

WHAT IS APOLOGETICS?

INTRODUCTION

Apologetics may be simply defined as the defense of the Christian faith. The simplicity of this definition, however, masks the complexity of the problem of defining apologetics. It turns out that a diversity of approaches has been taken to defining the meaning, scope, and purpose of apologetics.

From *Apologia* to Apologetics

The word “apologetics” derives from the Greek word *apologia*, pronounced "ap-ol-og-ee'-ah", which was originally used in reference to “a speech of defense” or “an answer given in reply”. In ancient Athens it referred to a defense made in the courtroom as part of the normal judicial procedure. After the accusation, the defendant was allowed to refute the charges with a defense or reply (*apologia*). The accused would attempt to “speak away” (*apo-away, logia-speech*) the accusation.

It means, "a verbal defense." It is used eight times in the *New Testament: Acts 22:1; 25:16; 1 Cor. 9:3; 2 Cor. 10:5-6; Phil. 1:7; 2 Tim. 4:16*, and *1 Pet. 3:15*. But it is the last verse that is most commonly associated with Christian apologetics.

"...but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence" (*1 Pet. 3:15, NASB*).

“...but in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...(1 Peter 3:15, NIV)”

DEFINING APOLOGETICS

Apologetics therefore has been defined in the following ways:

“Christian apologetics is a field of Christian theology which aims to present a rational basis for the Christian faith, defending the faith against objections with the aim of bringing people to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and a relationship with God.”

"Apologetics is the work of convincing people to change their views."

“Apologetics is the *Science and Art of Christian Persuasion.*”



“Christian apologetics is simply presenting a reasonable defense of the Christian faith and truth to those who disagree.”

TYPES OF APOLOGETICS

There are two primary methods of Christian apologetics:

- **Classical Apologetics**
- **Presuppositional Apologetics**

Classical apologetics: This involves sharing proofs and evidences that the Christian message is true. It is that style of Christian defense that stresses rational arguments for the existence of God and uses evidence to substantiate biblical claims and miracles. It appeals to human reason and evidence.

Some of the arguments relied upon for proofs of God's existence are the cosmological argument and the teleological argument. The cosmological argument attempts to prove that God exists by stating that there has to be an uncaused cause of all things. That uncaused cause is God. The teleological argument uses the analogy of design; that is, the universe and life exhibit marks of design. Therefore, there must be a Designer.

Presuppositional apologetics: This involves confronting the presuppositions (preconceived ideas, assumptions) behind anti-Christian positions. This form of Christian apologetics deals with presuppositions. A Christian presuppositionalist presupposes God's existence and argues from that perspective to show the validity of Christian theism. This position also presupposes the truth of the Christian Scriptures and relies on the validity and power of the gospel to change lives (Rom. 1:16).

A BIBLICAL MODEL FOR APOLOGETICS

Considering biblical examples, mostly of Jesus and Paul, the following can be seen as a model for apologetics:

- **Motivated by love and compassion**

Matthew 9:35-38 relates how Jesus was confronted by the needs of the masses:

“...When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd...”

Our motivation should be love and compassion for all who we interact with the gospel.

- **Understanding**

Jesus understood his audience and employed images that they understood. Paul sought to proclaim, explain and defend the gospel (persuade) in a way that made sense in each separate context. Understanding the person or audience one is addressing is the first essential step of persuasion. To help individuals understand and respond to the Gospel, we need to first understand them.

There are many different types of unbelievers:

- Indifferent Unbelievers
- Hostile Unbelievers
- Curious Unbelievers
- Sincere Unbelievers

Each requires a different response.

- **Relevance**

Jesus taught the truth to people where they lived. Jesus spoke a distinct word to each unique situation. He taught people the truth, rather than the truth to people. When the scribes showed their lack of sincerity, Jesus responded by telling a parable that illustrated their hard hearts. (Mark 12:12)

New Testament scholar Walter Hollenweger explains:

We find everywhere the same pattern: the starting point of Jesus' evangelism is mostly (although not always) a question, or the concrete situation of the people around him...

- **Identifying**

The Apostle Paul is the primary example of one who, in his efforts to communicate, identified with different audiences. In 1 Corinthians 9:19-22 he writes:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible....so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all means I might save some.

Historian Henry Chadwick explains:

Paul's genius as an apologist is his astonishing ability to reduce to an apparent vanishing point the gulf between himself and his converts and yet to gain them for the Christian gospel.



- **Challenging individuals to sincerely seek the truth**

Jesus promised “*If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.*” (John 7:17)

The Bereans, after listening to Paul in Acts 17 are called “*of more noble character*” for they responded to Paul’s message by “*examining the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul was saying was true*”.

“To give truth to he who loves it not is to give him more reason for argument.” And so we need to pray that our listeners will yearn for and honestly seek the truth and challenge them to do so.

- **Deconstructive Apologetics**

A destabilizing argument seeks to eliminate a false belief system or idea which someone may hold. We see the apostle Paul engaged in this enterprise when he writes:

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5)

Before a non-believer is willing to seriously consider the truth claims of Christianity, he must be willing to leave his current worldview or explanation of the world. An unbeliever becomes increasingly open to an alternative when shown that his world view does not adequately explain the world.

We need to identify various **Alternatives** to Christianity, the common **Roadblocks** to Christianity, and the various **Misconceptions** about Christianity and begin a work of deconstruction.

WHAT APOLOGETICS IS NOT?

In light of all that has been said and discussed, it is very important to highlight some points concerning what apologetics is not or not for.

- **Arguing for argument sake**

Apologetics is not a tool to merely win an argument. Because you can win an argument and still lose the person. So in doing apologetics, we must be sensitive to the questioner and their felt needs.

- **Making another person’s believe seem ridiculous**



There is an Indian proverb that says: “after you cut off a persons’ nose, there is no point in giving them a rose to smell”. Anyone who thinks they can make any worldview look completely irrelevant and ridiculous must know then that they don’t really understand that worldview. We aim to help people of other worldviews open up within their own assumptions and presuppositions and not to disrespect what they believe. The ending part of 1 Peter 3:15 says: *“But do this with gentleness and respect”*

CONCLUSION

There is no excuse for a Christian to be completely unable to defend his or her faith. Every Christian should be able to give a reasonable presentation of his or her faith in Christ. No, not every Christian needs to be an expert in apologetics. Every Christian, though, should know what he believes, why he believes it, how to share it with others, and how to defend it against lies, attacks and contrary world views.

And we must remember that a important aspect of our apologetic is living consistently with what we believe.