

Foundations of Apologetics (part 1 of 2)

I. Introduction

1. Goal

- The goal of apologetics: to defend the Christian faith *winsomely* and *intelligently*, 1) giving answers to attacks, 2) challenging unbelief, and 3) providing good reasons for faith.
- The goals of this course are that you would be able to:
 1. Explain why we believe in Christ in a way that is consistent with the Scriptures.
 2. Understand the particular challenges our culture poses to the faith, and how to answer those challenges.
 3. Engage with unbelief in a winsome way.

2. Our Approach

- We want to derive our apologetic approach from the Scriptures themselves.
- How we do apologetics depends on our theology: for example: How does God reveal himself? How does sin affect people? How are people able to believe in Christ?
- We never want to grant (even subtly!) the unbeliever's position in the process of defending the faith.

II. The Problem: Unbelief

- There are only two kinds of people: those who trust in Christ and those who do not.
 - Everyone is either in Adam or in Christ (Rom 5:12–21; 1 Cor 15:22, 48–49).
 - We are all born into Adam; we become united to Christ by the gift of the Spirit, who causes us to be born again and who unites us to the savior by faith.
- Every unbeliever:
 - Knows God (really! see Rom 1:19–21)
 - This is *immediate* knowledge, not the result of reasoning: it is plain through God's revelation of Himself in nature (Rom 1:19–20; Ps 19:1).
 - It is *involuntary* knowledge: everyone has it.
 - Calvin: "men cannot open their eyes without being compelled to see [God] ... there being as many miracles of divine power, as many striking evidences of wisdom and goodness, as there are classes of objects, nay, as there are individual objects, great or small, throughout the universe" (*Institutes*, 1.5.1; 1.14.21).
 - But they suppress that truth in unrighteousness (Rom 1:18).
 - Unbelief seeks autonomy from God. It does not want to acknowledge him in any of its thinking, because to do so would mean they are admitting their guilt.
 - One's beliefs are always *ethical* in character: to whom will you submit?
 - They are slaves of sin (Rom 6:17; 8:8). This is not just about ideas.

- Very few non-Christians are fully conscious of the presuppositions that drive their thinking.
- No one is able to believe in Christ by their own power. (1 Cor 2:14; Eph 2:5)
- Yet, there is common grace: people are not as depraved as they could be.
 - But even what the unbeliever understands rightly he is really just borrowing from his unacknowledged knowledge of God.
 - These half-truths are what we call “borrowed capital” from the Christian worldview. For example, the belief that some actions are right and some are wrong: you can’t have this without a creator over us all who defines right and wrong!
- Therefore:
 - No one is neutral: you are either seeking the glory and honor of Jesus or not. Our *minds* are fallen: *no one can be unbiased*.
 - The problem we are fighting is not merely lack of knowledge or mistaken knowledge, but *stiff-necked hostility to God*, combined with *a profound trust in their own goodness and understanding*. Blindness! (2 Cor 4:4)
 - In apologetics, we’re essentially saying, “Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind, that you may see!” (Isa 42:18)
 - All non-Christian worldviews are ultimately one and the same at their root: they all seek autonomy from the true and living God.
 - Unbelief stands in judgment *over* God, deciding whether to allow that he is right or wrong.
 - Gen 3: Eve asserts her equivalence or even supremacy over God when she entertained the idea that the devil might be right and God might be wrong; she had already fallen at this point!
 - Unbelievers make themselves the ultimate court of appeal. Does it make sense to me?
 - But in so doing, they take for granted the ultimacy of the human mind, thus assuming what they mean to prove!

III. The Hope of God-honoring apologetics

- God is the great apologist, the defender of his name.
 - 1 Sam 17:47: the battle belongs to the LORD.
 - Exod 12–15: in the defeat of Pharaoh, God is the active agent, the one who truly won the battle, vindicating his name.
 - Josh 5:13–15: Joshua asks, who is the Lord fighting for, Israel or their adversaries. Wrong question: The Lord is fighting on his own behalf, and we are in his army.
 - Matt 4: Jesus defeats Satan in the very spiritual battle that Israel lost.
 - Matt 23: Jesus exposes the lies of the scribes and Pharisees.
 - God vindicates his honor by raising Jesus from the dead.
- God’s intends to use *us* to defend his name! 1 Pet 3:13–16
- The gospel has the power, through the Holy Spirit, to transform people’s minds.
 - WSC 31. What is effectual calling? A. Effectual calling is the work of God’s Spirit, whereby, *convincing* us of our sin and misery, *enlightening our minds* in the knowledge of Christ, and *renewing our wills*, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel. (see John 6:44; Ezek 36:26).