



ANSWERING THE **TOUGH QUESTIONS** ABOUT CHRISTIANITY

INTRODUCTION

LESSON #
1

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

In today's increasingly secular society, many people consider all religions, including Christianity, outdated, mythological, false, etc.; therefore, they believe that religion in general is only for flawed people (e.g., the ignorant, bigoted, emotionally crippled, brainwashed, etc.) As a result, Christians should expect to encounter challenging questions from their unsaved family members, coworkers, friends, and others. These questions can fall into three general categories and might include:

Is Christianity true?

- Why do you believe God exists?
- Doesn't evil, pain, and suffering in the world prove there is no good god?
- Doesn't science do away with the need for religious myths?

Is Christianity the only truth?

- Don't all religions lead to the same God?
- Why do you think the Bible is God's Word to the exclusion of others?
- What about the contradictions in the Bible?
- How do we know Jesus rose from the grave?

Is Christianity good?

- How can you believe in the God of the Old Testament?
- Why do Christians hate other people (e.g., LGBTQ+, members of other religions, etc.)?
- Don't Christians oppress others (e.g. other races, genders, women, etc.)?

This series of lessons will cover the topics above and help Christians prepare themselves to share with others not only the hope that we have in Jesus, but also the reasons we believe this hope is real.

THINK ABOUT THIS

What is "apologetics," and how can it help me be a more confident Christian?

TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

1 Peter 3:14b-16 (NIV); Acts 17:17-20, 32; 2 Tim 1:13, 2:1-2
(All Scripture CSB unless otherwise noted)

THE MAIN IDEA

Christian faith that results in salvation is the work of the Holy Spirit, it is not a "blind" faith. The Christian faith is supported by evidence and reason. It is not illogical or untrustworthy, as critics of the Christian worldview would have us believe. Christian apologetics can equip us to engage our world for Christ.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Why should apologetics be important to a growing Christian?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

1 Peter 3:15-16 The believers Peter wrote to faced increasing levels of persecution. He encouraged them to be ready to present a reasonable defense of the hope that they had. Three key points in these verses are:

- You have hope
- Be prepared to use confrontation/persecution as an evangelistic opportunity
- Be gentle and respectful

Acts 17:1-3, 17-20, 32 Luke recorded that when Paul entered a new city on his missionary journeys, he immediately engaged both the religious and the lost through discussions about why he believed Jesus is the Savior of the world.

2 Tim 1:13, 2:1-2 In these verses, Paul wrote to Timothy, a beloved younger coworker in the missionary efforts. He encouraged Timothy to live what he preached and to teach sound doctrine to others who, in turn, were to pass this knowledge on to others.



START HERE

The word "apologetics" may cause some people to feel uncomfortable because they may think it is only for people who like to debate and argue or is reserved solely for discussions among religious philosophers. Others may think apologetics is unnecessary because all Christians need to do is share their personal testimony. In American society today, however, Christians need more "tools" in their "evangelistic toolbox" to be confident and effective.

CONVERSATION EXAMPLE

You have given your personal testimony to your doctor, and they reply, "I'm a Muslim, and I had a similar personal experience when I felt this overwhelming sense of relief the moment I recited the Shahadah (shuh-HAA-duh) in submission to Allah. This is why I believe the Quran is the Word of God." How would you reply?

Apologetics helps you understand what your doctor just said, and helps you explain why the Bible is true, reveals the true God, and thus, other "holy books" and the gods they describe are false because they contradict the Bible about the nature of God.

ADDING CLARITY

Apologetics is defined as "**reasoned** arguments or writings in justification of something, typically a theory or religious doctrine."¹ The original Greek word "apologia" (a-puh-LOW-jee-uh) was used to describe a formal verbal defense against accusation or prosecution. Therefore, Christian apologetics can be defined as reasonable justifications to accept Jesus as Savior and a formal defense of the essential tenets of the Christian faith. Note that Christian apologetics has nothing to do with making apologies for the Christian faith or God but instead communicates the reasonableness of a belief in God and faith that Jesus is the Savior of the world.

How are apologetics, evangelism, and discipleship related?

Evangelism is defined as "the act of spreading of the Christian gospel by public preaching and/or personal witness."² It describes the activity of Christians, both by word and deed, to

¹ Oxford Languages (2024). Apologetics. In languages.oup.com. Retrieved November 19, 2024 from <https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/>.

² Oxford Languages (2024). Evangelism. In languages.oup.com. Retrieved November 19, 2024 from <https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/>.



proclaim or announce the "good news" that God desires fellowship with man and through his Son, Jesus, has solved man's "sin problem" which prevents that fellowship.

Until recently, a significant portion of the people living in the United States either identified as Christian or had some understanding of/agreement with Christian beliefs (e.g., God is the all-powerful, all-knowing, perfect creator of the universe who rules the world today, the Bible is God's Word, etc.). Thus, Christ-followers typically did not have to defend these basic Christian tenets and could start evangelizing using their personal testimony and/or a gospel presentation like the FAITH outline, "Romans Road," Evangelism Explosion, "5 Steps to Peace with God," etc. This is no longer true in many cases.

Now, the bulk of the non-Christian American population doesn't hold the same basic beliefs as we do (over 70% according to a poll recently conducted by Barna³). They can be grouped into four general categories:

- **Relativist** – Familiar with Christian spiritual truths but reject the exclusiveness (e.g., hold positions such as "There is no absolute truth," "Your truth works for you but not for me," etc.)
- **Antagonistic** – Reject all spiritual truths as false (atheist) or have other religious backgrounds (Muslim, Hindu, etc.)
- **Apathetic** – May be familiar with Christian spiritual truths but don't see the relevance of these truths in their lives (e.g., responses like "Whatever")
- **Unfamiliar** – Know little, if anything, about Christian spiritual truths

Many of the people in the first three groups (Relativist, Antagonistic, and Apathetic) question the basic tenets of the Christian faith. Before they will be open to hearing the gospel, we may have to answer some of their profound questions about our faith. In the forward to *Prelude to Philosophy: An Introduction for Christians*, noted Christian philosopher J.P. Moreland refers to apologetics as "pre-evangelism":

If a culture reaches the point where Christian claims are not even part of its plausibility structure, fewer and fewer people will be able to entertain the possibility that they might be true...This is why a vibrant intellectual life is so crucial to evangelism. It empowers the church to be able to create a plausibility structure in a person's mind, "favourable conditions" as Machen puts it, so the gospel can be entertained by that person. To plant a seed in someone's mind in pre-evangelism is to present a person with an idea that will

³ *What Are Non-Christians' Views of God?* (n.d.). Barna Group. Retrieved November 2, 2024, from <https://www.barna.com/research/non-christian-beliefs/>.



work on his or her plausibility structure to create a space in which Christianity can be entertained seriously. If this is important to evangelism, it is strategically crucial that local churches think about how they can address those aspects of the modern worldview that place Christianity outside the plausibility structures of so many.⁴

CONVERSATION EXAMPLE

You give your personal testimony to your co-worker or relative, and they reply, “Well, I’m glad you had that experience. It might be true for you, but it’s not true for me. I believe in a different truth.”

DISCUSS

Have you or someone you know had a conversation like this? If so, please share.

As the body of Christ, we are called to “...*be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks [us] to give the reason for the hope that [we] have*” (1 Peter 3:15). In most cases, using Scripture to substantiate our response to the questions from people in these first three groups is ineffective because they reject the authority of the Bible.

Although people in the “unfamiliar” group (e.g., our children, etc.) may not ask difficult questions about the faith before they are ready to hear and accept the gospel, it is important that Christians at any stage of spiritual formation learn the fundamentals of Christian apologetics so they can become more confident in sharing their faith. For this reason, apologetics should also be considered an essential part of “post-evangelism” discipleship. Using Scripture with these individuals in the discussion is important to help them see that our faith is grounded in the truthfulness of the Bible.

GOSPEL FOCUS

We cannot debate or persuade someone into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. While we might convince their mind through our presentation, a new heart is the work of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:4-5). We can, however, be ready for the Holy Spirit to use us more effectively in witnessing to unbelievers and in the discipleship of new believers by better understanding what we believe and why we believe it.

⁴ Foreman, M. W. (2014). *Prelude to Philosophy: An Introduction for Christians*. (pp. 9-10) Intervasity Press.



REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. BEING PREPARED TO GIVE THE REASONS FOR THE HOPE THAT WE HAVE HELPS US DO IT WITH GENTLENESS AND RESPECT.

1 Peter 3:14b-16 (NIV)

*"Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." 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, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander." (emphasis added)*

Unpacking 1 Peter 3:14b-16

In the Christian Study Bible, these verses are translated:

*"Do not fear what they fear or be intimidated, but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a **defense** to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. Yet do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that when you are accused, those who disparage your good conduct in Christ will be put to shame."*

In context, Peter is encouraging fellow believers to stand strong in the face of persecution and not be intimidated by people who challenge their faith. He also points out that:

- Being prepared with a response is part of loving Christ properly.
- The tone used to deliver the defense or reasons is as important as the answer, because "your good behavior" reflects that you are "in Christ." Providing responses to challenging questions with "gentleness and respect" provides a stark contrast to the "take no prisoners" approach so prevalent in our current "cancel" culture.

DISCUSS

Have you ever been confronted by someone who challenged one or more of your deeply held Christian beliefs? How did you feel? (Possible answers: anxious, afraid, angry, frustrated, intimidated)

If you felt negative emotions like anxiety, fear, anger, frustration, and/or intimidation, why do you think you felt this way? (Possible answers: Didn't want to appear dumb; Was unaware this issue was in the Bible; Have struggled with same question myself, etc.)



How would you define "being prepared"?

*How can being prepared replace these negative emotions with "gentleness and respect"?
(Possible answers: Comfortable with topic; Confident with answer, etc.)*

2. EVANGELISM FOCUS: BEING PREPARED TO GIVE THE REASONS FOR OUR HOPE HELPS US PREPARE THE UNBELIEVER TO HEAR THE GOSPEL.

Acts 17:1-3

After they passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As usual, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and rise from the dead: "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah." (emphasis added)

Acts 17:17-20, 32

So he [Paul] reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with those who worshiped God, as well as in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also debated with him. Some said, "What is this ignorant show-off trying to say?" Others replied, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign deities"—because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. They took him and brought him to the Areopagus, and said, "May we learn about this new teaching you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to us, and we want to know what these things mean (emphasis added).

When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some began to ridicule him, but others said, "We'd like to hear from you again about this."

Unpacking Act 17:1-3, 17-20, 32

In these verses, Luke documents Paul's routine for sharing the gospel when he went to a new city on his missionary journeys. He would go the local synagogue and speak with the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles; presenting reasoned justification from Scripture that Jesus was the promised Messiah and came to be their Savior.

He would also spend time in the marketplace sharing the good news with the Gentiles. In Athens, he debated with unsaved scholars by first understanding what they believed (had an altar to an "unknown god") and what excited them (acquiring more knowledge), then using that information to facilitate his introduction of the gospel.

DISCUSS



Give some examples of questions a relativist might ask when you talk about Jesus. (Possible answers: Why do you believe there is only one way to heaven? Why do Christians insist everyone adopt their definitions of right and wrong behavior? What about those people who have never heard of Jesus?)

Give some examples of questions an antagonist might ask. (Possible answers: Why would an educated person need an emotional "crutch" like God? What about all those contradictions in the Bible? How can you believe in a God who wiped out everyone in a civilization, including women and children? I'm a Muslim, Hindu, etc. and have my own God, etc.)

Give some examples of questions someone who is apathetic might have when you talk about Jesus. (Possible answers: Whatever! Why should I care? I don't want to decide right now, etc.)

What should I do when they ask a question to which I don't know the answer? (Possible answers: Consider this an opportunity to meet again once you have researched the responses to their questions. Also, it is a chance to ask them to do research as well, etc.)

3. DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS: BEING PREPARED TO GIVE THE REASONS FOR OUR HOPE HELPS US PREPARE THE NEXT GENERATION OF BELIEVERS TO LIVE CONFIDENTLY IN A CHALLENGING WORLD.

2 Tim 1:13

"Hold on to the pattern of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."

2 Tim 2:1-2

"You, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

Unpacking 2 Tim 1:13, 2:1-2

Paul instructs his "true son in the faith" that sound teaching is so important that Timothy should be diligent about not straying from it. In addition, it is essential that Timothy passes along this sound teaching to others so that they, in turn, can teach others. In other words, all Christians are charged with the responsibility of passing along sound doctrine to the next generation.



DISCUSS

How can sharing apologetic topics with new believers strengthen their walk with Christ? (Possible answers: It can be an important part of their discipleship; they can gain understanding of key doctrines and grow more confident in sharing their faith, etc.)

Give some examples of questions your preteen, high school, or college-aged child has asked about the Christian faith. (Possible answers: Do you believe in evolution? How old is the earth? Did God really create the world in seven literal days? What do you believe about gender identity issues, etc.) How did you respond?

Recent studies have shown that a significant percentage of youth raised in the church reject religion when they leave home. In your opinion, what can cause this rejection of their parents' faith? (Possible answers: Faith was not practiced or spoken about at home; home was not a safe place to express doubts or questions; youth did not see how faith made a difference in the lives of their parents; youth never came to an "ownership" of their faith where they knew what they believed and why, etc.)

REFLECT ON THE TEXT

Scripture clearly teaches that followers of Christ are expected to grow in their understanding of what they believe, with the intent that they are better prepared to share Him with others (Heb 5:12-14). Apologetics is part of that ever-growing process in a believer's life.

DISCUSS

How will studying difficult topics help you grow in your walk with Christ? (Possible answers: It will equip me with valuable knowledge and strengthen my faith as I spend more time with God and in His Word, etc.)

Why is it crucial that parents have discussions about these concepts with their preteen and teenage children who have accepted Christ and are mature enough to understand? (Possible answers: It is part of their responsibility as parents [see Deuteronomy 6:4-9]; It provides a strong faith foundation for their children and helps to equip them to own their faith, etc.)

RESPOND TO THE TEXT

When engaging non-believers who have difficult questions about Christianity, we must recognize that, like Paul when he reasoned with the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, the



reasons we present will not convince everyone they need a Savior. However, without having thought through difficult issues and developed good reasons for our faith, we have little chance any of these people will "want to hear you again on this subject" (Acts 17:32).

APPLY

- List names of people that you know who you think fall into the relativist, antagonistic, apathetic, and unfamiliar categories.
- Think about the questions they might ask. Study those topics so you are "prepared" to respond with "gentleness and respect."
- Pray about starting spiritual conversations with them based on where they are.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In a discussion about apologetics with a lost person, we must remember that, while their objective may be to win the "argument," our objective must be to allow the Holy Spirit to use us to save their soul. Therefore, we must not only "be prepared" but also follow the Holy Spirit's leadership so He can speak to their heart through us.

This series of lessons will not be able to explore each of these issues in detail. Each question will be addressed at the "30,000 ft level." Resources will be provided for each topic if anyone wants to delve deeper.

LOOKING TO NEXT WEEK...

WHO'S IN CHARGE?

A person's worldview is their way to understand what they see, hear, and experience in life. Next week, we will explore various worldviews that are popular in American culture, how these worldviews answer the question "Who's in charge?" and how we might respond to people who "see" things differently than we do.

GENERAL RESOURCES

Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics by Norman Geisler
When Skeptics Ask by Norman Geisler and Ronald Matthew Brooks
Any of The Case for... books by Lee Strobel
Living in Truth by Mary Jo Sharp
Worldviews by John Yeats and John Blase
Know What You Believe and Know Why You Believe by Paul Little
When Critics Ask by Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe



Apologetics for a New Generation edited by Sean McDowell