

What Is Apologetics?

By Paul Gould

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read Exodus 20:1-3 and then turn to the comments related to Exodus 20:1-3 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answer to the following questions: Why does our idea of God matter? Why is it important that God is preeminent in our lives? How is God's existence and nature under attack today in the culture?

Assignment Two

Read 1 Peter 3:15 and then turn to the comments related to 1 Peter 3:15 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answer to the following questions: Who is an apologist? What kind of character is an apologist supposed to have?

Assignment Three

Read the comments related to why apologetics matters in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share some of the most common "defeater beliefs" of your unbelieving friends. Share some of the common "defeater beliefs" of the culture in general.

Scripture to Memorize

"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." 1 Peter 3:15

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit - by the end of this session, disciples will understand the nature and importance of apologetics.

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It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

Imagine spending the afternoon at the lake with some friends. The topic of Christianity comes up and your friends, knowing you are a Christian, start asking you questions about your faith. Some think the reality of pain and suffering in the world shows God does not exist. Others argue that evolution explains all we need to know about the origin of the universe, life, species, and human beings. Still others want to know if they must believe in Jesus to go to heaven. They turn to you for answers. Would such a scenario excite or panic you? Why?

What Is Apologetics?

Apologetics is not about apologizing to someone that you are a Christian. Nor is it the study of how to say “I’m sorry” really well. Rather, apologetics comes from the Greek word *apologia*, which means “defense” or “vindication.” As such, *Christian apologetics* can be defined as “an attempt to remove obstacles or doubts to, as well as offer positive reasons for, believing that Christianity is true and satisfying.” Sometimes those obstacles to faith, or defeaters to Christianity, will be intellectual; sometimes those obstacles are of the will; and sometimes those obstacles are due to a failure to imagine a world where Christianity is good and beautiful.

Discussion Questions

How does this definition of *apologetics* compare with your prior understanding of apologetics? How does it compare with other descriptions of apologetics you may have heard?

Read Exodus 20:1-3 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 3. You shall have no other gods before Me. In Exodus 20 we learn that there is one God, whose nature and existence must be affirmed and proclaimed by those who would be faithful in the face of multiple counterfeits. Thus, *apologetics is rooted in our desire to faithfully represent the reality of God*. Part of what it means to flourish as humans is to be rightly related to reality. Apologetics can help by pointing to the One who stands at the center of reality as its Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer.

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now report on why believers’ ideas and worship of God matters.

Discussion Questions

How is our culture confused about God’s character? How can apologetics help believers faithfully represent the reality of God? Discuss examples.

On Your Own

In the space below, list some questions you have about God's character or action in the world that you would like to explore in the future.

Read 1 Peter 3:15 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 15. as holy. Reminiscent of Exodus 20, Peter exhorts the believers to make Christ preeminent in their lives. The word *holy* suggests seeing something in its proper light. It is a kind of re-enchantment where we are to see and savor the brilliance and beauty of Christ as our greatest need and highest good. **being prepared . . . defense . . . reason . . . hope.** The believer is to "stand at attention" ready to defend Christ, using reason and evidence, to share the hope of eternal life in Christ whenever called upon. **gentleness and respect.** Peter instructs us to engage with proper attitudes toward both the non-Christians *with whom* we are speaking and the Lord *about whom* we are speaking. The word *gentleness* indicates the manner in which we are to answer those who challenge our faith; the word *respect* speaks to an attitude of holy fear toward Christ, whom we honor as Lord, and a respect toward the people with whom we are speaking.

The goal in apologetics is not to win an argument. Rather, the goal is to be a faithful witness. Think of it this way: Jesus is on trial in every human heart. The accuser is Satan, the defense attorney is the Holy Spirit and you are a witness. You must be ready, when God calls on you, to be a *faithful* witness (some are even called to be *expert* witnesses); to share, with gentleness and respect, the reason for the hope within.

However, you are not the defense attorney. It is the Holy Spirit's job to draw people to Himself. God uses us as His witnesses and God uses apologetics in the process, but it is important to keep in mind that God ultimately draws people to Himself.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now answer, Who is an apologist? Hint: the words *always* and *everyone* are helpful guides. Discuss why the character of an apologist matters.

Discussion Questions

What happens if someone forgets to do apologetics with gentleness and reverence? Have you ever experienced someone who forgets this? How did it go? Have you ever been that person? Finally, how have you seen apologetics *demonstrated* in Scripture?

On Your Own

In the space below, list the areas of your “defense” of Christianity that need attention. Commit to studying, role-playing and exploring the evidence and reasons in support of your topic.

Why Is Apologetics Important?

Apologetics is not only biblical, but it is also vitally important for a vibrant faith and witness in at least three ways. First, *apologetics addresses the ideas and values embraced by a culture that shape its openness to the gospel*. Every culture and every individual within culture has a set of “defeater beliefs” that rule out or “defeat” belief in Christianity, if true. In order for Christianity to get a fair hearing, these barriers to belief must be addressed. Apologetics helps address these barriers.

Second, *apologetics contributes to our spiritual formation unto Christ*. Knowing both *what* you believe and *why* you believe it helps you grow into Christlikeness. What we believe about God, the world and ourselves will, in a large part, determine the course of our lives and the condition of our souls (see Romans 12:2). Apologetics can help you think more deeply about the content of your mental life in order to root out error, strengthen beliefs and bring a deeper appreciation of the lure and enchantment of Jesus and the gospel.

Finally, *apologetics helps win unbelievers to Christ*. Countless believers testify to how God used apologetics to remove intellectual and emotional doubts for them on their journey to Christ. God cares about the whole person - reason, imagination and the will. He wants all of us to be fully devoted to Him, and He uses apologetics to draw people to Himself as whole people. Thanks be to God!

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now report on the “defeater beliefs” of his/her unbelieving friends and of the culture in general.

Discussion Questions

How has God used apologetics in your own life? How has he used it in the lives of those you hope to reach for Christ?

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session, I made a commitment to . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue, I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Groups of disciples are always making preparations for evangelism, missions and service. Use these minutes to work on the next plan.

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

Apologetics can be defined as “an attempt to remove obstacles to the faith so a person can see and believe Christianity is true and satisfying.” This definition is more robust than typical definitions in that it is concerned with the whole person: reason, imagination and the will.

Apologetics is essential to faithfulness to Christ. It points to the brilliance, beauty and truth of the gospel. It helps in our spiritual formation unto Christ. God uses it to bring people into the kingdom of God.

Two passages were explored in this study.

1. Exodus 20:1-3 grounds the apologetical task in our desire to faithfully represent God in the face of multiple counterfeits.
2. In 1 Peter 3:15 we learn that apologetics is *commanded* in Scripture. Believers are always (and everywhere) to be prepared to give a defense of the reason for the hope within and to do so with gentleness and respect both about whom they speak and with whom they speak.

A cursory scan of the Gospels and the book of Acts reveal that apologetics is *demonstrated* in Scripture as well (see John 14:11; Luke 24:25-27 and Acts 17:22-34).

It is the Holy Spirit’s job to draw people to Himself. God uses us as His witnesses and God uses apologetics in the process, but it is important to keep in mind that God ultimately draws people to Himself.

Follow-Up Question

What is the nature of apologetics, and why is it important?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.