

# Apologetics -1 Introduction

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## Introduction to Apologetics

We live in an era in which society ridicules both the Bible and those who take its claims seriously.

Scientism

Pluralism

Claims of biblical distortion

The possibility of miracles, revelation, and incarnation are questioned. Doubt is cast upon the deity of Christ or the existence of God.

The historical or scientific accuracy of the Bible is attacked. Scriptural teaching is rejected for not being logically coherent.

Conscious life following physical death, everlasting damnation, and a future resurrection are not readily accepted.

The way of salvation is found disgusting or unnecessary. The nature of God and the way of salvation are falsified by heretical schools of thought.

Competing religious systems are set over against Christianity—or some try to assimilate it into their own thought forms.

The ethics of Scripture is criticized. The psychological or political adequacy of Christianity is looked down upon.

Others suggest that the Bible was never meant to be taken literally. Like most fables and morality tales, the stories of the Bible are rooted in historical reality but point to higher principles that are true. It doesn't matter if Jesus rose from the dead or not. The moral principles Jesus taught are more significant than detailed accuracy of the account. This is the position that most Liberal "Christians" take.

Those who do take the Bible seriously are not comfortable letting such criticism pass without comment. Students of the Bible have for many years argued for the truth of Scripture, defending both themselves and the Bible from their critics. If the Bible is what it claims to be, all allegations of error and inaccuracies must prove unfounded. Christianity is not a "blind" faith. It is established upon verifiable historical events. If the record of the Bible is found to be genuinely mistaken, especially regarding key elements of the faith, Christianity would instantly lose all credibility. If Jesus did not actually rise from the dead, or if a certified error or contradiction could be proved to exist in the Bible, biblically-based faith would also crumble.

Hence, those who have staked their eternal destiny on the truth of the Bible strive to respond to criticisms. If the Bible is verifiably mistaken or corrupt, no one would retain his commitment to it as the Word of God. Also, believers seek to present logical, reasonable responses to critics to show

them that their criticism of the Bible is inaccurate or mistaken. Further, students of the Bible want to be able to give an answer to those who have genuine questions about the Bible or about Christianity.

Apologetics has had a long history going all the way back to the New Testament itself. In the Book of Acts the Christians presented reasoned answers to various charges made against Christianity. To the Jews the church pointed out that Christ was the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. To the Gentiles the church argued that God was calling them to turn from superstitious religions to the true God revealed in Jesus Christ. In all of their apologetics the early Church emphasized the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In fact, they called it the central pillar on which all of Christianity either stood or fell.

**Key Text:** 1 Peter 3:15 *Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:*

All Christians should be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks for the reason for their hope in Jesus Christ. Of course, for some Christians this will be a very special ministry calling, but all Christians should be able to explain what they believe, why they believe it, why others should believe it, and why contradictory systems are inadequate.

Apologetics involves responding to any intellectual challenge to the Christian faith. This means that apologetics deals, first and foremost, with answering the outright denials of Christianity which are found in atheism and in other religions. But apologetics also deals with answering the distortions of Christianity, which are found primarily in the cults, as well as in some professing Christian groups within the Christian community itself. Thus, Christian apologetics must answer all challenges to the orthodox, biblical Christian faith — no matter who the challengers are.<sup>3</sup>

## THE MEANING AND PURPOSES OF APOLOGETICS

### Meaning

The Greek Word *apologia* is used 20 times in the NT.

Acts 18:4 *Every Sabbath he **reasoned** in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.*

Acts 19:8-9 *Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, **arguing persuasively** about the kingdom of God... [and later] **reasoning** daily in the school of Tyrannus.*

Acts 22:1 *Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my **defense** which I make now unto you.*

Philippians 1:7 *It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or **defending** and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me.*

Philippians 1:16 *I am put here for the **defense** of the gospel.*

1 Peter 3:15 *Always be prepared **to give an answer** to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.*

### Activities synonymous with apologetics

Jude 3 you should **earnestly contend** for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

Titus 1:3 he brought his word to light through the **preaching** entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior

Titus 1:9, 11 [Pastors must] **encourage** others by sound doctrine and **refute** those who oppose it. For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. **They must be silenced**, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach— and that for the sake of dishonest gain.

Definition of Apologetics: “A verbal defense; a reply to a formal charge; an answer.”

Apologetics is the justification and defense of biblical Christianity. Biblical apologetics focuses on spreading and defending the Christian philosophy of life while challenging non-Christian philosophies.

The apologist responds to the objections of unbelievers in a way which sets forth the objective truth of Christianity and the exclusive character of the Christian system. He or she offers reasons for belief, vindicating the Christian worldview over against competing systems of thought and living. The appropriate response to critics of the faith is that of reasoning with them, refuting objections, proving conclusions, and offering arguments.

Offering arguments in favour of certain conclusions should not be confused with being argumentative or contentious in one’s demeanor. Presenting a reason for the hope that is within us does not demand that we do so in an offensive or arrogant way.<sup>4</sup>

By the way, apologetics has nothing to do with apologizing (saying you’re sorry) for anything.

### **Specific Purposes of Apologetics**

- to defend or demonstrate the truth-claims of Christianity; to prove that Christianity is true
- to answer particular objections and/or criticisms of the Bible and Christianity
- to give an account of the foundational concepts of the Christian faith
- the existence of God
- the reality of divine revelation, the Bible
- the ability to know God and truth
- to reach non-Christian with the gospel (i.e., evangelism)
- to challenge non-Christian faith systems (); to attack the foolishness of unbelieving or unorthodox thought

### **Summary: Apologetics consists of:**

- **Proof:** presenting a rational basis for faith
- **Defense:** answering objections of unbelief
- **Offense:** exposing the foolishness of unbelief and unorthodoxy

### **Three approaches to Apologetics**

**Evidentialist:** listing out facts, or evidences that prove Christianity is based in fact. These include archaeology, scientific facts verifying creation, historical facts related to the accounts in the Bible or the Resurrection, facts regarding the Bible's preservation or transmission, facts related to the fulfillment of prophecy. The problem with this approach is believing that facts are neutral, brute, uninterpreted data, and that the unbeliever will take your facts as "proven" or "objective" and simply include them into his neutral grid. Actually, all facts are interpreted before they make sense, and therefore, no unbeliever will accept as "fact" the Christian interpretations. For example, you might be able to show that the tomb was empty on Sunday morning, but the unbeliever will not accept as a "fact" that it means Jesus rose from the dead.

**Rationalist:** setting forth rational, logical arguments defending Christianity with the aim of convincing unbelievers. Usually, it begins with God's existence, and then moves to the probability of Jesus' resurrection and the credibility of the Bible. This is often called "traditional" or "classical" apologetics because this seems to be the method used by the most prominent apologists of earlier centuries. Rationalists start from "neutral" ground and work toward proofs that the Bible and Christianity are true. Before one can meaningfully discuss historical evidences, one has to establish God's existence. Without a theistic context, no historical event could ever be shown to be a divine miracle. Once God is proven to exist, one can show that the Bible is God's Word, that Jesus is God's Son, and that Christianity is the only valid faith.

The problem with a rationalistic approach to apologetics is that one must assume a standard of truth that exists apart from the Bible. The Bible, in order to be true, must meet this independent standard. The Bible becomes subject to man's ability to reason—one must show the unsaved person that the Bible is truly reasonable.<sup>5</sup> Further, rationalists seem to rely on weighty arguments and evidence to bring conversion rather than on a simple declaration of the Gospel message.

**Presuppositional:** starting out with the notion that God exists and has spoken as the foundational assumption. God is presupposed as the starting point for all rational thought. This approach focuses on presenting the truths of Christianity, recognising that an unbeliever's posture will include resistance and objections to those starting assumptions.

Presuppositional writer John Frame states, "[We] should present the biblical God, not merely as the conclusion to an argument, but as the one who makes argument possible."<sup>6</sup> By demonstrating that unbelievers cannot argue, think, or live without presupposing God, presuppositionalists try to show unbelievers that their own worldview is inadequate to explain their experience of the world and to get unbelievers to see that Christianity alone can make sense of their experience.

The problem with this approach is that it assumes what it's trying to prove, namely, that the Bible is true. However, all systems of thought have a first principle that they assume, and cannot prove. There is no true neutrality—everyone accepts the authority of God's Word or they do not, and not to do so is sin.

Both the testimony of history and the testimony of God's Word have informed us that the world will not be convinced one whit of the truth of Genesis because of a mountain of creationist evidence or the discovery of Noah's Ark. The world will not be convinced one whit of the truth of Exodus and Joshua because of a mountain of archaeological evidence. The "evidence that demands a verdict" will always return from the world a verdict of unbelief. The "search for the historical Jesus" or for the

“historical Paul” will never convince men that Christ died and rose for them or that the New Testament is authentic. These might attract the nod of approval from a humanistic world that operates from a foundation of intellectual autonomy, but they will do nothing to change the heart. The Holy Spirit can change the heart of the enemy of the gospel, but he never stoops to engage the enemy *on their terms*. He will only engage the enemy *on God’s terms*: the foolishness of the Word preached. Far be it from us to imagine we can improve on his methods. The world may call us “anti-intellectual,” but God will call us wise.<sup>7</sup>

Why does which apologetic approach you take matter? Imagine this scenario: you are attempting to convince a friend that Jesus really did rise from the dead. You show your friend all the evidence from the Bible that the resurrection is a fact. But your friend does not believe the Bible. He says that you can’t use information from the Bible to defend the Bible. The rational apologist would then step back and show that the Bible is indeed trustworthy. The presuppositionalist, on the other hand, would keep preaching the Bible, knowing that God has promised to use the Word to draw unbelievers to Himself in spite of the unbeliever’s unbelief. One should not revert to the unbeliever’s worldview just because the unbeliever doesn’t accept the Christian worldview.

**Conclusion:** Apologetics is the study of the best ways to 1) *explain* Christianity to unbelievers; 2) *defend* Christianity against its critics; and 3) *challenge* unbelieving and unorthodox ideas about God. In this series we’ll follow this general outline, first looking at the validity of what Christianity teaches, then showing that many criticisms of Christianity don’t hold up under scrutiny, and finally exposing the weaknesses of unbelief and unorthodox ideas.