

Syllabus: Persuasive Faith

Trinity Baptist Church
2019-20

Responsibilities

In class: Take notes. Participate in discussion, and ask questions.

Weekly: Do the review sheet. Jot down any questions you have to ask in class.

Reading: Select at least one book to read this year (more if you're interested or like to read) from the list of Suggested Readings, read it, share briefly with the class about it (see tips).

Subject Modules

Module 1: INTRODUCTION (3 weeks)

Organization of our Campus Group (Class). The subject and purposes of the class. What the class is and what it is not. Class objectives. Class participation. What is apologetics? What it means to represent Christ as an apologist. The spiritual life of a Christian apologist. Objections to doing apologetics and reasons for doing it. The role of faith and the role of reason in the Christian faith. Developments in apologetics.

Module 2: EPISTEMOLOGICAL ISSUES (About knowing) (3 weeks)

What does it mean to “know” something? How we know what we know. Justified belief. The relationship between believing and knowing. Necessary epistemological assumptions. Justified True Belief (JTB). What is truth? How we know Christianity is true. Skepticism. Postmodernism. Sources and kinds of knowledge. Evidence bases for belief and knowledge. Role of the Holy Spirit in knowing. Revelation. Preliminary thoughts on logic.

Module 3: PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES (8 weeks)

Understanding logic and argumentation. The difference between deductive, inductive and abductive reasoning and why it's important. Identifying and avoiding logical fallacies. Trends towards natural philosophy among contemporary philosophers. The existence of God: arguments for and against. The nature of God. What we mean by a “necessary being.” A God of the gaps? Causes: kinds of causes, uncaused cause, infinite regress. Atheism/naturalism's misperceptions about the nature of God. Nature of humanness: dualism vs. physicalism. Free agency. Origin of morality. The problem of evil, suffering, and pain.

Module 4: WORLDVIEW ISSUES (5 weeks)

Understanding worldviews and their importance. Theism. The monotheistic religions: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Islam's similarities with, and contrasts to Christianity. Monotheism vs. polytheism. Monotheism and the Trinity. Theism vs. deism. Deism's influence in history and Western culture. Pantheism. Religious pluralism. The Enlightenment: from deism to atheism. Atheism and naturalism: its implications, the New Atheists, arguments against God, source of morality, can atheists be good people?.

Module 5: SCIENCE ISSUES (6 weeks)

What is science? Science vs. Scientism. Philosophical assumptions of science and of scientism. Limits of science. Science and the Bible. Christianity's relationship to science—theologically and historically (incl. Copernicus, Galileo, Darwinism, etc.). Reductionism: methodological, epistemological, and ontological. The issue of causes. Observational and historical science. Evolution and creation. Cosmological issues: Big Bang, alternate cosmologies. Science and faith in God. "God of the Gaps." Science and the origins of life, morality and religious belief, self-consciousness, information/language/code. Intelligent design. Fine tuning. The anthropic principle. Laws of nature and miracles/supernatural events. Benedict Spinoza, William Paley, David Hume and the teleological (design) argument.

Module 6: AUTHORITY ISSUES (the Bible) (5 weeks)

History of the Bible, its origin and transmission. State of current Biblical scholarship. Biblical criticism. Bible's self-attestation. Attacks against the Bible: Enlightenment, "Higher" criticism, Quest for the Historical Jesus, Documentary hypothesis. Historical reliability of the Bible. Textual reliability of the Bible. The issue of inspiration. Infallibility and inerrancy. Interpretation. Canonicity: the process of determining canon, pseudo-gospels, apocryphal books, texts of other religions. Supernatural accounts/miracles. The Bible and myth.

Module 7: HISTORICAL ISSUES (5 weeks)

The problem of historical knowledge. Modern historiography. Ancient and Biblical history. Early Christianity and neighboring religions. The Christian view of history vs. pagan and pantheistic views: linear vs. circular. Impact of the Christian view of history on discovery, inventions, democratic institutions, and rise of modernity. Christianity's influence and role in history: the Roman Empire, Constantine, the "Dark Ages", the Crusades, Medieval scholasticism, Renaissance, the Enlightenment, witch hunts, slavery, "Wars of Religion", atrocities in the New World, impact of missions on other cultures, relationship to science, discovery, and intellectual development, David Hume, Voltaire, et.al.

Module 8: JESUS ISSUES, GENERAL (4 weeks)

The historical record regarding Jesus. "Quest(s) for the Historical Jesus." The "Jesus Seminar." Recent developments in Jesus scholarship. The Jesus of the Gospels and neighboring paganism. Jesus' self-understanding (Did he view himself as God?). The deity of Jesus. Miracle accounts in Jesus' life. The New Age Jesus: Eastern travels/influences?, Christ consciousness, Gnosticism (past and present). The early church's understanding of Jesus. Jesus' crucifixion, in history and as history. The atonement: the "offense of the cross," is it a repellent belief (as per the New Atheists)? Islamic denials of the crucifixion.

Module 9: JESUS ISSUES, THE RESURRECTION (3 weeks)

Its centrality to the credibility of Christianity. Developments in resurrection apologetics. Views of resurrection in the Greco-Roman world and first-century Judaism. Historical evidences for the Resurrection. Arguments against the resurrection. Traditional and minimal-facts defenses of the Resurrection. Supposed resurrection beliefs in pagan religions? State of current scholarship on the Resurrection. Possibility of the Resurrection. Differing accounts of the Resurrection in the Gospels. Testimony of the Apostles. Testimony of the early church. The meaning of the Resurrection.