***Apologetics - CA-001***

Apologetics is the branch of theology which deals with the defense and the proof of Christianity. It comes from a Greek word "apologia" which means a legal defense. In the New Testament world, if you were accused of breaking the law, you were taken into court, and a "kategoria" (or an accusation) was placed against you. Then your defense attorney would get up and make a defense which was known as your "apologia." The verb is "apologeomai," and we will be looking at some scriptural references for these words shortly.

The English word "apologetics" is like politics. It ends with an "s", but it's a singular verb, so you don't say, "Apologetics are." You would say, "Apologetics is." There is really no study that I know of that is quite as comprehensive as Christian apologetics. It involves many branches of theology, and even philosophy, that are not parts of apologetics per se, but they are legitimate studies for a Christian apologist.

One is the theodicy. Theodicy is the study of how can God be good, and yet allow evil to exist. You hear people say, "Well, I don't believe there's a God because just look at all the starving children in Africa. A good God wouldn't allow that." So theodicy is the defense of the goodness of God in the face of existing evil.

Christian evidences is not apologetics per se, but can be used by Christian apologists. Polemics is offensive Christian apologetics. There are defensive apologetics, and offensive apologetics. Polemics is apologetics going to war. In fact it comes from the Greek word for "war." When you engage in offensive apologetics, in showing that other systems; world religions; cults; and, so on are wrong, then you're engaging in polemics. It is a useful tool for Christian apologetics.

Bibliology is the study of the Bible, but not necessarily the theological study of the Bible. Bibliology is the study of the Bible itself – answering biblical difficulties and objections to the Bible. How do we know the Bible is the Word of God? How do we know the Bible is without error? How do we know the Bible is historically accurate? All of these questions fall under bibliology.

Christology is the study of the person of Christ. This would involve the dignity of Christ; the virgin birth; and, the resurrection. Why do we believe that Jesus rose from the dead? Why do we accept the claims of Christ – that he was totally God and totally man? Why do we believe the virgin birth? All of these questions are under Christology, and are used by Christian apologists.

Then there is the study of world views. In the study of Christian apologetics, you have to meet people where they are. Your type of apologetics that you use will be different if you're dealing with an atheist than if you're dealing with a Muslim. Or they'll be different if you're dealing with a person with a Christian background who is familiar with biblical terms and so on, but doesn't believe them. So you have to take into account the world view of a person. In Christian apologetics, you study different world views so that you can meet people where they are. A world view is the comprehensive grid through which all of us interpret whatever we know; whatever knowledge we have; and, whatever we see.

As a Christian apologist, you need to be informed about the cults, and you need to meet people who are members of cults where they are, and be able to defend Christianity, and hopefully to lead them out of the cults.

Christian apologetics includes the very doctrine of God and the existence of God. Why do we even believe there is a God? This is all a part of Christian apologetics. Throughout the study of apologetics, you're going to emphasize always the uniqueness of Christianity; the uniqueness of the Bible; and, the uniqueness of the God of the Bible.

This is primarily for believers. If you know some unbelievers who've had questions, of course, they're welcome. But the purpose of this series is to equip believers to answer questions. I'm sure that you all have questions, and that you have looked for the answers yourself. Furthermore, others may have asked you, "How do you know there is a God? How do you know the Bible is in inerrant? How do you know it's historically accurate? Why do you even believe the claims of Christ? Why do you believe that Jesus was resurrected from the dead?" When you've had these questions, and you've searched for the answers and you find them, you're a lot better equipped to deal with someone who asks you the question. Then you can say, "You know, I used to wonder that myself. Let me share some of my answers with you."

**The Purpose of Christian Apologetics**

The purpose of Christian apologetics is essentially pre-evangelistic. All unbelievers are on a scale. You might have a person who is an atheist who doesn't even believe in God. Then, on the other end of the scale, you may have a person who has a theistic world view. That is, they believe in a God – maybe even the God of the Bible. All you have to do is give them the gospel, and they may say, "Wow, that's great. That's what I've been waiting for." So that is a person who's ready for the gospel.

On the other extreme is the person who has no concept at all of God, and no belief at all in the Bible. The job of the Christian apologist is to bring people closer to the end of the scale in which they're ready to receive the gospel. So Christian apologetics is basically not evangelistic, but pre-evangelistic. Every once in a while, you may meet someone who's ready for the gospel. They just have one little question, and boy, once they get the answer to that question, they're ready to believe. Most people are not like that. Most people fall somewhere between being ready for the gospel and having no readiness at all.

Apologetics has its limits. We're not saying that if you can answer anyone's questions that they're going to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We understand that it takes an act of will. It's a personal decision. You can give someone all the evidence in the world, and they still may not believe. It all depends on their personal will, and the work of the Holy Spirit. They may not be ready to believe, but God the Holy Spirit does not work in a vacuum. He has to have materials to work with. Our job as Christian apologists is to provide the materials. Sometimes we are just planting the seeds.

So over the next few sessions, we're going to learn some techniques of seed planting and answering questions to meet people where they are.

We're going to see that there are different types of apologetics. Different believers approach apologetics differently. As we look at some of the different kinds of apologetics, some of them you might find very appealing, and others you may say, "I just don't feel good about this." But remember that we're not buying any of them wholesale. We're buying retail. As we go into an apologetics store, we look at what they have to offer. There may just be one thing in that store that we buy. All types of apologetics have their strengths and their weaknesses. Not any one type is sufficient in itself. So we're going to be eclectic. We're going to visit different apologetical stores that have been used over the Christian centuries. We're going to buy something from this store, and something from another. We will mostly buy retail. We're not going to buy wholesale very often.

**Christian Apologetics in the New Testament**

Let's look at some examples in the Bible of the uses of the words that we've looked at. Let's turn to Acts 19:33. Paul is at Ephesus, and there's a riot because the gospel message that Paul is preaching is hitting people where it hurts: in their pocketbook. That is because once they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, they're no longer worshiping idols. Some of the people who make their living making and selling statues for worship start a riot. Acts 19:33: "They drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward, and Alexander motion with his hand and wanted to make his defense to the people." So Alexander wanted to make an "apologia." He wanted to make his legal defense as to what the apostle Paul had been doing, and so on, but he wasn't allowed to.

Then in Acts 22:1, again, Paul is the victim of a mob. This time he's in Jerusalem, and the Jewish people are storming him. So the apostle Paul says in Acts 22:1, "Men, brethren, and fathers, hear my "apologia" before you now." He's going to make his defense.

In Acts 25:8, Paul is before Festus: "While Paul answered for himself, he said, 'Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all.'" The word for "answered" ("he answered for himself"), is "apologia." He made his own defense.

Then 1 Corinthians 9:3, the apostle Paul says, "My defense (my "apologia") to those who examined me is this." He is making a defense that would stand up in a court of law.

2 Timothy 4:16: "At my first defense, no one stood with me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them." He says, "At my first trial, when I offered my defense, no one stood with me."

In Philippians 1:17, Paul is speaking of different types of Christians who preach the gospel: "But the latter out of 'agape' love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel." Paul wants to make a defense of the gospel that would stand up in any court of law.

Luke 12:11 is another example of the use of the word for making a legal defense: "Jesus said, 'Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about what you should answer, or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.'" The word "answer" in verse 11 is the word to make an "apologia," an apologetic.

There are some passages where the word is not used, but the concept is. For example, in John 5:31, we could say that from verse 31 on through the rest of John 5, Jesus is making an "apologia" to the Jewish people who were negative to His message. We're not going to read all of it, but He said in verse 31, "If I were just bearing witness of Myself, then you may have reason not to believe it. But I have someone else who bears witness for Me." Then he tells about John the Baptist. Then in verse 36, He says, "Someone even greater than John, God the Father, is My witness." He says, "But you don't even listen to Me. You say you're going to search the Scriptures to find eternal life, but the Scriptures talked about Me, and you reject Me." So He goes on and says, "You trust in Moses. You say, 'We're children of Moses.' But Moses wrote about Me. If you were really Bible scholars, you'd recognize who I am – that Moses wrote about Me." So He gives a good "apologia" for His teaching.

In Acts 17, the apostle Paul was in Athens at a place at the Areopagus which later became known as the supreme court of Greece. It was where the wise men would meet. Acts 17:16: "While Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. Therefore, he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there." He reasoned with them. He showed them that the gospel was reasonable.

That's one thing I'm thankful for Dr. Danish for. He taught me that if you're a Christian, you don't have to check your brains at the door. Christians should be the sharpest people intellectually in the world because we know something about the mind of God.

So the apostle Paul reasoned with Jews. He reasoned with gentiles. Verse 18: "Epicureans and Stoic philosophers encountered them." He reasoned with them. "Some were saying, 'What does this babbler want to say?' Others said, 'He seems to be a proclaimer or of foreign gods,' because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus saying, 'May we know what this new doctrine is of what you speak? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore, we want to know what these things mean.' For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear, some new thing."

So Paul has been reasoning with them. Then he gives an apologetic for the gospel. He says, "Men of Athens, I perceived that in all things you are very religious." He meets them where they are. He says, "I see you're interested in spiritual matters. Well, good. That's what I want to talk to you about. I notice there's a monument that you have to an unknown God, and I want to tell you about it. You've built all these shrines, and then you built one just in case you forgot a god. And you call this one "to the unknown god." I'm here to tell you about the unknown God." He meets them where they are. Then he gradually builds and gives them the gospel.

We're going to talk some more about the shrine to the unknown God in our study of Titus. You'll find this very interesting. But for now, in Acts 1:3, Luke is saying, "To whom He (Jesus) also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs." He's saying Christians are not a bunch of weirdos who believe weird things. But this man really did come to life after He was dead, and He proved this by many infallible proofs. There are eyewitnesses being seen of Him during 40 days, and speaking of things pertaining to the kingdom of God. So Luke was using Christian apologetics in the book of Acts.

Then we could say that the whole chapter of 1 Corinthians 15 is an apologetic of the resurrection. Paul, first of all, gives the gospel – one of the best, basic, simple outlines of what the gospel is. Then he says, "He definitely rose according to the Old Testament Scriptures." Verse 4: "He was buried, then He rose again the third day, and He was seen by Cephas, that then by the twelve." So he gives evidences of the resurrection. "He was seen by Peter, and then all 12 of the apostles saw him, and then over 500 saw him at once. If you don't believe me, you can go talk to them. Most of them are still alive (at that time)." Then He was seen by James, His brother, who wasn't even a believer then, and after Jesus appeared to him, he was. Then he says, "And if the resurrection is not true, then Christianity is not worth believing. So Paul is using Christian apologetics in 1 Corinthians 15.

**Christian Apologetics in the Old Testament**

What about the Old Testament? Well, the Jews didn't practice apologetics per se, but there are some passages in the Old Testament which are very apologetical. For example, in Isaiah 44, the Jews were plagued with idolatry. This was always a temptation to the Jewish people until the captivity. They just couldn't keep from looking at all the heathen pagan people around them, and all the fun they had worshiping idols. Tell kept thinking they were missing something while they were worshiping a God you couldn't even see. These people had their gods out. They knew just exactly what they looked like. They had so much fun at the pagan temples that idolatry was really an attraction to the Hebrew people.

In Isaiah 44:9, Isaiah pokes fun at idolaters. He says, "Just look at these people who make something with their own hands, or they hire a craftsman." Verse 12: "A blacksmith makes something." Verse 13: "Another craftsman takes his ruler and his chalk, and he draws something on a block of wood. Then he carves it out. Then he takes a part of it and plants it as a tree, and the rain nourishes it. Then he takes another part of it, and he burns it to make a fire. Boy, this is some God you're worshiping, isn't it – one that you can take a piece of and make a fire. You take another piece and you can plant it. You make it with your hands, and then you fall down and worship it. Isn't that ridiculous?" So Isaiah is using polemics. He's saying, "Just look how foolish it is to worship any God but the one true God."

Jeremiah does the same thing in Jeremiah 2, using offensive apologetics. Jeremiah 2:13: "'My people,' God says, 'have committed two evils. They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water.'" Jeremiah says, "Does that really make sense? You've got cisterns (tanks of stored pure water), and you're just rejecting it, and you're going out and buying cisterns that have holes in them. They won't even hold water anyway. Does that really make sense?"

Verse 27: "You worship trees. You say to a tree, 'You're my father,' and to a stone, 'You gave birth to me,' for they have turned their backs to Me, the one true God, and not their face. But in the time of trouble they will say, 'Arise and save us.' But where are your gods that you have made for yourselves? Yeah, you have a lot of fun with these pagan ceremonies and going to the pagan temple, worshiping these idols that you have made yourself or you have hired someone to make. But when you get in trouble and you pray to them, let them arise. See if they can save you in the time of your trouble." So Jeremiah is using some offensive polemics – some apologetics to say, "This is really not reasonable. Idolatry is not reasonable. I'll tell you that what does make sense is the worship of the one true God."

Jonah was an unwilling prophet, as you know. When he was on the ship, the guys were saying, "Boy, this is a bad storm?" These were hardened, experienced seaman, and they were saying, "We're really in trouble. We better have a prayer meeting. Everybody pray to whatever gods you worship. So they went and woke Jonah up and said, 'Where are you from? What God you worship?'" And Jonah, somewhat reluctantly, gave them a little apologetics. He said, "'I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.' Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, 'Why have you done this?' For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord because he had told them."

It is amazing what can happen when you just give people a little sound doctrine. You might not even realize what you're doing at the time. But he really got these guys' attention when he told them that he served the God of the Hebrews, the Lord, the God of heaven who made the sea: "Oh, He actually made the sea? Then He can control it. Why didn't you tell us? Why are you hiding from Him?" Jonah made an impression on them. Remember the rest of the account. When they threw him into the sea, immediately the storm stopped. I really believe that some of those sailors became converts. They said, "Boy, as soon as I get to land, I'm going to learn more about the God of the Hebrews." So when we use Christian apologetics, it is amazing, when we do it soundly, how people can, through the power of the Holy Spirit, have their eyes opened and come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

One thing we need to be very aware of is that apologetics is not about winning arguments. Apologetics is about getting the truth to people. At the right time, and it may be as you speak to them, you may plant the seed. They may need to think about it, and at a time in the future, when God the Holy Spirit enlightens their spiritual lives, they exercise saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I like to think of apologetics as a film. You know, you put film in a camera, and you can go around (provided you have a battery in the camera), and you can take pictures. Each time you flip the switch, your shutter is opened for a fraction of a second, and lets light in to hit the film. The film's got to be there. I like to think of apologetics as the film. We, through the guidance of God and His empowerment, and with the doors that He opens, we put film in people's spiritual cameras. Then when God the Holy Spirit alone wins them (when He provides the light), they say, "Aha, I believe."

The way we do this is usually through points of contact. Everyone has a point at which you can discuss spiritual matters with him. Somewhere in his or her world view, there is a question about spiritual matters. It may be a matter of theodicy. Remember the vindication of the goodness of God in spite of evil. They may have a question: "How can God be good when there is all this evil in the world?" Or it may be a question having to do with their religious background. That's why, in the study of Christian apologetics, you need to know something about the major religions of the world. So, for example, when a person says he's a Muslim, you'll know where he's coming from. You'll know what kind of background he has, and there may be a point of contact with which you can feed him the truth: "Oh, you're a Muslim? That means that you recognize Jesus as a prophet. Did you know that Jesus is really much more than a prophet? You believe in the virgin birth of Jesus as a Muslim. That would imply that Jesus is sinless. Even Muhammad was not sinless. As Muhammad lay dying, his last prayer was, 'Allah, forgive me for my sins.'" So you have a point of contact.

**Modernism**

The average American that you meet in this world today is coming from a post-modern viewpoint. We're going to be talking about post-modernism later. The average person down the street is a post-modernists, even though he may have never heard the word. But this is the way people think. To understand post-modernism, the word "post" means "after," and modernism is what preceded post-modernism. From the late 1800s on through the 1960s, people who thought they were in the know were modernist. Modernism is just another way of saying, "Look how smart we are. See how far we've come. We know that the Bible is not historically accurate. We know that God didn't create the world and people like the Bible says. Darwin proved that," the modernist says. "Just look how far we've come and how much we know. But we still have a spiritual hunger, and we believe there probably is something to this religion business, so let's just keep it in its place, and let's remember how smart we are. But let's see if we can learn a little bit about religion." That's basically modernism.

**Post-Modernism**

Post-modernism comes along and says, "We're not even sure there is such a thing as truth. It may be true for you, but not true for me. Who are you to try to cram your truth down my throat? There is not any such thing," the postmodern says, "as absolute objective truth." That's the viewpoint that most people have in the Western world today, including the United States. It's all relative. So we're going to spend some time learning a little bit about this viewpoint, and how to reach people and plant some seeds in those who have this viewpoint.

So we reach people through what apologists call points of contact. Everybody has some kind of interest in the spiritual. You can meet some people on the street, and you can say, "Did you know that Jesus died for your sins?" They're going to say, "Huh? What are you talking about? There's no such thing as sin. I don't need anybody to do that for my sins." They have no biblical frame of reference. So you have to start from scratch. But there is something there that they're interested in that can lead to spiritual things.

Maybe they want success. Maybe they're even interested in coming to church if you can teach him how to be successful. So you say, "Well, everybody wants to be successful. God's definition of success may not be the same as yours. Let's look at what God's definition of success is. Once you're in God's plan, you've got a foundation to have a successful life. How do you get into God's plan?" And then you give them the gospel.

How many of you remember the story of serendipity? There was a king in Persia in ancient times, and he sent his sons out looking for some relic. They all went around the world, and they all had some great adventures. None of them found what they were looking for. But each one of them found something else – something really delightful. So sometimes we don't find what we think we're looking for. We find something better. So some people are interested in spiritual things because they think it may be a shortcut to some kind of worldly success or something. We use that as a point of contact for serendipity. They may not find what they think they're looking for, but they find something much better. The key is that we have to meet people where they are.

**Our Mandate for Christian Apologetics**

Our mandate for Christian apologetics is found in 1 Peter 3:15. This is in the context of suffering. The people that Peter was writing to were being persecuted for doing that which was right. Peter says, "Don't be afraid of their threats. Don't let them trouble you, but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts." That means to set aside a special place for the Lord God. That special place should be the throne of your life. In other words, he's saying, "Stay in fellowship. See to it that Jesus is lord of your life at all times. Don't say, 'Move over. I want to sit on the throne for a while.' Sanctify the Lord God in your heart (always be in fellowship), and always be ready to give an 'apologia.' Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you for the reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and with fear." Notice that we're to be prepared. We're to be such good Bible students that we're ready to give a defense.

Sometimes the best defense you can give is to say, "Well, that's a good question. I think I know the answer. Let me check on it so I'll be sure I'm not telling you something wrong, and I'll get back with you. Sometimes that's the best defense. Do you remember the blind man that Jesus healed – the man who had been blind from birth? The Pharisees came after him, and they demanded, "What about this man who healed you? Everybody knows he's a sinner." Do you remember his response? He said, "I don't know whether this man was a sinner or not. All I know is that once I was blind, and now I can see." That may be the best defense you can give at the time. But remember that this man had no knowledge of Jesus, and that was literally all he knew about Jesus – that He had healed him of his blindness. I can't help but feel like if you had gone to that man a year later; 10 years later; or, 20 years later, he would have been able to give you a much more detailed answer.

So we who have been Christians for a number of years, are never going to have all the answers, but we can keep adding to our frame of reference throughout the years. When people ask us about the reason for the hope that is in us, we should be able to answer. Notice that the implication is that the person has noticed something about us. We have hope. Remember that in the Bible, hope is "elpis" – a sure thing. It's not subjunctive and not maybe, but certain. We can maintain stability. So people come to us and ask us things. If you're out in the world, you know that's true. People may make fun of Christianity. They may not like you for being a Christian. But they like to lay things at your feet and say, "Explain this. What about all these wars? What about all these bombings? What about all the sick children? You're a Christian. Explain it to me." They like to lay these things at our feet. Then they know there's something different about us. Sometimes they'll say, "The world's crumbling around your ears, and you just seem to go on. You've got this hope. What is that? Tell me about it." Peter says, "Be ready always to give a class in Christian apologetics to anyone who asks you the reason for the hope that is in you.

Listen to this. Remember that apologetics is not about winning arguments, but "with meekness; with fear; and, with deep reverence" – not with arrogance and not an opportunity to show off how smart you are. It's an opportunity to introduce someone to the person that you love most, the Lord Jesus Christ. If they're not ready to meet Him, then you plant the seeds, and you try to bring them along on the scale where they will be ready to meet Him. And remember, more than the words you speak, the importance is an apologetical life.

Leon Adkins, 2003

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