

What is Christian apologetics?

Apologetics is the discipline of explaining and supporting Christian teachings, especially in response to non-Christians and critics. Contrary to what some people think, it does not involve apologizing for our faith; rather, it is about supporting our faith.

How does one go about supporting faith? Isn't faith just faith? Isn't it "the evidence of things that are not visible?"

Biblical faith is putting one's trust in something that one finds trustworthy. This does not mean only something for which there is no evidence, but rather faith goes beyond simple evidence. The evidence need not, and usually does not provide an absolute and complete answer or absolute proof.

Are there different approaches to apologetics among Christians? If so, what are they?

There are two major approaches to providing logical support for the Christian faith. These are presuppositional apologetics and evidentiary apologetics. It is quite common for a Christian lay person to use a combination of both.

Presuppositional apologetics looks basically at our world-view, and how we build a logical set of doctrines from that. They regard Christianity as a well-supported world-view because based on

Faith makes us sure of what we hope for and gives us proof of what we cannot see. -- Hebrews 11:1

Christian presuppositions you can build a logical, non-contradictory system of beliefs.

Evidentiary apologetics looks for external evidence for Christian history and Christian beliefs. They would regard the best system of belief to be one best supported by the evidence.

Both would generally acknowledge that there is evidence, and that we all have some presuppositions when we start thinking. In practice it is often more a question of emphasis.

I'm not an expert in theology. How can I be prepared to defend my faith?

All Christians are called to be witness (1 Peter 3:15), and to be prepared to defend their faith, but not all Christians are called to be experts in everything. Here are some practical suggestions.

- **Review and understand your own testimony**
How did you come to be a Christian? What has Jesus done in your own life. No matter what you don't know, you can know your own story. (To help sharpen your testimony, see the participatory pamphlets "God's Good News for

You" and "What is the Good News?")

- **Regularly study your faith**
Get involved in small groups and/or Sunday School classes. Ask questions. Read books. Don't study to look for the best arguments to use; study to truly understand what it is you believe.
- **Don't be intimidated**
Sometimes people will use abusive or condescending language against you. For example, they may suggest that Christianity is only for the uneducated, stupid, or weak. Simply be aware that there are Christians who are educated and well-informed in practically every field of endeavor. Christians don't have to take second place in any of these areas of endeavor.
- **Don't become overbearing or try to intimidate**
It is much more important to demonstrate a Christ-like attitude than it is to win every argument. While there are well-educated Christians in practically every field of endeavor, not every Christian can be skilled in every one.
- **Don't be afraid to admit you don't know**
A conversation with a non-Christian is not a contest either of

knowledge or of debating skill. It's just a conversation with another human being. You love Jesus and want to share your faith. Share what you know. Admit you don't know when you don't. Be willing to look for answers or to refer your friend to someone else who might have them.

- **Listen as much or more than you talk**
Why is listening so important? Apologetics is about answering questions that other people are asking. It's easy to hear part of what people ask, and then fill in the rest with what you *expect* them to ask. This is especially tempting if you've studied a list of standard questions and answers. It is important to understand what you believe, and then speak personally about your understanding.
- **Don't be desperate and manipulative**
Jesus called on Christians to be witnesses, not to convert people. The Holy Spirit does the convicting and converting, and when He does, you then have the duty to help make disciples. People will recognize if you are only their friend so you can take them to church. They will recognize if you are trying to trick or manipulate them. Let the Holy Spirit do His job in His time. You just be ready to be a witness whenever necessary.

➤ **Emphasize essential beliefs**

When you are witnessing for Jesus it is not important to persuade someone to believe in all the doctrines of your particular denomination. Your goal is to bring them into a relationship with Jesus, and then let God lead them forward. This does not mean you refuse to answer questions about your other beliefs. Just freely admit that Christians disagree on many non-essential details. They probably know that anyhow.

victory over death.

- Man is a sinner in need of salvation, which is made possible by the death of Jesus, and can only be gained by grace through faith.
- The Bible is the inspired word of God.

Where can I find more information to help me understand and support my faith?

Tracts:

God's Good News for You, What is the Good News, The Authority of the Bible, What is the Word of God? All are available at <http://www.participatorystudyseries.com>,

Books:

Fox, H. Eddie, and George E. Morris. Faith-Sharing. (ISBN 0881771589, Discipleship Resources, 1996)

Geisler, Norman. Christian Apologetics. (ISBN 0801038227, Baker Academic, 1988). A more advanced work.

Hushbeck, Elgin L. Jr. Consider Christianity, Volume 1: Evidence for the Bible (ISBN 1-893729-29-X, Energion Publications, 2005) and Consider Christianity, Volume 2: Evidence for the Christian Faith (ISBN 1-893729-30-3, Energion Publications, 2005).

Lewis, C. S. Mere Christianity. (Available in many editions.)

Neufeld, Henry. What's in a Version? (1-893729-20-6, Energion Publications, 2004).

Stott, John R. W. Basic Christianity. (ISBN 0802811892, Eerdmans, 1981)

What are the essential beliefs of Christianity?

The following is from Consider Christianity, Volume 2: Evidence for the Christian Faith (ISBN 1-893729-30-3, Energion Publications, 2005)

There are basically four beliefs that have defined Christianity as a religion for nearly 2000 years. From these four beliefs come all of the other teachings and beliefs of Christianity. These beliefs can be briefly summarized as follows:

- The nature of God is best represented by the doctrine of the Trinity: that there is only one God but within the one God exists three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus Christ is the only Son of God, who died on the cross for our sins, and he rose again bodily in

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Always be ready to give an answer when someone asks you about your hope. Give a kind and respectful answer and keep your conscience clear. This way you will make people ashamed for saying bad things about your good conduct as a follower of Christ.

-- 1 Peter 3:15-16