



"...in your hearts regard Christ
the Lord as holy, ready at any time
to give a defense to anyone
who asks you for a reason
for the hope that is in you."
–1 Peter 3:15, CSB



APOLOGETICS WORKSHOP

This workbook belongs to:

What Is Apologetics?

We get the word “apologetics” from the Greek word *apologia*, meaning a verbal defense. Peter uses this word in 1 Peter 3:15-16 when he says,

“...but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. Yet do this with gentleness and respect...”

Thus, when we say “Christian apologetics,” we are essentially referring to providing an intellectual defense, or giving intellectual reasons, for why we believe what we believe.

One way to think about apologetics is by thinking of your favorite sports team. Nearly every sport, such as football, basketball, soccer, or baseball, has both an opportunity for defense and offense to take place. Defense happens when a team tries to prevent the other team from scoring, whether by blocking the goal or getting three outs to retire the inning. Offense, on the other hand, is when a team tries to score, whether through base hits or throwing for a touchdown. Both of these strategies—defense and offense—can be seen in apologetics.

Defensive Apologetics

When it comes to the defensive side of apologetics, the task of the Christian is simply to answer any objections or questions a person may have regarding Christianity in general.

What are some common objections/questions a Christian may be asked regarding their faith?

1. Does science contradict Christianity?
2. Is Jesus really the only way?
3. If God is so good and all-powerful, why is there so much evil in the world?
4. Doesn't the Bible contain contradictions?
5. _____
6. _____

Beginning on page 8, we'll offer some strategies for answering objections like these. And at the end of the workbook, we'll suggest a few resources that will help you better equip yourself for both defensive and offensive apologetics.

When it comes to sharing our faith as Christians, most of us think only in terms of evangelism. However, apologetics and evangelism are two sides to the same coin. Evangelism seeks to present the gospel in hopes that people would repent of their sins and turn to Christ for salvation. Apologetics seeks to pave the way for that gospel presentation by first answering any questions or objections a person may have about Christianity. It helps to overcome any intellectual obstacles so that a conversation about the gospel can move forward with someone.

Share a time when someone has raised an objection to, or asked a question about, your faith. How did you respond?

Offensive Apologetics

While defensive apologetics seeks to answer objections and questions people raise against Christianity, offensive apologetics seeks to provide reasons, evidences, and support in showing Christianity to be true. This type of apologetics can be addressed to both unbelievers and believers. For instance, if a Christian is talking to someone who is really considering the Christian faith but has doubts, then the Christian can provide a host of reasons showing that the Christian worldview is rational, grounded in historical evidence, able to make the best sense of everything we know, and so forth. Likewise, the same could be done for the believer. If a Christian is wrestling with doubts over certain aspects of their faith, a fellow believer can encourage him or her by offering the same sort of evidence and reasons, helping that person to become even more grounded and secure in their walk with God.

Share a time when a fellow Christian helped you address some doubts or questions you were wrestling with. How did his or her ministry to you help you become more grounded in your faith in God?

What Do I Do With My Doubts?

Most people experience doubts at some point or another—even believers. This shouldn't come as a surprise for the simple reason that we, unlike God, are finite creatures who don't possess infinite knowledge. Because we don't know everything, doubts can sometimes arise.

Have you ever experienced doubt when it comes to your beliefs? If so, what are some of the doubts or questions you've wrestled with?

It is unfortunate when churches don't properly address the doubts and difficult questions that come their way, even from among their fellow Christians. Having personal doubts is often viewed as taboo, which only adds to the shame a fellow Christian feels when he or she is wrestling with them. In fact, a recent study concluded that the No. 1 reason young people are leaving the church has to do with the simple facts that either 1) their questions regarding faith weren't being addressed or 2) that the answers given seemed superficial.

For those who have experienced doubts, how did having these doubts make you feel? Why do you think most people feel ashamed for having doubts or asking questions?

Did you share these doubts with a trusted friend? If so, what was the end result? If not, why?

How can avoiding the doubts we have hinder our ability to grow in our relationship with God?

In what ways could facing our doubts and seeking answers for them make us stronger Christians?

It is important to recognize that faith and doubt are not opposites. Doubting is not unbelief, although not dealing with one's doubts may eventually lead to a place of unbelief. When a fellow Christian is wrestling with some form of doubting, it is important to help that person so that he or she can continue to grow and flourish in their Christian faith.

Heroes Who Sometimes Doubt

While there are certainly more instances of people in the Bible we can point to who experienced doubt, let's look at two familiar characters and what they teach us about how God responds to doubt.

Read Luke 7:18-23.

What does Jesus' response to John's struggle teach us about how God will respond when we doubt?

In Luke 7, we come across a scene where John the Baptist, imprisoned by Herod, begins to struggle with his faith in light of his circumstances. So much so that he sends some of his disciples to Jesus for confirmation that He is, in fact, who John imagined Him to be—the Messiah. Instead of Jesus being discouraged by this or chiding John for his lack of faith, Jesus graciously replies with reasons and evidences that, in the end, give assurance to John. Jesus tells John the things that are taking place as a result of His ministry, such as the blind being able to see, the lame to walk, and the dead being raised to life. The specific works Jesus was doing would have been reassuring to John not only because they are supernatural works of God, but also because they were fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies regarding the works of the Messiah who was to come.

Read John 20:24-29.

In what ways do you identify with Thomas when it comes to faith in Christ?

It is unfortunate that Thomas is not remembered for some of the good things he said and did in the Gospels, but as the doubting disciple. There was nothing necessarily wrong on Thomas' part with wanting to see the evidences for Jesus' resurrection (after all, he wasn't present when Jesus first appeared to the other disciples). We know this because, at the very least, Jesus doesn't correct Thomas on this point. Remember, the other disciples did not believe Mary Magdalene when she told them Jesus had been resurrected until they had seen Him themselves. So instead of seeing Thomas for his doubts, perhaps we should see him as an example of working through doubts to become a lifelong follower of Christ who is widely credited for taking the gospel to India.

Identifying Our Doubts

Most people don't realize that doubts can come in a variety of forms. Here are the three most common:

1. Intellectual doubts: These types of doubts are what most people think of when they think of doubting. Intellectual doubts are essentially just that—intellectual. For instance, they come in the form of questions relating to any alleged contradictions between Christianity and science, or perhaps a question asking how Jesus can be both divine and human. Since these doubts are intellectual by nature, they require an intellectual response in order to help the person having them to overcome any intellectual obstacles.

What are some other instances of intellectual doubts you have come across?

2. Emotional doubts: These types of doubts often arise in the midst of some tragedy or suffering. They may look like intellectual doubts on the surface, but once you dig a little deeper, it is clear the person is dealing more with emotional doubts. For instance, a person who has recently experienced the loss of a loved one while going through a season of grief, sorrow, and spiritual depression may begin to ask questions like "Why would God allow such suffering and evil," "Does God really exist, and if so, does He care," "If God is all-good and all-powerful, why did He allow this to happen," and so forth. Questions like these can come from a person with intellectual doubts, but when they come from a source of emotional doubts, intellectual answers offer little to no help. At this point, what is needed is a pastoral response, not intellectual reasons that show why such and such an event would take place.

Have you ever experienced emotional doubts? What were some of the best ways you got through this season of doubting?

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Identifying Our Doubts (continued)

3. Volitional doubts: These types of doubts can be characterized as coming directly from a person's will and personal choosing. Like emotional doubts, they too can disguise themselves as being intellectual in nature. For instance, if a person has been wronged and sinned against by others, perhaps even from professing Christians, and finds the idea of forgiving them to be inconceivable, then that person may find it convenient to begin doubting Jesus' teaching on that subject. If that is the case, then an intellectual response will not likely help them, nor necessarily a pastoral response as in the case of emotional doubting. Here the person will need to be confronted with their heart issues of pride, authority, and their personal need of repentance, realizing that the same forgiveness that has been extended to us should be extended to those who have wronged us in some way.

What are some instances of volitional doubts you have experienced? How did you help address them?

It is important to think through where people's doubts stem from as we engage in conversation with them. Knowing this will not only give us insight as to how to address them apologetically, but it will also simply allow us to know them better as individuals and where they are in their relationship with God, giving us a better understanding of both how to talk to them and how to pray for them. After all, the Bible clearly tells us to have mercy on those who doubt (Jude 22).

How to Engage in Apologetic Conversations

Now that we know what Christian apologetics seeks to do, why it's important, and how to identify different forms of doubts and questions, let's look at how we can go about having apologetic conversations in our everyday lives.

When having apologetic conversations with others, it is important to remember a few things:

1. Know what you believe: This may seem obvious, but it is worth mentioning. You can't articulate the reasons for why you believe something if you don't first know what you believe.

Thus, every Christian should be in the habit of growing in their understanding of who God is and what He has done for them in Christ through a consistent study of His Word.

Read 2 Timothy 3:15.

According to Paul, how does a Christian grow in their faith? How would you describe your own devotional life? What are some practices you have found helpful in our own studying of the Bible?

What are some other ways a person can grow as a believer?

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How to Engage in Apologetic Conversations (continued)

2. Know your audience: When answering other people's questions about your faith, it is important to know the person(s) you are talking to and try to deliver the reasons for your beliefs to them in the best way possible. This may mean using illustrations and examples from pop culture to get your point across to those who would find this means effective, or using logical arguments for those friends of yours who process information better that way. Whatever the method of delivery, the trick is to match it to the audience you have.

Read Acts 17:16-34.

What can we learn from Paul in this account about knowing one's audience before speaking to them?

Why is it important to know your audience when defending your faith? In what ways would it be helpful to know what other religions believe and how that compares to Christianity?

3. Pay attention to your tone: It is important that we pay close attention to our tone and demeanor when speaking with others. Despite how well-versed we are in the Scriptures or how well we can articulate arguments for our belief in God, if we come across as rude and condescending to the people we talk to, there is no doubt they will dismiss us and what we have to say. Our character speaks volumes about who we are, especially if claiming to be a follower of Christ.

Read 1 Peter 3:15-16.

Why do you think Peter emphasized that we should defend the faith with all gentleness and respect?

Read Mark 10:21.

What does this account say about Jesus' attitude toward the rich, young ruler? What does this say about how our own attitudes should be toward others, despite whether they believe us or not?

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How to Engage in Apologetic Conversations (continued)

4. Avoid foolish debates: Sometimes our conversations with others may lead to certain issues that are highly debated. Knowing that the gospel and the Christian worldview speak into all matters under the sun, we, as Christians, should never avoid these hot topics out of fear of not being able to bring truth to the discussion. However, while we should never run from a debate, we should avoid debating with those whose only intention is to argue with us. If we are speaking with that atheist uncle who never allows us to get a word in or isn't at all interested in hearing our side of the matter, then we should simply bow out of the discussion and begin praying for his or her heart to be softened toward the gospel.

Read Titus 3:9.

What does Paul say about foolish debates?

Have you ever experienced conversations with someone who was more interested in debating rather than actually hearing your point of view? How did you respond?

5. Recognize the limits of what apologetics can do:

However important the role of apologetics can play in helping others see things clearer, it is just as important to remember its limits. Apologetics cannot change a person's heart. Sure, it can be used by God to remove obstacles to faith, but it can't create saving faith in the heart of a person—only Jesus can do that. We can't argue people into the Christian faith (even though it is our job to be winsome and persuasive).

However, we can answer people's questions and introduce them to the only One who is capable of transforming them from the inside out—Jesus.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:5.

According to Paul, what can apologetics accomplish?

Read Ephesians 2:1-9.

According to these verses, who is it that makes us alive in Christ?

How does knowing that God is the primary agent in one's salvation allow us to share the gospel freely, without fear that it is all up to us in convincing someone of the truth?

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How to Engage in Apologetic Conversations (continued)

6. Don't talk too much: It is our natural response to dump all of the information we know on someone in one conversation. However, we need to release ourselves from that mindset.

People need time to digest the information they are given, and by talking less, we are giving them the opportunity to thoroughly think through what we have to say. Not only that, but by talking less, we offer them an opportunity to be thoroughly heard, which helps eventually to strengthen our relationship with that person.

7. Ask questions, and lots of them: Asking questions is essential to any apologetic/evangelistic conversation. In the first place, when we ask people questions and allow them the chance to speak, we gain a better understanding of their beliefs and worldview. Such knowledge is essential in knowing not only our audience, but also how best to navigate a conversation with them. Knowing what they believe about God, the nature of man and sin, life after death, and so forth will be indispensable knowledge in crafting a presentation of the gospel to that person. Not only that, but it is through asking questions that we are capable of identifying the types of doubts that person may have, whether intellectual, moral, or volitional.

Second, asking questions puts the person we are talking to in the position of defending their own beliefs and why they believe them. If a person claims they believe that everything in the universe is here by chance, you can follow up that claim by politely asking them how they came to that belief: "What evidences or reasons led you to that conclusion?" In doing so, you are putting what philosophers call the "burden of proof" on that individual, and they are responsible for defending their beliefs.

Questions like these may include:

How did you come to that conclusion?

Why do you say that?

What are your reasons for holding that view?

What makes you think that's the right way to see it?

I'm curious; why would that idea seem compelling to you?

Third, asking questions allows people to think through their own beliefs and the reasons they hold them. This is extremely important because most people have never thought through their own reasons for believing what they do. By allowing people to thoughtfully consider the reasons they hold to certain beliefs, you are giving them the opportunity to see any contradictions or lack of evidence that may exist in their own thinking. Once that happens, you are in a better position to offer positive evidence for the truth of Christianity.

Here are some ways you can ask questions to get them thinking while inserting your point indirectly:

- Have you ever considered... that if the Bible were "merely written by men," it would be very hard to account for fulfilled prophecy? How would you explain that?
- Have you ever considered... that the existence of evil is actually evidence for the existence of God, not against it?
- Have you ever considered... that if Jesus was wrong about being the only way of salvation, it is difficult to call him a good man, a prophet, or a wise religious teacher? What do you think about that problem? [1]

[1] Gregory Koukl, *Tactics* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI), 2009: 84-85

Sharing Our Faith Without Fear

Remember that apologetics is a ministry to others as you seek to help remove the intellectual obstacles that may be in their way toward faith in Christ. It isn't about getting into arguments or winning debates—first and foremost, it is about making much of Jesus as we lovingly and graciously present Him to those around us.

Perhaps one of the best ways to begin doing apologetics is just by allowing apologetics to seep into your everyday conversations with others. That means you should look for opportunities to steer your conversations in the direction of allowing people to explain why they believe something, as well as opportunities for yourself to come back and present your own reasons for the beliefs you have.

Doing apologetics can be difficult work, but that isn't something that should come as a surprise.

In essence, we are challenging people to think about their core beliefs, and at times, graciously telling them that they should abandon their worldview for the Christian worldview. That can be a lot for a person to take in. They have been living in their worldview for quite some time. Like a house they have lived in for decades, knowing every square inch and where everything is, we are suggesting that they relocate to a house and neighborhood of which they have no knowledge. Nobody likes to move and be uprooted from everything that is familiar to him or her, which is why the supernatural work of God in the hearts of people is necessary for genuine transformation to take place.

Finally, remember that you are never alone when sharing your faith with others. The Book of Acts is filled with Spirit-empowered conversations on the part of the apostles because of their reliance upon the Holy Spirit at work in their ministry. Thus, when the opportunity presents itself to share with someone, pray and ask the Holy Spirit for not only the right words to say and the right way to say them, but also that the heart of the person hearing them would be open to the gospel. After all, it is God who is the One at work in changing a person's heart; we just get to participate by telling of His love and grace.

Read Matthew 22:37.

Why do you think Jesus emphasized that we should love God with our minds?

Why is it important for Christians not to neglect loving God with their minds?

What does loving God with your mind look like? What are some ways you can strive to do better in this area?

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Sharing Our Faith Without Fear

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Loving God is a holistic enterprise—something we do with our entire being, not just our emotions. Likewise, loving our neighbor will mean that we seek to minister to them by answering any questions or objections they have to the Christian faith.

As you seek to love God with your mind in the coming months and years, and as you grow in your knowledge of Him and His world, seek to share that with others. Talk with a neighbor, a co-worker, or the person you talk to each week at your local gym. Ask them questions about their beliefs, and in turn, share what you believe and why you believe it, all the while being diligent in your own personal study so that you can anticipate what questions will be asked and how you might be able to respond. You don't have to be a professional apologist or have seminary-level training to do apologetics—you simply need to build relationships and talk with others. Besides, remember that it isn't just you doing the witnessing—God's Spirit is working both through you and in the person you are talking to, and that should encourage you greatly!

Suggested Apologetics Resources

Books

On Guard by William Lane

Tactics by Gregory Koukl

Mere Christianity by C. S. Lewis

Cold-Case Christianity by J. Warner Wallace

The Reason for God by Timothy Keller

If God Is Good by Randy Alcorn

For Kids

Cold-Case Christianity for Kids
by J. Warner Wallace and Susie Wallace

For Teens

Big Questions by Andy McLean



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