

Facing Tough Questions: Defending the Faith

Opening Questions

- When do you feel the most insecure about talking about your faith to others? Why?
- A friend asks, “Why should I believe that the Christian God exists?” What would you say?

I. Defense Verses Persuasion

A. If you know the term, what do you think of when you hear the word “apologetics”? Apologetics can also sometimes be used like ammunition to win an argument, specifically to persuade someone to become a Christian.

*What concerns might you have with this approach?

B. Scripture is consistent that salvation is the work of God and that comes by the proclamation of the gospel.

Romans 10:14-15

[14] How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? [15] And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

C. How does Romans 10 tell us we come to faith in God? How does anyone have saving faith in God? [Deeper issues to explore: sin affects a person’s mind, not just behaviors. We cannot and will not come to God on our own.]

1. The only path to savingly know God is in dependence on God and his word.
2. In week 1 we looked at the content of the gospel and worked on ways to communicate that gospel clearly and concisely.

D. We want to get to the proclamation of the gospel, but we realize that there are often obstacles that must be dealt with first. Our approach to apologetics is as a means of **clearing the objections** to get to the gospel. This is called apologetics or defending the faith.

1. If our goal is to defend Christianity, what is kind of knowledge or preparation should we pursue?

II. Apologetics

A. Definition of apologetics from 1 Peter 3:15-16

[15] but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, [16] having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

We learned that it is essential to **honor Christ the Lord as holy** when we give a defense

of our faith. This means we must be faithful to scripture in what we believe and how we defend our faith.

B. There is no independent knowledge.

The distinction between the independent God and dependent creation is one of the fundamental differences between Christians and non-Christians. Christians should see everything in light of this dependence. Non-Christians will try to deny creation's total dependence.

One of the most difficult concepts to grasp in light of this is that our knowledge is not independent. To know something correctly, we must know it the way God intends for us to know it. Knowing something independent of God will lead to misunderstanding it.

Most intellectuals are proud of their autonomy. They call it neutrality, unbiased objectivity, etc. They are convinced that independency is a better path to true knowledge than being dependent on God.

[18] For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. [19] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. [21] For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.
(Romans 1:18-21 ESV)

- Where must our knowledge of God (what he is like, his existence, his goodness, etc.) come from? Why can't this be independently achieved?
- How will our dependence on God come across to someone who believes they are completely independent? What should we do about that?

"There can be no court to which we take God's judgments; He is the supreme judge. That which He declares concerning morality is binding on all men, and if we wish to know good and evil, we must remember our creaturely dependence on Him in this regard." Pratt

- What happens when we pretend that our knowledge is not dependent in order to have an evangelistic conversation with someone who doesn't believe?

C. But "Circular Logic" Won't Convince Anyone???

This is not a "better system" for gaining converts or winning arguments. It is trying to help us defend Christianity without compromising our faith or pretending to be agnostic. The work of conversion only happens by God's Spirit when the gospel is proclaimed.

Here is an important truth: "Both Christians and non-Christians are involved in **circularities**; they are impossible to avoid when considering our most basic conviction...[Yet] Non-Christian

circularity consists of the attempt to justify the groundless assumption of independence by independent thought...Christian circularity, however, consists of the recognition that nothing is more ultimate than the authority of God and His Word.” Pratt

A Christian has dependent certainty about the existence and character of God, the nature of the world, and the nature of humanity. The point of this lesson is to **expose the myth of neutrality**. As Christians we sometimes wrongly seek to find common ground between believers and unbelievers.

IV. Biblical Grounds For Your Faith

Can you have hope in the Christianity that rests on illegitimate grounds? What would some of them be? What should you do if you are a Christian only because of these things?

“As followers of Christ, we must remember always to build our defense of the Christian faith on the sure foundation of the Bible. If we do so, there will be no weight too great to be supported; no wind too strong to be resisted. Pratt

V. A Biblical Approach

1. Gentle Firmness

We are often tempted to be gentle by saying, “Well, I don’t know for certain that Christianity is true...” or “I personally believe...” or “It’s possible that I’m wrong, but...”

How is gentleness different than acting uncertain about God?

Others can mistake firmness with insensitivity. We can shut down a conversation before it even begins by the offensive way we can approach it.

2. Respectful Challenging

Respect does not mean you cannot challenge. We must not be intimidated by the intellect or authority of the other person.

Yet, we should not be prideful or boastful of our own intellect. Our knowledge of God is nothing we’ve earned.

3. Wise Answers

Should we answer everyone’s questions or objections to Christianity? What’s harmful if we don’t? What’s harmful if we do?

“refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels” 2 Timothy 2:23

We must be careful not to avoid hard questions or ignore what they are deeply concerned about. Yet, we need to be careful not to feed endless speculation. We must helpfully direct questions to the gospel.

4. Concerned Preparation

What kind of preparation should you do before engaging in an evangelistic encounter?

When Peter tell us to “be prepared,” what kind of preparation is helpful?

VI. The Structure of a Conversation

As we have been saying, our goal is to present the gospel and call on others to believe in Christ. But, part of that conversation includes not just “what” we believe but “why” we should believe.

Answering the “why” is where a lot of evangelism runs into problems. What are some reasons typically given for why one should believe in Christianity? How do some of these approaches actually undermine our witness?

As we have said, the biggest problem with popular apologetics is that we frequently appeal to a person’s ability to objectively verify claims of Christianity independently. This denies the claim that we are utterly dependent on God for our knowledge of God.

If these arguments are taken away, though, what is left for us to use in giving reasons why one should believe?

Twofold Answer

“Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.” Proverbs 26:4,5.

What do you notice about these two proverbs?

Verse 4 warns us not to forsake our dependence on God when answering a non-believer. In other words, don’t answer them according to their way of thinking (independent from God). Yet, v. 5 tell us we should answer them according to their philosophy so they might not leave unchallenged.

[What is below is not intended to be used like a formula or articulated mechanically. The point is not to win some philosophical argument. Rather, it is to defend your Christian faith as actually a valid way of thinking and expose independent thought as faulty. This is a radical reversal of how the world commonly thinks about the two points of view.]

A. Argument by Truth (3 steps)

1. A Christian should **first admit that her answer stems from her trust in Christ as Lord.**

2. **Then offer evidence consistent with your Christian convictions:**

- Evidence from scripture,
- Evidence from the world (order shows God’s wisdom, beauty demonstrates God’s glory, goodness in the world shows His mercy, etc.), we can demonstrate how the truth of scripture agrees with personal experience.

- Evidence from personal experience (testimony of God’s presence in your life and others).

When challenged with an objection to faith, a Christian should appeal to the scripture’s answer to that objection. If you don’t know what scripture has to say about it, it is still valid to claim that the answer ultimately is found in dependence on God and his knowledge. This doesn’t ignore the natural world but claims that the world can only be “rightly viewed” when done so according to the perspective of scripture.

3. Acknowledge that they may not be convincing. Help her see that they are not convincing because of her basic allegiance to independence. It is necessary to expose the fact that the non-Christian rejects Christian evidence because of his commitment to independence. We must expose the truth that their view is not neutral or objective.

We can do this in a very simple way by asking the question, “Why do you believe that?” or “How do you know that?” again and again until the point becomes obvious.

When you get to the point of saying, “You have shown me no convincing evidence.” He will have to admit that his evidence does not meet with his independent criterion of truth.

By exposing this commitment, the Christian reveals the truth that all men have chosen their allegiance at a base level. This is not the end of the conversation, but just the beginning. Now the door is open to show the weakness and even hopelessness of the non-Christian way of thinking.

B. Argument by Folly (3 steps)

Verse 5, “Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.”

1. As we’ve seen with step 3 above, it is not difficult to get to the point where a non-believer can see his commitment to independence is all pervasive and that this commitment can’t be justified. If the unbeliever admits that it can’t be justified, then the believer may ask why he holds it so dear.

2. This step takes one of two forms.

- a. If the unbeliever claims absolute certainty he should be shown the total uncertainty of his statement.
- b. If the unbeliever claims total uncertainty, he should be shown the absolute certainty of this position. In other words, we are back at point “a.”

Example:

If he claims there is no God, he must be shown that one cannot know exhaustively all of creation, much less God Himself. If he claims total uncertainty about God, the unbeliever cannot have such certainty.

3. Challenge the unbeliever's commitment to independence and offer the hope of the gospel.

Why is this approach helpful even if our conversation partner isn't philosophical or that concerned about justifying what they believe?

VI. Facing Other Tough Questions

A. What are some difficult or sensitive issues you feel inadequate to address? Pluralism, sexuality/gender, evolution, morality, the existence of evil, etc. How would you approach these issues with what you've learned?

B. What causes you the most doubts about your own faith? How can this study help bring you back to a biblical basis for your assurance?