

**How to give the reason for your faith**

# *Timothy Project*

Student Manual

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## **HOW TO GIVE THE REASON FOR YOUR FAITH**

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Source: N. L. Geisler, Christian Apologetics.

LESSON

1

AGNOSTICISM

**Theme text: “He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him” (John 1.10).**

I WHAT IS AGNOSTICISM?

- According to agnosticism, it is not possible to know God or to have knowledge of him.
- The agnostic doesn't deny the existence of God, rather that person denies the possibility of knowing him.
- Agnosticism is based philosophically on the teaching of Immanuel Kant and David Hume of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Hume argues that if it isn't possible to quantify or establish something as concrete fact or reality, then it doesn't deserve to be contemplated (David Hume, Investigation Concerning Human Understanding). He affirms that all knowledge is derived from the senses or human experience, having been subjected to reasoning, in order to verify whether there exist connections between diverse experiences, with the aim of making sense of them.

Therefore, for the agnostic, it is not possible to establish a connection between things that exist and the God who created them. Such things are beyond the scope of human competence. In other words, human beings are unable to establish a connection between the existence of the world and the existence of God.

**Respond:** Why does the philosopher, David Hume, think that it is impossible to know God?

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**II**

**HOW TO REFUTE AGNOSTICISM**

1. When confronting the agnostic, it is correct that human beings cannot know God completely, since we are all finite beings with finite knowledge. The apostle Paul underlines this point: “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Corinthians 13.12). It is right to say that we cannot know God, not even in part, without the help of God, or without the self revelation of himself to us. The apostle John affirms: “No-one has ever seen God, but God the One and only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (John 1.18).
2. The agnostic questions the concept of time. Did the world come to exist in time, or before time existed? We are dealing with the inability of expressing certain things or ideas, simply because our language is inadequate for such a task.

The infinite or eternal cannot be thought of as successive periods of time, as in the case of agnosticism. It is better to say that history, and the world itself, began at the beginning of time. Before this, only eternity existed.

In order to argue (as does the agnostic) that time always existed is problematic. And this, because it begs the question: “When did time begin, and what existed before time”? The regression is infinite. So we end up exactly where we began and the question remains unanswered.

There is only one answer. Everything that is finite (including time and space) has a beginning and in order to begin, there needs to be a pre-existing cause. This cause is God.

Obviously, the finite cannot comprehend the infinite, neither can those who are subject to time and space understand the eternal. However, the impossibility of understanding the infinite and the eternal (by which we mean God), isn't sufficient to deny that such a reality exists. Although it is beyond the scope of our knowledge, this reality does exist.

3. The agnostic argues from the premise that everything that exists must have a cause. It is true that the finite has a cause responsible for its existence. The finite came to exist at a certain point in time, or at the beginning of time. The infinite, however, does not have a cause, because such a reality always existed, that is, before the existence of time.

**Respond:** When and how did the history of the world begin? Describe in your own words. Include in your answer something about time, eternity and God.

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<b>III</b>	<b>FINAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>
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We now proceed to ask if it is possible to know this God? The agnostic argues that this is not possible. The Christian replies that it is possible, but only by way of the self-revelation of God. By his own initiative, God resolved to reveal himself to us, through his work in creation (see Job 40), through his Word (the Law and the prophets), and finally in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1.1).

All philosophical arguments are based on presupposition or dogmatism, exactly what the agnostic is at pains to oppose. Every philosophical position requires an attitude of faith, whether to affirm belief or not. Philosophical arguments raise questions concerning the Christian faith, but are not able to offer answers, only more questions.

The answers that the Christian is able to offer, in the presence of unbelievers, are grounded in biblical reasoning and daily experience: God, who is unknown to many, is the One who reveals himself to us, as he comes in search of the lost and those who are far from him (Luke 15.4). Only the God of the Bible does this.

**Respond:** How can the believer know God?

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