

Christian Apologetics

A Claim on Reality

Introduction

Today we begin the first of three lessons on *Christian Apologetics*. The term comes from the Greek word *apologia*, which means “defense.” We are prepared rigorously to defend our Christian faith in the face of skepticism and attack.

It’s easy to compartmentalize our lives. We may easily put our “work life” into one category, our “family life” into another, our “entertainment life” into yet another, and our “religious life” into another compartment still. Sometimes it’s a good idea to keep work separate from family and play. But separating our “religious life” or our “faith life” into its own compartment can disconnect our faith from daily reality and fail to make connections between our Christian faith and real life in the real world.

Christianity is not disconnected from reality. Christianity claims a place in space, time and history, and it is founded upon realities that must be reckoned with.¹

What Christian apologetics *is not*

Christian apologetics is not a way to argue people into the kingdom of God. Scripture tells us, “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17), and “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3). Only God’s Word can create saving faith through the working of the Holy Spirit.

Christian apologetics is not primarily a way to refute scientific theories about the origin of the universe or the evolution of species. There is evidence that the universe is very old. There is evidence that the appearance of life on earth is very recent. In matters of origin and evolution the scientific method can be used to postulate theories and draw conclusions based on evidence. But assertions about origins, purpose and destiny will invariably rest on philosophies and belief systems (“faith”).

What Christian apologetics *is*

Christian apologetics is the pursuit of intellectually stimulating dialog to encourage critical thinking about the Christian faith.

Christian apologetics encourages examination of the evidence about Christianity, its origins, its foundations, its tenets, its dogmas, and ultimately the person at the center of the Christian faith: Jesus of Nazareth.

Christian apologetics encourages the use of human reason to ask probing questions and seek logical answers where such answers can be found.

Is Christianity fanciful tales and mythological characters?

A person might believe in guardian angels but refuse to believe in demon-possession. Are both real? A person might believe God is the Creator but deny that he created the universe in six normal days. Is this consistent? A person might believe God is protecting her but does not believe that God alters the laws of physics to do so. There is a disconnect between faith and reality.

Can you think of other areas where there might be incongruities between faith and daily life? Give examples.

Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy are fanciful characters. Sooner or later children will realize they are not real. Explain how we might inadvertently foster the idea that Jesus is the same.

¹ Portions of today’s discussion outline are based on “Apologetics in Preaching: A Claim on Reality,” by Michael Berg, in *Preach the Word*, www.wels.net.

What is faith?

“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1). In daily life the word *faith* is used in different ways. Give an example of each of the following understandings of faith:

- A deeply-held opinion
- Blind conviction
- A strong desire for something to happen
- Can you think of other things people mean when they speak of faith?

Faith is only as good as the object of that faith, yet some have left the impression that the Christian faith is separated from fact, that Christianity is not a claim on reality: “Chemistry is a claim on reality; theology is not. Physics deals in reality; religion does not. The hard sciences do fact; faith is an opinion.”

Too many Christians may have the mindset that faith is mere opinion, tradition, a virtue, or a psychological crutch: it’s good, it’s helpful, but it has no claim on reality. Eventually we’re confronted with this question: Do I turn my brain off in the spiritual realm and just accept that my faith is a soft truth that does not necessarily correspond with daily reality? Or do I simply leave behind such childish things as Santa, Tooth Fairies, and Jesus?

What is the foundation or *object* of the Christian faith? Be specific.

Many declarations proclaimed as factual or scientific are really articles of faith. In each of the following examples, identify the foundation or basis for the assertion. What is the basis for the confidence of the assertion?

- There is no afterlife.
- Dinosaurs became extinct 65 million years ago.
- The universe is 13 to 17 billion years old, and life on earth in its earliest form began about 4 billion years ago.
- A human being (*homo sapiens*) is a highly developed and clever animal descended from ape-like ancestors.

Which of the preceding statements are scientific and which are religious?

Faith’s claim on reality

Consider the following case studies and evaluate whether the appeal to faith is well-founded or misguided. Be prepared to explain your thinking.

The budget committee at church is struggling with a significant budget shortfall. Some are reluctant to increase offering projections and insist on cutting expenses. Others say, “We just need to have faith that the Lord will provide.”

Jesus told his disciples things like, “I am going to prepare a place for you” and “I am with you always.” Therefore, as Jesus’ disciples today, we can have certain faith that Jesus is preparing a place for us in heaven and is with us even now.

Bad habits have gotten you into serious debt. You got caught embezzling money from your employer, so that you could pay your bills. Now out of a job and drowning in debt, you feel lost, helpless, guilty, and ashamed. Your only refuge is your faith that God has forgiven you and will work everything out for your good.

What is the most important thing you learned about faith today? How can this help you defend the Christian faith?