

What Is Apologetics?

By Paul Gould

Scripture to Memorize

“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.” 1 Peter 3:15

Session Goal

Consistent with God’s Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will understand the nature and importance of apologetics.

Introduction

Imagine being in a group of peers. The topic of Christianity comes up, and your coworkers, knowing you are a Christian, start asking you questions about your faith. Some think the reality of pain and suffering in the world shows God does not exist. Others argue that evolution explains all we need to know about the origin of the universe, life, species, and human beings. Still others want to know if they must believe in Jesus to go to heaven. They turn to you for answers. Would such a scenario excite or panic you? Why?

What Is Apologetics?

Apologetics is not about apologizing to someone that you are a Christian. Nor is it the study of how to say “I’m sorry” really well. *Christian apologetics* can be defined as “an attempt to remove obstacles or doubts to, as well as offer positive reasons for, believing that Christianity is true and satisfying.” Sometimes those obstacles to faith, or defeaters to Christianity, will be intellectual; sometimes those obstacles are of the will; and sometimes those obstacles are due to a failure to imagine a world where Christianity is good and beautiful.

Read Exodus 20:1–3 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 3. You shall have no other gods before Me. In Exodus 20 we learn that there is one God, whose nature and existence must be affirmed and proclaimed by those who would be faithful in the face of multiple counterfeits. Thus, *apologetics is rooted in our desire to faithfully represent the reality of God.* Part of what it means to flourish as humans is to be rightly related to reality. Apologetics can help by pointing to the One who stands at the center of reality as its Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer.

Discussion Questions

How is our culture confused about God’s character? How can apologetics help believers faithfully represent the reality of God? Discuss examples.

Read 1 Peter 3:15 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 15. sanctify. Reminiscent of Exodus 20, Peter exhorts the believers to make Christ preeminent in their lives. The word *sanctify* suggests seeing something in its proper light. It is a kind of re-enchantment where we are to see and savor the brilliance and beauty of Christ as our greatest need and highest good. **being ready . . . defense . . . account . . . hope.** The believer is to “stand at attention” ready to defend Christ, using reason and evidence, to share the hope of eternal life in Christ whenever called upon. **gentleness and reverence.** Peter instructs us to engage with proper attitudes toward both the non-Christians *with whom* we are speaking and the Lord *about whom* we are speaking. The word *gentleness* indicates the manner in which we are to

answer those who challenge our faith; the word *reverence* speaks to an attitude of holy fear toward Christ, whom we honor as Lord, and a respect toward the people with whom we are speaking.

The goal in apologetics is not to win an argument. Rather, the goal is to be a faithful witness. Think of it this way. Jesus is on trial in every human heart. The accuser is Satan. The defense attorney is the Holy Spirit. And you are a witness. You must be ready, when God calls you, to be a *faithful* witness (some are even called to be *expert* witnesses), to share with gentleness and reverence, the reason for the hope within.

But you are not the defense attorney. It is the Holy Spirit's job to draw people to Himself. God uses us as His witnesses, and God uses apologetics in the process, but it is important to keep in mind that God ultimately draws people to Himself.

Discussion Questions

What happens if one forgets to do apologetics with gentleness and reverence? Have you ever experienced someone who forgets this? How did it go? Have you ever been that person? Finally, how have you seen apologetics *demonstrated* in Scripture?

Why Is Apologetics Important?

Apologetics is not only biblical, but it is also vitally important for a vibrant faith and witness in at least three ways. First, *apologetics addresses the ideas and values embraced by a culture that shape its openness to the gospel*. Every culture, and every individual within culture, has a set of “defeater beliefs” that rule out or “defeat” belief in Christianity if true. In order for Christianity to get a fair hearing, these barriers to belief must be addressed. Apologetics helps address these barriers.

Second, *apologetics contributes to our spiritual formation unto Christ*. Knowing both *what* you believe and *why* you believe it helps you grow into Christlikeness. What we believe about God, the world, and the self will, in a large part, determine the course of our lives and the shape of our souls (see Romans 12:2). Apologetics can help you think more deeply about the content of your mental life in order to root out error, strengthen beliefs, and bring a deeper appreciation of the lure and enchantment of Jesus and the gospel.

Finally, *apologetics helps win unbelievers to Christ*. Countless believers testify to how God used apologetics to remove intellectual and emotional doubts for them on their journey to Christ. God cares about the whole person—reason, imagination, and the will. He wants all of us to be fully devoted to Him, and He uses apologetics to draw people to Himself as whole people. Thanks be to God!

Discussion Questions

How has God used apologetics in your own life? How has he used it in the lives of those you hope to reach for Christ?

At Home: Nail It Down

Apologetics can be defined as “an attempt to remove obstacles to the faith so a person can see and believe Christianity is true and satisfying.” This definition is more robust than typical definitions in that it is concerned with the whole person: reason, imagination, and the will.

Apologetics is essential to faithfulness unto Christ. It points to the brilliance, beauty, and truth of the gospel. It helps in our spiritual formation unto Christ. God uses it to bring people into the kingdom of God.

Two passages were explored in this study.

- Exodus 20:1–3 grounds the apologetical task in our desire to faithfully represent God in the face of multiple counterfeits.
- In 1 Peter 3:15 we learn that apologetics is *commanded* in Scripture. Believers are always (and everywhere) to be prepared to give a defense of the reason for the hope within and to do so with gentleness and respect both about whom they speak and with whom they speak.

A cursory scan of the Gospels and the book of Acts reveal that apologetics is *demonstrated* in Scripture as well (see John 14:11; Luke 24:25–27; and Acts 17:22–34).

It is the Holy Spirit's job to draw people to Himself. God uses us as His witnesses, and God uses apologetics in the process, but it is important to keep in mind that God ultimately draws people to Himself.