

1.4. What Is Apologetics

When I gave the course overview a few lessons ago, I mentioned that we would be using apologetics as part of the classes. Apologetics isn't a term that many people know these days, so I wanted to take some time and lay out what that is.

You'll notice that apologetics sounds a lot like "apology". When I say that word, you probably picture a time when you said you were sorry for something you did wrong. The "I'm sorry" is usually followed up with reasons on why we did what we did.

"I'm sorry I ate all the mint oreo ice cream. But, you know that's my favorite. And, no body else was eating it."

Or

"I'm sorry I haven't fixed the dripping faucet yet. I got caught up in my favorite book and lost track of time."

The word *apology* comes from the Greek word *apologia* which means "to give a defense". To make your case. But, apologetics isn't where we say we're sorry for being a Christian; it's where we give *reasons* for why we believe what we believe.

We get the mandate to do apologetics from 1 Peter 3:15 where Peter writes:

1Pe 3,15 15but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being 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

That part where it says "make a defense" is the Greek word *apologia*. In ancient Rome and Greece, an apology was something like a legal brief; where you would get up in front of the court - or write to a magistrate - and make your case about something. It wasn't when you said "I'm sorry". They weren't pleading guilty and throwing themselves on the mercy of the court. No, the person believed they were in the right for the thing they did or the position they held and they pled their case.

Why Should We Use Apologetics?

You may have heard someone tell you that you can't argue someone into the Kingdom. Usually this comes from someone who would say that you have to show them God's love and let Him do the rest. While it *is* true that we need to show non-believers love, an attractive character, and

be welcoming, the two things aren't mutually exclusive. To say someone can't be argued into the Kingdom is just wrong. I know lots of people who needed to hear reasons for why Christianity is true before they would open up to the message of the gospel. Including me!

Doing apologetics serves a few different purposes.

Shaping The Culture

First, it helps shape the culture we live in. Most of the West is largely post-Christian. Church attendance is declining in most places like Europe, Canada and the US. A lot of this has to do with the idea that faith and reason are two opposing forces. Like you can't have both - you have to take a side. This stems mostly from a period of history known as the Enlightenment that occurred in the 17th and 18th centuries. It detached reason from things like theology and monarchies. In fact, another name for the Enlightenment period is the Age of Reason.

This movement had a tremendous impact on how society sees religion now. Theology and things like the Bible are no longer considered sources of knowledge. Reason and science are king.

Part of the history of the church in America is its unfortunate retreat behind closed doors in the early 20th century. As new scientific discoveries were made, rather than come along side of science and offer ways in which Christianity and science line up, the church largely withdrew from the public sectors - like politics, education and the arts. Christians kept their beliefs to themselves or confined to their churches. And, thus, Christianity stopped being a viable explanation and influencer of the culture. Non-Christians weren't hearing about it and Christians stopped talking about it openly.

So, one of the purposes of apologetics is to present the Christian world view to the rest of the culture as a viable option that explains a lot about how the world works. The more Christians are able to articulate what it is they believe and can give strong reasons for why they believe it, the more the culture at large will be influenced by it.

One thing Christians love to do is gripe about the culture and how bad it has gotten. We complain about the state of the family, the education system, the entertainment industry... Well, how can we expect to fix the problems we see if we don't know how to engage with it? When we want to discuss issues of marriage we can't lead with "the Bible says" because people don't trust the Bible anymore. Now, we can – and should – eventually get to the Bible. But, we have to be careful when we choose to start there. Apologetics helps us have those discussions about cultural issues we see that need to be solved.

We can already see this happening today. In his book *The Surprising Rebirth Of Belief In God*, Justin Brierely outlines how the New Atheism movement of the early 2000s has largely failed and people are seeking after God again. He gives an account of how many cultural influencers -

like Jordan Peterson, Tom Holland, and Ayaan Hersi Ali - are talking about how the Christian story has influenced the world and led to the prosperity of the West. Even staunch critics - like Joe Rogan and even Richard Dawkins - have toned down their rhetoric and begun to see how the ideals that Christianity promotes are often the ones that lead to the best societies.

So, it's important that we be able to engage with the culture at large as a way to open the door to the gospel.

Clearing The Way For The Cross

Today we live in an ultra-skeptical increasingly secular culture where more and more people don't trust the Bible anymore. I brought this up a second ago; just saying "the Bible tells me so" or "I just feel it's right" isn't enough. We can't appeal to the Bible as an authority when they think of it as an outdated book that's full of myths and legends and it was written by men of power with an agenda. We have to be able to give well thought out reasons for what we believe that both speak God's Truth and communicate it in a language that others are open to hearing.

The good news is to get the conversation started you don't even have to quote a single passage from the Bible most times. We can give reasons for God's existence, evidence for the life of Jesus and proof we have the right books in the Bible without having to throw out a single verse.

This quote from Dr. Os Guinness is one of my favorites and it just about sums up the reason we, as Christians, need to use apologetics in order to spread the Gospel today:

Apologetics is pre-evangelism, which is communication that clarifies what is obscuring and obstructing the good news. And in this sense, it is the necessary foreword or preface wherever there is indifference or complacency or resistance or hostility. It is the intellectual, moral, spiritual bush-clearing operation that is the preparation for the gospel to come in.

A lot of people have a lot of roadblocks they need cleared away before they will be open to hearing the good news. Some people see science and Christianity in conflict. Some people can't get past the images of greedy, hypocritical pastors that dominate TV and movies. Some have suffered legitimate spiritual abuse by former pastors; maybe even family members. Apologetics can be used to try and get past all of that. Sometimes, you gotta do a lot of extra work before the evangelism can be done.

Strengthen Your Own Faith

I walked away from Christianity shortly after I went to college. Mostly because I never heard Christians offering up intelligent defenses of what they believed when Christianity came under attack. It felt like reason and logic were on the side of the non-religious. But, once I discovered apologetics, that all changed.

When I first encountered apologetics, I was a “spiritual” person who still believed in A Something but bought into a lot of clever assertions about how the Bible was put together, how we didn’t really know anything about Jesus outside of the Bible, how everything could be the path to God and Christianity was just some people’s way. I thought these things because I had never heard anyone refute them, and they all sounded terribly clever and informed. It wasn’t until I started listening to [William Lane Craig](#) and [Greg Koukl](#) that I realized how terrible my arguments and objections were. I was just spitting party lines without really thinking them through. But, once I started studying the issues and arguments, it was like a flood light was being shone on reality and I was finally seeing things as they truly are for the first time.

Our faith in God is kind of like standing on a Jenga tower. When we first come to Christ, we’re all fired up and nothing can touch us. Over time, we start to have questions. Some of us are taught we can’t ask those questions and we should just “have faith”. So, some of the Jenga blocks get knocked out from under us. We are still standing, but the tower is a bit more wobbly. Then, we start to see clever slogans on social media, or hear assertions about Christianity that we have no response for. Maybe we have bad experiences with people who call themselves Christians. And more blocks get knocked out. Until finally, the whole foundation collapses and we fall to the ground – our belief in God completely damaged and maybe unable to be repaired.

When doubts arise - and make no mistake, they will arise - apologetics is like building up the Jenga tower and then slathering it in Super Glue. When life seems unbearably hard, if you've studied about God's character, you know He's in control and your suffering is temporary. If you’ve studied how the Bible was put together, you'll be confident that you can trust it and what it says. If you study a little about world religions, you can see how they can’t all be true at the same time. If you study the arguments for God's existence, it will only strengthen your faith and reassure you that the Christian world view is the one that makes the most sense on how the world works, why it's so messed up, and how it gets fixed.

Who Should Do Apologetics?

Apologetics has seen a tremendous resurgence in the past couple of decades. There are numerous apologetics-focused ministries today. Usually, someone who focuses on apologetics is known as an apologist. Whenever my pastor introduces me to some new visitors to our church, he often says "this is Dave. He's our apologist". I consider this a tremendous honor when he does it because he is recognizing my passion for the field.

But, here's the thing. There is no church office of "apologist". The Bible lists the offices of the church as bishops, deacons, elders, and administrators. It doesn't list apologists. Why? Because we are *all* called to be apologists! Peter isn't giving instructions to a select few when he says we need to be able to give reasons for what we believe; he says we *all* need to be able to do it.

Another way to say someone is giving reasons for something is to say they are making an argument. We briefly touched on how arguments are constructed in the lesson on truth. And we'll talk later about some of the arguments for God's existence. For some people, though, using the word "argument" seems counter to what Jesus taught. But, that's because we are picturing heated discussions where people are yelling at each other. There's a difference, though between giving an argument and being argumentative. Just think of arguments as making a claim and backing it up with reasons.

Still don't think Christians should argue? I'll bet you argue all the time over the things you care about. If you're into sports, I bet you could argue all day long about who the best players have been in your team, what year was best for your team, and whether or not your team is going to make the championship game this year. I bet you could give reasons for why your favorite movie franchise is better than the others. In a house full of people, you better be able to make the case for why *your* favorite meal should be on the menu this week or you'll just be out of luck.

So, it's not that people feel uncomfortable making arguments; it's that they often don't do it when they feel their argument isn't very good. And, their argument isn't very good because they lack the knowledge they need to make their case. So, they don't say anything.

The tagline for Legati Christi is "equipping ambassadors for Christ". It is my goal to equip you with the knowledge you need in order to confidently make the case for the Christian world view. So, these lessons will hopefully give you that confidence.

How Should Christians Argue?

Now, let's talk a little bit about giving arguments. Doing apologetics. This class won't necessarily teach a lot on *how* to do apologetics. We won't discuss tactics and evangelism. But, in everything that we assert, we will want to give reasons for why we believe what we believe. This is apologetics.

Just as a way to kind of relax the mood on what arguments should look like, I'll briefly talk about it here. Because I know the word "argument" makes some people uncomfortable. We have enough arguing going on over politics and cultural issues. Do we really want to act like *that* when we talk about Christ?

The answer, of course, is no. We don't want our discussions to turn into heated shouting matches. And, we aren't trying to win a logical grappling match. The goal of arguing for Christianity isn't to win the argument; it's to clear away any obstacles that person may have that's keeping them from getting to the Cross.

In 1 Peter 3:15, Peter tells us *that* we should be able to give reasons for what we believe. And, he also tells us how it should look; the verse ends "with gentleness and respect". This is how Christians should differentiate their discussions from what we see happening all too often today. We need to treat people we disagree with in a respectful manner. Our engagements need to look more like natural conversations and less like insult-laden, mic drop rap battles.

And, notice I keep using the word "discussions". The goal of apologetics isn't to train debaters; although I don't want to disparage people who get on stage and have debates. Those people provide a tremendous service to the Kingdom when they get up like that in front of people and discuss these important topics. But, debaters aren't the norm. Regular folk like us are the norm. We need to be apologists, too. Our "debate stage" is going to be in line at the coffee shop. Or at the dinner table. Or hanging out with our friends.

The goal of apologetics is to equip you well enough that you could talk about who Jesus was, what He did, and why Christianity makes the most sense just as easily and naturally as you talk about your favorite movie or book or era of music. Not as a debater in a public forum, but as a conversationalist talking about things they really care about.

Finally, I'll leave you with this quote from Chuck Colson. It sums up well our calling as regular believers to be able to give reasons for what we believe and the kinds of arenas it will be done in.

"If our culture is to be transformed, it will happen from the bottom up – from ordinary believers practicing apologetics over the backyard fence or around the barbecue grill." -
Chuck Colson