

What Is Apologetics? Why does it Matter?

Picture this scene. Your professor for a speech class is an atheist. She barges into class a few minutes late and starts her lecture off with a rant. Her face is flush with anger. The more she talks the louder she gets. She's railing against the Christian faith and berating everyone who reads the Bible and believes in the gospel of Jesus Christ. How would you feel? What would you do?

I experienced that as a sophomore at Missouri State University. I wish I had known then, the subject matter that we are introducing you to tonight. Because, I sat there completely dumbfounded and had no idea how to formulate an intelligent response. My topic tonight is:

What is apologetics? And, why does it matter?

Before I begin let me say a "Thank You" to Pastor Jensen and the Wittenberg Lutheran Center for opening your doors to us, and for being such a gracious host this evening. We are excited to be here and let me say while Baptists and Lutherans may differ on some of the finer points of doctrine and practice, we are on the same team. We agree on the core issues of the gospel and it is great to be working together like this.

Okay, so we're talking about apologetics. The word "apologetics" sounds very much like the word "apology" which can be misleading. Some might assume that it means to apologize, or to give an excuse. That's not what apologetics is about.

The word *apologetic(s)* comes from the Classical Greek word *apologia*. It was used by the ancient Greeks to describe a formal verbal defense, or a rebuttal given in response to an accusation or prosecution in a court of law. Socrates' famous defense, for example, was an

“apologia.” Put simply, the word apologetics means *to give a defense or present an argument to explain one’s belief, philosophical system, or idea.*

That may sound formal or intimidating to some, but it doesn’t need to be. We use apologetics in our daily lives. How many of you have been asked the question, “Why did you choose to attend the University you attend (or attended)?” Your response, is in essence, apologetical. You gave a rational for an important decision in your life. Broadly speaking, then, we engage in apologetics every time we give an explanation for a decision we have made, cite examples to contradict an assertion, or defend a position on a subject.

So what is Christian apologetics? That’s what we are here to discuss tonight. Christian apologetics is a branch of Christian theology which provides a defense or justification for Christian beliefs, Christian values, Christian views or ideas. Here’s a working definition: *Christian apologetics is the discipline of offering a defense of and a case for Christianity. It provides evidence for the veracity and reliability of the Christian faith.*

Another way of saying it would be to say that Christian apologetics defends the truthfulness and reliability of Christian claims and it provides a critique against false claims. In that sense, then, Christian apologetics, is aimed at helping non-Christians understand what Christian’s believe. So in that context, a Christian apologist is anyone who is sharing the Christian faith with a non-Christian. The “Christian” is sharing or explaining their “Christian” worldview with those who hold a non-Christian worldview, religion, or philosophy of life. The purpose of the apologist is to answer the “What” and the “Why” of the Christian faith. We want to help Christian and non-Christian alike understand what we believe and why we believe it. We want to let people know where we are coming from when we take a position on certain issues

and we want to help them understand why we hold certain values, assert certain views, or make certain truth claims.

By its very nature, Christian apologetics has a two pronged approach. On the one hand, a Christian apologist seeks to defend the gospel. On the other hand, a Christian apologist seeks to offer a critique for other worldviews and even unbelief.

Why does it matter? Why is Christian apologetics important? On the one hand, the discipline helps the Christian and non-Christian alike to better understand and appreciate Christian views. On the other hand, it is aimed at helping Christians answer questions, or objections they encounter from non-Christians. Christian apologetics provides an intelligent and rational explanation for our Christian worldview.

A decision to follow Jesus, does not mean turning off your brain. Instead, it means engaging your entire being into the pursuit of understanding the self-revelation of God. It means giving all of who you are—your heart, your mind, and your soul to him. Jesus calls those who follow Him to submit their entire being to God—that includes our intellect, as fallen as it is—for his glory. We do not rely on our faculties but we trust Him to use our faculties as we submit them to Him to guide us into deeper truth and to use us for His glory.

It could be said that 1 Peter 3:15 is a scriptural flag that the Christian apologists wave. The verse urges those who follow Christ to “...set apart the Messiah as Lord in your hearts, always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” The defense we give is an *apologia*. Every Christ follower needs to be able to do that. Christian apologetics helps us to both understand and articulate our Christian worldview.

There was a time where the masses primarily relied upon the educated class or the gentry class to tell them what to think, what to believe, and what to do. We call that period the Middle Ages. That period has often been referred to ominously as “the Dark Ages.” Why? Because people were discouraged, even persecuted, for thinking for themselves. We don’t live in that age anymore. We live in the information age where you can learn just about anything you want to learn with relative ease. In many respects, our world is getting smaller and worldviews that were once fairly localized, geographical, and regional, have no borders. The internet has made it possible for information and worldview to go global with the click of a mouse. Consequently, worldviews are expanding and colliding like never before. If you spend time gaining an understanding of the nuances between various worldviews, or philosophies of life, you will likely gain a greater understanding of, and appreciation for the values, beliefs, and practices of those whose worldview differs from your own.

Your worldview is a set of beliefs and assumptions that help you make sense of your world. Your worldview answers some of the bigger questions in life: Is there a god or gods? Where did we come from? Did we evolve or were we created? Are there moral absolutes or is everything relative? Etc. and so on.

Have you identified the worldview(s) influence you the most? This is important because most arguments result from a clash of worldviews. We live in a time when there is a lot of intolerance toward differing opinions or world views. There is a lot of incivility and plain rudeness. We seem to have lost our ability to have cordial and respectful discussion. Nations have been divided and wars have been fought over the collision of worldviews. Can you name some of the major worldviews? Let’s start with the major religions:

-Christianity

-Hinduism

-Buddhism

-Islam

-New Age Movement

-Secular Humanism

-Dataism

The last one mentioned, “dataism”, is a newer worldview that is just now emerging. I heard about it recently while listening to a podcast where Yuval Noah Harari, a professor of history at Hebrew University of Tel Aviv Israel was talking about *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*. He said that human society has moved from a predominate reliance upon deism—where we prayed to a god or deity for help or answers, to humanism—where we sought the doctors, experts, or skilled practitioners to answers to questions or help to resolve our problems. As Professor Harari, observes mega trends, he says that there has been a shifting away from deism to humanism. And now we are starting to see a major shift away from humanism toward “dataism.” We are fast becoming a data driven world. People are relying less and less upon humans and are beginning to rely more and more upon artificial intelligence and complex computer algorithms. What does FB know, for example? “What does Google say? What does the data show us? We are placing more and more faith in BIG DATA and artificial intelligence as opposed to human beings. So, that’s an interesting development to be aware of as we discuss worldviews.

Whether you realize it or not, you are deeply influenced by your worldview, religion, or philosophy of life. If you don’t know your own core worldview, you would do well to give serious consideration to that question. Not only to the question, “What’s my worldview?” But also “Why do I ascribe to that particular worldview, religion, or philosophy of life?” Why do you

believe what you believe? Your answers will be your personal apologetical response to your core values and beliefs.

I hadn't yet formulated a thoughtful response to those questions when I was a sophomore in college. If you have thought about these things, I applaud your efforts. We constantly need to be developing and growing in our understanding of our worldview and our ability to cordially interact with those whose views differ from our own.

This is where Christian apologetics provides a great service. Because everyone operates out of a core worldview. Your worldview is influenced by your parents, teachers, preachers, books, movies, celebrities—we call the idols by the way—and the people you follow on social media, etc. and so on. In many cases, persons grow up under the influence of one worldview and when they grow older some persons may adopt another worldview, religion, or philosophy of life. Some may even be operating out of a synthesis of differing worldviews without even realizing it. When it comes to subjects where those worldviews are irreconcilable—and if you study the major worldview you will find that there are areas where they are irreconcilable—these points of contention can result in a deal of inner conflict, confusion, or frustration for those who attempt to synthesize various viewpoints.

So, let me ask it again? What is your worldview? It would be good to know that question because your worldview bias's you on virtually every subject you interact with. It affects your values and beliefs. It influences your decisions, and informs the views you hold on most every subject. Your worldview affects you more than most of us are willing to admit. Your worldview influences your beliefs, your decisions, your actions, so forth, and so on.

Now, it needs to be said at this point that many people or groups call themselves Christians. But to say, “I’m Christian” can mean different things to different people. For some, it means having Judeo-Christian heritage by birth. Then, there are those for whom it means that they have adopted some aspect of Christian ideology. For others, it means being affiliated with a church or group that self-identifies as being Christian. But what needs to be said is that just because some person or group calls themselves “Christian” does not necessarily mean that they hold to a biblical worldview. So for the record, we are talking about a Christian worldview that is deeply rooted in biblical truth.

In closing, let me sum my talk up by saying that Christian apologetics explains what we believe and why we believe it. Christian apologetics is important because it helps us make sense of our world. It helps us to provide answers to common objections to our faith. And, it helps us to evaluate and critique differing worldviews.

That concludes my talk. We will take a 10 minute break in just a moment. But first, allow me to introduce Ben Kreckman. Ben is one of an intelligent college age young man who has already written a book. He’s got an amazing and talented side-kick, named Karalin. This talented young lady illustrated the book for Ben. Guess what the book is about? You guessed it: Christian Apologetics. It is titled: *Christian Witness: An Apologetical Anchor*. Copies are available in the back, if you’d like to pick one up tonight, you can. Or, you can Google it, or order on Amazon. When we come back, Ben will speak on the topic: Why is Christianity true?

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