

What is Apologetics?

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Apologetics is the discipline that deals with a rational defense of Christian faith. It comes from a Greek word *apologia* which means to give a reason or defense. In spite of the objections to doing apologetics, there are important reasons to participate in the work of apologetics.

God Commands It.

The most important reason to do apologetics is that God told us to do so. The classic statement is 1 Peter 3:15, which says, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." This verse tells us to be ready. We may never run across someone who asks tough questions about our faith, but we should still be ready to respond if someone does. Being ready is not just a matter of having the right information available, it is also an attitude of readiness and eagerness to share the truth of what we believe. We are to give a reason to those who ask the questions. It is not expected that everyone needs pre-evangelism, but when they do need it, we must be able and willing to give them an answer.

This command also links the work of pre-evangelism with Christ's place as Lord in our hearts. If he is really Lord, then we should be obedient to him as "we demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). This means we should confront issues in our own minds and in the expressed thoughts of others that prevent us and them from knowing God. That is what apologetics is all about.

In Philippians 1:7 Paul speaks of his mission as "defending and confirming the gospel." He adds in verse 16, "I am put here for the defense of the gospel." This implies that the defender of the gospel is out where he or she can encounter others and defend truth.

Jude 3 adds, "Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and *urge you to contend for the faith* that was once for all entrusted to the saints." The people Jude addressed had been assaulted by false teachers, and he needed to encourage them to protect (literally agonize for) the faith as it had been revealed through Christ. Jude makes a significant statement about our attitude in verse 22, that we "have mercy on some, who are doubting."

Titus 1:9 makes knowledge of Christian evidences a requirement for church leadership. An elder in the church should "hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and *refute those who oppose it.*" Paul also gives us an indication of our attitude in this work in 2 Timothy 2:24-25: "And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. *Those who oppose him he must gently instruct*, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth." Anyone attempting to answer the questions of unbelievers will surely be wronged and be tempted to lose patience, but our ultimate goal is that they might come to a knowledge of the truth that Jesus

has died for their sins. With so important a task at hand, we must not neglect obedience to this command.

Reason Demands It.

God created humans to reason as part of his image (Gen. 1:27; cf. Col. 3:10). Indeed, it is by reasoning that humans are distinguished from “brute beasts” (Jude 10). God calls upon his people to use reason (Isa. 1:18) to discern truth from error (1 John 4:6) and right from wrong (Heb. 5:14). A fundamental principle of reason is that it should give sufficient grounds for belief. An unjustified belief is just that—unjustified.

Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” He surely would have been willing to add that the unexamined belief is not worth believing. Therefore, it is incumbent upon Christians to give a reason for their hope. This is part of the great command to love God with all our mind, as well as our heart and soul (Matt. 22:36-37).

The World Needs It.

People rightly refuse to believe without evidence. Since God created humans as rational beings, he expects them to live rationally, to look before they leap. This does not mean there is no room for faith. But God wants us to take a step of faith in the light of evidence, rather than to leap in the dark.

Evidence of truth should precede faith. No rational person steps in an elevator without some reason to believe it will hold him up. No reasonable person gets on an airplane that is missing part of one wing and smells of smoke in the cabin. People deal in two dimensions of belief: *belief that* and *belief in*. *Belief that* gives the evidence and rational basis for confidence needed to establish *belief in*. Once *belief that* is established, one can place faith *in* it. Thus, the rational person wants evidence that God exists before he places his faith in God. Rational unbelievers want evidence that Jesus is the Son of God before they place their trust in him.