

"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."



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### **Apologetics, Is It Necessary?**

--By Billy Dyer – a Graduate Student at Summit



What is the deal with this whole 'Apologetic' movement and is it really necessary? Shouldn't we just focus on preaching the Gospel? The Gospel, not a philosophical argument, is the power to salvation. This is a sample from the questions and statements that can be heard in churches across our brotherhood. In fact, if you were to ask the regular churchgoer to define the term *Apologetic* I wonder if they even could?! So let us define the term before we attempt to broach the question of its necessity.

Even though it may sound like our English word 'apology', it is far from it. The word comes from the Greek *ἀπολογία* (*apologia*) which means 'a defense' or 'a reasoned argument'. Therefore, apologetics is the branch of Christian teaching, which attempts to offer a defense for the Christian worldview. This may include topics such as 'The Reliability of the Bible', 'A Defense of the Resurrection', 'An Argument for Creation *Ex Nihilo*', etc... without necessarily using the Bible.

But at this point some may say "Well, that isn't necessary because people just need to 'have faith'". I have two points of contention with this statement:

(1) The Bible never tells us to separate our mind from our faith. In fact, it instructs us to have rational faith. Jesus told us the greatest commandment was to love God with all our

heart, soul, strength, and *mind*. (**Mk 12:30**). Peter commands us to always be ready to give a *defense* for the hope that is in us (**1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3:15**). The word 'defense' is the Greek word *apologia* where our term "apologetics" comes from. (2) It defines 'faith' differently than what we find in the Bible. Faith isn't some leap in the dark or a belief where there is no evidence. In fact, that is the antithesis of the Biblical definition of faith. The New Testament defines faith as *trusting* in what you cannot see *based on* what you do observe (**Hebrews 11:1**). We ask jurors to make a judgment in the courtroom on something they did not see (the crime) based on the evidence that is presented during the court proceedings. God puts us in the same seat. In fact, one of the greatest pieces of evidence in the courtroom is multiple eyewitness testimonies. The content of our faith is the person and work of Jesus Christ, but faith is simply accepting the eyewitness testimony of the Apostles (**Romans 10:17**). Therefore, faith and reason are not mutually exclusive.

Furthermore, God is the God who gave us the created world so we are without excuse (**Romans 1:18-21**). He also gave us the empty tomb/resurrection appearances so we could have eyewitness testimony and our faith wouldn't have to rest on fairy tales (**2nd Peter 1:16**).

So when someone says, "We just need to have faith", I agree. But what I agree to is not a belief with no firm foundation or a blind leap in the dark. I agree with a faith that naturally flows from the evidence presented in both of God's books: the Bible and the book of nature.

The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation (**Romans 1:16**) and I am not promoting the idea that philosophical arguments or dry manuscript evidence will ever save a soul. However, I am challenging the mindset, which says, "Questions are bad."

The Church lives in a different culture than it did 40, 30, or even 20 years ago. No longer can we tell people "The Bible says..." for they do not even accept its validity. In fact, when we teach our young people, "Don't question and just

believe,” we are only compounding the problem. This is why different studies show that around 75% of young people raised in the Church will fall away from the faith when they go to college. They read books like *‘The God Delusion’* by Dawkins or *‘God is Not Great’* by Hitchens. Their professors ridicule their faith and mock God as a jealous vindictive old man who commits many atrocities in the Old Testament. They make claims that the Bible is full of contradictions which leave our students confused and clueless.

The problem is that we, as a movement, have told them *that* the Bible is true but we have never told them *why* the Bible is true. Our brotherhood needs to catch up to the culture and approach it head on. There is no fear on the side of truth. If the Bible is God’s revelation and Jesus really did rise from the dead, then we should expect our awesome God to provide us with the evidence we need to advance the Kingdom of God.

What I am contending is that there are four major questions to be asked: (1) Does truth exist? (2) Does any God exist? (3) Are Miracles possible? (4) Did the Resurrection really happen?

The problem is that the Church is stuck on number four while the culture is asking number one. How are we going to tell them that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is an absolute truth when they are questioning whether truth exists and flat out denying miracles from a philosophical basis?!?!

Someone may, to contradict me, argue thus: “The resurrection happened, therefore miracles are possible, if miracles are possible then God exists, and if God exists then absolute truth exists. Therefore, all we need to do is preach the resurrection.” I would agree with this line of logic but deny that we can jump straight into conversations about the resurrection. The problem you run into is when someone responds, “That’s true for you but not for me”, this is why you have to start with the question; “Does truth exist?”

Furthermore, what would you do if you came across a Buddhist who believes that all reality is simply illusory? It would be frivolous to debate the resurrection of Jesus when they will simply argue that none of this is real.

How about a person who has studied the Germany Philosopher, Immanuel Kant? He argued that you can’t know reality (which would include the Resurrection); you can only know what you perceive about the world. In other words, what you think about reality is not the same thing as reality; therefore, you cannot make definitive statements about reality. Thus, any discussion about what *really* happened on

the Sunday after the crucifixion is fruitless because a person who agrees with Kant would say we can never *really* know what *really* happened.

Finally, you can proclaim the resurrection until you turn blue in the face but it will not work on those who (1) Do not trust the veracity of the New Testament, (2) Believe the Bible has been changed throughout history, or (3) Think ‘resurrection’ means something other than bodily resurrection.

These examples will hopefully show to the reader the necessity of building from the foundation upwards. That is, we must convince our culture that absolute truth exists before we can declare to them what is the content of this absolute truth.

The person who says, “Just preach the Gospel”, is technically using apologetics. They are using what is called *pre-suppositional apologetics*. That is, they pre-suppose a whole gambit of things before they begin to make their case. In this instance they take for granted that truth of logic, absolute truth, existence of God, that the Bible has been accurately copied, that the original New Testament eye-witnesses told the truth, that miracles are possible, etc...

You can use this method as long as the person you are discussing with pre-supposes the same things. But that is the whole point of my article; that most of the world DOES NOT!!! This is why we must begin by teaching people the validity of absolute truth.

In essence, a little bit of common sense and a few illustrations will show us two things. That is, those who deny absolute truth (1) by the very nature of things affirm what they deny and (2) reject that line of thought in all other areas of their life.

How is it that they affirm the very thing they deny? This can be proven by simply turning their statement around on itself. Let me illustrate: If someone says, “There is no absolute truth”, you should ask, “Is that absolutely true?” If they answer “yes” then they just contradicted themselves and agreed that at least something has absolute truth.

Furthermore, it would make their statement self-defeating and thus logically incoherent. If they answer “no” then they are denying what they just affirmed. It would be like saying, “There is no absolute truth but this is only relatively true”. Something cannot be absolutely true but only relative at the same time. Again, when put this way, just about anyone can see how this is unintelligible.

Let's use another example. What if someone stated, "You can't know the truth"! You should respond, "Is that true?" If they answer, "Yes", then they just claimed that they have what they deny; that is, truth. If you claim nobody has the truth, then you must have examined everything in the known universe to come to this conclusion, which you view as true. If they answer, "No", then they obviously just denied what they affirmed and again fall into incoherency. Therefore, by the very nature of things, anyone who denies absolute truth actually affirms it.

But they also reject this idea practically in all other areas of life. Imagine someone who thinks this way gets pulled over one day. The cop says, "Sir, I pulled you over for doing 75 mph in a 55 mph zone and that is illegal." Would the person dare respond, "Ha! That's true for you but not true for me!" and proceed to speed off? Certainly this line of reasoning would never hold up in a court of law.

What if a person walked into their bank and asked to withdraw \$5,000.00 from their account. The bank teller shows them their account only has \$37.12 as a balance. Could the person respond, "That is only relatively true for you, but for me it is true that I have over \$5,000.00 so please give me my money"! Of course not!!! We might relish in that idea but it simply doesn't pass in reality. You might get a good laugh from your bank but you will not get any money.

Therefore, by using these tactics we can help people to understand that they affirm absolute truth when they attempt to deny it and they would never extend that sort of thinking into their day to day life.

Once this task is completed, we can move on to the question, "What is absolutely true?" When we move them to this question, then we can begin to present to them the evidence for God's existence, the validity of the New Testament, and the truth of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

For some reason we think that it is more spiritual to believe without the need of evidence. *This is a false view that has infiltrated the Church.* In fact, the early Church produced some great men who did apologetics from the very beginning. The Church fathers were apologists mostly because they had to be.

The pagan world at first tried to ignore our claims. Then, once they realized that we were growing, they constructed straw men and argued to the contrary. Once our early apologists corrected their misunderstandings, the pagan world launched into full scale attack mode.

The beautiful story is that the greatest minds of the Church met their philosophical attackers head on and dismantled their arguments. These men used fulfilled prophecy, types/anti-types, miracles of Jesus, the moral effect of Christianity, its rapid spread by persuasion only, the ability of Christianity to meet the deepest needs of man and its reasonableness to debate critics. They did not simply tell people to believe, but battled with evidence and tore down every speculation or lofty thing raised up against Christ (**2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 10:3-5**).

So then, my questions for you are the following: "Could some members in your church outline the cosmological, teleological or moral arguments for God's existence? How familiar are they with the manuscript evidence we have for the Bible and how it compares to other ancient documents? Would your preacher even be able to do this? What was the last book you read by an atheist who attempted to discredit Christianity?"

You may not need auxiliary arguments to support your faith in God but I guarantee you that your children and/or grandchildren do. It is crucial that we familiarize and train our churches in this topic. We cannot convert people fast enough to fill the hole left by the young people who are abandoning their faith because they view Christianity as a fairy tale. If you (the reader) choose not to deal with it and sweep it under the rug, then you will wake up one day to a dying church of old faithful saints (God bless them all) with no next generation to carry the torch.

In this moment you will realize that you have the same problem that I am presenting to you now; *that people want to know why Christianity is true before they want to know how to be saved.* Unfortunately, if this issue goes un-addressed by you, it is only a matter of time before you will not only have lost a whole generation, but a lot of time when you could have been preparing yourself to give a defense for the hope that is in you.