

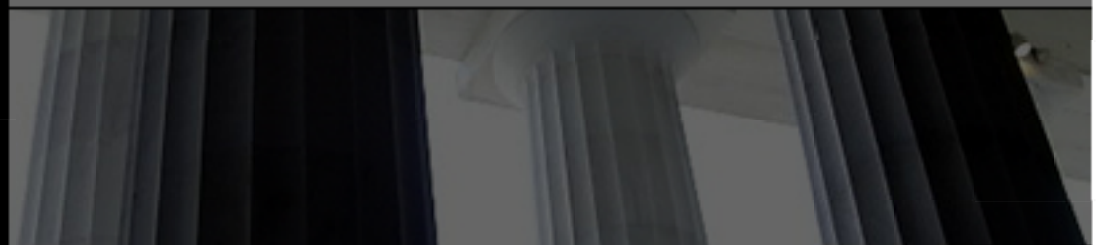


Accessible Apologetics

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Lesson One

INTRODUCTION TO APOLOGETICS:
WHY DEFEND MY FAITH?



Apologetics Guy

ACCESSIBLE APOLOGETICS TRAINING
WITH MIKEL DEL ROSARIO

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Introduction

"But in your hearts set apart 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."

- Peter, the Apostle (1 Peter 3:15 NIV)

Lesson 1: Outline

Introduction to Apologetics

- I. What is Christian Apologetics?
- II. Why Defend the Faith?

Introduction:

Want to study Apologetics?

You won't be sorry!

An "apologetic" is simply a defense. Peter actually commanded all believers to be ready with answers when people ask us about our faith. In **1 Peter 3:15**, the word translated as "answer" is the word *apologia*, which means "a reasoned statement or argument."¹ Obeying this command just means you've got reasons for what you believe and you're ready to talk with anyone who's got questions. It doesn't mean getting defensive. It doesn't mean getting into fights. It means speaking the truth in love as we represent our Lord at work, at school, in our community and society. But in order to be prepared, **we've got to know what we believe and why we believe it.**

That's what this course in defending the faith is all about---increasing your confidence as a Christian by exploring the reasons and evidences for the faith, and preparing yourself to be a more effective ambassador of Jesus Christ.

Defend without being defensive

Even if you're totally new to this, there's apologetic value in a confident believer simply remaining calm under fire. Many people who oppose the faith often repeat slogans they've heard but never really considered: "The Bible's full of contradictions," "Christians

¹ Thayer and Smith, "Apologia - Greek Lexion," StudyLight.org, <http://www.studylight.org/lex/grk/view.cgi?number=627> (accessed June 4, 2010).

are intolerant,” “All religions are basically the same.” Relax. **No need to get defensive.** Remember that the truth is on our side, and lies are not defensible.

One of my favorite radio show hosts, Greg Koukl, often says that apologetics can “look more like diplomacy than combat.”² I like that. Sincerely asking questions like “What do you mean by that?” or “How did you come to that conclusion?” can help critics consider what *they* believe and why *they* believe it—perhaps for the first time. And if you’re stumped by a question, it’s no problem to say, “Let me think about that and get back to you.” Afterwards, do your homework and look it up. You’ll find there are good answers to the hard questions.

Argue without being argumentative

When we say “argue,” we don’t mean getting into fights. Paul said we shouldn’t be mean, contentious or going around looking for a fight (2 Tim. 2:24). But he didn’t say we couldn’t have arguments in the sense of having reasoned disagreements about important issues. In fact, he said we should humbly teach those who oppose the truth so they could “come to their senses” and be saved (2 Timothy 2:25-26). Because of this, **we’re going to study some of the best arguments for the truth of the Christian faith together.**

Part of loving God with our minds (Mark 12:30) is using our mental faculties to draw conclusions about Him and His world based on Scripture, observation, and careful thinking. Indeed, the ability to argue well is important for rational discussion about spiritual matters. In this sense, an argument is actually a good thing because it helps us discover and clearly communicate truth.

ar·gue

(ahr-gue) verb

1. To present reasons for or against a thing.
2. To contend in oral disagreement.
3. To state the reasons for or against.

Dictionary.com Unabridged. Based on the Random House Dictionary, © Random House, Inc. 2010.

² Koukl also mentions this in Ravi Zacharias et al., *To Everyone an Answer: A Case for the Christian Worldview: Essays in Honor of Norman L. Geisler*, ed. Francis J. Beckwith, William Lane Craig, James Porter Moreland and Norman L. Geisler (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2004), 48.

Speak the truth in love

Are we ready to do the hard work of discovering truth and defending it against error? If not, we may fall prey to the latest piece of misinformation popularized by our culture through music, movies or literature. Consider the connection between truth, love and discipleship:

“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, **speaking the truth in love**, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.”

- Paul, the Apostle (Ephesians 4:14-15 NIV)

This literally means “*truthing* in love,” and includes the ideas of “living” and “doing” the truth.³ Here’s the point: Since the church grows in maturity through truth and love, **false ideas and unloving attitudes are major obstacles to our discipleship**. If becoming like Jesus is our end goal, “speaking the truth in love” is an important part of getting there.

If we’re doing this, gentleness and respect will be a natural part of our apologetic. Unfortunately, some Christians are quick to quote **1 Peter 3:15**, but don’t really live out the command because they treat the last part of the verse like a suggestion. **It’s not**. And it doesn’t honor God when we act like jerks. We’ve got to study and present the truth—not for the sake of winning arguments or looking smart—but because we love God and love people. It’s an obedience thing. It’s a love thing. And when people come to faith, it’s always a God thing.

Let’s embark on this course together as an act of discipleship to Jesus.



Mikel Del Rosario

Apologetics Speaker & Trainer

mikel@apologeticsguy.com

³ John R.W. Stott, *Message of Ephesians: God’s New Society (The Bible Speaks Today)*, New Ed ed. (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 172.

Lesson 1:

Why Defend My Faith?

Lesson Overview

- Apologetics means defending the faith and giving reasons to believe that Christianity is true.
- Jesus and his disciples gave people reasons to believe their teachings were actually true.
- We're commanded to be ready to give people reasons for the hope that we have in Jesus, but we've got to do it with humility and respect.

Lesson Objectives

- Students will learn what apologetics is and why it's important for all Christians to defend the faith.
- Students will construct thoughtful responses to common Christian objections to studying apologetics.

Primary Scriptures

- 1 Peter 3:15
- Mark 2:1-12

Time

- **Got 45 minutes to a full hour per class?** You can teach this over two sessions. Consider ending the first session on page 9 and beginning the second session with a review of the material already covered.
- **Got an hour and a half per class?** This lesson will easily last the whole session. Go for as many interactive options as time allows!

Preparation

- Read the introduction and so you can share these ideas before diving into the main lesson.
- Ask a few students to prepare a dramatic reading of Mark 2:1-12.

Physical Objects

- Grab a ping pong paddle to illustrate the mnemonic device on page 10.
- You could write the mnemonic device on ping pong balls to help your students' memory.

Interactive Options

- Dramatic reading of Mark 2:1-12
- Group activity

Lecture Notes

- Underlined sections correspond to the fill-in-the-blank sections of the *Student Guide*.
- Highlighted definitions also appear in the *Student Guide*.

Getting Things Started

- Ever had to defend your Christian convictions?
- Ever told anyone why you believe Christianity is true?
- Ever told anyone why you don't believe another religion or idea is true?
- If so, you've already been involved in something called "apologetics."

I. What is Christian Apologetics?

A. About the Discipline

1. It's a **theoretical** discipline:

“Apologetics is that branch of Christian theology which seeks to provide a rational justification for the truth claims of the Christian faith.”

– William Lane Craig⁴

2. It has **practical** application:

- To confirm for believers that the Christian faith is true.
- To show unbelievers that the Christian faith is true.

3. There's **offensive** (positive) apologetics:

- Focuses on building a positive case for Christianity
- This is where you give someone good reasons to believe
- This includes:
 - Showing that God exists
 - Showing that Christianity is true

4. There's **defensive** (negative) apologetics:

- Focuses on responding to challenges to the faith
- This is where you refute arguments against the truth of Christianity
- This includes:
 - Refuting objections to belief in God
 - Refuting objections to Christianity

a·pol·o·get·ics

(uh-pol-uh-jet-iks) noun

- The branch of theology that is concerned with defending or proving the truth of Christian doctrines.
- Formal argumentation in defense of something, such as a position or system.

The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. Dictionary.com

⁴ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3 ed. (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008),

- d. “Apologetics is simply to defend the faith, and thereby destroy arguments and every proud obstacle against the knowledge of God (2 Cor. 10:5). It is opening the door, clearing the rubble, and getting rid of the hurdles so that people can come to Christ.” –Norman Geisler⁵
5. **It involves other disciplines:** Christian apologists can use evidence and arguments from history, science, philosophy, theology, ethics, and a variety of other disciplines.

B. Three Essential Elements of Apologetics

1. To understand the answers to tough questions about Christianity
2. To give good answers to those who ask tough questions about Christianity
3. To do this in a wise and tactical manner in our apologetic encounters

II. Why Defend My Faith?⁶

A. Jesus Gave People Reasons to Believe

1. Jesus gave people reasons to believe (in many different ways).
2. “Jesus demonstrated the truth of His message and his identity over and over again, using nearly every method at his disposal, including miracle, prophecy, godly style of life, authoritative teaching *and* reasoned argumentation.”
– Craig Hazen⁷
3. For example, Jesus “gave many convincing proofs” of His resurrection (Acts 1:3).

⁵ Quoted by Josh McDowell in *To Everyone an Answer*, 9.

⁶ Adapted from “Defending the Defense of the Faith” in *To Everyone an Answer*, 37-46.

⁷ Ibid, 39.

B. Case Study: Healing of the Paralytic (Mark 2:1-12)

1. First, Jesus said, “Your sins are forgiven.”
2. Then, he did a miracle and healed the man. Why? Because you can’t tell if Jesus forgiving the guy really meant he was forgiven by God. Did it work? Can anyone else besides God forgive sins?
3. Jesus gave people a good *reason* to know that he had authority from God to forgive sins—and by implication, that he was the divine Messiah.
 - a. Jews assumed the Messiah would have supernatural power
 - b. For example, signs of the Messianic era: the deaf would hear, the lame would walk, the mute would shout (Isaiah 35:5-6).
4. Another time, Jesus said the ultimate sign of his Messiahship would be his death and resurrection (Luke 11:29).
5. This wasn’t new. Jesus was following God’s example from the Old Testament.
 - a. **1 Kings 18:20-45** Elijah’s Mount Carmel showdown against Baal’s prophets miraculously proved Yahweh was the true God.
 - b. **Isaiah 41:21-22** God says to his enemies, “Present your case. Set forth your arguments.”

Interactive Option

- To introduce this case study, have some participants present a prepared, dramatic reading of Mark 2:1-12.
- Have two or three readers take on the roles of the narrator, Jesus, the teachers, and the observers.
- Direct the students to imagine that they were one of the people listening to Jesus teach when this event happened.
- Ask, “Why did Jesus heal this man?”

C. Jesus' Disciples Provided Reasons to Believe

1. Jesus' disciples followed His example and told other believers to do the same thing.
 - a. Jesus gave people reasons to believe.
 - b. **Jude** told believers to contend for the faith (Jude 3)
 - c. **Luke** believed eyewitness testimony and careful history would help Theophilus know with certainty that the things he was taught are true. That's why he wrote Luke-Acts (Luke 1:1-4).
 - d. **Peter** said to always be ready to give a reason for the hope you have in Jesus, but with humility and respect (1 Peter 3:15).
 - e. **Paul** was explaining and proving that Jesus was the Messiah. Because of this, many Jews and God-fearing Greeks in Thessalonica were *persuaded* and joined them (Acts 17:2-4)
2. You can use the mnemonic device, "Jo Jo likes ping pong," to remember that Jesus, Jude, Luke, Peter and Paul believed in persuading and giving people reasons to believe.
3. Here's the point: The Holy Spirit has used believers who **reason**, **persuade**, and present **evidence** to lead people to salvation in Christ.
4. Practice using the mnemonic device, "**Jo Jo likes ping pong**," to recite this list of names from memory.
5. Choose a partner and ask them why we should give unbelievers reasons to believe
 - a. See if they can explain how Jesus and his disciples gave unbelievers reasons to believe.
 - b. Switch. See if you can explain this to your partner.

Going for two sessions?

Wrap-up here

- This is a good place to wrap up your first session.
- Summarize your discussion.

Ask the class:

- “What is Christian Apologetics?”
- “Why is it important to study this?”
- “Why should we be ready to give reasons for what we believe?”

Application

- Challenge students to memorize 1 Peter 3:15.
- Begin the next session with a review.
- Introduce the next section by asking, “Why would a Christian ever say we shouldn’t study apologetics or give reasons for our faith?” (various answers)
- Say, “Let’s analyze some of these common objections.”

Group Activity

- Have the students break into groups.
- Assign each group to brainstorm a response to one objection discussed on the next page.
 - *Going for two sessions? If so, you've got a lot more time. Do the first one together as a class.*
 - *Then, have each group work through each of the last 3 objections.*
 - *Be sure to debrief after each one.*
- Visit each group. Help participants discover the problems with each objection and come up with a suggested response (timing will vary).
- Have a spokesperson share their group's suggested response with the class and explain how they worked through this objection.
- Debrief the activity and teach through the material outlined in **D** and **E** (p. 14 – 17).

Christian Objections to Studying Apologetics

- “People don’t come to faith in Christ through apologetics.”
- “Without faith, it’s impossible to please God.”
- “Just preach the Word because it will not return void.”



Christian Objections to Supporting Scripture with Evidence

- “We must believe Scripture’s true because it says it’s true or else you’re ‘testing Scripture’ by another standard---and that’s bad.”
- “People won’t repent no matter how much evidence you give them.”



D. Christian Objections to Studying Apologetics

1. Objection: “People don’t come to faith in Christ through apologetics.”

- a. If that’s true, why do Jude and Peter command believers to give reasons for the faith?
- b. If that’s true, why was Paul reasoning, proving, and persuading if these things were no good?
- c. Paul’s persuasion resulted in “large numbers” coming to faith in Acts 17:2-4.
- d. This objection is simply false. But why would a Christian say something like this? (Various answers; Ex: Maybe they don’t know people who came to faith through apologetics)
- c. People come to faith through the work of the **Holy Spirit**, but there are **many tools** the Holy Spirit uses to do the work. One of them is apologetic **reasoning**.
 - i. **Augustine** writes in his *Confessions* about how he was as led toward Christianity by hearing a Christian debate an unbeliever⁸
 - ii. **C.S. Lewis** rejected his atheism and came to Christ under the influence of apologetics.⁹
- d. Occasionally, apologetic argument is the main tool that brings people to faith.
- e. Sometimes, it’s more of a secondary thing.

⁸ *Apologetics, Need for*. Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Baker Reference Library) (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 1998), 41.

⁹ Ibid. Entry also includes Lewis’ quote from *God in the Dock*: “Nearly everyone I know who has embraced Christianity in adult life has been influenced by what seemed to him a probable argument for Theism.”

2. Objection: “Don’t give reasons to believe. Without faith, it’s impossible to please God.”

- a. What’s this mean?
 - 1) This implies that providing evidence for Christianity or reasons to believe actually removes a person’s need for faith.
 - 2) But this comes from a misinterpretation of **Hebrews 11:6** which is based on an unbiblical definition of the word “faith.”
- b. Biblical faith isn’t a “blind faith” that’s opposed to reason, evidence or logic.
 - 1) **1 Cor. 15:12-19** Although Paul could have encouraged faith that rejects evidence, he boldly pins the truth of Christianity on a historical event which can be tested for truth by reason and evidence.
 - 2) Paul says that if Jesus didn’t rise from the dead, Christianity is false.
- c. Biblical faith isn’t blind; it’s dependent on a historical event that can be investigated.
- d. Another word for *faith* is “trust;” and we can definitely trust what we know is true.
- e. Our faith is stronger when we have good reasons to believe in someone we trust.

3. Objection: “Don’t give reasons to believe. Just preach the Word because it will not return void.”

- a. This comes from a misuse of **Isaiah 55:11**.
 - 1) The word “just” implies that nothing else is needed in order for Scripture to begin its work in a person’s heart.
 - 2) But this verse doesn’t include the word “just.”
- b. Jesus and the apostles showed that other things could advance the gospel.
- c. For example, they used miracles, godly lifestyle, prophecy, and reasoned argumentation to show the gospel message was true.
- d. It wouldn’t make sense for Peter and Jude to command believers to defend the faith if the only “right way” to make disciples is by directly preaching the gospel.

E. Christian Objections to Supporting Scripture with Evidence

1. **Objection: “Don’t give reasons to believe. We must believe Scripture’s true because it says it’s true or else you’re ‘testing Scripture’ by another standard---and that’s bad.”**
 - a. Some say that presenting evidence for the truth of Scripture means you are “judging” the text by a “more ultimate” standard. But what does the Bible itself teach about this?
 - b. Prophets like Elijah did not limit appeals to Scripture, but used historical evidence.
 - 1) **1 Kings 18:20-45:** Elijah vs. Baal’s prophets.
 - 2) Elijah said, “The God who answers by fire, He is God.”
 - 3) The people were challenged to view an awesome miracle to vindicate Elijah’s message.
 - 4) **Elijah** used historical evidence to support God’s word.
 - c. Even God did not limit appeals to Scripture, but used historical evidence.¹⁰
 - 1) In Isaiah, God issued a challenge to false gods: Let them predict the future and make their predictions come true and prove they are gods (Is. 41:21-24; 44:7).
 - 2) Turns out, only God can pass this test (Is. 41:25-29; 42:9; 44:24-28; 46:10; 48:5, 14).
 - 3) The Jews were called to be witnesses of these historic events (Is. 44:6-8; 52:6).

¹⁰ William Lane Craig, Gary Habermas and John Frame, eds., *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2000), 245.

- d. In the New Testament, both Peter (Acts 2:22-24) and Paul (Acts 16:30-31) said that Jesus' resurrection validated His teachings.
 - 1) So **Peter** and **Paul** used historical evidence to support Jesus' words.
 - e. Jesus didn't limit appeals to Scripture, but used historical evidence (miracles):
 - 1) When John's disciples asked Jesus if he was the one to come or if they should be waiting for someone else, He didn't appeal to His own word.
 - 2) Rather, Jesus appealed to historical evidence---miracles which showed people His Messianic authority (**Matt. 11:4-5**, Luke 7:18-23).
 - 3) **Jesus** used historical evidence to support His word.
- 2. Objection: "People won't repent no matter how much evidence you give them."**
- a. **Matt. 11:20-21** shows that Jesus knows what would happen in any given circumstance, including people's free choices:
 - b. "Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. 'Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! *If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.*'"
 - c. Remember that the Holy Spirit can use a variety of things to bring people to repentance including: A clear presentation of the gospel, a godly lifestyle, your personal testimony, *and* arguments and evidence, too.
 - 1) There are **many tools** the Holy Spirit can use.
 - 2) One of them is historical **evidence**.

Closing Time

Wrap-up here

- Ask for any clarification questions.
- Summarize your discussion.

Ask the class:

- “What is Christian Apologetics?”
- “Why is it important to study this?”
- “Why should we be ready to give reasons for what we believe?”

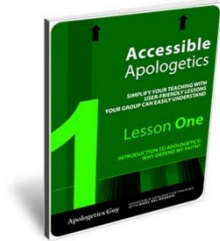
Application

- Tell someone you’re taking this class and explain to them how Jesus and his disciples gave unbelievers reasons to believe.
- Memorize 1 Peter 3:15.

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