

WE AFFIRM BIBLICAL EVANGELISM AND APOLOGETICS

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A common feeling among Christians is discomfort in speaking to others about their faith. Many have unrealistic ideas about what it means, thinking that it must look the same for everyone or it's not evangelism. Others think it's only the job of the paid ministers to preach the gospel. What it often comes down to is a misunderstanding of the faith.

Consider this in light of Ephesians 4, which describes the kind of doctrinal unity we should strive for as a church. As we are committed to the truth of God, following His structure of the church, we are being equipped and built up until we attain maturity in Christ (vv. 12-13). Notice how that leads into our topic: "As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but [and here it is] speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ" (vv. 14-15). At church, you should be growing in the knowledge and grace of our Lord.

So, one of our goals as a church is to help you mature, to help you know what you believe, so you won't be uncomfortable with the idea of evangelism. Our hope is that, as time goes on here, you'll not only know the gospel or the message of Scripture, but also be able to explain it. As you learn more about the Christ Who saved you, you'll sanctify Him as Lord in your hearts, and then be able to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for your hope with gentleness and reverence. This verse gives us this template.

FIRST, SANCTIFY CHRIST AS LORD IN YOUR HEART (V. 15A)

but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts

What does this mean? When we set apart something inside of us for worship, we are sanctifying it, meaning "**to treat as holy, reverence.**"¹ Of course, to do this with anything or anyone but God is idolatry; Isaiah 8:13 says, "It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, and He shall be your dread." Some of the older translations have that we should sanctify the "Lord God," but it looks like "Christ" is the best rendering.

Notice though, that it isn't "sanctify Christ the Lord in your hearts," but instead set apart "Christ *as* Lord." You might remember that several weeks ago, we discussed the importance of the Lordship of Christ. Obviously, you can't effectively evangelize the lost if you are lost! Similarly, though, if you as a Christian are harboring sin (i.e., living like an unbeliever, or have some secret life of sin), then you're engaging in futility.

¹ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 10.

I'm not talking about occasionally falling into sin or sometimes struggling with your assurance as a believer – that's all of us, and thankfully, God still uses us all the time. Even so, you should strive set apart Christ in your hearts before you engage in this. Doing so will result in your seeking to reflect the Lord you serve. It will also change *how* you interact with others – operating in a manner glorifying to God and respecting His image in others. What's more, it'll shake you from your lethargy and prompt you to talk to others about faith in Him.

So sanctifying Christ as Lord in your hearts is vital – and there's even *more* to consider. We must hold to Christ's Lordship as part of the evangelistic process. This comes out in Augustine's motto, "I believe in order that I may understand." Such a motto seems backwards to us because we think that we need to understand everything before we can believe in it. However, those not already committed to seeing the world as God has created it can't understand it.

Scripture alone gives us the basis for knowing. There, we read, "For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light" (Ps 36:9) – there's no life without God, and by His light illuminating our paths, we're able to see the lesser points of light reflecting in this world. We must know and trust that the "fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps 111:10), "the beginning of knowledge" (Pv 1:7), "and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Pv 9:10). So, sanctifying Christ as Lord brings us to a point of humble acknowledgment that we need to know Him before we can really understand the world around us, which changes how we defend the faith in the world.

This leads us into our next point.

SECOND, PREPARE A READY DEFENSE (V. 15B)

always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you

With the preparation of the first part of the verse under our belts, we get now to the heart of the matter. Interestingly, some read "to everyone who asks you" and think it means we should wait for someone to ask us about our faith – have such a Christian character that people will naturally want to know more. While you should strive for that according to this passage, this verse isn't calling for our passivity.

We're called to always be "ready to make a defense." The word "defense" comes from the Greek word *apologia*, the word from which we get our word "apologetic." Now, in this sense of the term, apologetics does not mean "apologizing," as though we need to go on an apology tour. I only say that half tongue-in-cheek, since some feel the need to ask forgiveness of the lost world for the faith. Perhaps distancing themselves from Christian abuses in the past, real and imagined, they're almost seeking to win the approval of others first.

Biblical apologetics means to provide a defense, and the term appears this way throughout the New Testament (cf. 1 Cor 9:3; 2 Cor 7:11; 12:19; Rm 2:15; 2 Tm 4:16; Phil 1:7, 16). For instance, as Paul stood before the Jewish mob, he declared, "Hear my defense [*apologia*]," and proceeded to preach Christ (Acts 22:1-21). He also used it to speak of his call to give a "defense of the gospel" (Phil 1:16). In the second century, Justin Martyr wrote his *Apology* to defend Christianity in pagan culture, and many other examples spring up throughout church history.

We should be ready. We're confronting worldviews, and as 2 Corinthians 10:5 says, "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." With that in mind, when I took apologetics with Dr. Michael Vlach, he gave us four goals in the apologetic process:

- **Proof** – Providing philosophical arguments and scientific and historical evidences for the Christian faith. This is a positive case for Christianity to show that it should be accepted.
Goal: Show that Christianity is reasonable.
- **Defense** – Defending Christianity against attacks made against it. This involves answering misunderstandings and misrepresentations. It includes answering objections, criticisms, and questions from non-Christians.
Goal: Show that Christianity is not unreasonable.
- **Refutation** – Refuting the claims of non-Christian belief systems to show that these systems cannot be true.
Goal: Show that Non-Christian belief systems are not reasonable.
- **Persuasion** – Convincing people that they should embrace Christianity. More than intellectual knowledge is needed.
Goal: Show that Christianity involves commitment.

That sounds like a lot at first, but the odds are that some of you may already have been doing this as you talk to unbelievers, at least in part. That's because it's simply the logical progression of a gospel presentation. You want to present the gospel as reasonable, answer questions that people may have, try to show the inconsistency in their current beliefs, and then call them to repentance and faith.

I say that for your comfort, for you may be tempted to think that evangelism and apologetics requires you to be a genius or, at least, well-educated before you can begin telling people about the faith. Many apologetic methods focus on the arguments for God, like the cosmological argument, ontological argument, teleological argument, etc. There may be a usefulness in this, but I'm afraid it unwittingly discourages many Christians from the process.

The problem is fundamentally flawed. Some apologists seek to first prove theism, that there is a "higher power" or intelligence behind the creation, and then go on to argue for the Christian religion. They may speak of the preponderance of evidence for the existence of the Christian God, utilizing terms of probability.

However, Scripture begins by presupposing God – the first verse is, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Scripture goes on to also says that God is plain in the world around us – "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands" (Ps 19:1-2). It also affirms that people know God – "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse" (Rm 1:20). People believe in God, and they hate Him.

What we need to realize is that human mind is fallen. While evidences certainly exist, the sinner will always explain them away. That's why it would have been useless to send Lazarus back from the dead to the rich man's

brothers, and why the raising of another Lazarus was ultimately rejected. Because of total depravity, 1 Corinthians 2:14 says, “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”

This means that Christian apologetics and evangelism is “simpler” than we often make them. We don’t need to memorize the various philosophical arguments to share the gospel. We only need to know the Bible and believe it. Our *presupposition* that we must own is that the Bible is true (and that comes back to sanctifying Christ as Lord).

If you understand that the person you’re witnessing to is lost in their sin and suppressing the truth in unrighteousness (Rm 1:18), then you can navigate most of what they will say. If they say that the Bible is full of contradictions, ask them for some; if they can’t come up with any, ask them if you can show them what the Bible clearly says. If they say they don’t think God exists, ask them what their basis for knowing that is; if they say because we can explain the universe with science, tell them that’s what we’d expect since the God of the Bible created it. If they say there’s too many religions to know the truth, tell them how thankful you are to have a sure Word in the form of Scripture. Keep bringing them back to the truth that they’re trying to avoid.

Mark this: there’s no common ground in human reason if sinners naturally suppress the truth. As such, it is right for Christians to proceed with Augustine’s premise, “I believe in order that I may understand.” Of course, an unbeliever may counter that you’re being circular to argue that the Bible is true because you presuppose it’s true. However, the unbeliever is also circular when he rejects biblical claims because he’s already decided the Bible is false. We’re being consistent within our own worldview and upfront with our presuppositions; the unbeliever denies that he has presuppositions.

Let’s think about this another way. Some Christians might think that they are gaining approval by appearing to be fair or open-minded by not starting with the Bible, by setting it aside and then proving our way to it. However, the Bible is a double-edged sword, and sharing the gospel with the lost is a spiritual battle – why would we disarm ourselves as we enter the fray? Notice that this is a defense “for the hope that is in you;” the promises of Scripture *are* what drive us (or they should).

So, when you share the faith, do so with assurance. You worship on Sundays like Christianity is true and defensible, and that should be your attitude speaking about it on Monday. Avoid language of probability, speaking of the possibility of Christian truth rather than its reality. Otherwise, you can do more than damage your case; you may even harm yourself spiritually with that kind of thinking.

Of course, that said, continue to learn more about apologetics as you gain opportunity. The more understanding in other worldviews you gain, the more confidently you’ll speak, overcoming any communication barriers. You’re gaining preparation to give a defense. Even so, always remember to keep your Bible by your side for this battle.

THIRD, ENGAGE WITH GENTLENESS AND REVERENCE (V. 15C)

yet with gentleness and reverence;

This is a vital tempering of our methods, especially as we use terms of battle. One evangelist claimed to be able to convert anyone if locked in a room with him. I'm sure the "convert" would say *anything* to get out of that room!

We need to have the correct attitude in the evangelistic process, and **the first word to describe that is gentleness**. It's the same word translated "gentle" in v. 4 to speak of a godly woman's proper spirit. That means this should mark the demeanor of men as well as women—we all should "be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be uncontentious, gentle, showing every consideration for all men" (Ti 3:1-2).

This is a quality so important that it becomes a quality of elders. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 2:23-26,

But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

I spend time on this because some specialize in what they call "truth with an attitude." However, we're told in Ephesians 4:15 to be "speaking the truth in love." If we are only to be concerned with speaking the truth, then prepositional phrases like "in love" and "with gentleness" would be absent from God's Word. We live in an age that prizes mic-drop moments, but we shouldn't engage in gotcha tactics, but instead of mocking, we have to patiently bear with the so-called wisdom of the world while recognizing its foolishness. We do this for the love of eternal souls, and our demeanor can either help or hinder gospel proclamation.

The second word to describe our attitude here is reverence. The actual Greek word is "fear," which is how the KJV and NKJV have it. On the other hand, both the ESV and HCSB translate it "respect." This obviously refers first to God—we cannot fear people more than God. The next verse connects this to keeping a good conscience, and verse 17 speaks of avoiding suffering that you might bring on yourself. We must strive for a holy apologetic.

Still, there's a certain kind of honor that we should show to people. We see this when Paul speaks a word against the unbelieving high priest and then retracts it (Acts 23:1-5)—in v. 5, he quotes from Exodus 22:28, which says, "You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people." In Colossians 4:6, we read, "Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person."

AN EXAMPLE: ACTS 17

One of the greatest examples of this is in Acts 17:16-34. There, Paul presents the Christian worldview to the pagan Athenian philosophers. Let's focus on vv. 22-31.

So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed

anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.' Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

We don't have everything there in the exact order that I've presented it today, and that's because there's no "script" that guarantees converts (and the following verse reveals the different reactions you will likely face). Even so, there are a few points to highlight.

First, Paul was certainly gentle and reverent. He didn't call them a bunch of hell-bound heathens, and he wasn't standing before them on trial for taking a hammer to their statues. Instead, he addresses them with truth, indeed telling them they are wrong, but doing so without acerbic rhetoric or disrespect.

Second, Paul was ready to give a defense. He was studied in the Scripture and alluded to it throughout his presentation, most notably in vv. 24–25, a reference to Isaiah 42:5. He had observed their idolatrous and superstitious situation. He even knew their own writers!

Third, Paul presented the unreasonableness of their position. They clearly had no assurance if they felt the need to create a statue to an unknown God. They "worship in ignorance" (v. 23). Indeed, he says that God doesn't dwell in temples or is served by human hands (vv. 24–25), meaning that there's nothing they can do for Him—as our lives actually depend on Him (vv. 25–26). They may be "very religious" (v. 22), but they are groping for a God that's not even far away (v. 27).

Fourth, Paul defended the truth of Christianity. He jumps straight into the biblical message, again, making numerous allusions to Scripture. He doesn't give a lengthy dissertation on the differences between their faith and his own, but instead, he quotes their own poets to demonstrate that they already have some understanding about the things of God (v. 28). He doesn't shy from the greatest proof which may have embarrassed him in this congregation of intellectuals—the resurrection of Christ from the dead (v. 31).

Fifth, Paul called them to repentance. If we are indeed God's children, and we are not made of unreasoning, inanimate material like stone or gold, then we dare not think of Him as a product of our own hands (v. 29). He presents God as calling for the repentance of all people (v. 30), and he tells them of the coming day of judgment (v. 31).

CONCLUSION

Like with all the sermons in this series, there's so much more to discuss. Hopefully, though, you're seeing that this isn't an impossible task. You, as a believer already trying to practice obedience and to learn more about the faith, are more than capable of walking someone through the gospel. You don't need to get a philosophy degree first.

However, you may still feel uncomfortable, and you will need to ask yourself why. Sometimes, it's fear of man—you may be afraid of ruining friendships, but is it friendly to say nothing? Sometimes, it's because you just don't know much about the gospel, and that's easily remedied. Let's remember the gospel right now in the Lord's Supper.

In Matthew 26:26-29, we read,

While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

We are about distributing the elements in obedience to our Lord, and any baptized believer is welcome to partake. First Corinthians 11:28 says, "But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup." Let's have a moment of silent prayer and reflection on both ourselves, His body that was broken for us, and His blood that was shed for us.

(Wait a minute and distribute the elements)

Our Lord said "Take, eat; this is my body."

Our Lord also said, "Drink... for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."