

Apologetics 101

A Primer in Investigating the Truth-Claims of Christianity

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Lesson 1

What is apologetics? And why should I care about it?

I think that religion stops people from thinking. I think that religion is a neurological disorder. I am just embarrassed that it has been taken over by people like the evangelicals, by people who do not believe in science and rationality. It is the 21st century. And I will tell you, my friend, the future does not belong to the evangelicals. The future does not belong to religion.

- Bill Maher

We have a two-fold task tonight – we have two key questions that must be answered. Answering them will provide deeper insight from the Bible on how to live our lives in obedience to Christ and set the stage for the rest of our study. The two key questions we want to answer tonight are:

- 1) What is apologetics?
- 2) Why should I care about apologetics?

What Is Apologetics?

Some people hear the word apologetics and think it means an apology or being ashamed of one's beliefs. Nothing could be further from the truth! Apologetics is an incredibly broad field with literally hundreds of definitions. Simply put, apologetics is “the branch of Christianity that deals with the defense and establishment of the Christian faith.”¹ Apologetics is used in defending sound doctrine, personal evangelism, responding to attacks from philosophy and science, as well as many other areas.

There is one reason all believers should be passionate about apologetics. There is one reason all believers should be excited to see churches across America emphasizing apologetics. There is one reason all believers should be thankful that many Christian high schools and colleges are teaching apologetics to their students. What is that reason? **Apologetics is commanded in Scripture and modeled by Jesus and the Apostles!** Before we go any further in talking about what apologetics is, let's take a look at what the Bible says about it.

Scriptural Commands to Defend the Faith

I Peter 3:15

The term, “apologetics” actually comes from I Peter 3:15, “*but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect*” The Greek word “apologia” (απολογία), translated as “defense” means, ‘verbal defense, speech in defense, a reasoned statement or argument.’² It is a legal term that communicates a court room defense. We are

¹ <http://carm.org/apologetics>

² <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/apologia.html>

called to be prepared to speak about our faith and to have good reasons and arguments for why we believe it!

Some people hear the term ‘argument’ and will respond with something like, “we aren’t supposed to be arguing with people – we are supposed to be loving them!” If this is your response, you are exactly right!! The confusion comes from what that word ‘argument’ means. One definition of argument is, “an angry disagreement”³ – these are the arguments we want to avoid. Another definition of argument is, “a statement, reason, or fact for or against a point”⁴ – these are the kinds of arguments we do want. I Peter 3:15 commands us to have good reasons for believing what we do and to be prepared to give those reasons to people who do not accept Christianity.

The second part of verse 15 is easily as important as the first part. It says, “*yet do it with gentleness and respect.*” This statement clearly tells us that the first kind of argument is not what Peter had in mind. The following verse is helpful in unpacking the message Peter wanted to communicate, “*keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*”⁵ The whole context of I Peter 3 deals with how Christians should behave in difficult circumstances. Christians tend to gravitate toward extremes – they either work to show the love of God and neglect commands to boldly proclaim the truth of God or they work to boldly proclaim the truth of God and neglect commands to show people the love of God. Peter blows this faulty thinking right out of the water! In the middle of telling people how to live, he commands them to always be prepared to give a logical defense of Christianity. The Bible does not teach and either/or model – it teaches a both/and model!

Proverbs 15:1 also emphasizes the need to present Christianity with gentleness and respect, “*A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*” This point is crucial! After all, Jesus said, “*By this, all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*”⁶ Notice that Jesus didn’t say, “All men will know you are my disciples because of your awesome debate skills!” The love mentioned refers both to unity within the body of Christ as well as love for the community. The old cliché is true – people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care. Meeting physical needs often precedes meeting spiritual needs. Showing genuine love for our community opens doors to spiritual conversations where apologetics is needed. One of this generation’s most influential apologists, William Lane Craig, said, “When people see this – our love for one another and our unity through love – then they will in turn be drawn to Christ and will respond to the Gospel’s offer of salvation.”⁷ If at any point our apologetic, our defense and establishment of Christian faith, ceases to be done “with gentleness and respect”, we have become sinful in our apologetics. So, I Peter 3:15 is a command that tells us not only that we *should* do apologetics, but also *how* we should do apologetics. Being prepared to give a defense of our faith is not a matter of personal preference; it is a matter of Biblical obedience.

³ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/argument>

⁴ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/argument>

⁵ I Peter 3:16

⁶ John 13:35

⁷ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, pg. 407.

2 Corinthians 10:5

Another important passage that commands us to do apologetics is 2 Corinthians 10:5, “*For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.*” Notice Paul’s use of ‘argument’ again in this passage to indicate something besides an angry disagreement. The Greek word used is Logismos (λογισμος), which means, “reasoning, thinking.” In other words, Paul is commanding us to refute ideas that are against the knowledge of God. These could be ideas that deny His existence, misrepresent His character, pervert His Word, or distort His actions. Simply stated, Paul is commanding us to be active in the defense and establishment of Christian faith.

Notice that Paul did not say we argue people into faith. We argue against ideas, but we love people. What does this look like in a conversation with your neighbor? It means that you need to be a great listener. I do not mean just listen to the words they say, you need to hear their heart when they talk and empathize with their struggles. Listening while they talk about life and immediately jumping into an argument for the existence of God communicates a love for the information you memorized instead of a Biblical love for your neighbor.

You’d be amazed how many people are fake listeners. By “fake listener,” I mean someone pretending to listen to what you are saying, but you know they really aren’t listening at all. A number of months ago, my wife and I were at a party, talking to one of our friends. We had just gotten back from attending my grandmother’s funeral and as soon as Emily mentioned that my grandmother had died, our friend walked right out of the room to talk to someone else without even acknowledging she had left us! It was pretty shocking. We were sharing an intimate struggle of our lives, and our friend literally did not even know the topic that we were talking about. About 5 minutes later she returned and without mentioning her abrupt departure, asked us where we had left off. Please, love people well by being a good listener.

After showing that you genuinely love your neighbors, you will be able to share Biblical truth with them. People will ask questions about the truth you are sharing, and you will be able to defend Christian truth. Some might object and want to discuss it some more, and further discussion would be great! But always remember, we build arguments against ideas; we show radical love for all people, regardless of the ideas they believe. Again notice that destroying “arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God” is not an optional recommendation; it is a Scriptural command that requires obedience.

Jude 3

Jude 3 says, “*Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.*” This verse is powerful! Think about what Jude said – he wanted to write about the salvation they shared. But, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he found it necessary to set aside writing about salvation in order to plead with the church to “contend for

the faith.” John MacArthur says it is significant that an entire book of the Bible is “devoted exclusively to confronting ... defection from the true, biblical faith.”⁸

It should also be noted that both Paul and Jude quote from non-biblical sources as a part of their defense of the faith. Jude quotes from 1 Enoch (an ancient Jewish book) in v. 14 and the Assumption of Moses (another ancient Jewish book) in v. 9. Paul quotes from a Greek philosopher and a Greek poet in Acts 17:28. He also quotes from a Greek comedian in I Corinthians 15:33 and another Greek poet in Titus 1:12.⁹ I mention these only to point out examples from Biblical writers, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who were led to quote from sources outside the Bible. Since our task is to present and defend the truth of the Bible, it should be primary subject of our study; however, in defending the truth of the Bible, we should integrate sources that our neighbors will recognize as we build a persuasive case for Christianity.

“Love Your God With All Your Mind”

In addition to the commands found in I Peter 3, 2 Corinthians 10, and Jude 3, we are commanded numerous times throughout Scripture to “love your God with all your mind.” This command is given by Jesus as the Greatest Commandment and is quoted in Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30 and Luke 10:27. All 3 passages are referring back to perhaps the most prominent passage in the Old Testament for Jews, Deuteronomy 6:5. The commands of Jesus are meant to call us to love Him comprehensively – with every aspect of our being. Part of this, as clearly stated in the passages, is to love God with our mind. Of course, loving God with all of our mind extends beyond apologetics to resisting temptation, consistent prayer, placing others’ needs ahead of our own, and many other areas. That said, apologetics – the defense and establishment of Christian faith – naturally flows out of loving God with all of our mind.

We have examined a few Biblical commands to *do* apologetics, now we will focus our attention on the examples of Jesus and the Apostles in *how* to do apologetics.

Defense of the Faith Modeled by Jesus and the Apostles

Jesus’ Example

From the New Testament accounts of Jesus’ life, it is clear that he offered signs to convince and persuade people that He was really God. He knew people would challenge Him, but He didn’t merely pound His fist on the table and yell a little bit louder, “Because I said I am God!” In John 3:2, Nicodemus came to Jesus and said, “*Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.*” God could have used any means in the world to persuade skeptical Pharisees that Jesus was God, but He chose to use miraculous signs. John 14:11 offers a particularly interesting insight into this discussion when Jesus says, “*Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.*” Clearly, Jesus invited people to believe that He was God on the basis of the miracles he was performing. If Jesus used miracles to convince people, it is only reasonable that we would seek to defend the historical accuracy and reliability of the miracles

⁸ <http://www.gty.org/resources/bible-introductions/MSB65/jude>

⁹ See previous citation.

themselves. You might be thinking this is an impossible task – how in the world can you prove a miracle 2000 years after the fact?!? You might be surprised! We will deal with this question in chapter 3, but there is a lot more evidence than most people realize.

Peter's Example

Just a few years later, at the Day of Pentecost, Peter gave one of the most famous sermons in the Bible. In Acts 2:22 he introduces Jesus by saying, “*Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know.*” Look at exactly what he said – Jesus was attested by God with various miraculous signs. The Greek word translated “attested” is “*Apodeiknumi*” (αποδεικνυμι) and means “to prove what kind of person anyone is, to prove by arguments, demonstrate.”¹⁰ In short, Peter was saying that the miracles served as a good argument to prove that Jesus was God. But if you look later in the verse, you see a key phrase, “*in your midst, as you yourselves know.*” Peter was taking the question of Jesus’ identity and creating something like a public trial and calling on the eyewitnesses. He was challenging the audience to check out the sources for his argument! Peter knew the evidence was enormous in his favor, so in essence he was saying, “Jesus was God and you guys all know it! If any of you doubt it, then just go talk to the rest of the people here who can confirm it for you.”

A few verses later (verse 32), Peter goes on and says, “*This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses.*” Peter didn’t stop at proving that Jesus was God – he went on to publicly claim that Jesus had been raised from the dead after being crucified! From the context, we know that this was accepted by many who were there. Going on a bit further (verse 36-38), we read, “*Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.’ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.’*”

Wow, what a powerful passage! In the middle of a Gospel presentation where 3,000 people got saved (v. 41), we see Peter making strong, reasoned arguments for the Deity and Resurrection of Jesus! His sermon not only contains strong arguments, but he also appeals to multiple prophecies from the Old Testament that prove Jesus was God. So, at the very least, Peter’s apologetic used arguments for the Resurrection and Deity of Christ as well as appeals to fulfilled prophecy, all within one of the great evangelistic sermons in history!

There’s another important point that we need to notice in Peter’s speech. While he was establishing and defending Christian faith through strong arguments, it wasn’t the actual arguments that caused the people to get saved. When he was presenting the arguments, he said, “*as you yourselves know.*” (vs. 22) They knew the truth of the arguments prior to verse 37, “*Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart*”. This is a crucial point for apologetics ministry that you have to understand: **People are never argued into Christianity. People rarely reject God for intellectual reasons. People usually reject God because they do not want to submit to Him. Our job is to show that the intellectual objections to faith ultimately fail and the true rejection is from a rebellious heart.** This claim may seem controversial to

¹⁰ <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/apodeiknumi.html>

some, but Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the most celebrated atheistic philosophers of the last 200 years seems to agree. He coined the famous phrase, “God is dead,” yet he says he did not reject Christianity because of the evidence, “It is our preference that decides against Christianity, not arguments.”¹¹ New York University professor of philosophy Thomas Nagel makes a similar point, “It isn’t just that I don’t believe in God and naturally, hope that I’m right in my belief. It’s that I hope there is no God! I don’t want there to be a God: I don’t want the universe to be like that.”¹²

We establish and defend the truth – the Holy Spirit convicts the heart and gives faith that leads to repentance. This is one of the most freeing truths of Christianity! When you are put on the spot and questioned by a co-worker, it ultimately is not about the eloquence of your response, although your harsh response can quickly turn people away.

Paul’s Example

We’ll take a look at 2 more passages, both demonstrating Paul’s use of apologetics. In Acts 14, we find Paul and Barnabas at a city called Lystra. After performing a miracle, the men of the city tried to worship them as Greek gods! Paul responds in verses 15-17, “*Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet He did not leave Himself without witness, for He did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.*”

Notice the different types of evidence given by Paul. First, he makes an indirect appeal to the Resurrection when he says, “turn from these vain things to a living God.” At the very least, he was challenging the religion of those in Lystra by saying it was a fraud because the “gods” were dead. We could then conclude that while apologetics is primarily about showing the truth of Christianity, it is also about showing how the others views of God and the world are false. Second, Paul makes a direct appeal to Creation. Not only is the true God alive, he also, “*made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.*” Finally, Paul made an appeal to nature as we currently see it not only as an argument for God’s existence, but also for a specific attribute of God – His goodness. Psalm 52:1 says, “*The goodness of God endureth continually.*” This claim by Paul fits within his argument in Romans 1:20, “*For His invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*” For Paul, appealing to God as Creator, God as Giver of rain and crops, and God as seen in every aspect of Creation was a powerful argument for Christian faith!

One final passage gives insight to the example of apologetics we are given from Jesus and the Apostles. Acts 17 is one of the most famous passages for apologetics because it tells us a great deal about Paul’s method for apologetics in addition to the content that he communicates. We will start in verse 16 and read until the end of the chapter.

¹¹ Quoted in Os Guinness, *Time for Truth*, pg. 114.

¹² Quoted in Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*, pg. 123.

“Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, ‘What does this babbler wish to say?’ Others said, ‘He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities’—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.¹⁹ And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, ‘May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?’ ²⁰For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.’ ²¹Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

²²So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: ‘Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. ²³For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸for

‘‘In him we live and move and have our being’ as even some of your own poets have said, ‘‘For we are indeed his offspring.’

²⁹Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. ³⁰The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.’

³²Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, ‘‘We will hear you again about this.’’ ³³So Paul went out from their midst. ³⁴But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.’

Right away, we find Paul in Athens, the center of philosophy and thought in the ancient world. Athens was the home of some of the most famous philosophers in history, including Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Athens was not his final destination; he was merely waiting for Silas and Timothy to catch up with him on their journey.¹³ As an aside, how often do we fail to see ministry opportunities where we are because we think we have a different destination? God places each of us at a specific place in history at a specific time for a specific reason. He has prepared good deeds for us to do in that location. Do not be so focused on future plans that you miss the opportunities to do ministry at your current station!

¹³ Acts 17:14-16

While Paul was in Athens, God moved him deeply for the city that was overrun by false idols. As Paul listened to the voice of God, he made daily trips to the synagogue to reason from the Scriptures with the Jews in addition to making daily trips to the marketplace to tell literally whoever he could find about Jesus.¹⁴ As he made arguments for Christianity in the marketplace, the leading philosophers were intrigued by what they heard and invited him to the “Aeropagus”,¹⁵ which was “the supreme tribunal of ancient Athens.”¹⁶ The important intellectuals gathered at the Aeropagus – it might be the equivalent of Capitol Hill today for Senators. Some will object that apologetics should be separated from evangelism because people don’t get saved – they are just encouraged to endless debate. In light of this objection, look again at verses 32-34 of Acts 17.

“Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, ‘We will hear you again about this.’ So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them”

It should be noted that the objection does have some merit, as there were mockers who probably wanted to debate, but never truly consider Christianity. However, there were genuine conversions at that time in addition to others who wanted time to process the truth-claims of Christianity. When you think about it, is this situation really specific to apologetics? I think not. When the truth of Christianity is presented, some will respond in faith, some will desire additional study, and some will reject. Based on the text of Scripture, this objection to apologetics is nothing more than a simple misunderstanding. Certainly Paul understood this when he wrote, “*I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.*”¹⁷ That some would not accept Paul’s message was a given. He was so burdened for the lost that he would do whatever it took to see a single soul find rest in Christ.

A Couple of Observations

First, let us remember the explicit command in I Peter 3:15 that our defense of the faith be conducted with “gentleness and respect.” Love is our primary apologetic, although it is not our only apologetic. Second, people are never argued into saving faith. Consider Nicodemus in John 3. He came to Jesus, persuaded that He was the Son of God on the basis of the miracles, yet he had not accepted Jesus as Savior. The miracles gave Nicodemus good reasons to believe that Jesus was God, which opened the door for further Gospel-centered conversations. It is never about winning arguments. It is always about Jesus saving people. Third, realize that rejection of Christianity is not for intellectual reasons alone, although intellectual objections can be a barrier to faith. It is our job to peel back the intellectual objections and show that they are not legitimate – but this must be done with gentleness and respect. Many people think they are rejecting Christianity on the basis of intellectual objections, but when those objections are exposed, some

¹⁴ Acts 17:17

¹⁵ Acts 17:18-21.

¹⁶ <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Aeropagus>

¹⁷ I Corinthians 9:22

will come to faith. This was seen in Peter's sermon in Acts 2, Paul's visit to the Aeropagus in Acts 17, and Nicodemus' encounter with Jesus in John 3.

Types of Apologetics

To be sure, our definition of apologetics, "a defense and establishment of the faith," can be accomplished in numerous ways. For example, benevolence ministries meet this definition. Showing radical, genuine love by meeting physical needs of the community provides a springboard to defend the truth of Christianity. As was the case with Paul's visit to the Aeropagus, people will often respond, "Why do you guys give so freely? I want to hear more about this." By engaging people where they are, an opportunity has been found to defend and establish the truth of Christianity. This, however, is not what is typically understood when people talk about apologetics. The common understanding is that apologetics deals with intellectual barriers to faith. We will spend our class time focusing on this aspect, although the other should not be neglected.

Within the topic of intellectual barriers to faith, there are 2 branches that will both be explored in this class: internal vs. external apologetics and positive vs. negative apologetics.

Many people say that apologetics should not be used as evangelism, but only as a means to strengthen the faith of believers. This is known as internal apologetics. That is, a ministry that is directed toward people already in the body of Christ. The practical benefit here is immense. Christianity is faced with a barrage of questions that can be damaging to one's faith if they have not studied the truth of Christianity: Why does a loving God allow bad things to happen to good people? Hasn't science disproved Christianity? The Bible is a really old book, can we actually trust it? And the questions go on. Internal apologetics can help believers understand the truth of Scripture at a deeper level and strengthen their faith.

External apologetics seeks to give evidence for the truth of Christianity that will persuade people to surrender their life to Jesus Christ. Some Christians, however, argue that apologetics should be limited to the internal variety. The problem with limiting apologetics to internal apologetics is that it's simply unbiblical! Some who favor external apologetics argue for apologetics as an evangelistic tool based on how many people "got saved" through that ministry or other benchmarks that supposedly say apologetics is "working". This seems silly to me. If God himself used apologetics in His Gospel presentation, and the Apostles used apologetics in their Gospel presentations, then the level of effectiveness we currently see from this type of ministry is secondary at best. Apologetics, both internally and externally, is not a matter of personal preference, but of Biblical obedience!

The second branch to understand is that of positive vs. negative apologetics. Positive apologetics focuses on reasons that one should believe Christianity is actually true. This involves providing good reasons to believe the truth claims of Christianity. Popular topics within this realm include arguments for the existence of God, the resurrection of Jesus, the reliability of the Bible, our inherent knowledge of morality, and other archaeological and historical evidences.

Negative apologetics involves responding to objections to Christian faith. Some of the most popular topics are how a loving God could send people to hell, why God allows so much evil and suffering in the world, hypocrisy in the church, and religion as the cause of so many wars. Both aspects are important in our defense of Christian faith. We want to give people good reasons for believing that Christianity is true. At the same time, they may have legitimate questions that need answered and our job is to show them the truth of the Scriptures. Of course, to be able to do this, we have to know the Scriptures ourselves. A second definition of apologetics might be helpful at this point. Many times, apologetics is defined as “knowing what you believe and why you believe it.” Using this definition simplifies our task quite a bit! We simply need to know what the Bible says and why we should believe it.

Getting hung up on a specific “type” of apologetics would be a mistake. We must be sure that regardless of our apologetic method, our central theme remains love. On this this topic, Francis Schaeffer commented that all people “are valuable, so we should meet them in love and compassion.”¹⁸ Schaeffer continues, “If people do not have ‘modern’ intellectual questions, there is no need of dealing with such questions; but we must acknowledge that in our generation almost everybody has them.”¹⁹ He builds his case that many objections are not phrased in lofty language, yet they are serious intellectual objections to faith. Learning to answer the objection in the language of the objector, whether it be lofty, plain, or otherwise is itself an act of love – of meeting them where they are.

Practical Benefits of Apologetics

We have already seen the clear commands of Scripture to defend and establish the truth-claims of Christianity. In closing, we will take a brief look at the practical benefits of every believer viewing themselves as apologists.

Strengthen Faith of Believers

Christian faith has come under significant attack in 21st century American culture. Secular arguments portray those who have faith as ignorant or even stupid. Going back in history, Mark Twain commented, “Faith is believing what you know ain’t so.” Famous atheist, Richard Dawkins said,

“Faith is the great copout, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence ... Mock them, ridicule them in public. Don’t fall for the convention that we’re all too polite to talk about religion.”²⁰

In a similar vein, Bill Maher comments,

¹⁸ Francis Schaeffer, *Trilogy: The God Who Is There, Escape from Reason, He Is There and He Is Not Silent*, pg. 176.

¹⁹ Schaeffer, 177.

²⁰ Richard Dawkins, “Lecture from ‘The Nullifidian’”, The Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science, <http://old.richarddawkins.net/articles/89>, December 9, 2013.

“We are a nation that is unenlightened because of religion. I do believe that. I think that religion stops people from thinking. I think that religion is a neurological disorder. I am just embarrassed that it has been taken over by people like the evangelicals, by people who do not believe in science and rationality. It is the 21st century. And I will tell you, my friend, the future does not belong to the evangelicals. The future does not belong to religion.”²¹

If you think those comments are extreme, consider the words of Peter Singer, a current professor of Ethics at Princeton. He says, “Human babies are not persons ... the life of a newborn is of less value than the life of a pig, a dog, or a chimpanzee.”²² This assault on Biblical truth is in literally every aspect of life. How are Christians to respond to claims like these? When your son comes home and reports that his 10th grade Sociology teacher told him that all religions are manmade and none are really true, how do you respond? When your daughter returns from college and says that she has learned that babies do not become persons until after birth (according to modern biology), do you have good arguments ready to help her see the truth? Many of these claims seem outlandish, but more and more people are buying into them and we are commanded to be prepared to make a defense.

Perhaps most startling of all is the fact that many of these attacks are coming from within the church. Harold DeWolf was a mentor to Martin Luther King Jr, a professor of systematic theology, and a Methodist pastor during the Great Depression. When building a case for errors being found in the Bible, DeWolf was careful to insist that those who claim the Bible is inerrant are simply unintelligent. DeWolf said, “to the intelligent student who is more concerned with seeking and declaring truth than with maintaining a dogma it must be apparent that the Bible is by no means infallible.”²³

The comments cited do not express a minority opinion within university and media settings. By redefining faith, these people ostracize Christians and often leave them stumbling for words and embarrassed by their “faith.” In these, and other similar contexts, a working knowledge of apologetics serves to validate Christian truth and strengthen the faith of believers. It should be clear at this point that apologetics is extremely helpful in strengthening the faith of believers, particularly in a society that is so aggressively anti-Christian.

Apologetics is also helpful in strengthening the faith of believers in the midst of personal and family turbulence. In Matthew 11, we find John in jail and apparently questioning whether Jesus was truly Messiah. He sends messengers to Jesus to inquire about His true identity. Jesus’ response is, “*the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up*”²⁴ Think about that! In jail and perhaps in despair, John was having doubts about whether or not Jesus was truly the Messiah. How did Jesus respond? He made an appeal to evidence based on miracles. Why then, would we not engage our skeptical

²¹ “Bill Maher: Christians Have Neurological Disorder”, WorldNetDaily, <http://www.wnd.com/2005/02/28970/>, December 9, 2013.

²² Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, pg. 122-123.

²³ Harold DeWolfe, *The Case for Theology in Liberal Perspectives*, pg. 58.

²⁴ Matthew 11:5

friends about the reality of the miracles of Jesus? I submit that if Jesus felt that was a good enough reason to believe, we should as well!

The deeper our understanding of the truths of Scripture prior to turmoil, the more comforting these truths will be during the turmoil. Tim Keller mourns the suffering endured by people in his church who did not take time to study the truths of Scripture prior to adversity, “As a working pastor for nearly four decades, I have often sat beside people who were going through terrible troubles and silently wished they had taken the time to learn more about their faith before the tidal wave of trouble had engulfed them.”²⁵ Investing time and effort in studying the truths of Scripture will enable believers to face the difficulties of life with hope that the world cannot explain. Notice the cyclical pattern here: (1) study Scripture to approach trials with hope (2) receive questions for non-believers about how you face difficulty with hope, then (3) “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”²⁶ Studying apologetics allows us to face difficulty with hope, which in turn allows us to share with others the truth of Scripture and perhaps guide them to Jesus. Michael Horton echoes Keller’s main point,

“Understanding who God is, who we are, and God’s ways in creation, providence, and redemption ... is to the trials of life what preparing for the LSAT is to the practice of law ... Preparing for this exam is not just a head game ... it’s about living, and dying, well.”²⁷

Increase Evangelism

Our educational system is regularly parroting the need for progress through investigation and thorough searching. As Christians who love the glory of God, we should be advocates of rigorous science as we know that “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork.”²⁸ However, for many in the educational system, this investigation is to be encouraged as long as the conclusion is pre-determined – that is, that God does not exist. That said, many in our culture are legitimately seeking answers to life’s toughest questions and want truth more than a pre-determined answer. While other worldviews are unable to answer the toughest questions, Christianity offers the most plausible answers to every question. Because of this, we should seek out people who are seeking answers. Through the ages, some of the best defenders of Christianity were converted through investigating the hardest questions of life. C. S. Lewis, rejected Christianity as a teenager and became an atheist because of all the suffering in the world. Reflecting on his return to Christianity and attempts to evangelize his peers, Lewis said, “Nearly everyone I know who has embraced Christianity in adult life has been influenced by what seemed to him to be at least probable arguments for Theism.”²⁹ Reflecting on Paul’s trip to the Aeropagus in Acts 17, one commentator said, “Paul had proclaimed the simple gospel with integrity to the intellectual sophisticates of Athens. And we must reintroduce post-Christians to Jesus with freshness ... But we must do so with faithfulness, telling it the way it was and is.”

²⁵ Timothy Keller, *Walking With God Through Pain and Suffering*, pg. 196-197.

²⁶ I Peter 3:15

²⁷ Michael Horton, *A Place for Weakness*, pg. 19.

²⁸ Psalm 19:1

²⁹ C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 173.

Up until the early 1900s, Princeton University was a conservative institution that was committed to training pastors in America. However, the last century brought great liberalism into Princeton. During the transition away from Biblical Christianity, J. Gresham Machen was a professor at Princeton and a leading voice for true Christianity. He said,

“False ideas are the greatest obstacles to the reception of the Gospel. We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation to be controlled by ideas which prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion.”³⁰

Machen knew that evangelistic efforts would be greatly hindered if the majority of people saw Christianity simply as a delusional belief system. Now, nearly 100 years after his life, his words appear prophetic. We have a great responsibility to take the Gospel of Jesus to all men, and apologetics is one way that we can do that. We must be careful to craft our apologetics in such a way that people are shown Jesus through our arguments and behavior. Francis Schaeffer comments on the centrality of Jesus to true Christian apologetics, “I wonder if ‘apologetics’ which does not lead people to Christ as Savior, and then on to their living under the Lordship of Christ in the whole of life really is Christian apologetics.”³¹

On a more personal note, one of my classmates in graduate school told me he had been a “hate-theist” (his term) for about 15 years before turning to Christianity. I asked him what caused his turn from atheism to Christianity and he told me that the claims made by atheism about the world just didn’t make sense. After spending several years studying with a Christian friend, God gave him faith to believe and he repented of his sin and turned to Christ. He still teaches science in the public sector in Arizona, but his life has been radically turned around by examining the claims of Christianity. Praise God for his faithful servant who took several years to systematically examine the claims of Christianity with him!

It has been said the some people reject Christian faith for intellectual reasons, some for emotional reasons, and some for volitional (refusal to submit) reasons.³² Some are held back by multiple reasons, but we must take the time to deal with the intellectual barriers to faith. Some may be ready to submit to Divine authority and have no emotional barriers, but they will not accept Christianity if they think it is as fictional as *The Hunger Games*! Rarely are the intellectual objections the only barrier to faith, but we still have a Biblical responsibility to peel them away.

Final Thoughts

In closing, we have defined apologetics as, “the branch of Christianity that deals with the defense and establishment of the Christian faith.” We have also seen that we should be prepared as apologists because we are commanded to do so. Additionally, we have examples from Jesus and the Apostles of this type of ministry. With our culture’s hatred of Christianity, the need has never been greater for Bible-based apologetics. Our primary apologetic is to be our love, which will

³⁰ J. Gresham Machen, “Christianity and Culture”, *Princeton Theological Review* 11 (1913): 7.

³¹ Schaeffer, 186-187.

³² See Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, Introduction.

transcend all people, regardless of their reasons for rejecting Christianity. We must understand that we will never argue someone into Christianity. Our job is to help people see that intellectual objections to Christianity fall flat and the true reason for rejection is a heart of rebellion. Apologetics is much like peeling an onion – peel away the outer layer (intellectual objections) to show what is really at the core. We present the evidence and the Holy Spirit convicts hearts. This study will equip you to maintain strong faith in the face of attacks on Christianity and enable you to direct your skeptical friends and co-workers to Jesus by examining the biggest questions of life from a Biblical viewpoint.

Verse for Scripture Memory

I Peter 3:15

“but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect”

Discussion Questions

1. What is apologetics?
2. Why should Christians care about apologetics?
3. Give at least 2 example of apologetics being used in Scripture.
4. What are the practical benefits of studying apologetics?

Recommended Reading

The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism
by Timothy Keller

This was actually the first book about apologetics I ever read. I hadn't had a single class on the topic, nor had I really been exposed to it at all. It is a great introduction to the material. I've taught from this book in my classes at BCS for the last 3 years and the kids absolutely love it – I mean, how could you not love a book about defending God's truth that starts with a quote from Darth Vader?!? Tim Keller planted a church in New York City in 1989 amidst the tumult of a city that was spiraling out of control; many of the churches had closed their doors as members moved to the suburbs. For their evening services, Keller invited skeptics to come and discuss why they thought Christianity could not be true. He would reason with them from the Scriptures and present a compelling case for Christianity. The first half of the book is a compilation of the most common objections to faith he has heard over the last 20 years, along with the Christian response. The second half of the book builds a cumulative case for Christianity's truth. This book is particularly helpful if you want to do a small group study because you can also order a study guide as well as a DVD set. The DVD's cost about \$20 and include an open discussion with 6-10 people from various worldviews discussing the popular objections to faith. Keller does a great job of covering heavy content in a very conversational style. I highly recommend it.

7 Truths that Changed the World: Discovering Christianity's Most Dangerous Ideas
by Kenneth Samples

Samples takes 7 unique Christian doctrines and helps the readers understand why they are so significant. It is helpful for people who have grown up in the church and not considered how radical some of the Bible's claims are; it is also helpful for people unfamiliar with the Bible to quickly learn the key doctrines that make Christianity unique. Each of the 7 Truths is unpacked in 2 chapters. The first chapter explains the doctrine and the second chapter responds to attacks from philosophy, science, and liberal theologians. This book is also at an introductory level and each section is concluded with some discussion questions for reflection or a group study. My wife recently led a couple of her friends through this book and they loved it. They had grown up in the church, but had not studied theology and apologetics. They commented that the book really made them think, but it helped them understand Christianity in a deeper way and emboldened their witness.