

C.S. LEWIS INSTITUTE - BASIC APOLOGETICS COURSE

Small Group Participant Guide

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"This is a journey of faith and reason — learning to know why we believe, defend truth, and share Christ with grace."

SET 2 - Session 4 – Understanding Atheism

Introduction (from CSLI)

Is Belief in God “Just a Crutch”?

One of the leading charges that has advanced atheism in our time is that religion (belief in God) is wish-fulfillment. Because belief in some kind of God is so pervasive, present in every age and culture, it has to be explained. Either this unanimity points to something real (a God who exists, however imperfectly understood), or it can be explained as wish-fulfillment (a fantasy created by weak people who can't face real fears and threats). The philosophical founders of modern atheism, Feuerbach, Freud, and Marx, all used a variation of this latter approach. Contemporary atheists such as Dawkins, Hitchens, and Harris, also use this psychological charge against believers. This lecture gives answers to this objection and in the end, turns the tables on this approach. It can, with real force and cogency, be argued that atheism is wish-fulfillment.

Lecture Synopsis

Synopsis: “Is Jesus the Only Way?” – Dr. Arthur Lindsley

This lecture confronts one of the most pressing and controversial questions in modern theology and culture: is Jesus truly the only way to God? Dr. Arthur Lindsley, drawing from C.S. Lewis’s profound insights and his own theological expertise, explores the uniqueness of Christ in a pluralistic world. The talk begins by acknowledging that all major religions contain elements of truth—morality, the search for transcendence, spiritual insight—but stresses that this does not mean they are equally true or equally salvific.

The lecture examines Lewis’s personal journey from atheism to faith and unpacks the tension between spiritual longing and moral law, suggesting that Christianity uniquely satisfies both. At the heart of the argument is the incarnation—the radical claim that God became man in the person of Jesus Christ. This event stands in stark contrast to all other religious claims and offers a decisive reason for Christ’s exclusivity.

Lindsley also distinguishes between pluralism (all paths equally valid), inclusivism (Christ saves, but people may follow unknowingly), and exclusivism (conscious faith in Christ is necessary). He supports the exclusivist position using biblical texts, historical reasoning, and the central claims of Christianity about sin, atonement, and resurrection.

Importantly, Lindsley doesn’t sidestep the emotional and pastoral challenges of this doctrine. He urges believers to combine truth with love and to speak about Christ with humility, confidence, and compassion. The lecture closes by reinforcing the radical, beautiful distinctiveness of Jesus: not just a good teacher or spiritual guide, but the incarnate Son of God who alone bridges the gap between humanity and God.

This lecture strengthens both conviction and clarity for Christians as they navigate conversations in an increasingly relativistic society.

Ten Life Applications

Below are **10 unique examples of arguments to support our faith in God**, each drawn from themes across the apologetics lectures you’ve covered so far. Each includes:

- The **name/type of argument**
 - A **concise example**
 - A brief note on **how the argument is constructed**
 - A **guiding note to help participants learn and grow this skill** of forming thoughtful, articulate defenses of their faith.
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- **1. Cosmological Argument – The Universe Had a Cause**

Example: “Everything that begins to exist has a cause. The universe began to exist. Therefore, the universe has a cause—something outside of space, time, and matter.”

How It’s Built: This is a syllogism—three logical steps grounded in causality.

Skill Tip: Practice writing your own syllogism with a topic (e.g., morality, purpose) to get comfortable building logic chains.

- **2. Argument from Desire – Deep Longings Point to God**

Example: “Every natural human desire corresponds to something real (e.g., thirst = water). We long for purpose, eternity, and joy. These point to God.”

How It’s Built: Uses analogy and inductive reasoning from common human experience.

Skill Tip: Journal about universal human desires and how Christianity uniquely fulfills them.

- **3. Moral Argument – Objective Morality Requires a Moral Lawgiver**

Example: “If objective moral values exist, there must be a moral lawgiver. Since we all agree some things are truly right or wrong, there must be a God.”

How It’s Built: This uses “If... then...” logic based on moral intuitions.

Skill Tip: Practice this by asking: “Why do I believe something is wrong or right?” Trace it to a source.

- **4. Historical Argument for the Resurrection – The Empty Tomb and Eyewitnesses**

Example: “The empty tomb, resurrection appearances, and transformation of the disciples point to a real historical resurrection.”

How It’s Built: Combines evidence, multiple attestations, and explanatory power.

Skill Tip: Learn the acronym **EAT** (Empty tomb, Appearances, Transformation) to structure this case concisely.

- **5. Argument from Reason – Why Logic Itself Needs God**

Example: “If our minds are just products of blind evolution, why trust reason? But if we’re made in God’s image, reason makes sense.”

How It’s Built: Shows the self-defeating nature of naturalism and affirms God as the ground of logic.

Skill Tip: Practice identifying the assumptions behind common claims (e.g., “Science is the only way to truth”).

- **6. The Argument from Beauty – Aesthetic Experience Points to a Creator**

Example: “Beauty isn’t necessary for survival, yet it moves us deeply. That suggests a transcendent source.”

How It’s Built: Uses inference to the best explanation from an everyday experience.

Skill Tip: Pick a personal moment of awe (music, nature, art) and describe how it points to something beyond.

- **7. The Argument from the Canon – Reliability of the New Testament**

Example: “The New Testament passes the bibliographic, internal, and external tests better than any ancient document.”

How It’s Built: Applies historical criteria to establish trust in Scripture.

Skill Tip: Study one test in depth (e.g., early manuscripts) and practice explaining it in under 2 minutes.

- **8. The Problem of Evil as a Theistic Challenge – Evil Requires Good**

Example: “If you say something is evil, you assume there is good. But objective good can only exist if God exists.”

How It’s Built: Turns the emotional objection into a logical pointer to God.

Skill Tip: Try writing out the “objection” first, then see how Christian theism provides a better answer.

- **9. Jesus’ Claims and Resurrection – Trilemma Argument**

Example: “Jesus claimed to be God. He wasn’t a liar or lunatic. So, He must be Lord.”

How It’s Built: Lewis’s “Trilemma” forces listeners to deal honestly with Jesus’ identity.

Skill Tip: Try the “if-then” sequence with another doctrine (e.g., atonement) to see how it plays out logically.

- **10. Argument from Church Transformation – Global and Personal Impact**

Example: “How could a small band of fearful disciples change the world unless something incredible—like a resurrection—actually happened?”

How It’s Built: Uses cumulative circumstantial evidence and transformation as validation.

Skill Tip: Reflect on one way the gospel has transformed your life or others’ and explain how it supports the case for Christ.

Study Questions (from CSLI)

1	Why do atheists have to explain religion's existence?
2	Why is the charge of wish-fulfillment a logical fallacy? What does C.S. Lewis call this?
3	Does the fact that we wish for something prove its non-existence?
4	Are there some elements of Christianity that we might wish were not true?
5	How is atheism wish-fulfillment?
6	Do atheists admit that this is the case?
7	How does atheism undermine the very use of reason necessary to make their case?

Building Faith Conversations

1	How does the incarnation of Jesus set Christianity apart from every other religious worldview? – What does it mean that God became flesh, and why is that central to exclusivity?
2	In what way does the claim “all religions are basically the same” misunderstand the core doctrines of Christianity? – How can we clarify key differences in a respectful and honest way?
3	Why does Lewis argue that Christianity is a “myth become fact”? – How does this concept bridge reason, imagination, and faith?

4	What role does the resurrection play in validating Jesus' exclusive claim to be the only way to God? – Can the resurrection be defended historically and why is that important?
5	How should Christians approach conversations about religious pluralism with both conviction and compassion? – What are practical ways to disagree without becoming divisive?
6	Why is it insufficient to say that Jesus was just a good moral teacher? – How do Jesus' own claims make that position logically untenable?
7	How does the problem of sin reveal our need for a unique savior rather than a generic spiritual path? – What does this mean for people who view all religions as morally equivalent?
8	What does C.S. Lewis mean by the “trilemma” (Liar, Lunatic, or Lord), and how does it challenge modern skepticism? – How can this be explained simply in conversation?
9	Why is the exclusivity of Christ not arrogant, but actually a gift grounded in truth and grace? – How does this reframe the idea of evangelism in a pluralistic age?
10	What are some cultural assumptions that make the exclusivity of Jesus difficult for people to accept today? – How can Christians wisely and lovingly respond to those assumptions?

Links to Lectures and Notes: <https://srmatthews.com/tsg>



Set 2 - Lecture 4

(0:22 - 3:10) Well, good morning, I'm glad to have you here and be able to address a very important topic of wish fulfillment or maybe a better way of titling what I'm going to address is if there is no God, why is there religion? Or if there is a God, why are there atheists? And I particularly want to do that in the context of dealing with a new atheist and their objections, that religion itself is wish fulfillment. And that it's either a mild dementia or a kind of lunacy that involves both stupidity, where we're less intelligent if we're religious, and also somewhat mentally imbalanced in one way or another. So that's what I want to address because it's a very common objection within the culture.

Before we do so, let's start out with a word of prayer. Well, we thank you for this time where we can come together and address important truth. I pray that your spirit might give us clarity.

I pray that the same spirit who inspired the word might drive home this message in our hearts, minds, and consciences. And I pray that the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts might be acceptable to you, oh Lord, our strength and our redeemer, Amen.

What we have on the horizon right now is a new kind of atheism. There have been various kinds of atheism that have been around historically. Like, for instance, there are existential atheists, such as Jean-Paul Sartre. Marx, a Marxist atheist, following Karl Marx. More psychological atheists, such as Freud, and we're going to address that at some point here. The behaviorist atheist, B.F. Skinner. Mythological atheists, Friedrich Nietzsche.

You might call Ayn Rand either the self-oriented atheist or the capitalist atheist. You might give various titles to what she does. But now we have a new species, a new variety of atheists, and you might call them the angry atheists. These are atheists with an attitude. What's unique about this is you have a coming out party, much like in the culture you have gay pride, now you have atheist pride. We're the atheists, we're proud, we're asserting ourselves in a unique way.

And I think another unique thing about this kind of atheism is the strong affirmation that atheism is good and the way to have a good society. And religion is bad, or religion is somehow or another intrinsically evil. All religion is evil.

(3:11 - 6:12) That's a very unique spin that is being placed on it by these new atheists. Now even though these atheists write in a very angry way, if you're just a corner with their books, you've got Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great*, or Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, or Sam Harris, *The End of Faith*, or *Letter to a Christian Nation*. They write in a very angry way with all kinds of strong language and epithets that describe believers, and we'll look at some of those as we go.

But even though they speak in an angry way, they don't always come off in an angry way when you see them in person. They can be engaging. In fact, a lot of the perspective is that somehow we're friendly, and we're good, and we can be moral too.

For instance, we ran a seminar on the new atheism not too long ago. We had a group called the Beltway Atheists, and they had as a slogan, *We're Your Friendly Neighborhood Atheists*. Or another slogan that's on their website, *We Are Good People, Just Not God People*. Or there's been a more recent advertising campaign on buses in Washington, D.C. around last Christmas, *Be Good for Goodness' Sake*. Not for God's sake, but be good for goodness' sake. So we can be good, we can decide to be good without God, and we'll address that particularly later on in this series. But there's something about this claim of the new atheism that gives them a kind of, or claims a kind of superiority. Not only a moral superiority, but also an intellectual superiority. They're sometimes called the brights, which by contrast means that those of us that believe in religion are somehow less intelligent, less able to really engage reality in a coherent fashion.

In many ways, this new atheism gets its impetus from 9-11, where you see particularly what people in the name of religion, the terrorists, were able to do because they believed in religious faith. And much of the books that are written contain accounts of all different religions. Not only Christianity, say the Inquisition and the Crusades, but Hinduism, Buddhism, the Islamic perspective, and all kinds of atrocities that have been done in the name of religion. So there's a desire to paint religion with that same brush. That religion leads to all these kinds of evils, therefore I suppose religion is

evil. And because of this, there's sometimes some very strong language not only used in the charges, but I came across this one quote by Sam Harris that was rather shocking, I would say.

(6:14 - 11:52) It's in *From the End of Faith*, page 5253. It says, The link between belief and behavior raises the stakes considerably. Some propositions are so dangerous that it may even be ethical to kill people for believing them. This may seem an extraordinary claim, but it merely enunciates ordinary fact about the world in which we live. Certain beliefs place their adherence beyond the peaceful means of persuasion. Again, some propositions, I mean, I suppose actions, if you were to commit violence, then you should be stopped using force if necessary. But some propositions are so dangerous that it may be ethical to kill people for believing them. It makes you wonder what propositions he's talking about, because he doesn't specifically give illustrations within this context. In other words, would it be ethical to kill people for believing in Christ or believing in God? That at least remains to be seen.

It's the kind of language that was used around the time of the French Revolution. It makes you wonder what some of these atheists are capable of doing, especially when this kind of language is being used. Well, I want to address particularly two aspects during our time.

I wish I could deal with a lot more, but we are limited in what we can cover. I want to deal particularly with the psychological charge that somehow religion is a projection, opium, or wish fulfillment. And I also want to deal with the charge that somehow religion is stupid or irrational or less than intelligent. First of all, I want to look at three predecessors for these new atheists, Feuerbach, Freud, and Marx. And they particularly have shaped much of our culture. In fact, it was an essential thing for atheism to be able to give an account for why the vast majority of throughout the ages have believed in God or some kind of God. And a very distinct minority have been atheists. If atheism is really the truth and religion is essentially false, why have so many people believed in spiritual realities? That's something that has to be addressed in order to maintain their atheism. So this more psychological explanation was an attempt to deal with what is really a significant problem for the atheists.

In other words, does this vast majority of people that believe really point to reality or is there something else going on? Well, Feuerbach basically argued, and I can't go into it in detail here, but he basically argued that religion is a projection, that you project something of your humanity out onto the universe, that somehow or we're limited in our ability to think, our intelligence, and our knowledge. And so we project a God who's all-knowing. We're limited in our power and we might be threatened by that and be afraid at the forces of the universe around us. And so we project a God that's all-powerful and so on and so on. Basically, the idea is that God is an exalted picture of mankind that is really put up to the nth degree. The way that Feuerbach put it in another way is that theology is anthropology.

Theology is anthropology. So that it's really an articulation of what's true about people rather than what's true about God. And by the way, that's been taken over in the modern university system. So that when I got my PhD from the University of Pittsburgh, it wasn't in theology, University of Pittsburgh being a secular institution, it was a department of religion or religious studies. So that it's a study of mankind's practices rather than a study of God. And that's very much the legacy of Feuerbach and the secular perspective that theology is anthropology.

Karl Marx made the charge that religion is the opiate of the people. That religion, especially the ruling classes, the bourgeoisie are those that take religion and use it to their own advantage. They tell poor people that are in their unjust situations to take it easy. Be content with your situation and with the, they wouldn't say it this way, evil and unjust practices that are being done to you and you'll receive your reward eventually. You'll receive your pie in the sky by and by. And just be content and everything will be okay. So they use it as a way to placate. Just as drugs or an opiate, opium could be used to dull your senses. So religion is used to dull your senses to the injustice that's in the world. And it prevents the anger and violent action that would lead to a revolution, which is what Marx desired. So you need to eliminate religion so that you can, so people can see the reality of their situation. And there is, as we'll see in a little bit, some justice to the charge sometimes.

(11:54 - 14:14) Freud, it's very complicated to address Freud on a larger level, but we'll just say religion is wish fulfillment. It's essentially a psychological crutch that enables you to face a difficult universe. So these are some of the predecessors for the new atheists and the new atheists have taken up this kind of refrain.

For instance, French atheist Michael Onfray says, God is a fiction invented by men so as to not confront the reality of their condition. Or Richard Dawkins says that religion poses a major puzzle to anyone who thinks in a Darwinian way. Sam Harris says, points to the lunatic influence of religious faith. Christopher Hitchens says all religions and all churches are equally demented in their belief in divine intervention, divine intercession, or even the existence of the divine in the first place. Just recently, about a week ago, in the Wall Street Journal, there was an article on religion where it talked about the atheists in a very positive light that religion is something of a mild dementia. So that these kind of charges are still floating around and I think we're going to see them ratcheted up and increased in modern times because this new atheism wants to make it so that anybody in the culture that views someone with religious belief immediately sees them as unworthy of any kind of cultural leadership.

Kind of paint the picture so that somehow or another we look down on people of religious faith. That's the stated purpose in a number of the new atheist writings. Well, what can we say to this kind of charge? Well, first of all, I'd like to say that there's at least a partial truth to each of these charges. A partial truth, though taken as the whole truth, becomes an untruth. Just because there's some truth in each of these charges doesn't mean that the whole thing is true. For instance, I would agree that religion can be a projection.

(14:15 - 14:36) We can project certain aspects of our psychology onto the universe and onto God. For instance, the classic illustration that's often used is where people take their own image of their father and project it onto God. For instance, if their father is very harsh and cold, they might view God as harsh and cold and have difficulty conceiving of a God of love.

(14:37 - 18:25) That's just one of many examples that could be given. Certainly, you could say that religion can be an opiate. I took a class, a PhD class, in Marxism from a Marxist, and the Marxist was able to bring up a number of different illustrations where religion was manipulated and was used, and you sometimes see films to that effect, and there's at least some truth to it. Religion can be abused or misused for these kinds of events. That doesn't mean that it's intrinsically false or necessarily false because it has been misused in that way. Religion also can be wish fulfillment.

Particularly, you find this a lot when you talk to people today. People will say, my God is a God of fill in the blank, usually God of love, but people believe that God has to be the way they think about him. So that's the idea that is out there in the culture. I certainly would agree with the atheists and say this, that there is a kind of toxic faith to take the title of a book that's out there. There's some faith that can be poisoning. That doesn't mean that all types of faith are that way, though.

An argument against abuse is not an argument against use. Well, let me, I'll come back to this in a little bit and answer this objection in a second, but let me just stop and look at this idea that religion is stupid for a minute. Are all religious people stupid or irrational? Surely not, but that's the impression that's given. It becomes a kind of caricature. Not long ago in the Washington Post, there was a front page article where the journalist said that Christians are poor, uneducated, and easily led. And there was a firestorm where this editor received a flood of mail. And he called a friend who is a believer and said, well, what's the problem? And he said to him that certainly there are Christians that are poor, uneducated, and easily led, but many believers are rich, very educated, and very strong in terms of their leadership. So that's the worst kind of caricature you could give of things. Also, we need to note that some of the most intelligent people who have ever lived have been believers.

And even some atheists admit that. For instance, Stephen Jay Gould, who's an atheist, says about scientists, it's amazing, about 40% of scientists, and this has been true for the last 20 years, about 40% of scientists have some kind of belief in God. So here's what Gould says. Either half of my colleagues are enormously stupid, or else the science of Darwinianism is fully compatible with conventional religious beliefs, and equally compatible with atheism. But that's not the attitude that many of the new atheists take to people with religious faith. Another question you might ask, and this is an analogy that's used that I think is pretty easily addressed, but you hear it all the time, is religion like believing in the tooth fairy or Santa Claus? And I think not.

We naturally outgrow these beliefs as we get older. I don't know of any of you that really believe in the tooth fairy or Santa Claus, although it's fun to dream about these things when you're younger. But people naturally outgrow that, yet people in their full maturity and intellectual and emotional maturity still believe in God.

(18:26 - 20:00) Does faith mean blind trust, or is it irrational? It's amazing how many of these atheists assume that that's the only definition of religion. For instance, Dawkins says this, faith means blind trust in the absence of evidence, even in the teeth of evidence. I don't know where he got this, you know, but he missed about the whole of Christian history in this. Dawkins lives in Oxford, and if you go to the Bodleian Library or one of the buildings there, the Radcliffe Camera, where there's a great theological library, you see thousands of books, tens of thousands of books that deal with religious perspective and contain much intelligent arguments, many intelligent arguments on all kinds of levels that address every objection that could conceivably be raised throughout the ages. Now, you may not like their arguments, you might think that their evidence is lacking, but I would hope that Dawkins would at least address the best of the arguments and show where they're flawed. He doesn't do that, he just assumes that there is no such thing.

And by the way, Sam Harris does that too, repeatedly. In the first chapter of his book *End of Faith*, he repeatedly says that there is no evidence, it's utterly irrational, without any reason or any justifying ground at all. It's like he's totally ignorant of the whole history of the Christian faith.

(20:01 - 25:37) Now, just to give you one illustration of a believer, this is W.H. Griffith Thomas, who was the principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, in an earlier time. He said this, faith affects the whole of man's nature. It commences with the conviction of the mind based on adequate evidence, it continues in the confidence of the heart or emotions based on conviction, and it is crowned in the consent of the will, by means of which the conviction and confidence are expressed in conduct.

That's just one example of the kind of relationship between faith and reason that could be multiplied by many people. C.S. Lewis, for instance, said that he believed that there was enough probable evidence to show that faith in Christ is true, and he said if you believe that there's more probable evidence for atheism than for Christianity, then believe that. But he believed that the evidence was more for faith in Christ than it was for atheism. Or he said in another place, he believed that there was enough probable evidence to lead to a psychological exclusion of doubt, but not the logical exclusion of dispute. So that, you know, certainly believers have claimed to do that, to have that kind of evidence, so it certainly should be part of the atheist's task to take a bunch of that evidence and show that it is false. They often don't do that.

But let's come back to the idea that faith is a projection, an opiate, or a wish fulfillment. I would suggest that Feuerbach, Freud, and Marx, and many of these new atheists as well, are guilty of a logical fallacy, and that fallacy is essentially the fallacy of begging the question. C.S. Lewis talks about it in an essay, a classic essay, it's only a few pages, I recommend that you read it, called *Bolvarism*. And in that essay, he says that if you think that my claim to have a large balance in my bank account is due to wish fulfillment, it might be good to do this, to, you must first see whether I have such an account, and then add up the amount in it before you start proceeding to the psychological charge. In other words, deal with the fact first, and establish it, and then I suppose then you can try to go and explain the psychological motives that you might have invented that idea. In other words, he said, you must show that a man is wrong before you start explaining why he's wrong.

The modern method is to assume without discussion that he is wrong, and to distract attention from this, the only real issue, by busily explaining how he became so silly. What Lewis does in this essay, called *Bolvarism*, is he invents an imaginary character, Ezekiel Bolvar, by which he then names the article, *Bolvarism*. And this character, Ezekiel Bolvar, comes to this realization when he's five years old, when he hears his mother say to his father, who had been arguing, his father had been arguing that two sides of a triangle were greater than that of the third, his mother said, oh you say that because you're a man.

At that moment, Bolvar assures us, they're flashed across my opening mind, the great truth that refutation is no necessary part of an argument. Assume that your opponent's wrong, then explain his error, and the world will be at your feet. Attempt to prove that he's wrong, or worse still, try to find out whether he's wrong or right, and the national dynamism of our age will thrust you to the wall.

That has become one of the makers of the 20th century, and certainly well into the 21st. Lewis saw *Bolvarism* at work in every political argument, and warned that until *Bolvarism* is crushed, reason can play no effective part in human affairs. Try this exercise sometime when you watch a political talk show, see how many times that there's this *Bolvarist* fallacy,

where people are labeled, put in boxes, or name calling is used, where you essentially reject the other person's argument rather than try to refute it.

And why is that more convenient? Because it's much more, much easier to reject somebody's argument to get the higher ground, because if you try to refute the argument, you might be vulnerable to what? Refutation. You might actually lose the argument. So it's much safer to do the psychological labeling thing and call people's names, call people names, or put them in boxes, rather than try to actually address the arguments themselves.

That's why he says that Bolvarism is at work in every political argument. I'm amazed how often it is so. I know that the essay and this idea has transformed the way I view the political debates that go on, and the level of arguments that are there.

But to sum it up, it's much easier to reject somebody's perspective and use labeling or name calling rather than refute their arguments. Let me give you some additional thoughts along this line to address this charge that religion is projection, opiate, wish fulfillment. First of all, do some things that we wish for exist? And I think the answer is yes.

In fact, there are a number of different drives that do have corresponding fulfillment, a number of different natural drives. For instance, there is hunger, and it happens to be food that corresponds to that hunger for food. There's thirst, and it happens to be drink that corresponds to the desire for drink.

(25:37 - 32:59) There's sexual desire, and then there's sex. There's drowsiness, which you may be feeling now, and there's actually sleep that corresponds to that desire for sleep, and so on and so on. There are many natural desires, and there's a corresponding fulfillment for it.

The only question is whether certain spiritual desires, like a desire for awe, to be in contact with the holy, which is what Rudolph Otto talked about, or whether a desire for meaning, desire for morality, desire for immortality, desire for these other things, if these are natural desires, and if all natural desires have a corresponding fulfillment, then there is a real fulfillment for these spiritual desires as well. Now, that remains to be argued. We're going to look at that later in terms of the argument from desire, which is one of C.S. Lewis' favorite arguments for God's existence.

We'll come back and look at that in a little bit, but it's at least worth considering. Just the fact that we wish for something doesn't prove its non-existence. In fact, our desires for these things might be cosmic pointers rather than things that we invent to satisfy ourselves.

They might be cosmic pointers to that which is beyond. That's at least a possibility. Right now, we haven't argued fully that that's true, but it's very conceivable that that's the case.

Also, some religious views are contrary to our wishes. For instance, R.C. Sproul makes this comment, Why would disciples invent a God whose holiness was more terrifying than the forces of nature that provoked them to invent a God in the first place? That's true with many other negative things that are not easily embraced in terms of religious belief, in terms of, say, the biblical truth, understanding of Scripture. There are many things that we struggle with.

You wouldn't easily invent those kinds of things to make your life more simple or make them easier. You can almost find a way to rationalize these things, but it doesn't easily fit a wish fulfillment hypothesis. You might also ask, if all faith is due to non-rational forces, it leads to some strange implications.

And the question is, is all faith due to non-rational forces or only some aspects of faith? Like Richard Dawkins says that all religious faith is there as a result of memes. You ever heard this idea? The idea of a meme, M-E-M-E, is the idea that there's this entity, invisible, unverifiable entity called a meme. It's like a gene.

It's used on the analogy of a gene. And that the reason, he postulates, why people come to believe in God is because they have this meme that is part of them. And this meme kind of jumps from person to person, like fleas or like mosquitoes or something like that, and people get bit.

You might say, he wouldn't use this language, but it spreads so that people come to believe in God because they have these memes that end up impacting them. It's much like a God module, that's another word, a thought contagion, that's another word that's used. Or a God virus, perhaps is the best picture or metaphor that can be used about these memes.

These memes leap from brain to brain, Dawkins says, by a process called imitation. Now, there's no direct evidence for the idea of memes itself. The case for the existence of memes depends solely on the analogy with genes.

In fact, there's a scientist, Simon Conway Morris, that says this. Memes are trivial to be banished by simple mental exercises. In any wider context, they're hopelessly, if not hilariously, simplistic.

The conjure-up memes not only reveals a strange imprecision of thought, but as Anthony O'Heer has remarked, if memes really existed, they would ultimately deny the reality of reflective thought, especially this last one. If memes really existed, they would ultimately deny the reality of reflective thought. If we come to believe in God because we have this meme, and it's spread like a virus, this God virus, it raises the question, if all ideas are spread this way, that's the idea.

But that, of course, leads to the implication that people believe in their atheism because they also have an atheist meme or an atheist virus. But if everybody believes in what they believe as a result of a virus, then there's no objective truth. There's no one that's unaffected by this kind of meme or virus.

There's no thought that can stand above the system and really judge the system because it's all determined by matter and by memes and by viruses. Do you understand? So that all reflective thought would come under question. And we'll come back to this at the very end of this talk here.

But we might ask the question on the other side, if there is a God, why are there atheists? And if there is a God, why are there atheists? And I think we could equally say, and I wish I had more time, if I had two or three hours or a whole book to make this case, you know, I would do it. But I think it's very plausible to say that atheism is a projection, a desire to be free of God and without accountability. That atheism is an opiate of the conscience.

That atheism is wish fulfillment. You might even call it, to use the Freudian perspective, a giant Oedipal complex, where there's a wishing of the death of the Heavenly Father. Now, at the very least, these charges can be made very plausible.

I know when my wife and I were on our honeymoon, we went, among a couple other places, to Bora Bora. We stayed in some grass huts. It was actually the Hotel Oa Oa in Bora Bora.

And we met the proprietor there, and he found out that we were in religious work. And he immediately said, oh, religion's a crutch. It's just invented for your own comfort.

And I said, well, you know, I didn't do this in any kind of hostile fashion. I just said, well, I think atheism is a crutch. And I developed a little bit along the lines that I have been in this lecture.

He was totally taken aback. And at the very least, it neutralized his argument. And we could go on to have a further discussion.

(33:01 - 34:36) But it's very interesting that not only can we make a case, and in other places, I do spend two or three hours developing this case. But it's interesting how many atheists make admissions along this line, that they want to believe in their atheism. That you can argue that atheism is a certain way wish fulfillment from atheists' own words.

That's all I can do right now. Let me give you a few of things that atheists say. For instance, H. L. Mencken says about belief in God, my private inclination is that it is not so.

Or Thomas Nagel confessed to a fear of religion itself. He said, I want atheism to be true. It isn't that I don't believe in God.

I don't want there to be a God. I don't want the universe to be like that. Now, where's this hostility from religion come from? Why be so angry with God if he doesn't exist? Sometimes you think, methinks thou dost protest too much.

Where does this anger come from? Stephen Jay Gould, the atheist, says we may be, we may yearn for a higher answer, but none exists. This explanation, though superficially troubling, if not terrifying, is ultimately liberating and exhilarating. But you might ask the question, liberating for what? Exhilarating in what sense? I suppose it's to do whatever you want to do.

(34:37 - 36:20) To be free without restriction, to live your life in the way that you want to live it. Julian Huxley said this sense of spiritual relief which comes from rejecting the idea of God as a supernatural being is enormous. Now, particularly, what does this relate to? Now, Aldous Huxley gives us a clue.

He said, Aldous Huxley said this, I had motives for not wanting the world to have meaning. Consequently, I assumed it had none. Was able without difficulty to find satisfactory reasons for this assumption.

For myself, as no doubt for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation. The liberation we desired was liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom.

There we go. There's the bottom line. And I think you see this kind of refrain over and over again, and we'll see this later in one of the other quotes.

There's a Nobel laureate that wrote an essay, The Discrete Charm of Nihilism, and here's what he says, pointing out the problem of atheism along these lines. He says, the true opium of the people is a belief in nothingness after death. The huge solace of thinking that for our betrayals, greed, cowardice, and murders, we are not to be judged.

Pretty profound comment there. Christopher Hitchens also makes a very interesting admission at one point. He says, well, I can imagine a life without religion.

(36:21 - 36:46) I cannot imagine what it would be like to be leading a religious life or the life of a believer. He says, if I'm in a political argument, I think I can with reasonable accuracy without boasting, put the other person's side of the case at least as well as they could. Of course, that's a necessary thing to be able to listen to the other person's arguments and be able to hopefully be able to state their position to their satisfaction before you begin to critique it.

(36:47 - 37:05) And he says, you know, he usually can do that with most arguments. He says, one has to be able to say that in any well-conducted argument. But it's not possible to think myself into the position of someone who is a believing Roman Catholic or a believing Protestant, I suppose, as well.

(37:06 - 37:19) He says, I can't imagine what it's like. I hope it's not a failure of imagination on my part. Or I might add to that a failure of ability to understand or even hear what's being said.

(37:20 - 42:41) He says, to us, when people talk about faith, it's white noise. Recently, Hitchens tried to read a copy of N.T. Wright's book, Resurrection of the Son of God. And his comment after trying to read it was, I can't read it.

It's just white noise. In other words, there's somehow an inability to hear. There's a static that gets in the way that makes him unable to even think or consider anything along these lines.

And that static is not there with regard to anything else. It makes you wonder why. I'll let you be able to deal with that question as we go on.

Here's what he says. Here's another separate place. The discourse between sexual life and fear can now at last be attempted on the sole condition that we banish all religions from discourse.

Notice the discourse between sexual life and fear is similar to the Aldous Huxley thing. Again, makes you wonder what a main motive underlying the wish fulfillment of atheism might be. Dawkins makes a similar kind of comment.

He says, speak for yourself. It's not part of me, this idea of belief in God or religious belief. It's not part of a great majority of my friends in universities in England, in the US and elsewhere.

It's somehow I don't have the God meme in me. I suppose I have the atheist meme in me. So I just can't get it.

I can't hear it. To use the Hitchens phrase, it's all white noise. There's a disconnect that's there.

So I would suggest that it's certainly valid to say atheism can be a projection, can be an opiate, can be wish fulfillment. At least you have the beginnings of a case in the admission of a number of atheists that this actually is the case for them. And we could argue that further looking at Romans 1 and looking at some of the history of intellectual argument.

And there's some great books out there that do that. For instance, Paul Johnson's book, *Intellectuals*, is a magnificent study right along these lines of the leading intellectual shapers of the 20th century. Or there's another book by Derek Freeman called *Margaret Mead and Samoa, The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth*.

Look at that book. It would make my case very strongly along these lines. There are various other books like Paul Witt's *Sigmund Freud's Christian Unconscious*.

You read something of Freud's background and you understand this. We're probably in a better place with a lot of these different biographies and studies to be able to make this case than ever before. So I'm not going to make that case right now, but there are some little hints as to where you can develop it further.

In the end, this argument from reason is a very powerful argument. This reducing of religion to the physical, the material, the biological, and the genetic is in the end self-refuting. Is it at all possible then to get up above this materialistic determination to give an objective account even of the materialism itself? That's a good question.

Is it somehow possible to get outside the system and get up on Mount Olympus, so to speak, and get a bird's eye view of this situation? Are you always part of this materialistic determination? I don't see how atheists can address this. Lewis argues that Marx and Freud, we could say this with regard to the new atheists, are sawing off the branch on which they're sitting. You know, that would be a rather ridiculous thing.

You're sitting out on a branch of a tree and you're sawing off the branch at the trunk and you're going to fall along with it. That's in many ways what the atheists are doing with this materialistic kind of argument. If all our thoughts are materialistically determined by memes or some other fashion, also the atheist thoughts, including their materialist arguments that all is matter, seem to be thus determined.

Feuerbach put it in a graphic way that you are what you eat. But of course, if you are what you eat, then everybody is determined, their thoughts are determined by what they eat or by materialistic factors, at least in general. With Marx, it was economic factors that determine us.

But in any case, if we're all determined, then who's to say that anybody's right? C.S. Lewis said that this problem of Marx and Freud, and we could also apply it to the new atheists, is the problem of trying to prove that all proofs are invalid. If you fail, you fail. If you succeed, you fail even more.

For the proof that all proofs are invalid must be invalid itself. That's a rather strange problem. And atheists admit the problem.

(42:41 - 43:43) Probably the most succinct way that this is addressed, and there are much more philosophical ways that it can be developed, but it's great when somebody can put the whole argument in a nutshell. And this is it. This is the quote by J.B.S. Haldane, who says this, if my mental processes are determined wholly by motions of atoms in my brain, I have no reason to suppose that my beliefs are true, and hence I have no reason for supposing my brain to be composed of atoms.

That's beautifully put in a nutshell. Let me go through that again. If my mental processes are determined wholly by motion of atoms in my brain, I have no reason to suppose my beliefs are true, that my beliefs are determined by the motion of atoms in my brain and your beliefs are determined by the motion of atoms in your brain, but is there some view that's more true than another? If so, how would you even know it? And hence I have no reason for supposing my brain to be composed of atoms.

(43:43 - 45:43) So even that idea or any ideas would be materialistically determined, and none could really be argued to be objectively true. Do you understand that? It's a little bit abstract, but it's not that abstract. There are more philosophical ways of making it.

For instance, C.S. Lewis had a debate where he argued this, and I talk about that in C.S. Lewis's case for Christ, but he deals with it in the first four chapters of *Miracles*. Recently, a guy by the name of Nicholas Ruppert defended C.S. Lewis's argument and calls it C.S. Lewis's dangerous idea. Now, it's a dangerous idea.

Why? Because it pulls the rug right out from under atheism at its starting point, and what Ruppert argued is despite a number of objections that were raised in C.S. Lewis's day and have been raised since, it's an eminently defensible argument. It's very much something that you could maintain at the highest level. Another advocate, Stephen Hawking, who you may have heard of for this brief history of time, says this.

It reaffirms what Haldane says. He says, there's a fundamental paradox in the search for a completely unified theory. Our ideas about scientific theories assume that we're rational beings who are free to observe the universe as we want and to draw logical deductions from what we see.

In such a scheme, it's reasonable to suppose we might progress ever closer towards the laws that govern the universe. Yet if there really is a unified theory, it would also presumably determine our actions. And so the theory itself would determine the outcome of our search for it.

(45:44 - 47:45) And why should we determine, why should it determine that we come to the right conclusions from the evidence? Might it not equally well determine that we draw the wrong conclusions from the evidence? In other words, what he's saying within the Darwinian perspective, that we're programmed for survival and not for truth. And so that if this materialistic atheism or Darwinian atheism is true, there's reason to doubt or suspect any thoughts that we have, including the thoughts about Darwinian materialism. All right, so that we wouldn't, even if they were true, we wouldn't be able to know that they were, and there'd be reason to suspect in every case whether they were true.

A very interesting argument. I've seen in every essay that Alvin Plantinga, who perhaps is America's greatest Christian philosopher, when he addresses articles on Hitchens, Harris, and Dawkins, he always uses, regularly uses this argument from reason. Because even though it's a little bit more abstract and difficult to grasp, perhaps initially, if you can grasp it, again, it goes right to the Achilles heel.

Atheists can't even get started in their beliefs without that. Now there's some other good arguments that we're going to address later in the class. One is the argument from love that I will develop a little bit later.

Darwin made the statement, if you could show me even one truly other-centered characteristic, it would annihilate my theory. In other words, if there really is agape love, if there's truly other-centered love, it would totally go against my Darwinian theory. Because everything has got to be determined by what you might call the selfish gene.

(47:46 - 48:12) Everything's got to be determined for survival. Any truly other-centered characteristic would go against the Darwinian perspective, would go against the survival of the fittest. In other words, if I tried to preserve those who are weak, not for my own selfish reason or benefit in any case, but just solely for giving to other people, that would go counter to the survival of the fittest.

(48:14 - 50:30) It would also be inexplicable in a Darwinian perspective. Again, any truly other-centered characteristic, any true agape love, would annihilate my theory. And we'll come back and deal with some explanations that they have later on in this lecture series.

But it's a very important foundational argument that's right at the core. Later on too, we're going to address the argument for morality. It's very difficult, certainly atheists can be moral, but it's difficult, if not impossible, and we'll actually argue that it is impossible, for them to give a justification for morality.

So that if we step back and look at this, basically what we see is we don't even have to go out. Later on, we're going to look at arguments for God's existence that look out to the cosmos, and look at the anthropic principle, look at the Big Bang, look at other things, evidences that come from the outside for God's existence. But right now, what we're doing is just looking at things that are right inside us, like reason, and love, and morality.

And I think there's sufficient ground even there to believe God exists. So that if God exists, he's given us minds, he's made us in the image of God, and he's given us minds that are able to not perfectly or totally or exhaustively understand reality, but truly and really understand what is out there in the world. So there's a ground, a basis to trust our reason, at least to some extent, in our senses.

Though not perfectly, we have a reason to trust it as being substantially reliable, or accurate, or adequate at least for what we need to live our lives. So that this whole atheist perspective, in reducing reality to the laws of nature, risks undermining rationality and truth itself. And that's a very severe problem that they have.

(50:30 - 51:14) So that in the end, what we're looking at is that far from faith in Christ being irrational, there certainly is a long history of rational argument and evidence, and we're going to address that further as we go through different talks in this series. And far from religion being proved to be projection, wish fulfillment, and opiate, we can actually suggest reasons why that may not be the case, and why actually atheism is along that line, is a projection, an opiate, and wish fulfillment. So let's stop at this point, and we'll be able to take questions.

The “5C” Framework for Constructing Arguments

This simple structure works across all six sessions and can be scaled with complexity:

1. Claim — *What truth am I stating?*

► Example: "The universe had a beginning."

2. Clarify — *What do I mean by that?*

► "By beginning, I mean it is not eternal and came into existence at a certain point in time."

3. Confirm — *What evidence supports it?*

► "Scientific models like the Big Bang and philosophical arguments (like the impossibility of infinite regress) support this."

4. Connect — *How does this support the Christian worldview?*

► "This beginning points toward a Beginner — a necessary, eternal, immaterial cause, consistent with God."

5. Counter — *What objections might come up, and how can I respond?*

► "Some say quantum events are uncaused, but those still occur in space-time, which began with the universe."

Sample Application to Each Session

Session	Sample Argument	Application of 5Cs
1. Cosmological Argument	The universe had a cause	Clarify what a beginning means; confirm with Big Bang science; connect to an eternal cause
2. Argument from Desire	Every human longs for something more	Clarify longing vs. need; confirm with C.S. Lewis's reasoning; connect to God as the fulfillment
3. Jesus & Gnostic Claims	Jesus' divinity was not invented	Clarify what Nicea affirmed vs. created; confirm with early creeds and church fathers
4. Resurrection	The best explanation for the empty tomb is that Jesus rose	Confirm with eyewitnesses, early creeds, and historical transformation
5. Problem of Evil	Evil is best explained by a moral standard	Confirm that calling something "evil" presumes objective morality; connect to God as the moral lawgiver
6. Exclusivity of Christ	Jesus is the only way	Clarify the difference between truth and preference; confirm His unique claims, resurrection, and authority