

Defending Your Faith: The Case for a Creator Lesson 1

Apologetics – What and Why?

- 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). Different apologists may prefer one of the four arguments, rejecting one or more of the others.
 - 2) **Establish the truth of Christianity** specifically by appealing to the historical evidence, particularly of the life of Jesus, his miracles, and his resurrection.

Our focus in this series will be on the first part, “**Establishing the Existence of God**”.

- **Moral / Philosophical Arguments** – ***Truths*** and ***principles of being*** that through logical deduction, provide ***rational*** support for belief in a Creator.
- **Cosmological Arguments** – Facts related to our understanding of the ***origin, structure and evolution*** of our physical universe that would support our belief in a Creator.
- **Teleological Arguments** – Evidence and facts found in all of nature that reflect a ***design*** or ***purpose*** in creation that supports a belief in a Designer/ Creator.

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***”.

Scientific Method: A method of procedure that has characterized natural science since the 17th century, consisting in systematic observation, measurement, and experiment, and the formulation, testing, and modification of hypotheses.

Secularism: A worldview that allows no room for the supernatural: no miracles, no divine revelation, no God.

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 the ability to reconcile our faith in a Creator, with what we have discovered about the world around us, we provide legitimacy and potency to our belief system. Doing so, greatly increases the likelihood our message will be received and considered by the secular world.

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 just that.

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*

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. Our 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.

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 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.

God does not expect our faith to be *Blind Faith*!

Luke 24:25-27 (ESV) 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.

John 14:10-11 (ESV) 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.

Through His creation, God has provided more than enough evidence of his existence for our faith to be categorized as “**Reasonable**”!

Psalms 19:1 (ESV) ¹ ... The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

Romans 1:19-20 (ESV) ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 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.

In our next lesson we will discuss the question...“What difference does it make if God exists?”

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 your position?
3. How would you describe the nature of the relationship between science and faith in a Creator? *A-Totally compatible and mutually reaffirming. B-Uneasy companions. C-Hostile Adversaries. Why?*
4. Have you ever had your belief in a Creator challenged by non-believing family members, co-workers, acquaintances or strangers? If so, how did you respond in defending your faith?
5. Do you feel it is possible to effectively defend your faith in God from secular attacks? Do you feel being able to do so would be an important skill to possess?