the “treasure” of His power can be displayed. Not so in the evolutionary view. Flaws are things which are not worthy to be maintained in the gene pool. They will be systematically and ruthlessly selected out. When it comes to compassion on the part of evolution, there is nothing but the impersonal face of a mindless, heartless process!

Let me ask you one simple question, what teenager is not painfully aware of his or her shortcomings? How about their physical imperfections or failings in contrast to the *fit-test* of their high school classmates? What is the message of evolution—only the fit-test are worthy to survive! It is hard for any of us to fit in and feel like we belong within the backdrop of this kind of thinking.

Have you been on a high school campus lately? You will find some surprising sights. For example the students clothed all in black right down to their nail polish, collectively are known as Goths. If you look closer, you will notice death’s head jewelry and other symbols with which you will not be familiar. If you enter into conversation, you will find death a common theme. How does something like this get a grip among our young people for whom we normally think of nothing but the promise of life ahead? One answer is the need to belong and be loved is stronger than the need to belong to something inherently good. If you tell people that only the fittest survive and life has no real meaning—they might just take you at your word.

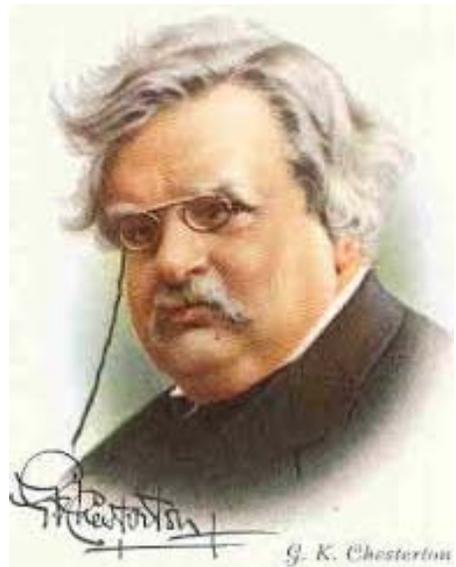


What About Relationship? The Biblical view of the marriage relationship is one whereby the marriage partners complete and complement each other in a way such that the whole is much greater than the sum of the parts. This makes the partner absolutely indispensable and, therefore, naturally something to be cherished. The sexual relationship is not an end in and of itself, but just a reminder of the completeness of the soul relationship.

How about the view of relationship inherent within the materialistic framework? To begin with, since the soul is inanimate and not material, its existence cannot even be acknowledged. This means the sexual union between a man and woman is reduced to the animal level of procreation with a bit of added pleasure. I really don't need to comment directly on the results of this approach—the evidence speaks for itself. Our public high schools hand out condoms as a matter of routine because the vast majority of our high school students, to say nothing of the college level, are sexually active. This might appear attractive to a 20-year-old college male, but it certainly undermines the potential happiness that can be built during decades of soul rapport.

G.K. Chesterton has some insightful comments on the eve of the sexual revolution—he begins with a comment on what he considers to be the misleading term “free-love”.

The revolt against vows has been carried in our day even to the extent of a revolt against the typical vow of marriage. It is most amusing to listen to the opponents of marriage on this subject. They appear to imagine that the ideal of constancy was a yoke mysteriously imposed on mankind by the Devil, instead of being, as it is, a yoke consistently imposed by all lovers on themselves. They have invented a phrase, a phrase that is a black and white contradiction in two words—free love—as if a lover ever had been, or ever could be, free. It is the nature of love to bind itself.



Chesterton continues with an analogy of what it will mean to pursue this “free-love” type of approach to the physical relationship between a man and a woman.

Modern sages offer to the lover, with an ill-favored grin, the largest liberties and the fullest irresponsibility; . . . Thus in love the Free-lovers say, “Let us have the splendor of offering ourselves without the peril of committing ourselves; let us see whether one cannot commit suicide an unlimited number of times.”

I hope the distinctive nature of the truth-claims provided by Christianity and materialistic/evolution have been clearly portrayed. (I have focused on just one relationship—that of marriage; however, there is a similar stark dichotomy if one investigates family, friends, nation, etc.) On the one hand, life originated in the mind of a sovereign creator who had personal involvement in the origin of our life, an omnipotent Creator, who none the less, knows us each personally by name. This same creator has provided a relationship with a spouse whereby we can have soul rapport and completion.

On the other hand, the impersonal and capricious god of evolution asserts I am nothing but the result of accumulated mistakes, selection, and time. My life is one of striving to survive that I might pass on my genetic material which logically promotes as many sexual unions as possible apart from personal “entanglements”.

Which truth-claim is attractive? Which one is compelling because it answers a longing of our souls?

Christianity is Compelling for Answers Beyond Human Ingenuity!

To illustrate this point, let’s return to the concept of relational love. You know, sometimes as Christians, we are just a little too shallow in describing the concept of love, especially as it relates to God’s love for us. Although the statement, “Smile, God loves you!” is logical in nature, it hardly encompasses the depth of God’s love for us, and is not always helpful for someone dealing with one of life’s tribulations. You see, the superficial is not necessarily helpful when we are dealing with the deep traumas and needs of this life.



Need-Love. We can go deeper by making use of the insights of C. S. Lewis as he broke apart the concept of love into three distinct pieces. As we do so, we will find something that not only compels a response, but is also distinctly “above our ways” as all divine thought is above the ways of man. Let’s begin with a concept that Lewis calls “need love.” Simply stated, we all have the need to be loved. Some find this in a relationship with just one person, others by virtue of belonging to a group.

Those who study the psychology of gangs, tell us that members will go through the most hellish of initiation rights, simply to achieve a feeling of belonging. Misguided as it might at times be—the need to be loved and accepted is very strong.

We have discussed this earlier; in fact, both the Christian and the materialistic world-view are in agreement on this point. However, the predominant world-view of our day tends to see need-love as an end in and of itself. Witness the very public lives of Hollywood actors/actresses or professional athletes—often there is a continual pursuit to meet one’s need for love. In this regard, need-love becomes selfish and self-centered in nature and at this point the Christian perspective moves on to the next step, which is called “gift-love.”

Gift-love. Gift-love is the concept of expressing sacrificial love for others. Need-love is foundational, and for the Christian is ultimately found in God’s love for us. However, it doesn’t stop here. It becomes a richer and fuller concept as we take our eyes off ourselves and love others, i.e. work toward their best interests. It is easy to recognize this concept within the family setting: spouses giving of themselves in order to create a whole that is greater than the sum of the parts; parents giving of themselves sacrificially in order to develop and promote the welfare of their children. In fact, breakdowns in the family are often due to the failure or abuse of the concept of gift-love on the part of one or more members.

So I am not saying that we as Christians do not have the need to be loved—to be sure we do. However, the concept doesn't stop there. As our need to be loved is met—and this is a need that at its source is met from the hand of God—we are to continue on to sacrificially love others. This is a clear command within the Scriptures, and one modeled by our Lord himself. Let me show you several important contexts for you to consider.

Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:4-11

Notice first the demonstration of gift love—Christ died on the cross to provide payment for our sin and make available the gift of eternal life. Second, note that although the passage starts with the admonition for us to practice gift-love (look out for the interests of others), the example is that of Christ himself. Amazingly enough, we are not being asked to do something simply because God has commanded it; but rather, we are being asked to do

something that God incarnate first did on our behalf. Although not our current subject, this passage makes clear that the exercise of gift-love is one of the grounds for exaltation and reward.



But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. . . It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 4:7, 11-13

Not only is God calling us to serve one another in love—but he has provided a spiritual gift to aid us in doing so. Our gifting may involve serving others in such a way that it prepares God’s people for works of service (gift of teaching), or it may be a service oriented gift itself (gift of encouragement).

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

I Corinthians 9:19-23

I included this passage because I wanted you to see what might be considered the ultimate expression of gift-love on our part, i.e. the use of our time, talent and energies to share the life-giving good news of the gospel with the lost world around us.

Appreciation-love. After discussing need-love and gift-love, let’s continue the train of thought to the concept of “appreciation-love”. Consider the simple definition: an awareness that evokes a sense of appreciation. Consider these examples of appreciation-love:

- **Wonder.** The simplest example is exposure to some grand site in nature—perhaps a gorgeous sunset that simply catches our breath and forces us to say, “Wow!”
- **Human Relationships.** In time we may experience this in our closest relationships when we come to the place where we simply appreciate another person for who and what they are.
- **Communion with God.** It is most perfectly illustrated in the heart of the Christian in tune with his Savior. Consider sitting quietly and meditating on the truths of our faith: recalling the truths of what Christ has done to save us; considering our exalted and unmerited position in Christ; in awe of God’s desire to have ongoing relationship with each of us—a sense of unsolicited and almost overwhelming thankfulness just seems to well up within the soul. This is appreciation-love.



I want to take this one step further and make sure to reinforce that the concept of appreciation-love is only truly realized within the confines of Christianity. I want you to consider for a few moments the concept of “wonder” and what it takes to create a sense of wonder in the soul of the individual.

Borrowing from G. K. Chesterton, my three children make a perfect example. At one time they were three, six, and ten, and all of them loved stories. At bedtime I might begin: "It was a dark and windy night with the rain pounding against the windows. Suddenly, there was a loud knock at the door. The three children went up to the door and slowly opened it." That's all that was needed for the three-year-old's eyes to go wide with expectation and wonder. The other two are listening, but not yet "captured" by the story. I need to continue, "As the door slowly creaked open, you could begin to smell smoke, and there on the doorstep stood a three-foot-high dragon with green scales and smoke curling from its nostrils." Now the six-year-old is fully engaged. But I must press on, "The dragon held out a foreleg with jewels on each claw. Held gently in its claw was a heavy envelop with golden writing spelling out the word Amanda (the name of my oldest child)." Now even the oldest is engaged with that sense of wonder and expectation regarding the outcome of the story.

Now what's the point of this illustration? My oldest daughter is now 25, and it is no longer possible for me to create a sense of wonder in her soul with a bedtime story. And sad to say, for those living in the grip of atheism it has been a great many years since they felt any sense of wonder thrill their soul. That is because only God is big enough to create a perpetual sense of wonder, and absent Him—we are left with lives of quiet desperation! Consider first the testimony of Scripture:

*Shout with joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of his name;
make his praise glorious!
Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds!
So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you..
Come and see what God has done, how awesome his works in man's behalf!
He turned the sea into dry land, they passed through the waters on foot—come, let us rejoice in him.
He rules forever by his power, his eyes watch the nations—
let not the rebellious rise up against him. Selah
Psalm 66:1-7*

Both theologian and scientist have through the ages born testimony to this great truth.

*Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee. Augustine
God has created a "God-shaped" vacuum in the soul
of each of us. Pascal*

This sense of wonder, when directed toward God, has a name—it is called worship.

*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.
Hebrews 12:28-29*

Need-love is certainly something that could have originated in the heart of man, but how about the extension of gift-love and appreciation-love that finds its culmination in worshipping our Creator and Savior. This is something clearly beyond the ingenuity of man—as we would expect of the plan of God. So in summary, Christianity is compelling! It draws a response of soul as we see its provision for every need of the soul of man standing like a beacon in stark contrast to the extinguished lamp of the skeptic's materialistic atheism. It draws a response as we sense it is not another religion devised by man, but divine truth revealed from God—truth that could not have originated in the mind of man, but in our infinite and omniscient God.

III. Christianity is True and its Credibility Manifest!

I would like to provide support for the veracity of Christianity on two counts:

- In its logical consistency!
- In its freedom from hypocrisy!

Let's investigate these concepts one at a time.

Christianity is True in its Logical Consistency

Relational love has been our focus in previous discussions, so for now, let's limit ourselves to that aspect of Christianity. Everything we have discussed about relational love, indeed a great deal more than we have taken the time to uncover, flows logically from God's perfect character. Consider Psalm 89:14:

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you.

Here we have a very concise statement of what is developed to a much greater degree throughout the Bible—God's character is founded upon integrity, while He acts in love and faithfulness. We have already seen how this works itself out in the life of a Christian, now let's pull it altogether:

- God expresses himself in love and faithfulness—this has led him to take a personal involvement in the life of each individual right down to personal knowledge of our development in the womb (Psalm 139:13-f). God's love is personal and intimate to the extent He knows the number of hairs on our head (Matthew 10:30).
- God is not content with us being a self-absorbed object of His love. Rather, He expects us to follow His example and redirect that love to others in a sacrificial manner, i.e. the concept of gift-love which we have discussed earlier.
- God expects us to be accountable. We can expect that love is not an isolated characteristic. It must act in concert from its foundation, i.e. righteousness and justice. Just as there is something distorted about a parent who dotes on a child with no accountability, so there would be something distorted about being an object of God's love without being accountable to his holy nature. Thus we learn to love from a basis of integrity in our marriage and family relationships.

- God expects us to conform to His nature. In the realm of relational love we will have to deal with the weaknesses and foibles of others. This is a natural part of “gift-love” and is part of our conforming to the nature and character of our great God as He constantly loves us in spite of our much more numerous failures. However, sometimes the demands of relational love can become just too much for us—that is until we rest in the perfect love of Him who first loved us. It is here that we find no shadow of turning, no stain or blemish and an object truly big enough to fill our every need for love and encouragement—thus we have come full circle to appreciate and worship the source of love.

Are these concepts true? Is the picture I have developed real? I am asking you to consider the validity of these claims based upon their logical consistency. God has revealed himself to us in His Word. Everything that I have laid out for you flows logically and consistently from what he has revealed to us. Think it through and see if you do not come to the same conclusion. And now let’s put the materialistic view of the atheist to the same test. Is it logical? Is it rational?



So in the place of God we have the blind physical forces that govern the “big bang” and evolution. How do these forces relate to the individual? Listen to the “deep” answers that come from the gurus of the materialistic mindset:

We are just a random collocation of atoms. B. Russell

Just as $1 + (-1) = 0$, so to 0 can equal $1 + (-1)$. So we exist on something that just happened to come from nothing and are just wondering about it!

Isaac Asimov (when questioned about the origin of the universe)

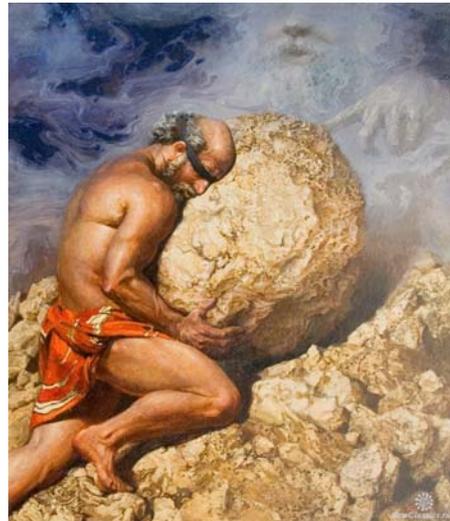
So in essence, life has no meaning! I’ve got news for anyone who thinks this is a valid world-view—**no one** can live consistently with this approach to life. There may be those who espouse such a view—but if you scrutinize their lives, everyone has areas where they associate meaning. And of course the broad cross section of humanity demands some kind of meaning. The more savvy spokesmen of materialism recognize this and have an answer.

We cannot read the meaning of life passively in the facts of nature. We must construct these answers for ourselves--from our own wisdom and ethical sense. There is no other way.

S.J. Gould

Aside from the obvious error of his last statement, I wonder if the average person realizes what they are being asked to do? They are being asked to accept an overarching meaninglessness to life, while at the same time being told to fabricate their own meaning within the details of their individual lives—kind of a pretend “meaning” within meaninglessness.

By the way, this personal fabrication must be able to stand the test of time, circumstances and routine. Are you familiar with the myth of Sisyphus? He was a Greek hero who angered the gods and as a result was sentenced to eternally roll a large rock up a hill. Each time he reached the top of the hill, the rock would roll down again and he would repeat the process—endlessly. His curse was in the sheer meaninglessness of his existence.



We are given a similar picture of life within the materialistic-evolutionary framework, and then told to find our own meaning in “the rolling of the stone up hill.” Do those who promulgate (and accept) this lie not realize that the story of Sisyphus was a description of what hell might be like? The intellectuals of our day have rejected God and instead offer man a sort of hell on earth—and mankind has succumbed to this falsehood from the intellectual pagans of our day. I see this worked out daily in my current workplace (which happens to be the academic realm). My atheistic colleagues claim life has no overall meaning, and then all live with passion for their particular area of interest. In essence, they embrace a philosophy of life that requires them to pretend what they do on a daily basis has meaning, all the while knowing it does not—and they consider me, as a Christian, irrational!

Now perhaps you are thinking, “Wait a minute, this is a just a little bit too strong!” Certainly those who embrace a materialistic-evolutionary view do not really see life as meaningless. They must have developed an alternative approach to life, which has both depth and richness to it. Famed mathematician Raymond Smullyan certainly thinks so, as he addresses this point directly.

I have always been extremely puzzled by those who have claimed that if there is no God, then life is meaningless. Is there the slightest shred of evidence that secular humanists find life less meaningful than do religious believers? I am not claiming that there is no God, nor am I claiming that there is one. All I am claiming is that life is extremely meaningful to most of those who live it--God or no God!

Perhaps I have been overzealous in stating my case. Before you decide, let's look at the rest of this particular quote.

*I cannot help but think of the marvelous haiku:
“Quite apart from our religion,
there are plum blossoms and cherry blossoms.”
Raymond Smullyan*

After stating so dogmatically that secular humanists find life to be meaningful, I am certainly interested in the evidence to support his case. Did you notice the extent of his depth and richness: “plum blossoms and cherry blossoms!” When your young child suffers and then succumbs to leukemia—plum blossoms and cherry blossoms. When 15 years of marriage disintegrates into betrayal and desertion—there are plum blossoms and cherry blossoms. As the number of your days draw to a close and death stares you in the face—don’t forget there are plum blossoms and cherry blossoms. Those who spout such pabulum, either have no real life experience, or have an extremely low view of the needs of the average person.



An individual who would pass off the above as wisdom has managed to both delude and isolate himself from the reality of life. This is difficult to do—even among secular humanists. I think the following cry of the heart is much closer to the truth among those who have no personal relationship with the God of the Bible.

The whole conviction of my life now rests upon the belief that the sense of loneliness, far from being a rare and curious phenomenon peculiar to myself and to a few other solitary people, is the central and inevitable fact of human existence . . . All this hideous doubt, despair, and dark confusion of the soul a lonely person must know, for he is united to no image save that which he creates himself. He is bolstered by no other knowledge save that which he can gather for himself with the vision of his own eye and brain. He is sustained and cheered and aided by no party. He is given comfort by no creed. He has no faith in him except his own and often that faith deserts him leaving him shaken and filled with impotence. Then it seems to him that life has come to nothing. That he is ruined, lost, and broken past redemption . . . Thomas Wolfe

This famous writer in vivid language makes clear the cause and effect of rejecting God. First there is nothing above man, but the idol his own mind forms. His knowledge ends with the boundaries of science. There is no higher being to help or provide truth. Self is seen in its powerless true light. All that is left is ruin and loneliness! If redemption ever did exist, such sustained rejection renders it no longer an option.

Of course, as Christians, we know it is never too late for redemption; however, reaping the consequences of a life of rejection has left many an empty heart feeling beyond hope. At this point, the simplicity of faith in Christ and a resultant relationship with our heavenly Father no longer feels like something that might have become passé with the advances of man, but rather the one sure anchor for our souls—holding promise for both this life and the life to come.

Christianity is True in its Freedom from Hypocrisy!



I want to develop this train of thought by taking a look at John 18:37, which in context, is part of the dialogue between Jesus and Pilate just prior to the crucifixion.

“You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.

Everyone on the side of truth listens to me. (emphasis mine)

The last sentence in this quote is both very clear and dogmatically stated. Jesus states it in the positive manner—those on the side of truth listen to Him. This same statement can also be stated in the negative—those who are not interested in the truth, will also as a matter of course reject the person and work of Christ. Think this through carefully, as it reveals the real crux of the day and age in which we live. The real issue is not one of the evidence as it relates to the truth, but of a personal agenda to go one’s own way. Naturalism is just a smoke screen that the academic heathens of our day have thrown up to hide their real agenda—that of satisfying the appetite of self. This cover-up is just a manifestation of rejection of the truth regarding the condition and needs of mankind.

Let me develop this for you. We can start with the response of famed agnostic Bertrand Russell. Although technically an agnostic holds the position that you can’t know one way or the other whether God exists, Russell argued vehemently against the existence of God. He was for all practical purposes a functional atheist and claimed the title of agnostic just to avoid the philosophical pitfalls of declaring God does not exist. Today’s secular-humanists have no such hesitancy. When asked what he would say to God if after he died he discovered he was wrong—and God really did exist. Bertrand Russell’s answer was the immediate quip:

I’ll tell God he didn’t give me enough evidence to believe.

A flip response, which no doubt delighted his supporters in the audience. I think he will be much less flippant on the day he comes face to face with our Lord at the Great White Throne. Maybe Mr. Russell really felt this way. Maybe one of the great minds of the 20th century was unaware of (or gave no thought to) the balances of forces that had to have occurred for our universe to form; or the intricate and irreducibly complex activity within a living cell; or most importantly of all the evidence supporting the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. On the other hand, perhaps this was just his way of allowing himself to pursue his own personal agenda.

Let's continue with a quote by Stephen Jay Gould.

We are here because one odd group of fishes had a peculiar fin anatomy that could transform into legs. . . We may yearn for a "higher" answer—but none exists. This explanation, though superficially troubling, if not terrifying, is ultimately liberating. . .

What could it be that would make the replacement of a personal creator with a cruel impersonal force "liberating"? Let's continue with a thought by another one of the great thinkers of the 20th century, Aldous Huxley.

For myself, as, no doubt, for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation. The liberation we desired was simultaneously liberation from a certain political and economic system and liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom; . . . There was one admirably simple method of confuting these people (Christians) and at the same time justifying ourselves. . . We could deny that the world had any meaning whatsoever.

It is somewhat refreshing to at least encounter an honest pagan. Mr. Huxley admits what is true of all who have rejected God. They do not do so on the basis of evidence; on the contrary, they do so to escape the demands of a holy God. A meaningless universe can not possibly require anything moral of the individual, and so men have the license to do what they want.

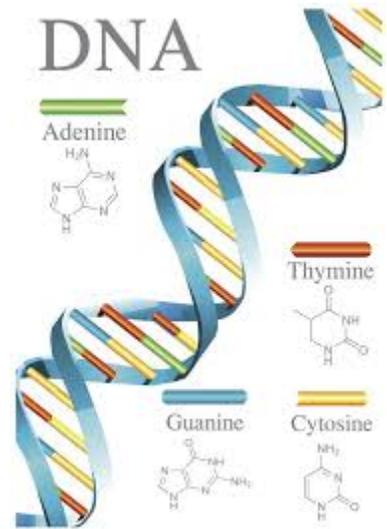
So in summary, denying God is a means of making self the center of one's existence. Naturalism is just the tool used to put God out of the picture—it doesn't have to be true, just an excuse, and the millions who have bought the lie are caught up in this web of hypocrisy, some intentionally and some unknowingly. I remind you that such men and women are not on the side of "truth."

Now it is not as though God has been surprised with a "novel" approach. On the contrary, he has seen it repeated many times throughout human history and clearly delineated the real issues in the first chapter of Romans.

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 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 men are without excuse.

Romans 1:18-20

We begin with a category of people who suppress the truth. In the context, the truth being suppressed is that regarding the existence and character of God. Furthermore, God declares that claiming ignorance about the existence of God is not an acceptable excuse, for the nature of God is clearly visible in the created order. Donald Watson and Francis Crick, the co-discoverers of the structure of DNA are both anti-God in perspective. Based upon their work, the scientific community has used our increasing understanding of DNA to push the need for a creator God aside—for you see the secret of life is now claimed to reside solely in the DNA. And yet when questioned about the origin of the tremendous amount of information that is stored in our DNA, Francis Crick, Nobel prize winner, suggests that it must have been sent to earth by aliens.



Does not this bring to mind the Scripture, “always learning, but never able to acknowledge the truth”? (2 Timothy 3:7) or this apt description from Romans:

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. . . Romans 1:21

Here is the essence of man’s rejection of God. There is no question, the secular-humanists of our day know God exists—they just do not want to give him thanks or the glory due His Name. For you see the existence of a sovereign God as described in the Bible, demands a response on the part of man. Rebellious man simply does not want to “owe” God anything, and so collectively mankind has historically chosen a series of lame substitutions. Currently, that happens to be the evolutionary-materialistic mindset of the day and age in which we live. It doesn’t have to be a good explanation nor does it have to be well supported by the evidence. It just needs to give man an excuse, a thin veneer behind which to hide his real motives.

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

Romans 1:24-25

If the secular-materialism of our day is not serving created things—than I don’t know what is! Have we not experienced a radical shift in this country away from traditional sexual mores and toward license of all kinds? Our society is simply reaping what has been sown, and the remainder of the passage in Romans describes in detail the judgment that we are in the process of experiencing as the result of our wholesale rejection of God as a nation.

(By the way, I do not have a solely gloom and doom outlook—I think the depravity and subsequent emptiness of the day in which we live makes a great backdrop for the startling truth of the Gospel. However I am convinced (and this isn't the first time in history it happened) that the truth of Romans chapter 1 is being demonstrated in the day in which we live. Let me give you a simple example. All three high schools in proximity to our local fellowship, have a school supported Gay and Lesbian Club for students. Was this true when you were a high school student? Our national rejection of God is leading us to embrace on a societal level, what no amount of "tolerance" can ever change from its Biblical label of "unnatural relations.")

All of this under the guise of "liberation"! As we have seen, a liberation to pursue sexual license, political agendas, and I might add science without moral restraints. Just what does such a liberated society look like? The cruel reality is that a life spent suppressing the truth, pursuing one's self agenda—with no room for thanks or praise—leads to a singular outcome which is best summarized in the words of one of its chief advocates.

*. . . the only sensible posture toward life is one of unyielding despair—
anything else is merely a seduction of the mind.*

B. Russell

The result—despair! However, notice how, even when facing the consequences of their choices, the prophets of materialism will seek to deny any other option to their fellow human beings. The words of Jesus ring true, those who do not listen to His words are not on the side of truth—bluntly spoken these men are liars.

The Choice Before All Mankind

Let me leave you with one final way of looking at the choice before all mankind—in our day and age it is the choice between the truth of the Gospel and that of evolutionary-materialism.

On the one hand, we have the choice expressed by the main character in *The Stranger* by Albert Camus. Near the end of the book, the main character is about to be executed for his crimes. A chaplain is attempting to speak to this man about his need for God. However the condemned man shows absolutely no interest. In frustration, the chaplain in essence asks, "Don't you care about what is to come? Don't you care about God." The reply of the condemned man is not only sad, but the height of rebellious arrogance. His response, "As for God, I don't know whether he exists or not. It is just that I don't really care", and in typical existential fashion, the book ends on a note of despair.

Nice picture—a life of despair followed by telling the creator of this universe you don't really care about His existence one way or the other. Has man become so arrogant that he really thinks that he will be able to hold that attitude for even one second after this life is over. There are many who are going to find out that there exists a whole range of existence beyond apathy.

On the other hand, I would like you to consider something commonly referred to as “Pascal’s Wager.” He lays out the call to the Christian Life in an interesting and thought provoking way. He begins by saying that if we believe in God (trust in Him and His offer of eternal life) and are right, than we have gained everything. If we believe and are wrong, we have lost nothing. If we fail to believe (in other words reject the gospel because we don’t think it is true) and are right, then again we have lost nothing (and can simply settle into the despair that is our lot). If on the other hand we reject the Gospel and are wrong, we have made a kind of mistake from which there is no recovery.

PASCAL'S WAGER

	YOU'RE RIGHT!	YOU'RE WRONG!
BELIEF	ETERNAL JOY	NOTHING
ATHEISM	NOTHING	ETERNAL SUFFERING

Now you have to realize that Pascal was not suggesting solely an analysis of the odds with the best option of winning. Rather, he was making an existential argument to match the spirit of the day. The Christian has indeed found the answers to the meaning of life in love, service, and worship—assuming of course Christianity is true. What’s more, the existential push is to live with passion for the moment and find your own meaning to life. Even within this context, the Christian can say—“I’ve found that meaning.”

Pascal’s wager is really an admonition to all to “taste and see that the Lord is good.”(Psalm 34:8) And, this is my admonitions to you:

Christianity is attractive, compelling and true.

Come and drink deep of the living water offered by our Lord and Savior. Do not be afraid of the hollow arguments of the spirit of this age, but hold fast to the message of the Gospel knowing that you are on the side of truth. Be bold as those who hold the brightest of lights to a generation that is lost and groping about in the dark. And all God’s people say. . .

VISTOSO Community Church

OUR PURPOSE

The purpose of Vistoso Community Church
is to bring glory to God by completing
the work He has given us to do.

John 17:4

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to be used by God to help
the lost receive eternal life,
and those with eternal life to grow
in grace and knowledge.

OUR CORE VALUES

- Christ is the only Lord and Savior. Acts 2:36
- The Bible is the inspired word of God. II Timothy 3:16-17
- We honor God through traditional worship: Psalm 19:14
- Our loving fellowship strengthens us. Hebrews 10:24-25
- Seeking the lost is our commission. Matthew 28:19-20
- The principles of divine establishment are God given.
Nehemiah. 4:14



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