

Unapologetic Apologetics

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Is Christianity embarrassing?

- *apologetic (adjective)* sorry, regretful, eager to apologize, embarrassed
- *apologetics (noun)* the branch of theology concerned with the defense and rational justification of Christianity
- Christian apologetics is a field of Christian theology that aims to present a rational basis for the Christian faith, defend the faith against objections, and expose the perceived flaws of other world views. (John Frame)

Barriers to belief

- ✓ Is there any evidence that God is real?
- ✓ Isn't faith unscientific, wishful thinking?
- ✓ Aren't miracles impossible?
- ✓ How could a good, all-powerful God allow so much suffering?
- ✓ Aren't all major religions alike?
- ✓ Isn't it arrogant to see Jesus as *the* way?
- ✓ Why become a Christian when so many churchgoers are hypocrites?

Bold brilliance

- Jesus outwitted opponents: “Marveling at his answer they became silent... they no longer dared to ask him any question. (Luke 20:26,40)
- Unschooled Peter and John amazed enemies with clear, bold proclamation. (Acts 4:13)
- They could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. (Acts 6:10)

True, reasonable, powerful

- “I am not insane, most excellent Festus,” Paul replied. “What I am saying is true and reasonable.” (Acts 26:25).
- For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. (Rom 1:16)
- Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. (Col 4:5-6)

Is apologetics wrong?

Some Christians attack apologetics and say:

- Apologetics depends too much on human reasoning, not divine revelation.
- Evidence and argument treat God as a theory for debate or a thing for analysis, not as a Person to be trusted and adored.
- Debates about God can inflate pride and make a human the judge of God. A bad starting point can't lead to good result.
- Preach the gospel! Let God do the rest.

Is evidence useless?

Some Christians avoid apologetics and say:

- It's useless to debate someone with a non-Christian worldview, whose ideas are rooted in ungodly heart commitments and hidden assumptions ("presuppositions").
- We should not give unbelievers the impression that if they convert, they can keep their worldview mostly intact and just add Jesus to it. They need radical rebirth: new heart, new presuppositions, new worldview.

Giving evidence

“Paul reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead” (Acts 17:2-3).

“He reasoned in the synagogue...as well as in the marketplace day by day” (17:17).

Reasoning and persuading

- “He reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks” (Acts 18:4).
- “...reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God... reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus” (Acts 19:8-9).
- Paul argued for Jesus’ resurrection. He stated that hundreds of eyewitnesses to the risen Jesus were still living and could testify about what they had seen. (1 Cor 15)

Ready to make a defense

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make a defense (*apologia*) 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. (1 Peter 3:15-16).

Unapologetic Apologetics

- ✓ **Dialogue:** reason together (listen and learn to talk their language)
- ✓ **Defense:** remove obstacles and objections (e.g. Christianity is not immoral or illogical)
- ✓ **Clarification:** correct misunderstandings (e.g. not atheists, cannibals, or anarchists)
- ✓ **Positive case:** reasons to believe (e.g. evidence, coherence, explanatory power)

Dangers of Apologetics

- As we try to dialogue, defend, clarify, and present a positive case, we might try to change the biblical gospel to suit a person's preferences or current trends. It might seem more believable, but it's not worth believing
- Skilled apologists may be tempted to pride and intellectual arrogance toward non-Christians or believers with simple faith.
- It's deadly to rest faith on mere human arguments. Christianity is knowing Christ.

Beware of success!

No doctrine of the Faith seems to me so unreal as the one that I have just successfully defended in a public debate. For a moment, you see, it has seemed to rest on oneself: as a result, when you go away from that debate, it seems no stronger than that weak pillar.

That is why we apologists take our lives in our hands and can be saved only by falling back continually from the web of our own arguments... into the Reality—from Christian apologetics into Christ himself. (C.S. Lewis)

Personal God of love, not a formula or machine

We only know God through Jesus Christ. The Christian's God does not merely consist of a God who is the Author of mathematical truths and the order of the elements. That is the notion of the heathen... the God of the Christians is a God of love and consolation. (Pascal)

Value of Apologetics

- Helps some non-Christians to take Christian claims more seriously.
- Helps some Christians to remain confident in the face of challenges.

Limits of Apologetics

- Often the best arguments don't persuade.
- Most people become Christians without much help from apologetics.
- Belief based on direct encounter is best and does not require further proof.
- Logic of speculative thought differs from logic of personal relations. Knowledge by personal acquaintance and delight in God are hard to convey in a debate.

To answer or not to answer?

4 Answer not a fool according to his folly,
lest you be like him yourself.

5 Answer a fool according to his folly,
lest he be wise in his own eyes.

(Proverbs 26:4-5)

- Answer when you think it will help and the person is open to truth.
- Don't answer if it's just a messy quarrel, or if you're sliding into their worldview.

Only the Lord gives life.

Do what you can, as He directs.

Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” ... So they took away the stone... Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.” (John 11:39-44)

- Apologetics can remove obstacles and prepare for the moment God gives life.
- Apologetics can unbind Christians who are still haunted or hindered by tough questions.