

What is Christian Apologetics?

Aaron Klopfenstein

Today

- I. Define Christian apologetics
- II. Examine its Biblical roots
- III. Role in our lives today – Why does it matter?

1 Peter 3:15

Be 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.

Greek: *apologia*

What would you say?

- Why do you believe God exists?
- How do you know that your religion is true?
- Why should I put my faith in Jesus Christ?

apol·o·get·ics.

Christian apologetics is both
the science and art of
answering the question of why
someone should place their
faith in Jesus Christ by
using reasons and evidence.

Apologetics is...

A branch of Christian theology which seeks to provide a rational justification for faith in Christ

"What are the rational grounds for believing Christianity is true?"

- Offering reasons for faith
- Removing intellectual barriers to faith

Apologetics is not...

Merely training in the art of answering questions or debating or evangelism, though these draw upon the science of apologetics and apply it practically.

Rather, *what rational warrant can be given for the Christian faith?* The student of Christian apologetics studies this question.

Two Types of Apologetics

- 1) Offense: Making a positive case that Christianity is true (corresponds to reality).
- 2) Defense: Responding to objections and refuting opposing beliefs

Outreach mindset: giving hope that is centered around Christ - "I am truth" John 14:6



Discipline



which leads to...

Motivation



which is the basis of...

Hope



which develops...

Conviction



which is the source of ...

Truth



Discipline

Motivation

Hope

Conviction

Truth

Behaviors



Beliefs

Biblical Roots

Apostle Paul's Approach to Apologetics

Paul With Jews (Acts 17)

They...came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As usual, Paul went to them, and on 3 Sabbath days reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and showing that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead, and saying: "This is the Messiah, Jesus, whom I am proclaiming to you." Then some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, including a great number of God-fearing Greeks as well as a number of the leading women.

With Gentiles (Non-Jews)

Paul changed course when debating the leading philosophers (Epicureans and Stoics) in Athens.

He started from *their* vantage point since they, unlike the Jews, did not accept the authority of Scripture. He used their own philosophical and religious ideas to engage them.

Areopagus in Athens



Acts 17

“Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For 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...



Observations: Paul's Method

- Developed an argument based on God's general revelation in nature (natural theology)
- Built bridges
- Challenged prevailing beliefs
- Complimented their religious inclinations
- Drew upon observable data from the natural world re: God's nature
- Identified God for them
- Argued God could be known (relationship)
- Announced coming judgment by God of the world
- Used evidence from the pagan poets

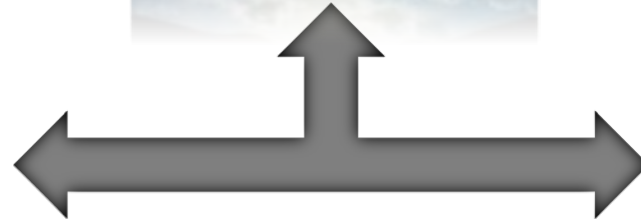
Same Method Effective Today



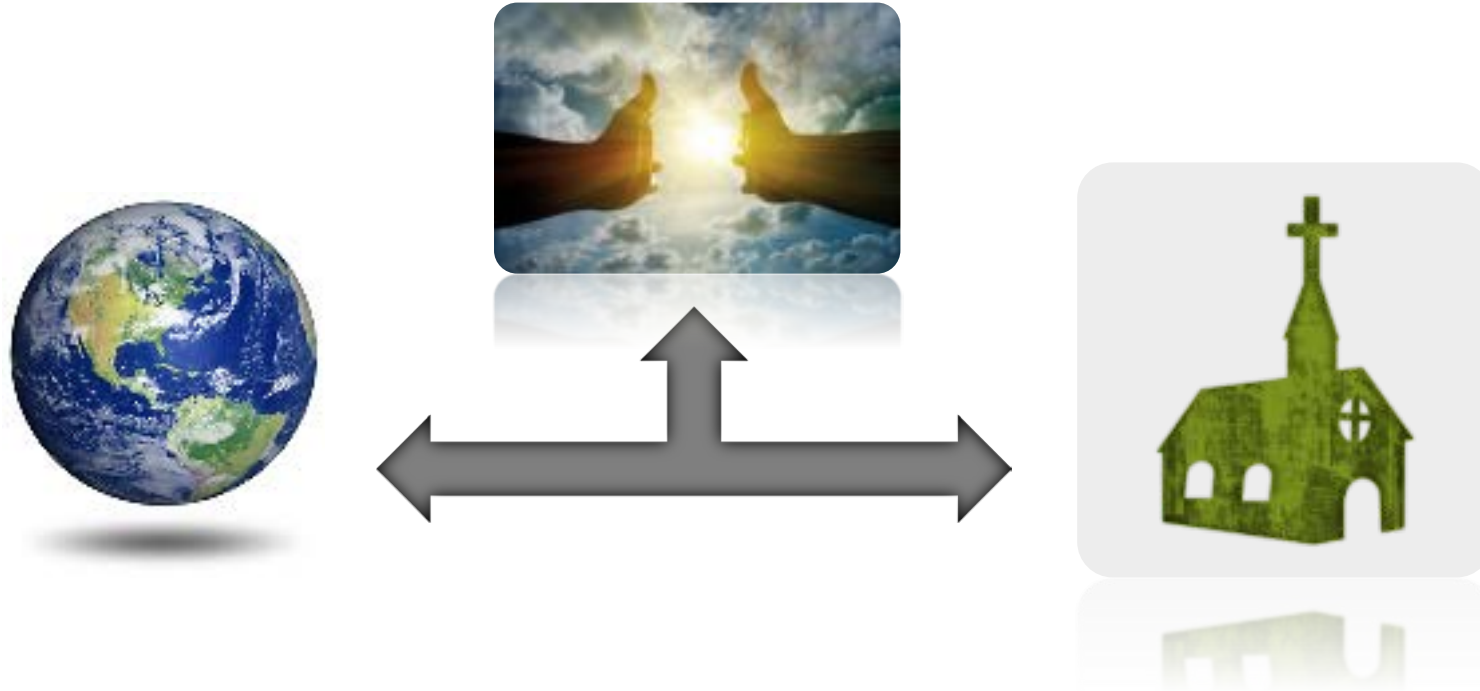
Role of Apologetics In Our Lives: Why Does It matter?

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind; this is the most important commandment. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.

Matt: 22:37-39



Studying God as an expression of loving Him with our minds – an act of worship



- Reaching out with the Gospel to those who have not yet come to know Christ
- Apologetics – offense/defense
- “Helping the thinker believe”

- Training Christians to understand, articulate, defend and apply Christian truths
- Strengthening believers - doctrinal maturity
- “Helping the believer think”

Why Does It Matter?

Aren't we supposed to
have a child-like faith?

Hebrews 5:12 to 6:1

...By this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food (*trophe*, or "*nourishment*") is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity...

1 Cor 14:20

Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.



Milk (gala): elementary teachings of Christ first learned by new believers.

Meat (broma): deeper, more robust understanding of the spiritual doctrines of Christ

Child-like faith - YES

- Wholly trusting
- “You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you - because he trusts in you.” (Isaiah 26:3)

Childish faith - NO

- Underdeveloped, immature
- Unreflective
- Doesn't explore and savor truth
- How will this hold up under pressure?

Biblical Model

Patterns in Paul's Epistles:

- First → doctrinal foundations (belief)
- Second → practical applications (behaviors)



Right thinking about God is foundational for right living.
Also helps us combat our own doubts.

If we really understand what God is like, we grow in spiritual maturity and become prepared to guide others similarly.

Application Today

- Cultural forces
- Rise in popularity of competing worldviews
- Mass confusion - next gen concerns
- Negative perceptions of Christianity

- Opportunities for impact
- Care for others
- Play offense – administer living water; with gentleness and respect

Worldview



A particular philosophy of life or conception of the world. Like it or not, every person has a worldview.

- Theism
- Pantheism
- Naturalism
- Judaism
- Christianity
- Islam
- Hinduism
- Buddhism
- Confucianism
- Mormonism
- Unitarianism
- Jehovah's Witnesses
- Zoroastrianism
- Baha'i Faith
- Scientology
- Jainism
- Atheism
- Agnosticism
- Others...

Every Worldview Must Address



Origin
Meaning
Morality
Destiny

Where did we come from?
What is the meaning of life?
How should we live?
What happens when I die?

Tests

Logical consistency (Is it logical or are there internal contradictions?)

Empirical adequacy (Is there evidence to support claims?)

Experiential relevance (Does it work in real life? Is it "livable"?)

Common Objections

- You can't prove that God exists
- Aren't all religions basically the same?
- It's narrow-minded to say one religion has "the" truth
- If there is a God, why is there evil and suffering?
- How could a loving God send people to hell?
- I choose science and reason over religion
- The Bible is not trustworthy
- I don't need God to be a good person (moral atheist)
- Jesus was a wise teacher but not the Son of God
- I believe in a higher power but not organized religion
- Religion poisons everything
- Bad experiences with Christians

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Recap

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Final Thoughts...

End Goal of Apologetics

“Although I am a free man and not anyone’s slave, I have made myself a slave to everyone in order to win more people...” (1 Cor 9)

“The goal in most conflicts is to destroy your opponent. The goal in apologetics is to win your opponent.”

End Goal of Apologetics

...“To the Jews I become as a Jew in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel that I might share with them in its blessings.”

Apologetics is the seasoning, the **Gospel** is the main course. You do not want too much seasoning or it will make the main course insipid. Apologetics does not dominate our message; it undergirds it. Argument doesn't save people, but it certainly clears the obstacles so they can take a direct look at the Cross.

Support the argument justifiably but recognize it is Jesus Christ who you need to lift up, and it is the Holy Spirit who brings about change within the human heart. An argument may remove doubt but only the Holy Spirit can convict of truth.

- Ravi Zacharias

Principles

- Focus on the gospel
- Promote Jesus, not “Christianity”, church, politics, etc.
- Be humble, win the person vs. win argument
- Develop life of the mind
- Get resourced, get connected, get engaged

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