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How to Engage Practical Christian Apologetics

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The topic of Christian apologetics seems, to many, to be a rather difficult thing to get their arms around. The truth is, the subject can become quite deep. In fact, there are even numerous approaches to doing apologetics. You have such types as:

- Classical Method - addresses the historical evidences that support Christianity
- Evidential Method - uses a broad range of historical evidences to argue for the validity of Theism and Christianity
- Historical Method - takes historical evidence as the basis for demonstrating the truth of Christianity
- Experiential Method - appeals to Christian experience as the starting point for the truth of Theism and/or Christianity
- Relational Method - introduces people to the idea of having a love relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Presuppositional Method - explicitly presupposes the truth of Christian Theism as a starting point, then argues that all meaning and thought presuppose the Triune God of the Bible
- Cultural Method - argues that only biblical Christianity posits a foundation that is strong enough to support sinful society and produce God-given values
- Reformed Epistemological Method - maintains that positive arguments for Christianity, or for Theism, are not necessary for holding a belief in God
- Imaginative Method - uses the power of imagination, story telling, and irony/paradox to communicate biblical concepts and teachings in a compelling way
- and there are others.

Traditionally, apologetics goes deep into different kinds of "proofs" that the Christian faith is true. The problem is, all of this can run so deep and become so academic that many, if not most, Christians don't really even attempt to understand it. As a result, most don't know how to defend their faith based on refuting false beliefs.

What is Apologetics?

The word "apologetics" comes from the Greek word *apologia* meaning "speaking in defense." In the Christian arena, it is the religious discipline of defending the faith. It is all about defending Christian beliefs against critics.

The most popular approach to doing apologetics is based on a defensive posture. This pertains to situations where anti-Christians throw up a perceived problem regarding the Christian faith, and a Christian comes up with an argument to counter it. There is nothing bad or wrong with this approach. In fact, virtually all of the approaches mentioned above are of this type. This is the traditional way of looking at apologetics. And if the person you are interacting with is genuinely seeking Christ and has questions that they are struggling with about the truth of the Bible or the Christian faith, then this is absolutely a great way to deal with it. If, on the other hand, the person is just an antagonist and is merely looking for a way to put down the Christian faith, then being on the defensive will rarely be a productive exercise.

A Different Perspective on Apologetics

As we look at the increasing secularization of the society that we live in, it becomes evident very quickly that there are more and more people who fall into

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the "antagonist" category. Their reason for questioning the Christian faith is not because they are trying to get their sincerely held questions answered, but because they are trying to use that as a means of dismantling the Christian faith itself. In cases like that, using a defensive approach to doing apologetics is probably not a productive way to go. When a Christian is put on the defensive, there is almost no way to come out on top. No matter how many questions we answer, it is never enough. The person will always come up with more objections. And no matter how well we answer, we remain on the defensive. What needs to happen is that we must go on the offense.

Going on the offense means that before we are willing to accept a skeptic's assumption that **OUR** beliefs are bad, we need to make them justify why **THEIR** beliefs are good. The fact is, when they attack our beliefs, they are doing so based on an assumption that the beliefs they hold are somehow superior to our Christian beliefs. As a result, we need to know what those beliefs are, and make them explain why they believe theirs are better than ours.

Doing that requires that we point out the false beliefs that antagonists hold, and respond with the actual truth. To do that, though, requires that we know both the false and the true. First of all, we need to know that information so that we can recognize and articulate false beliefs when we come across them. Second, we need to have that knowledge so that we can respond by showing them why their beliefs are wrong. We should never allow people to get away with simply putting us on the defensive. Make them justify their assumptions.

Some of the more prominent anti-Christian assumptions that people will make include:

- God does not exist, or the true God is different from the one revealed in the Bible.
- Science and Naturalism are one and the same.
- Naturalistic evolution is true.
- The truth of the Bible can be questioned by proof texting Bible verses out of context.

There are other's of course, but you get the idea.

So when people try to attack or question the Christian faith, the first questions you need to ask are, "Where does that question come from?" and, "What assumptions must be true for that attack to make sense?" If you can figure out the answers to these questions, you have put yourself in a position to go on the offensive and put antagonists on the defensive.

How to Understand Apologetics on the Offense

Training oneself to be able to do apologetics on the offense is not that difficult, but it does require a certain amount of preparation. In truth, it is not unlike anything else you wish to become proficient in. There is a knowledge base that you have to learn, and a skill set that you must master. You had to do that to become proficient in your profession, in any sport or hobby that you participate in, and even to be good at maintaining your house and yard. Learning to do apologetics on the offense is no different.

Obviously, it is not something that you can master by reading a single article like this, but I can point you in the right direction to help you get started. Here are the steps that will help you master an apologetics paradigm that is very practical for use in our modern pluralistic society.

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1. Learn the Worldview Paradigm

The traditional way Christians in American have conceived of interacting with those who are not Christians is based on a paradigm that was quite suitable for the time when America was more religiously homogeneous. But we do not live in that kind of society any more, and our traditional paradigm falls woefully short for many people. It will still work fine when interacting with those who grew up going to church and who have not converted to the beliefs of a different worldview. But for people who did not, or who were raised in a different religion, the old mindset will not do. To operate effectively in our more pluralistic society, we need to engage using a worldview paradigm. That requires Christians to get up to speed on what that is, and become conversant with the various worldview possibilities. This is a necessity for those who wish to engage in apologetics on the offense.

2. Know the Essentials of the Christian Faith from a Worldview Perspective

The traditional way for Christians in American society to study the Christian faith has been to focus on doctrine. When using a worldview paradigm, one must still know the essential Christian doctrines, but it must be approached using a worldview perspective. This is not at all complicated, but it does organize the doctrines in a particular way – a way that allows us to compare and contrast our biblical doctrines with the beliefs of other faiths, and to analyze for truth. In order to engage in apologetics on the offense, it is essential to know our faith using the parameters of this paradigm.

3. Discern the Faith System of the Person You Are Dealing With

When engaging in the apologetics process with people who do not hold a biblical worldview, one of the necessary elements of that engagement

is to compare and contrast our biblical beliefs with the beliefs of the other person. To do that, it is necessary to discern what worldview perspective that person bases their beliefs upon. You can't engage what you don't know.

4. Learn the Essentials of the Faith of the Person You Are Interacting With

Every belief system in existence is founded upon some worldview system, and that belief system contains the essential beliefs of that worldview. In order to have the ability to intelligently interact with an antagonistic individual, and understand the weaknesses of their beliefs, you have to know those essentials. This will give you the tools you need to not only talk intelligently with them, but also to understand and point out the weaknesses of their beliefs. This is the essence of apologetics on the offense.

5. Question How They Know That Their Faith Is True

Most apologetics encounters for Christians involve being on the defensive as people ask questions to make them justify their Christian beliefs. Apologetics on the offense turns the tables. The beliefs of the other person are every bit as much of a faith perspective as our Christian faith, and they have beliefs that they assume to be true as the reason they believe ours to be false. It is quite reasonable to question their beliefs as a prelude to giving answers for ours.

The Practical Implications of Apologetics on the Offense

As I post articles and videos online, it is not at all unusual for Atheists, and some others, to attack my posts – some even viciously. But they not only attack me personally, they also attack the Christian faith. When this happens, I virtually never attempt to refute what they are saying – at least

in the beginning. The problem with using a refutational approach is that no matter how I might reply, they are simply going to redouble their attack and pile on more hate.

Instead, I immediately begin to question *their* faith. It is possible to do that in different ways, depending on the particular situation. Sometimes I might respond to their question with a question of my own, such as, "How do you know that is true?" Other times I am able to simply tell them that the information in their attack is not true, and point out why it is false.

In almost every case, this leads to a conversation where it is possible to go deep into the problems with their attack. (If you are interested in reading some of these conversations, you will find them at: <http://www.marketfaith.org/worldview-dialogs.>)

When using this approach to apologetics, it is important to have the right expectations. It is mostly useful when interacting with people who are already very antagonistic. They are not generally in a mode to actually listen to reason. As such, I typically don't expect to be able to lead them to Christ during that conversation.

That said, there is great value in having the conversation. First, there are almost always other people either participating in or watching the dialog. If some of them are Christians, my refutation of the antagonist can provide strength to them to realize that there is an answer to the critics. For non-Christian observers, this becomes a witness to them, as well. A second value in the conversation is that while the antagonist may not turn to Christ at the moment, realizing that their beliefs do not hold up under scrutiny breaks up the hard soil covering their heart so that perhaps, in the future, someone else's witness will break through.

When people have a genuine interest in, or curiosity about, the Christian faith, a defensive approach to apologetics can be very valuable. However, when dealing with those who are antagonists, an offensive approach is usually more useful. Being equipped to handle every situation is a very valuable skill in a Christian's discipleship training toolbox. Mastering the full scope of Christian apologetics is worth the time and effort to learn.

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