

A Study in Christian Apologetics – What We Believe & Why

Lesson Two: Apologetics Defined

Cogito, Ergo Credo: I Think, Therefore I Believe!

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“...always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason [‘apologia’] for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...”
1 Peter 3:15b

Does Studying Apologetics Mean “I’m Apologizing For Being a Christian?!”

NO! ‘An apologetic’ is just another way to say ‘a defense’ (from the Greek word ‘apologia’). So, the study of Apologetics is simply the study of the defenses and explanations of the Christian Faith. The study of Christian Apologetics fulfills two purposes: it strengthens our faith by joining our mind with our spiritual needs (heart and soul), and it prepares us for discussions about the Christian Faith with others. Apologetics is therefore essential in our personal spiritual maturity as well as a tool for evangelism.

Matthew 22:37-38

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.”

There are multitudes of issues that Christians wonder or worry about, sometimes to the detriment of their faith. And these same kinds of issues can emerge when we find ourselves in evangelistic situations with a genuine seeker looking for answers. For example, we may be drawn into a debate over worldviews (why we think the way we do about life in general). Or we could be asked to explain our perspectives on specific situations while counseling others who are craving for our (and God’s) help. Or it could be a simple theological dilemma that has been nagging at someone, and has kept them from making a commitment of faith.

Some of the Questions and Issues We Face (and Sometimes Wonder About Ourselves...)

Where did God come from?

Why did my loved one have to die?

You can’t judge me or my choice of religion!

Jesus was just another good teacher.

The Bible and the Koran are equally true.

Modern man has science, and has no need for Christianity or religion.

The Church is full of hypocrites and has a history of incredible violence.

A basic understanding of what we believe and why we believe it prepares us to be used by the Spirit of God when He moves within someone and draws them to you to explain the reasons for your faith in Christ.

“Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage...discharge all the duties of your ministry.” **2 Timothy 4:2a,5c.**

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What glorious incentive for the study of Apologetics, to prepare ourselves to be the hands and feet of the Lord vis-a-vis His plan of salvation for the world, and to strengthen our personal faith at the same time!

A Pop Quiz

Quickly – how would you define ‘faith’? And how does the non-believer define ‘faith’?

- A. The same thing as (or synonymous with) ‘belief’
- B. Blind acceptance of something we do not know is ‘true’
- C. Our beliefs in action
- D. Trust

In modern times faith has come to be synonymous with belief, or even worse, with ‘blind acceptance.’ It is now usually accepted that ‘having faith’ is something a person does in the absence of evidence, or even despite evidence of to the contrary. People ‘with faith’ are ridiculed as having less intelligence than those who accept beliefs based upon ‘evidences.’ But in reality, when all is said and done, all knowing requires a certain amount of faith (trust, and taking action based upon the beliefs we hold).

The fact remains that all forms of knowledge ultimately rely on unprovable assumptions. For example, we assume that the restaurants we choose to visit are going to provide us with sanitary food. We also (normally) operate our lives with the assumption that we will all wake up in the morning ready for the next day. None of these (and countless other decisions and assumptions we make every day) are provable, or are assured. We take them ON FAITH! Sure, we make ‘educated’ assumptions, which takes away the ‘blindness.’ We can and do, every day, rely on intuitive statements backed up by logical evidences and philosophies and experiences, all which may or may not be ‘known beyond the shadow of a doubt.’ But they get us by in our day to day lives. The bottom line is that with proper reason to believe an assertion, despite the fact that we can never really be assured of anything, a ‘properly placed faith’ is not blind!

But I Sometimes Have Doubts – Isn’t That a Bad Thing?

Everyone periodically has doubts, whether it be about God, Jesus, or even our salvation. This may make us feel guilty – we may think that maybe our lack of ‘faith’ is bad, or that this is evidence that we may actually not be saved. But an honest appraisal of this situation clarifies why this is not so. In a world that values the natural world as all that exists, we become programmed to expect concrete evidence (despite the fact that there is no such thing), causing us to experience doubt when we don’t have it. We must understand that doubt WILL happen – it’s normal, even to be expected, when we are in a ‘relationship’ with an ‘unseen’ person.

Us doubters are in good company. Remember that “Jesus’ own neighbors doubted Him. John the Baptist, his cousin and forerunner, later questioned Him. Among the twelve disciples Thomas doubted, Peter cursed, and Judas betrayed, all after spending three years with Jesus.”
Philip Yancey; [Reaching for the Invisible God](#)

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In these times of our lives it is valuable to remember that a significant part of 'faith' is choice. We CHOOSE to believe, based upon not only the things we can experience with our five senses, but also with the things we can feel apart from these senses (love, fear, longing, right, wrong, etc.) Consider the immaterial concept of 'love' as an example. We know from experience that the feelings of love are strong enough to cause us to believe (or at least want to believe) that love exists. We then add to that experience the history of love in our life and in the lives of others. Combining these evidences enables us to make the intellectually honest conclusion that the immaterial concept of 'love' is 'real'. The same exercise is valid with other 'immaterial' concepts, such as the existence of God, or of objective truths, to name just two examples. As we combine experience with logic and corroborating physical evidence, we end up with a 'faith' that is credible to believe, and to build a world-view upon. This is what the Bible means when it tells us that 'faith is the evidence of things not seen'. This shows us how a study of Apologetics can help us build our faith, and assist in the building of faith in others.

"Well I Have Just Good Old 'Faith' – I Don't Need Evidence!"

Some claim that a faith that does not need evidence is a better faith than someone who seeks evidences. But Christianity is a faith system that has always been subject to verification. Our God shows us repeatedly in the Bible that He knows that we weak-willed humans would need more than just the natural revelation to lead us back to Him. He knows that we would need more than the creation to prove a Creator, more than just our ability to love to prove we need a Lover, and more than our desire for life to drive us to find how to live after death. Perhaps it is our fallen nature He is accommodating for us; perhaps it was always His plan. In any event, from the beginning of the faith, indeed from the beginning of the creation, God has provided His people with verifications and evidences.

For example, He provided Moses with a rod to show His power to Pharaoh. He allowed Elijah to show off His power to the prophets of Baal. Abraham asked for proof of his blessing, and Isaiah was the vessel of God for many prophecies 'so that men may see and know.' In the New Testament, the evidences are just as prolific. Jesus produced many wonders for both His apostles as well as the early followers. He climaxed His validation as the Christ by His resurrection from the dead – the ultimate price was also the ultimate confirmation. And the first Church was guided by men like the esteemed Dr. Luke, who documented for his colleagues the words of the eyewitnesses, so that 'you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught'. Peter likewise presented the evidences, and all but challenged the listeners to investigate the facts for themselves. And Paul reminded the Corinthians of the eyewitness testimony available also. Clearly, adding evidence to faith is a Biblical concept.

Evidential Apologetics vs. Presuppositional Apologetics

Within scholarly circles, a philosophical/theological debate has loomed for years which contrasts the value of presenting evidences for the faith to non-believers. 'Evidential' Apologetics assumes that the presentation of evidences can convince the opening of minds to the work of the Spirit in the conversion process.

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At the other end of the spectrum, 'Presuppositional' Apologetics assumes that Christianity makes sense only after the Spirit has moved in your life. Once you 'pre-suppose' that Christianity is true, everything else begins to fall in line and make sense. But until you do, the evidences that convince a Christian make no sense to a non-believer.

The concept of 'Combinational' Apologetics lies somewhere in the middle.

What is the real point to be learned from this debate? It is simply that we must learn to recognize

"We should know our subject
profoundly and share it simply."

William Lane Craig

where our discussion partner is coming from. Everyone will agree that the world (the evidences) looks different to everyone depending on one's presuppositions. So, we must be careful in how we present our evidences to a non-believer. If his is open minded, they may assist him in his decisions; but they may make no sense to him at all if he considers them in the framework of his dis-believing mind-set.

Don't Become an 'Apolo-Jedi'

Many are drawn to a study of Apologetics in order to get their 'Black Belt' in Apologetics and go out to look for an argument. They may then proceed to karate chop unbelievers to shreds with their intellectual acumen and verbal arguments. But one does not study Apologetics just to win arguments. Although many famous apologists are involved with other highly trained philosophers in debating atheism, creationism, and a million other -ism's, the main purpose of apologetics is not to convince but to confirm.

We must always remember the second half of the mandate in 1 Peter: "...with gentleness and respect..." The gospel is offensive enough—we do not need to add to that offense with our manner of speaking.

What Should We Do Now?

We must do what all believers should – focus on our Christian Maturity. In our quest for sanctification – throughout our devotional life, our prayer time, and our serving time – we must add time to feed our intellect. Take time to inventory your spiritual gifts. Check your 'spiritual fruit' basket to see what you have been blessed with, and mature these gifts.

God is wanting to prepare us for an eternity of relationship with Him, as well as to show others the way to do the same. To do both we must have a strong faith that is not simply based upon emotions or experience, but also intellectual confidence.

Begin to seriously pursue answers to the questions you may have. Start an 'ignorance notebook' in which you may journal these items, and document your investigations. This will assist you in your spiritual growth, and the Lord may use them in His outreach work also!

We should also realize that Apologetics has limits in evangelism. Ultimately, reasons alone are not enough for anyone to accept the Christian Faith. It is our intuition - our spirit - that leads us to accept the evidence as true, because it satisfies our natural God-given desire for meaning.

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Thinking Points

How important is it to join our intellect with our faith?

Can you have a strong faith if your 'beliefs' do not mesh with your 'mind'?

Do people like to be 'wrong'?

How can Apologetics assist in 'pre-evangelism'?

Lesson Summary

The defense of the faith is a Biblical command.

Christians must be prepared to explain what they believe and why they believe it, with gentleness and respect.

There are 'proofs' given by God evident throughout the Bible

Faith is a living, breathing way of life, based upon warrant and choice.

A Christian may begin the apologetical / evangelical journey with a consideration of presuppositions

Next Lesson: Examples Of The Internal Evidences For God That We All Have

Resources:

Apologetics Summaries

[Handbook Of Christian Apologetics](#); Kreeft & Tacelli; Intersity Press;1994

[Reasonable Faith](#); William Lane Craig; Crossway Books; 1994

[Five Views On Apologetics](#); Steven Cowan, editor; Zondervan; 2000

Examples Of Apologetics In Action

[When Skeptics Ask](#); Geisler & Brooks; Baker Book House; 2001

[Know What You Believe](#); Paul Little; Chariot Victor Publishing; 1999

[Know Why You Believe](#); Paul Little; Chariot Victor Publishing; 1999

Online

www.WhyIBelieve.org

www.CARM.org

www.Apologetics.com