AN INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

Objectives: As a result of the study of this topic we want to be able to:

1. Define the meaning of the term “apologetics.”
2. Consider the biblical reasons for using apologetics.
3. Distinguish between the defensive and offensive nature of apologetics.
4. Understand the practical reasons for doing apologetics.
5. Know six basic essentials for being successful when using apologetics.
6. Memorize two verses dealing with our responsibility for defending the faith.

I. What is Meant by Christian Apologetics?

A. The term “apologetics” is often misunderstood.

1. It is important that we understand precisely what we mean when we speak about Christian apologetics.
2. In English the word ‘apology’ has a primary and secondary meaning.
3. Since it’s primary meaning is, “an admission of error or discourtesy accompanied by an expression of regret” (Webster’s Dictionary) most people are quick to think that Christian apologetics is “apologizing” for how Christians have sometimes behaved.
4. However, the secondary meaning of the word in English, “a formal defense or justification” comes from the primary meaning of the word as found in Greek.
5. And so when we speak of ‘Christian apologetics’ it does not mean that we are apologizing for what we believe or how Christians have behaved.
6. Christian apologetics is a verbal defense, answer, or reply as to the reasonableness of the Christian faith.

7. Our English word “apologetics” comes directly from the Greek word “apologia.”

8. The word is found eight times in the New Testament used seven times by the Apostle Paul (Acts 22:1; 25:16; 1 Cor. 9:3; 2 Cor. 7:11; Phil. 1:7; 2 Tim. 4:16) and once by the Apostle Peter (1 Peter 3:15).

9. However, probably the verse most commonly referenced with Christian apologetics is 1 Peter 3:15 where Peter instructs us to:

   15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;

10. Giving a defense for the faith is important because there are many critics of Christianity both inside and outside the church who attack Christianity and the Bible.

11. In addition, giving a defense is important because there are as Jesus predicted in Matthew 7:15 many false teachers who deny the key tenets of Christianity, who attack the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible and who advocate additional so-called ‘revelation.’

12. Christian apologetics deals with answering the critics who attack the faith in order to convince those who are searching out the faith.

13. Christian apologetics has as its aim a desire to combat false movements in order to represent what God has plainly revealed in Scripture.

14. Apologetics is the work of convincing people to change their views.

15. It would parallel preaching in that its ultimate goal is to persuade the listener to change his way of thinking into conformity with the revelation of Scripture in order to receive Christ as Lord.

16. Part of maturing as a Christian is to be able to give a reasonable presentation of why you believe what you believe in such a way that you defend the truth against the lies and attacks of biblical Christianity (Hebrews 5:12; Titus 1:9).

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B. Apologetics can be both offensive and defensive.

1. When you examine the Scripture carefully you discover that there is both an offensive and defensive side to defending our faith.

2. An example of the offensive side would be 2 Corinthians 10:5 where the Apostle Paul plainly states:

   5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,

3. While sometimes we are called to defend our faith against attack, we are also called to speak out against those ideas that oppose the faith when we are called on to share the gospel.

4. On the day of Pentecost when the Apostle Peter addresses thousands of unbelieving Jews he went on the offensive reasoning from the Bible why one should come to the conclusion that Jesus is Lord (Acts 2:22ff.).

5. Beyond the offensive side of apologetics, very often Christian apologetics is expressed defensively as seen in the Apostle Paul’s statement found in Philippians 1:7:

   7 For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me.

6. When apologetics is used defensively, the Christian defends the faith against attack showing the reasonableness of our faith.

7. Whether our apologetic is offensive or defensive it is essential that we remember that our defense is always to be given “with gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3:15).

8. We are to have the fruit of the Spirit that includes “gentleness,” a picture of humility and strength under control.

9. But there should also be a sense of “reverence” knowing that we are dealing with people’s souls.

10. We are not to act arrogantly with a know-it-all attitude but with gentleness and we are to show reverence because the people we speak with are going to spend eternity somewhere.

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11. Our goal is not to win an argument with people who are lost, but rather to present to them in a loving manner why we believe what we believe.

12. We have represented Jesus Christ poorly if we are rude, angry, or disrespectful.

13. As Christ’s ambassadors God has called us to be knowledgeable in our defense while being Christ-like in our presentation.

14. The purpose our of defense is not to win an argument but to win lost people into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

15. If our manner is less than “gentle and respectful” than we can win a debate but turn a person away from listening by our non Christ-like attitude.

II. Is There A Biblical Basis For Using Apologetics?

A. We are commanded to engage in apologetics.

1. God gives a plain clear admonition to his people in 1 Peter 3:15 that we are to be ready to make a defense (an apologetic) for the hope that is within us - - this assumes some preparation on our part.

2. In similar fashion the Book of Jude commands Christians to, “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

3. Some people think that they must attend seminary or be a theologian pastor or a missionary to engage in apologetics.

4. If that were true then God could not command the entire Church to “be ready to make a defense” and He certainly would not have used ordinary fisherman to be His apostles.

5. While we need to “study and show ourselves approved of God” (2 Timothy 2:15), we must never forget that God uses ordinary everyday Christian people who are filled with the Holy Spirit to serve as His ambassadors.

6. Each of us is called to be ready to make a defense of his faith.
B. The Lord Jesus Christ employed apologetics.

1. The use of apologetics by Jesus Christ becomes a model for the believer to follow today.

2. Jesus Christ used logical arguments to refute His critics and establish the truth of His views.

3. Every time the Lord Jesus defended the crucial claims of ‘Christianity’ He was engaging in apologetics.

4. For instance, when the Sadducees wanted to challenge Christ with the doctrine of the resurrection, something they considered to be an absurdity, He used apologetics to show them the error in their thought.

5. To refute them Christ first challenged a presupposition they held to for which they could find no justification for in the Torah, namely that before-death institutions will remain in an after-death resurrected world (Matthew 22:23-32).

6. He then quoted the Torah (Exodus 3:6) underscoring what was spoken by God saying, “I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB” (Matthew 22:32).

7. Someone might say, “Why did He not quote a more straightforward text like Daniel 12:2 or Job 19:25-27 which specifically speaks to the doctrine of the resurrection?”

8. He appealed specifically to one of the first five books of the Bible because the Sadducees only accepted the writings of Moses as inspired.

9. If they had fully embraced Moses’ writings they would have clearly seen there is a future life where a person who dies continues to exist.

10. If the Sadducees were correct in their thinking that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died and had ceased to exist, then God should have used the words “I was” and not “I AM.”

11. “I AM” indicates these men were still very much alive and ultimately will share in the resurrection of the righteous.

12. He took their clever argument that a woman could not be married to all seven husbands at the resurrection, since Moses did not allow for multiple husbands, and then gave an apologetic for their error.
13. In their reasoning they thought they had put Jesus on the horns of a dilemma because how could He teach the doctrine of the resurrection while at the same time believe in polygamist marriage.

14. They thought that Jesus must either stand against Moses or deny the afterlife in order to remain free from contradiction.

15. The crowds were astonished by Christ’s use of apologetics because He found something the Sadducees could believe, namely the Torah, and then used that as a basis to reason something they should believe, namely the resurrection.

16. The very Scriptures they say they believe taught that God is not “the God of the dead but of the living” (Matthew 22:32).

17. In a very similar way we see the Lord using reason, or giving an apologetic, when encountering a synagogue official who was ‘indignant’ because Jesus healed a woman of her eighteen year sickness (Luke 13:10-17).

18. The religious official told the multitudes, “There are six days in which work should be done; so come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day” (Luke 13:14).

19. Jesus revealed the total hypocrisy and obvious foolishness of the religious leaders because even they reasoned that one could lawfully care for their ox or donkey on the Sabbath by giving it water (Luke 13:15 cf. Luke 14:5).

20. If that was true and it was, He reasoned, “Then shouldn’t this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be released from this imprisonment on the Sabbath day?” (Luke 13:16)

21. He gave a defense for His actions by arguing from the lesser to the greater reasoning that if one thing is true then logically the other must be as well.

22. If the application of the Law allowed for the care and well-being of their animals, is not a woman’s need far more important than watering an animal?

23. The only conclusion they could come to is that if watering an animal on the Sabbath is not a Sabbath violation, then Jesus’ healing of the woman on the Sabbath is not a violation of the Sabbath.

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24. Sometimes people falsely portray Christ as some mystical person who called for people to embrace an unthinking faith rather than really seeing His habitual appeal to evidence to confirm His claims.

25. When John the Baptist, the forerunner of Messiah, was suffering in prison he sent some of his disciples to ask, “Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?” (Matthew 11:3).

26. Some people are surprised that John the Baptist who had proclaimed Christ’s coming, called Him the Lamb of God, and then baptized Him could even ask such a question.

27. It is important that we remember that John’s ministry only lasted about one year before he was imprisoned.

28. John did not doubt Christ, he only doubted himself because this One whom he announced had not yet set up the kingdom he had been announcing.

29. What is very interesting is that the Lord Jesus does not berate him or rebuke him, in fact He will go on to commend him (Matthew 11:7-11).

30. However, Christ did tell John’s messengers to tell him, “the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM” (Matthew 11:5 cf. Isaiah 35:4-6; 42:1-7).

31. Since John was not convictionless like “a reed shaken by the wind” the Lord appealed to His works of healing and teaching as positive evidence that he was indeed the true Messiah.

32. He reasons with John that if one does certain kinds of miracles then that One must be the Messiah since He is doing those miracles that the Messiah is prophesied to do.

33. The fact that Jesus Christ used persuasive arguments and a variety of reasoning strategies demonstrates clearly that he was not against apologetics but in favor of sound reason.

34. And since God wrote the laws of the moral universe and recorded them both in His word and in peoples’ consciences, we should reason to that truth whether it concerns a theological issue or some other moral issue be it abortion, homosexuality, polygamous marriage or anything else.

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35. Some Christians have argued **against** reason by quoting verses like Matthew 18:3&4:

   “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 “Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

36. To discount all apologetics and use of reason on this verse not only would contradict what God commanded in 1 Peter 3:15, but it would also **ignore** the clear example Christ gave us to follow.

37. When Jesus taught us of our need to “become like children” He was not advocating that we be naïve and unthinking but rather **humble** and teachable.

38. The manner in which Christ lived and taught clearly reveals that being ‘humble’ was **not** a synonym for being stupid, ignorant, or gullible.

39. Jesus’ high estimation of **reason** by habitually appealing to the Old Testament Scriptures itself indicates that Christianity is not anti-intellectual and so neither should our defense of Christianity.

40. While Christ modeled the use of reason, we must never forget that His primary basis for reason came from the inspired **Scriptures**.

C. The early church modeled the use of apologetics.

   1. Since the student becomes like his master, we are not surprised to witness the early **church** following the example of Christ.

   2. The Apostle Peter reasoned from the Scriptures using the prophet Joel, a psalm by King David and the prophet Samuel to **prove** that Jesus had to be the Christ (Acts 2:14-36).

   3. The Apostle Paul on Mars Hill gave a defense of his faith reasoning from the pagan poets Aratus and Epimenides and using them as a spring board to share the **gospel** (Acts 17:22-34).

   4. The Apostle Paul in “his defense and confirmation of the gospel” (Philippians 1:7) attempted to **prove** to his Jewish brethren that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 17:1-3)

   5. Stephen, a deacon in the early church, proved from his review of the Old Testament Scriptures that Jesus had to be **Christ** (Acts 7:1-53).

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6. A Christian’s ability to defend the faith is a mark of maturity which is why God makes this a requirement for someone wanting to serve in the office of elder (Titus 1:5-9 cf. 2 Timothy 2:24-25):

5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, 6 namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife . . . 9holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

7. So if we are commanded in the Bible to engage in apologetics, if Christ employed apologetics, and if the early church modeled the use of apologetics, then we must be faithful to follow.

III. Why Is A Defense of the Faith So Important Today?

A. Apologetics are important to counter the apostasy of the last days.

1. There has always been apostasy among those who are part of the confessing church and they fall away because they are not true Christians (Luke 8:13; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Thessalonians 2:3).

2. The Apostle Paul warned that the ‘falling away’ within the professing church will come because of false doctrines learned from deceitful spirits and demons (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

3. Without a sound defense of the faith these false teachers can draw away innocent lambs causing harm and turmoil (Acts 20:29-31).

4. Because God’s people have not been taught a defense for their faith “certain persons have crept in unnoticed” destroying healthy churches (Jude 4).

5. In order to prevent healthy churches from becoming apostate God’s people must learn to, “contend earnestly for the faith” (Jude 3).

B. Apologetics are important to counter the false religions.

1. Besides those who depart from the true faith, apologetics is important to encounter those that teach a false faith.

2. The Lord Jesus taught in the kingdom parables, that concurrent with the truth of His word being spread, there would be the “tares” or false erroneous doctrines sown by Satan (Matthew 13:37-43).

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3. Such error is seen in Mormonism that teaches God used to be a man on another planet, or in Jehovah’s Witness that deny the Trinity and say there is no hell, or in atheism that denies God’s existence.

4. In addition, there is the growing movement of Islam that teaches Jesus was not God in the flesh, did not rise from the dead or atone for sins, and that the Holy Spirit is the angel Gabriel.

5. Apologetics is extremely important not just for combatting false brethren who may come into the local church but also to counter false teaching outside of the church that attempts to entice ‘unstable souls’ (2 Peter 2:14).

C. Apologetics are important to rescue people from eternal retribution.

1. God has commanded us to go and to, “make disciples of all nations” because God is desirous that people not perish eternally in hell but be saved (Matthew 28:19; 2 Peter 3:9).

2. Apologetics can be used by God to keep people out of the lake of fire (Jude 22-23).

3. It is our responsibility and privilege to reason with people as to why they should trust Christ as Lord to be spared from the just judgment that will come upon the sinner (John 3:36).

4. As Peter reasoned with the people of Jerusalem we are to help people to see that salvation is not found in one’s self, in one’s church, or in one’s religion, but only in Christ (Acts 4:12).

5. Apologetics involves defending the truth of the Bible in order to share the gospel so that all people can escape the coming wrath of God.

D. Apologetics are important so we can know why we believe what we believe.

1. We are living in an age of biblical illiteracy because the Bible predicted, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

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2. According to a recent survey done by George Barna, the most recognizable ‘Bible verse’ by Americans was, “God helps those who help themselves” (Ben Franklin).

3. There is gross biblical ignorance in the society because there is gross biblical ignorance in the church and so it is essential that we know why we believe what we believe.

4. Apologetics will help you to understand the reasonableness of the faith so that you will not be “carried away by the error of unprincipled men” and “fall from your own steadfastness” (2 Peter 3:17).

5. If you are truly saved, while your salvation is secure, your steadfastness, your victory, your consistency is not.

6. Without knowing why you believe what you believe, “as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3).

7. We need apologetics because it helps Christians know their faith, something that is sadly lacking in most believers.

E. Apologetics are important to pass the baton of the faith to our children.

1. It is the responsibility of fathers as their local pastors equip them to bring their children, “up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

2. One ongoing responsibility of the church and home is to teach every generation the truths of God’s Word.

3. It is a false notion to think that if we put our children in the right Christian environment that they will automatically know, love, and serve God.

4. We are to be able to defend the faith, not just for those who are searching and those who are opposing, but also so that we can teach our children and other people’s children that God entrusts to us.

5. Today’s children are tomorrow’s leaders and if each generation is not grounded doctrinally then both churches and institutions will drift.

6. I have never witnessed a local church drift into conservatism but only into liberalism because the doctrines of the faith were not taught to the rising generation (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Ephesians 6:4).

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7. Our society is no longer friendly to Christianity but has become **hostile** to Christianity especially in our schools and universities.

8. As in the beginning of the church age, it appears now at the end of the church age that Christianity is under attack and we need to fight the good fight of faith by equipping the next generation.

9. We need apologetics to give to the next generation rational, intelligent, explanations of Christianity in order to help them stand against those who want to **undermine** the teachings of Christ (2 Timothy 4:1-4).

10. If there was ever a time that apologetics is needed, it is **now**.

**IV. What Perspectives Should We Have When Defending the Faith?**

A. We should prepare by praying.

1. Before we speak to men about God we must speak to God about men because not to pray, before during and after our defense of the faith, is to be both naïve and **prideful**.

2. Since no one can come to the Father unless He first draws them, and since “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving,” we must pray that God **open** their hearts to believe (John 6:46; 2 Corinthians 4:4).

3. As God opened Lydia’s heart (Acts 16:14), He must open the hearts of those who are **lost**.

4. When we pray we recognize that it is God’s power working both in the lost person and in us that will **empower** our words and witness (Colossians 4:3-4; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

5. Defending the faith is not to be a validation of our intellectual **skill**, but rather an act of obedience to be carried out in the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:13).

6. Our study and practice of apologetics should never replace the power that comes through **prayer** by depending on the power of the Spirit.

B. We should prepare by memorizing Scripture.

1. Knowing that the principle basis for our defense is the Bible, we should **memorize** the location of Scripture for defending the faith.

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3. The examples in this study of Christ, Peter, Paul, and others demonstrate that we should use of Scripture in our apologetic.

4. God’s word is alive and He promises to bless it (Hebrews 4:12; Isaiah 55:10-11).

5. While it is impossible to learn everything concerning every erroneous doctrine, it is helpful to memorize a few pertinent facts about Islam, Mormonism, evolution, or whatever other errors you are encountering on a regular basis along with a counter argument from the Bible.

C. We should respect the person by listening to what they say.

1. You never want your witness to become an argument because while you may win the argument you can loose the person (1 Peter 3:15).

2. It is important to listen to people in order to understand what they believe but also to show respect for their being made in the image of God (James 1:19 cf. 3:9).

3. Don’t interrupt them and listen carefully for hurts, motives, and intent.

4. Just because you know the answer does not mean that you should immediately speak.

5. Respect the person by earning the right to speak.

D. Our inexperience should not prevent us from obeying.

1. Sometimes Christians are afraid to speak up and defend the faith because they are afraid they might now know the answer to a person’s questions.

2. If you don’t know the answer you might say, “That is a really good question that I cannot answer, but I would like to find out the answer to your question both for myself and you” (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

3. Sometimes our silence is representative of a lack of faith and obedience to Christ command to go and tell (Matthew 28:18-20).

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4. One of the best ways to improve your ability to defend the faith is to discover your weaknesses, but you cannot discover them if you do not begin sharing Christ.

5. God loves sinners far more than you do and so when you are available, when you speak up and defend the faith, you will be amazed at what God will do.

E. We should prepare to be better equipped.

1. Weakness is no excuse for laziness and for a lack of discipline and so we are to study so that God can use us (2 Timothy 2:15).

2. It will be helpful to write down what you learn and then to memorize it and even rehearse what you have learned.

3. Think of a situation that you have find yourself in or that you think you might face, and walk through in your mind how you would respond.

4. Isaac Newton wisely said, “If I have reached the stars, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants” and so learn from others who actually consistently share their faith.

5. Don’t let fear paralyze you from trusting and obeying God.

F. We should be discerning and consider the reason for a person’s objections.

1. Sometimes people have objections they place before Christians not because they want an answer but because they want to put before us a “smokescreen” so they can justify their unbelief (Luke 20:20-23).

2. Sometimes people have objections because Satan is trying to give them a reason not to believe (Ephesians 6:12).

3. Sometimes people have objections because they are asking an honest question from a searching heart (Mark 12:28-34).

4. God calls His people to be discerning and to judge with righteous judgment (Matthew 7:6; John 7:34).

5. We need to be filled with the Spirit so that we have discernment as to when to speak and when not to speak (Proverbs 26:4-5).

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G. We should guard our own hearts against pride.

1. I have met Christians who know a lot but lack a vibrant walk with Christ.

2. The church at Ephesus was a conservative Bible-believing church but the people in that church had lost their first love (Revelation 2:1-7).

3. Never forget that believing sound doctrine and knowing all the right answers in defending our faith can never replace a genuine, vibrant, walk with God.

4. Being able to answer the most difficult questions about your faith does not make you a spiritual person (1 Cor. 8:1).

5. Guard your heart from becoming arrogant over being right, and never forget that it is only by God’s grace that your eyes have been open (1 Corinthians 1:30).

6. Speak the truth in love, with compassion, following the example of Christ who always balanced grace and truth (John 1:17).

Memory Verses for this topic: 1 Peter 3:15 & Jude 3