

Grace Church
Roanoke, VA

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Elementary Apologetics
Lesson #1

WHY I BELIEVE

The Reasonableness of Christianity

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Christianity is based on evidence. It is a reasonable faith and related to historical facts. Of course, we do not know everything, because the Lord has not chosen to reveal His mind to us on everything. There are some things we will never completely grasp this side of Glory (Deut. 29:29). However, there are plenty of facts to substantiate the Christian Religion. Faith goes beyond reason but not against it. Note: A Sunday School teacher asked a young boy, "What is faith?" The boy answered, "Believing something you know isn't true."
- B. The gospel is always equated with truth and truth is always the opposite of error (II Thess. 2:11-12). Unbelievers are those who do not obey the truth but only partial truth (relativism). Note: Since there is spiritual truth, Christians are to defend the truth (Phil. 1:17).

II. APOLOGETICS

- A. Exhortation: Every Christian is commanded to give a reason for his faith (I Peter 3:15). The word "reason" is apologia in the Greek from which we get the word apologetics. Note: Each generation of Christians has had to stand for the Faith in its generation. This present age, while extremely anti-Christian, is no more difficult than what the Church faced the first three hundred years of its existence or during the Reformation. Of course, the intellectual challenge is greater in light of the scientific knowledge of the present age.
- B. Definition: Christian apologetics is the defense of the truthfulness of Christianity. The task of theology is to define the content of revealed truth but the task of apologetics is to defend its validity. Bernard Ramm says,

Christian theology assumes the truthfulness of the Christian religion. It is the function of Christian apologetics to show that this assumption is defensible. If it is the function of Christian theology to construct the Christian system, it is the function of Christian apologetics to verify it. Apologetics is not always so named. Sometimes it is called Christian theism of philosophical theology or philosophy of religion.

However apologetics is labeled, its function is still clear, namely, to show that Christianity is the true religion of God. (Protestant Christian Evidences)

- C. Purpose: Christian apologetics is both defensive and offensive. There are two purposes. The first is defense. The second is to communicate Christianity in a way that any given generation can understand. Defense is necessary because in every age historic Christianity will be under attack. However, defense does not mean on the defensive. Christians must have a sufficient answer for any questions raised about the Christian Faith. Answers are important for one's (1) own intellectual integrity and for (2) his own devotional life as well as (3) his witness to the world. Paul Little, "We live in an increasingly sophisticated and educated world. It is no longer enough to know what we believe. It is essential to know why we believe it." (Know Why You Believe)
- D. Importance:
1. Christians must be convinced of their faith or they will never stand firm for the Lord. Children of Christians are being lost to historic Christianity because parents do not understand the spirit of the age nor their children, and therefore they cannot help them in time of need. This lack of understanding is not only on the part of individual parents but often also of churches, Christian colleges, and Christian missions. Large numbers of professing Christians are not getting their intellectual questions answered and are casting overboard Christianity.
 2. Many people have been led to believe that they have to commit intellectual suicide to become a Christian. They think Christianity is non-rational if not irrational and feel there is no historical and objective basis for Christianity. Some believe Col. 2:8 is the basis for an anti-intellectual approach to Christianity. However, there is a reasonableness to the Christian Faith, and it plumbs the depths of one's intellectual resources.
 3. This modern generation needs to know that real Christianity is deeply rooted in historical fact – Christ is a real person who lived, died for sin, and was resurrected from the dead. These are real facts that can be verified by human reason. It is suicide to speak of Christianity as a foolish leap of faith without verifiable facts, for this cuts Christianity loose from history.
 4. If we know Christ lives only because as the hymn writer says, "He lives within my heart," we are going to fall flat on our faces when (1) we are absent of feelings, (2) or when we have doubts, (3) or when someone tells us the only reasons we think a certain way (4) or we meet intelligent people who are not Christians tell us that they had a religious experience that changed their lives. We will certainly fold in our witness for Christ if

we are not persuaded there is an objective basis for our faith. Note: Christian commitment does not take place in a vacuum. We need more apologetics, not less. Faith is not the opposite of knowledge. The gospel makes sense, not non-sense.

5. Doubt at times is normal for a Christian, especially a Christian young in the Lord. Young people with honest doubts should be free to express themselves openly, and Christians should be ready to give answers based on fact. No person should ever be belittled for thinking. Spiritual stability can only come through interaction with the truth, and interaction with truth means to question truth. Paul Little says,

Many Christians become troubled when they think about their faith and sometimes even wonder if it's true. Doubt is a word that strikes terror to the soul and often it is suppressed in a way that is very unhealthy. This is a particularly acute problem for those who have been reared in Christian homes and in the Christian Church. From their earliest years they have accepted the facts of Christianity solely on the basis of confidence and trust in parents, friends and minister. As the educational process develops, a re-examination of their position takes place. This is a healthy and necessary experience to bring virile faith into being. It's nothing to fear or to be shocked about. Occasionally I ask myself as I walk down the street, "Little, how do you know you haven't been taken in by a colossal propaganda program? After all, you can't see God, touch Him, taste Him or feel Him." And then I go on to ask myself how I know the Gospel is true. I always come back to two basic factors: The objective, external, historical facts of the Resurrection, and the subjective, internal, personal experience of Christ that I have known. (Know Why You Believe)

E. The Holy Spirit: Apologetics deals with bringing truth to people. However, apart from the work of the Spirit, the gospel will fall upon deaf ears, for man in his natural state has no ability to respond to God (I Cor. 2:14; Rom. 3:10-11). The unsaved man has a built-in bias to the gospel (Rom. 8:8). Conversion takes place when our witness to the truth (outward testimony), and the Spirit's creative work (inward testimony) in the heart coincide (Acts 16:14). All of our arguments will not move the unsaved man for Christ for the gospel must be caught as well as taught. The question is often asked, "If Christianity is rational and true, why is it most educated people do not believe it?" They don't believe it for the same reason most uneducated people don't believe it. They don't want to believe it (John 5:40). Note: It is not a matter of IQ for there are many scholarly men who are Christians. Also the scriptures teach that not many

intelligent people are called to salvation (I Cor. 1:16) for God leaves them in the pride of their intellectual attainment.

F. Proclaiming The Truth: The gospel is truth and is intelligible, consistent and satisfying. The problem is not with the gospel but man's inability to receive it because of sin (II Cor. 4:3-4). The Holy Spirit can do what He will, but the Bible does not separate His work from knowledge. Nor does the work of the Holy Spirit remove our responsibility as parents, pastors, evangelists, missionaries or teachers. The Spirit uses the Christian witness as a tool in regenerating the heart (I Peter 1:23) but it is God that ultimately gives the increase (I Cor. 3:6). Note: In salvation the Spirit creates the capacity for receiving God's truth, but truth it is. What saves is the Spirit acting upon the data of truth to bring about saving faith. Note: Christians are instruments in the Spirit's work, and without His skill no lasting results will ensue. Yet, paradoxically, without the preacher and apologist the Spirit is silent (Rom. 10:14-17).

G. Communicating The Truth: The gospel is the same and it never changes but the unsaved world is changing. The positive side of apologetics is the communication of the gospel to the present generation in terms that they understand. Man cannot be saved without prior knowledge of the gospel (Rom. 10:17), and we must be sure that this present generation is really hearing the true message of Christ.