

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

What Is an Apologist?

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All Christians are apologists. All of us must be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks us for a reason for the hope that is in us ([1 Peter 3:15](#)). But God not only demands that we defend the faith, he also defines how we must defend it.

By demanding confidence, love, and holiness ([1 Peter 3:15–16](#)) Peter warns against three faulty apologetic approaches:

1. The *fearful* apologist avoids all religious controversy. He craves safety. The approval of people matters more to him than the approval of God. He also fears that if exposed to controversy his faith might fail.
2. The *firebrand* apologist isn't afraid of people. He also doesn't really care about them. What he cares about is being right. His passion blinds him from seeing that his fierceness compromises his mission.
3. The *fraudulent* apologist boldly engages critics. He might know his Bible and his theology. He might exude compassion and tenderness. But his life contradicts his message. He is disqualified by ungodliness.

There is a better way.

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Faithful Apologists Are Confident

“Apologists do not start from a position of doubt or neutrality but from a position of firm and unshakeable conviction. They face the enemy, not in dread and fear, but with a strong sense of spiritual superiority.”¹

Spiritual superiority isn't arrogance, but certainty that the Christian faith is right. We are not talking about one valid approach among many, but *the Way, the Truth, and the Life*.

Faithful apologists are confident in God. True defenders of the faith “have no fear” of those intent on wronging the faithful (3:14). Here's Jesus' uncomfortable comfort: “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul” ([Matt. 10:28](#)). Whoever loses his life for Jesus' sake will find it (39). And nearly all early apologists died miserably. Stephen was stoned. John's brother James, and Paul were beheaded. Philip, Andrew, Jude, Bartholomew, Luke, and both Simons were crucified. Matthew and Thomas were speared. Jesus' brother James was “beat and stoned ... and finally had his brains dashed out” with a club. Matthias was stoned then beheaded. Mark was “dragged to pieces.”² Martyrs offer a pattern for the kind of conviction we need. And their deaths are themselves an apologetic for the faith. You don't follow your message to a horrible death if you believe it to be false.

Faithful apologists are also confident in God's word. We must depend on divine revelation and not be bothered by claims that “nothing can be true unless it is shown to be so by independent human thought.”³ Even the best philosophical proof for God cannot convince a critic. Only God's divinely blessed word can open a closed mind ([Heb. 4:12](#)). “Without the Knowledge of Scripture a biblical defense is practically impossible.”⁴

Biblical apologists have never left “attacks unanswered nor did they proceed to the defense with reluctance and hesitation. Rather, they were profoundly convinced that the truth was on their side and that it was capable of defense.” Their confidence was “practically half the victory.”⁵ Believing confidence will help facilitate apologetic meetings in the first place. Fearful Christians will keep their hope hidden and their views quiet, so as to avoid uncomfortable spiritual engagements.

¹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 507–508.

² William Byron Forbush, ed., *Fox's Book of Martyrs: A History of the Lives, Sufferings, and Triumphant Deaths of the Early Christians and the Protestant Martyrs* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston, 1926), 2–5.

³ Richard Pratt, *Every Thought Captive: A Study Manual for the Defense of Christian Truth* (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P&R, 1979), 45.

⁴ Pratt, *Every Thought Captive*, 64.

⁵ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, 515.

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Confidence doesn't mean you have every answer. Mysteries aren't problems. "It is the glory of God to conceal things" ([Prov. 25:2](#)). But know that nothing is "hidden that will not be known" ([Matt. 10:26](#)).

Faithful Apologists Are Loving

For the world to know us not by our arguments or forcefulness but by our love ([John 13:35](#)) we must defend the faith with "gentleness and respect" ([1 Peter 3:15](#)).

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Gentleness is the unexpected posture of a soul under the restful influence of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' gentleness is a main reason unbelieving people should seek rest in him ([Matt. 11:29](#)). So our speech with outsiders should "always be gracious" ([Col. 4:5-6](#)). Initially, people may be more affected by *how* we answer than by *what* we answer.

It is not perfectly clear whether Peter means that we should respect our opponents or, as some translations have it, "fear" God (KJV; NKJV). But both are true. And they work together. The fear of God is the believer's heartfelt awe at all that God is and does.⁶ Believers amazed in the presence of Jesus, wondering how he could love condemned, unclean sinners, can respect fellow image-bearers even when they have not yet come to fear God. Note Paul's gentle reverence and composure in [Acts 26:24-29](#), when Festus accused him of insanity and Agrippa tried to buy time:

"I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe."

And Agrippa said to Paul, 'In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?'

And Paul said, 'Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am — except for these chains.'"

You only answer like that if you fear the God of grace.

Sometimes we fail to argue gently and respectfully because we are looking for meaning in being right. Most habitual quarrelers "would be in such quarrels no matter what religion, or no religion, they inhabit ... Quarrels are mostly ... not about persuading

⁶ Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, in *The Bible Speaks Today*, ed. John R. W. Stott (Downers Grove, IL.: IVP, 1988), 148.

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opponents or making a difference in the world, but causing the quarreler to feel alive.”⁷ But “Christians are free from the need of vindication, and filled with humility as heirs of grace.”⁸ And the truth that we are defending is beyond the reach of the strongest accusations. God himself illustrates why this matters. “He who sits in the heavens laughs” at those who “take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed” ([Ps. 2:4, 2](#)). He isn’t anxious. He doesn’t lose his composure. He is perfectly secure. In the same way neither we nor the gospel we defend can ever be shaken ([Heb. 12:28](#)). So we can argue with hearts and minds, not with adrenaline.

Part of practicing apologetics in gentleness and respect means we truly listen and speak truthfully. Listening will help us find the reasons beneath the objections. Sometimes intellectual objections are a cover-up for refusal to submit to God. Some objections arise from terrible pain. But we’ll never truly know the heart of the argument if we refuse to listen. And disagreement need not be disrespectful ([Eph. 4:15](#)). An opponent should be able to say, “I disagree. But I feel loved.” Some people are too fragile or hostile to answer like that. But that’s how we want people to disagree with us if they must.

Faithful Apologists Are Holy

Defend the faith “Having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame” ([1 Peter 3:16](#)). Good consciences are cultivated by works that match our words. Our adversaries should have nothing to accuse us of other than that we follow Christ.⁹ The holiness of faithful apologists will shame those who accuse them of hypocrisy.

Or, the hypocrisy of unfaithful apologists will shame Christianity. Ravi Zacharias was the worst kind of apologists because he broke Peter’s rule. He was brilliant, confident, and charming. He appeared compassionate. He had every answer. But “biblical literacy and theological knowledge are not the same as holiness.”¹⁰ Because Ravi lived a lie, accusations stuck. And who can calculate the damage of his moral failure? Hypocritical apologists provide just the defense critics of the faith are looking for.

In a certain sense, we *are* the apologetic of the gospel. Jesus said, “[You] shall be My witnesses—My evidences, My credentials, My arguments.”¹¹ The goal of apologetic

⁷ Russel Moore, *The Courage to Stand: Facing your Fear without Losing Your Soul* (Nashville: B&H, 2020), 52, 55.

⁸ Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, 143.

⁹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1989), 110.

¹⁰ Tripp, Tedd. 2021. “Biblical literacy and theological knowledge are not the same as holiness.” Facebook, September 10, 2021. <https://www.facebook.com/tedd.tripp/posts/10224718585287523>.

¹¹ G. Cambell Morgan, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Old Tappan, NJ.: Fleming H. Revell, 1924), 13.

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conversations is “not so much about helping your friends understand your views as about helping them understand *your God*.”¹² You can’t do that without holiness.

Peter gives one command to those who defend the faith: “In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy” ([1 Peter 3:15](#)). “As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” ([1 Peter 1:15–16](#)). Christians must

“...distance themselves from those things that are contrary to [God’s] perfect character. This distancing is not necessarily special. It is impossible to live entirely apart from the world. The ‘distancing’ in view ... is positional. We are to be like God in *his* holiness. ... [This will] have definite moral or ethical consequences... We should *be* different because we *are* different.”¹³

And we must live differently together. Jesus prayed to his Father for Christian unity “that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me” ([John 17:23](#)). “There is hardly a greater obstacle to Christian apologetics than the fighting and bickering which goes on in the church.”¹⁴ [\[14\]](#)

If we are sometimes ungentle, unloving, unholy apologists—sometimes representing Christianity, sometimes denying the gospel—let’s be careful how we respond. Our hypocrisy is not a sign that we should stop defending the faith, but that we should repent of hypocrisy. We should trust in Christ who suffered to bring us to God ([1 Peter 3:18](#)). And then, as Peter did after his backsliding, continue to defend the reason that believers can hope in Christ.

[Read the previous post in this series here.](#)

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Related Links

- [Podcast: "Reforming Apologetics"](#)

¹² Michael Kruger, *Surviving Religion 101: Letters to a Christian Student on Keeping the Faith in College* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021), 74.

¹³ K. Scott Oliphint, *The Battle Belongs to the Lord: The Power of Scripture for Defending Our Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P&R, 2003), 26–27.

¹⁴ Pratt, *Every Thought Captive*, 63.

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- ["Nature and Apologetics"](#) by Arthur Hunt
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