

EVANGELISM'S HANDMAIDEN

Lesson 5

Apologetics

As we evangelize, the reality of effectual calling means that all of God's people will come to faith in Christ regardless of how well we evangelize and defend the faith. Yet the handmaiden to evangelism—apologetics—can free us from the formal methodologies of evangelism by providing more of a wisdom tapestry than necessarily a formulaic method.



What is apologetics? (Gk: avpologi, a apologia)

1. Defense (e.g. Acts 25:16; Phil. 1:7,16; 2 Tim. 4:16; 1 Pet. 3:15;
 2. Answer, Reply [apology] (e.g. 1 Cor. 9:3)
- Apologetics concerns itself with defending against any unbelief. It is most often a legal term used in a court of law.
 - When faced with charges to dismiss Christianity, apologetics answers in order to prove those accusations as blatantly false. The goal is to persuade an unbeliever that their false accusations and untenable charges prove their need for the gospel.
 - “Apologetics is concerned with answering objections to the gospel, clearing away intellectual obstacles, and commending the Christian faith as the only legitimate answer to man’s predicament.”¹

Why should we do apologetics?

1) God does it.

- Adam introduces enmity by his disobedience, but God does not leave him in his state of sin and rebellion. He condescends. He reasons to them of their guilt and the necessary consequences, and yet holds forth the gospel message of the seed of the woman.
- When God saves Israel from slavery in Egypt, he confronts their false gods with his miracles.
- The prophets confront the idolatries of Israel and Judah. God uses them to reason to his people by identifying their idols, exposing them as worthless, and calling them to repent and believe that he is the Living God.
- “God continually confronts violations of his Word and upholds and defends his glory, and he calls on his people to do the same.”² We confront lies of unbelief. We defend the faith. We appeal to believe on the faith.

2) God calls us to it.

¹ Mark Farnham, *Every Believer Confident: Apologetics for the Ordinary Christian* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2025), 18.

² Farnham, 38.

- We are to imitate our leaders, who ought to follow the commands of God. "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith." (Hebrews 13:7)
- The apostles apologized the faith. "I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accusers face to face and had opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him." (Acts 25:16)
- "But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but 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, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil." (1 Peter 3:14-17)

3) It bolsters the faith of Christians.

- "It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." (Philippians 1:7-11)
- When Jesus meets Thomas after his resurrection, he defends his resurrection with the evidence upon his body (John 20:25, 27). Jesus gives reasons for the faith to the apostles, especially Thomas. It is not a leap in the dark because it is not less than reasonable. It's more than reasonable, but not less.

4) It advances the work of evangelism.

- "And he [Paul] entered the synagogue [in Ephesus] and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God." (Acts 19:8)
- "For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ..." (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

Families of Apologetics

Those who stress the uniqueness of the Christian experience.

- Emphasis is placed on the subjective (personal) religious experience. Since sin blinds the human soul and since God is as different as he is from humans, God can be known only through some suprarational experience or "existential encounter." These experiences are so profound or unique that they themselves serve as the proof or defense. Proponents often cite Pentecost or Paul's testimony.
- The dilemma lies in either misinterpretation that centers on seeing something profound (Ephesians 2:20) or it centers on a lack of teaching the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27).
- Sharing your testimony is good and right. Paul does this before Agrippa (Acts 26:1-18).
 - I was this before Christ met me.
 - I met Christ.

- Now, this is how Christ has changed me.

Those who stress natural theology as the point at which apologetics begins.

- Emphasis and great trust are placed in human reason to discover religious knowledge.
- Religious truths can be known and verified much in the same way scientific propositions are said to be known and verified.
- This family uses theistic proofs/arguments and historical evidences, relying on logic, philosophy, history, and science.
- For instance, in Classical Apologetics, proponents establish arguments for God primarily on philosophy and logic. (e.g., Thomas Aquinas, Lee Strobel)
 - C.S. Lewis made use of this family by what some call the *cumulative case apologetic*. One uses evidences to show that Christian faith makes the most sense of the human condition. It is the best way to live in light of the world in front of us.
- Evidences are important. We do use evidences. Paul told Agrippa about the clear happenings in his day regarding Jesus of Nazareth. “For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner.” (Acts 26:26)
- Yet while the first family can fall into subjectivism and self-made religion, the second does not take man’s depravity seriously enough in light of the context in which the unbeliever finds himself. His context (unbelief – sin and rebellion) is often not taken into consideration.
 - Cornelius Van Til said it well, “Deep down in his mind every man knows that he is the creature of God and responsible to God. Every man, at bottom, knows that he is a covenant-breaker.”³

Those who stress revelation as the foundation upon which apologetics must be built.

- Revelation is a divine act of God as Creator who moves toward his creation.
- The unbeliever lives with convictions about the evidences of God. Either he borrows them for his own glory or suppresses them, but they ultimately live in God’s world.
- Revelation is understood only through the living Triune God, who has revealed himself generally in his creation, and specially through his word. There is purpose to the creation, yet Scripture, as God’s revelatory word, explains anthropology (man and creation) and theology (God and salvation), and thus Scripture is our ultimate standard for defending the faith.
- So, in light of Scripture, we will find depraved sinners who cannot know or understand that which is spiritually discerned. And we will also find that sinners rebel against what is perfectly known, that which he understands and cannot deny. Because they live in God’s world, “the result is that his whole life is an oscillation between the clearly revealed facts and his self-deluding fiction.”⁴ The unbeliever pretends to be something they can never be: independent of God.
- This family begins with one’s right relationship with God by faith through the Scriptures and uses this principle to defend the faith as well.
 - Doing apologetics means one is confident in the sufficiency and authority of God’s word. In so doing, we acknowledge that our worldview and argument for all truth is based upon

³ Thom Notaro, *Van Til & the Use of Evidence* (P&R Publishing, 1980) quoted from Cornelius Van Til, *Apologetics* (Syllabus, 1971), 57

⁴ Notaro, 37.

that same sufficiency and authority of God's word. This is a great task that requires great wisdom.

As ambassadors, we defend Christianity to the world for two big reasons:

1. Sometimes men and women ask questions about life that only Christianity can answer.
 - a. Who am I? What is my purpose in life?
2. Sometimes people are not asking the questions they should be asking about reality because they are actively bargaining away the critical questions with triviality.
 - a. It's all relative. There's no such thing as absolute truth. I'm just too busy to think about these things. The Bible is just an old book handed down through generations; it's clearly the work of men!

The apologist's central focus as we engage with men is to remember that "...man's problem of knowing ...centers on his rebellion against the covenant Lord. The apologist must confront men with the claims of that Lord."⁵

Paul said clearly to Agrippa, "For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner."²⁷ King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe."²⁸ And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?" (Acts 26:26-28)

⁵ Ibid., 41.