



## What is Apologetics and Why is it Important?

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### William Wilberforce and Apologetics What role did apologetics have on Wilberforce, the British politician who worked to eliminate slavery?

What is Apologetics?

1. Apologetics is the Science and Art of Christian Persuasion.

Most quoted verse about Apologetics: I Peter 3:15.

“Always be prepared to give an (apologia) defense to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”

What is the context of this verse?

I Peter 3: 8 – 17 is an ethical argument for how God’s people are to live life.

. But do this with gentleness and respect, 16keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. 17It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.’

§ As disciples of Jesus we are called to an ethical and relational way of life and out of this way of life to persuasively speak a word of truth

§ It is not Christian Apologetics without this ethical way of life

§ Burning a heretic vs. Reflecting Christ’s character

2. Apologetics is the Science and Art of Christian Persuasion

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We are called to persuade others like Paul did.  
Acts 17 records:

As his custom was Paul went into the synagogue and on three days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ,” he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women. (vs 2-4)

- We will examine the Biblical Principles of Persuasion in some depth in the second half of this lecture.

3. Apologetics is the Science and Art of Christian Persuasion

§ The Science of Apologetics is the systematic study of the academic disciplines which are involved in apologetics.

§ To study and practice apologetics, we need to be good students and understand a large body of knowledge. Apologetics is one branch of theological study which is interdisciplinary by its very nature. The dialectic of spiritual growth in Apologetics: Eagerness to grow and share our faith, being confronted with things we don’t understand, honestly asking questions and a zealous desire to learn

§ Many Christian leaders shame individuals to not be honest about their questions

§ Without understanding what we believe and why we believe it, our faith becomes brittle and fragile: “Honest questions deserve honest answers.”

§ Virtually any aspect of human life can be turned into an argument for why Christianity is true and reasonable

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4. Lastly Apologetics is the Science and Art of Christian Persuasion.

§ What are the skills that are needed to communicate effectively with a nonbeliever?

§ The skill of a Christian apologist who debates atheists is comparable to the skill needed in becoming an Olympic figure skater.

§ The four quadrants of learning any skill

§ Unconsciously Incompetent

§ Consciously Incompetent

§ Consciously Competent

§ Unconsciously Competent

We need to have lay apologists, apologists in politics, apologists in media, apologists in film, apologists in journalism, in law, in medicine and in all areas of academia.

What are the central elements of a biblical model of persuasion?

## A. Loving Relationships

With apologetics, we are to not merely protect our flock but we are to seek to win the sheep that are helpless and harassed without a Shepherd. The Gospel of Matthew 9: 35-38 relates how Jesus was confronted by the needs of the masses:

“Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

§ The individuals that Jesus responds to are not yet his disciples.

§ The Lord feels empathy and compassion in seeing unbelievers.

§ He tells his disciples to pray for workers, to pray for Spiritual Shepherds.

§ Augustine is attracted by Christian love and its way of life. Augustine recalls his mother's love for him and her confidence that he would one day turn to Christ. Bishop Ambrose's kindness and generosity softened Augustine's heart toward the gospel.

## B. 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.

### Roadblocks to faith:

The path to faith is often littered with various roadblocks. An apologist who is seeking to help someone come to faith must first identify the particular obstacles between that person and a commitment of faith. These roadblocks might include various Alternatives to Christianity, common Roadblocks to Christianity, and various Misconceptions about Christianity. Only after understanding an individual or group, can an apologist possibly help remove such roadblocks.

§ Roadblock of Pride

The doorway to the truth is humility. If someone wants to enter they must humbly lower their neck. When Augustine first examined Christianity, he rejected it, for it didn't appeal to his inflated pride.

§ Roadblock of Sin & Lust

Augustine explained, “for the space of nine years I lived a life in which I was seduced and seducing, deceived and deceiving, the prey of various desires.”

§ Roadblock of False Beliefs

Augustine explained “When I thought of you, I was not thinking of something firm and solid. For it was not you yourself who were my God; my God was an empty fantasy, a creation of my own error.”

§ Roadblock of False paths

Augustine began following the Manichean false teaching. Augustine writes “as I went farther from the truth, I had the impression that I was drawing

nearer to it.”

### C. 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 writes, “They knew he had spoken the parable against them.” (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... New Testament evangelism does not start from a proposition. It starts from a situation.”

### D. Identifying

The Apostle Paul is the primary example of one who, in his efforts to communicate, identified with different audiences. In I 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. To the Jews I become as a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), 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.”

### E. 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)

When Jesus sees Jerusalem he cries out:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you! How often I would have gathered you children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings and you would not.” (Mt. 23:37)

§ The Lord places blame on those who are not sincerely seeking the truth.

§ He condemns those who choose to not listen to and follow him.

§ Listen to what he says to his generation:

“The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here.” (Math. 12: 42)

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.”

“If you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom” (Prov. 2:3-6a)

§ We see God’s sovereignty and human freedom side by side in the Scripture on this very point.

In Acts 8:30-34 Philip is led by the Spirit to run along side the Eunuch chariot and then

Asks, “Do you understand what you are reading?” “How can I,” the Eunuch answers, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come and sit with him ... The Eunuch asked Philip Tell me please, who is the prophet talking about?

### F. 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.” (II Cor. 10:5)

Before a nonbeliever 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. The word nihilism comes from Nihilism, the philosophical belief that rejects the existence of meaning in the world. In essence, this process of destabilizing someone’s worldview seeks to push someone toward nihilism. We see an example of nihilism when Augustine observed one Christian Apologist who publically confronted the Manicheans in open debate. Augustine recalls,

I had begun to be disturbed by listening to a man called Elpidius who spoke and argued openly against the Manichees and produced evidence from the Scripture which was not easy to resist. And the answer which they (the Manichees) did give, seemed to me a very feeble one.”

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.

## G. Positive Arguments on why Christianity is True

It is this area of positive argument and evidence that many think is apologetics. Only at this point do arguments that show why Christianity is true and reasonable seem credible. A consistent example in Acts of a repeated positive (why is Christianity true) argument are Paul’s repeated speeches to the Jews explaining why Jesus was the Messiah of the Old Testament. Augustine was eager to grow in his professional life as a professor of Rhetoric and went to listen to Bishop Ambrose who was considered a great orator. He was stunned by what he heard.

“As I opened my heart in order to recognize how eloquently he was speaking, it occurred to me at the same time (though this idea came gradually) how truly he was speaking. First I began to see that the points which he made were capable of being defended. I had thought that nothing could be said for the Catholic faith in the face of the

objections raised by the Manichees, but it now appeared to me that this faith could be maintained on reasonable grounds”.

Applying this approach to our times

One historian summarizes that the early church’s success was due to 3 factors: The early Christians out-thought, out-lived and out-died their contemporaries.