

The Case for Christianity

Lesson 1 - What Is Apologetics and Why Study Apologetics At All?

The word **Apologetics** comes from the Greek word **Apologia**, which means a defense, as in a court of law. Christian apologetics involves making a case for the truth of the Christian faith.

Classical Apologetics – The classical approach is so named, because it was employed by the earliest Christian thinkers to practice formal apologetics, such as Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Anselm the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Classical Apologetics Is Comprised of Two Parts

1) **Establish the existence of God** (broad theism) through rational argumentation using the Cosmological (William Lane Craig, Thomas Aquinas), Teleological (William Paley, Michael Behe), Moral (C.S. Lewis, William Sorley), or Ontological arguments (Anselm, Alvin Plantinga, W.L. Craig).

2) **Establish the truth of Christianity** specifically by appealing to the historical evidence, particularly of the life of Jesus, his miracles, and his resurrection.

This lesson series will focus on the 2nd part of classical apologetics...**Establishing the truth of Christianity**.

There Are at Least 3 Very Good Reasons to Study Apologetics

1) To Maintain the Gospel's Relevancy in a Rapidly

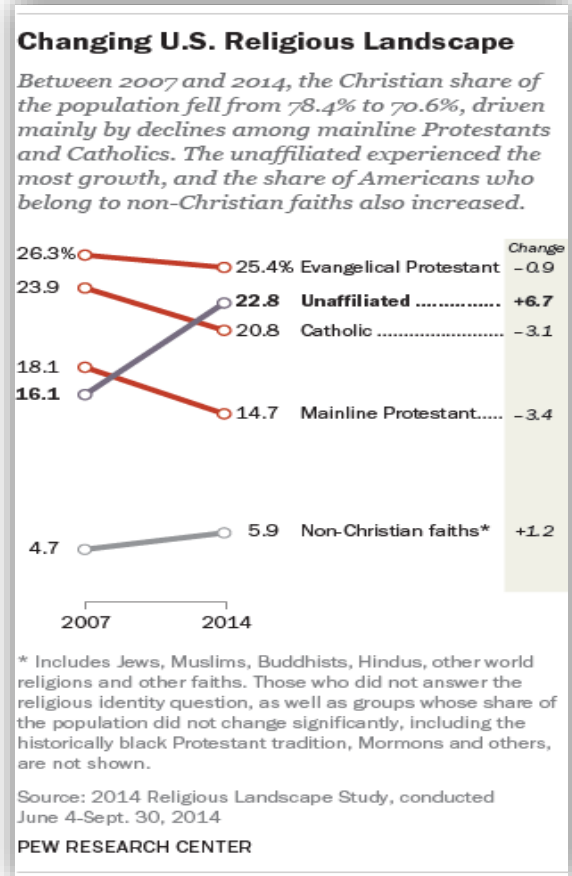
Evolving World Culture – Historians generally agree that from 1650 AD until about 1800 AD, world culture and scientific understanding rapidly evolved in what has been called “The Age of Reason” or “The Age of Enlightenment”. This was a cultural movement of intellectuals whose purpose was to reform society using reason, challenge ideas grounded in tradition and faith, and to advance knowledge through what is known as the “scientific method”. Today, in order to be taken seriously, the gospel needs to be seen as an *intellectually viable* option. Otherwise, it will be progressively dismissed as mere superstition.

This is where Classical Apologetics comes in. By demonstrating an ability to reconcile our faith in a Creator, with what we have discovered about the physical world, And...to demonstrate reconciliation of the gospel message with historical evidences, we provide legitimacy and potency to our belief system. By doing so, we greatly increase the likelihood that our message will be received and considered by a secular world.

Unaffiliated Make Up Growing Share Across Generations
% of each generation that identifies current religion as atheist, agnostic or nothing in particular

	2007	2014	Change
Silent generation (b. 1928-1945)	9	11	+2
Baby Boomers (b.1946-1964)	14	17	+3
Generation X (b. 1965-1980)	19	23	+4
Older Millennials (b. 1981-1989)	25	34	+9
Younger Millennials (b. 1990-1996)	n/a	36	n/a

2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014. All changes are statistically significant.
 PEW RESEARCH CENTER



Unitarian Universalism is a religious, theological, and philosophical concept with universal application. Universalist doctrines consider all faiths valid. It believes that religion is a universal human quality, emphasizing the universal principles of most religions and accepting other religions in an inclusive manner, believing in a universal reconciliation between humanity and the divine.

By Emily Swanson

Associated Press March 23, 2015

WASHINGTON — Poll: Americans are Disconnected from Religion, But Believe In God

Americans are likelier than ever to not feel connected to any particular religion, but no less likely to believe in God.

That’s one of the major findings from the 2014 General Social Survey, which has been measuring trends in American opinion and behavior since 1972.

The survey, which is conducted by the independent research organization NORC at the University of Chicago, puts wide-ranging and long-running questions about a large array of issues to the public.

Data from the 2014 survey was released earlier this month, and an analysis of its findings was conducted by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and the General Social Survey.

The portion of Americans saying they have no religious preference has increased dramatically since 1972, when only 5 percent of Americans said they didn’t identify with any particular religion.

In 2014, 21 percent of Americans said they had no religion — a record high. Younger Americans are especially likely to fall into that group, with 30 percent of those under age 35 saying they have no religion.

But that doesn’t mean Americans are more likely to be atheists than they used to be. Just 3 percent say they don’t believe in God, while 5 percent say they’re agnostic.

Fifty-eight percent say God does exist, and 70 percent believe in life after death.

2) The Bible Commands Us to Be Ready to Make a Defense - As Christians, we should be prepared to share objective facts with those around us that could reasonably support our convictions and beliefs. We are commanded in 1 Peter to do this.

1 Peter 3:15 (ESV) ¹⁵ *but in your hearts honor 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, ESV*

Some people might think that apologetics is unbiblical. They say that you should just preach the gospel and let the Holy Spirit do His work! But examples set by Jesus and the apostles affirm the value of apologetics.

Jesus appealed to miracles and to fulfilled prophecy to prove that His messianic claims were true.

Luke 24: 25– 27 (ESV “Referencing Fulfilled Prophecy”) ²⁵ *And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.*

**SECULARISM: A
WORLDVIEW THAT
ALLOWS NO ROOM
FOR THE
SUPERNATURAL:
NO MIRACLES, NO
DIVINE
REVELATION, NO
GOD.**

John 14: 10-11 (ESV “Referencing Miracles”) ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, **or else believe on account of the works themselves.**

Peter used fulfilled prophecy, Jesus’ miracles, and especially Jesus’ resurrection to prove to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. Take, for example, Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost recorded in the second chapter of Acts.

Acts 2: 22-23 (ESV “Referencing Miracles”) ²² Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— ²³ this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

Acts 2: 25-29 (ESV “Referencing Fulfilled Prophecy”) ²⁵ For David says concerning him, “I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; ²⁶ therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. ²⁷ For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. ²⁸ You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.” ²⁹ “Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.

Acts 2: 32 (ESV “Referencing Christ’s Resurrection”) ³² This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.

By means of these arguments Peter sought to demonstrate to his fellow Jews that Christianity was true. That rational arguments could be made that supported Christianity.

In addition, Paul when he brought the message of Christ to non-Jews, used rational arguments that would be found persuasive.

When addressing the Greeks in Acts chapter 17, he presented ideas that, although rooted in OT principles, appealed to the Greek philosophers by interacting with their thought, even quoting their own writers in a well-informed, respectful way.

Acts 17: 22-31 (ESV) ²² So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸ for “‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, “‘For we are indeed his offspring.’” ²⁹ Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. ³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

(When dealing with non-Jews, Paul sought to show the existence of God through his handiwork in nature. Saying that from nature alone all men can know that God exists.)

Romans 1:20 (ESV) ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

3) It Can Strengthen Believers – As followers of Christ, we all go through periods where we find our faith challenged. Expecting to go through life never wavering in our beliefs, is to fail to recognize the enormity of life’s challenges.

John 16:33 (ESV) ³³ *I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*"

If our faith is built primarily or solely on emotional experiences, we may find that faith vulnerable if we’re not equipped with something more substantial. Youth are particularly susceptible to attacks upon their faith. Once out of the home where their faith is encouraged and fostered, they are targeted by a secular world that disparages and aggressively attacks any belief system rooted in the spiritual or supernatural.

William Lane Craig is one of the world’s leading Christian apologists. He posted an article on his Reasonable Faith website that shared just one of numerous examples where Christian Apologetics helped to save the faith of a believer...

"Recently I had the privilege of speaking at Princeton University on arguments for the existence of God, and after my lecture I was approached by a young man who wanted to talk with me. Obviously trying to hold back the tears, he told me how a couple of years earlier he had been struggling with doubts and was on the brink of abandoning his faith. Someone then gave him a video of one of my debates. He said, "It saved me from losing my faith. I cannot thank you enough."

I said, "It was the Lord who saved you from falling."

"Yes," he replied, "but He used you. I can't thank you too much." I told him how thrilled I was for him and asked him about his future plans. "I'm graduating this year," he told me, "and I plan to go to seminary. I'm going into the pastorate." Praise God for the victory in this young man's life!"

You can read more at: <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/christian-apologetics-who-needs-it#ixzz48TRlxFNL>

Classical Apologetics Can Never Eliminate the Necessity of Approaching God through Faith

Hebrews 11: 1-6 (ESV) *1 Now **faith** is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2 For by it the people of old received their commendation. 3 By **faith** we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. 4 By **faith** Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his **faith**, though he died, he still speaks. 5 By **faith** Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. 6 **And without faith it is***



C.S Lewis (1898– 1963)

rejected Christianity as a teenager for both personal and intellectual reasons. However, as an English professor at Oxford in his twenties and early thirties, Lewis was exposed to writers and friends who offered convincing reasons first for theism and eventually for Christianity. Lewis became a Christian and began to use his intellectual and literary talents to articulate and defend a Christian view of the world. He became one of the most influential Christian apologists of his generation. His books have sold more than one hundred million copies worldwide.

impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

2 Corinthians 5: 6-7 (ESV) 6 So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight.

Modern society has segregated “Faith” into two distinct categories:

Blind Faith - Faith that believes in something logically inconsistent. Or, believes in something that is at odds with historical facts and / or physical evidences.

Reasonable Faith – Faith that believes in something logically consistent. Or, believes in something in harmony with historical facts and / or physical evidences.

Questions for Discussion:

1. How would you describe the attitude toward Christianity in your workplace?
2. Do you feel that society is evolving toward an environment where it is considered politically incorrect to self-identify as a Christian? If so, can you provide examples that support this belief?
3. What kinds of arguments does Paul use in Acts 17: 22– 31 to persuade non-Jews that the gospel is true? How are his arguments like and unlike those Peter uses when talking to Jews in Acts 2: 14– 29?
4. What have you learned about the place of apologetics in evangelism?
5. Have you ever encountered someone who dismissed Christianity as mere superstition? If so, when? How did you respond?
6. Why do you think so many students abandon their faith during or just after high school? Who or what is to blame for this?