

# **Proof That Christianity Is TRUE**

*An Easy-to-Understand  
Introduction to Apologetics*

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**By Patricia J. David**

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## Chapter #1

# The What, Why and How of Apologetics

### *What is Apologetics?*

One of the most unsettling moments for a Christian is the inevitable moment when an unbeliever challenges the fundamentals of his or her faith.

“You don’t really believe the Bible was written by God, do you?”

“Wasn’t Jesus just a myth developed by people who needed a crutch and made up a new religion?”

“The Bible was written hundreds of years after Jesus’ death, and it was copied and recopied hundreds of times. How could we ever know what was originally written?”

“There are no such things as miracles. That’s just how superstitious people interpreted things they didn’t understand scientifically.”

“The Bible contradicts science and reason. Do you really believe a person could rise from the dead?”

Most of us aren’t prepared to answer such questions. If we grew up in the church, we naturally accept the authority and inspiration of the Bible and the events surrounding the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as foregone conclusions. They’re facts. We’re so used to saying, “Because the Bible says so,” that we’re dumbfounded when someone questions whether or not the Bible is really reliable. “God said it, I believe it, and that settles it” may be fine for us, but it’s not fine for a good percentage of people who need the Gospel. If we don’t give an adequate answer to their questions, unbelievers determine that there is none and that our faith is an anti-intellectual faith.

If we ever hope to successfully defend Christianity to our skeptical generation, we need to learn “apologetics.” No, that word doesn’t mean that we “apologize” for our faith, in the way we use the term today. The Greek word translated “to apologize” was taken from Roman law. It involved presenting evidence in defending a case.

“The root meaning of the verb *to apologize* (Gr. *apologeisthai*) is “to answer, to account for, to defend, or to justify.” An apology (Gr. *apologia*) is a verbal or written discourse in defense or praise of persons or things. Christian apologetics refers properly not to a science, but to the art of defending or explaining the Christian faith to the nonbeliever.”<sup>1</sup>

### *Why do we need apologetics?*

#### **1. Because people deserve answers to their questions.**

It may be true that skeptics’ questions indicate a lack of faith, but our goal is to instill faith and to help them overcome their unbelief. Apologetics has been used from earliest times to reach thoroughly pagan people. In the second century, Celsus accused Christians of following a blind faith that was not based on fact. He said the resurrection appearances were to only a few disciples and were therefore not credible. Celsus and others severely questioned Christianity. They were answered by men such as Tertullian, Tatian, Athenagoras, Aristides and later Clement and Justin Martyr. But even in these early times there was a division about how to answer such questions. Tertullian was thoroughly against the use of philosophy or reason to defend Christianity. He wrote, “What is there in common between Athens and Jerusalem? What between the Academy and the Church? What between heretics and Christians?”<sup>2</sup>

But others, such as Clement and Justin Martyr, looked upon reason and philosophy as precursors to faith. They believed in a rational faith that could be defended using the philosophical terms of the day. They were preach-

ing the Gospel to a hostile, pagan world and they defended the Gospel using logic the pagans could understand. But once Christianity became an accepted religion after Constantine's Edict of Milan (A.D. 313), there was no longer a need to defend it. Constantine's conversion made being a Christian politically savvy and before long entire nations were being baptized as "Christian." A rational belief gave way to blind faith and acceptance. When the emperor Justinian I closed the ancient schools at Athens in 529, it was considered a symbolic triumph of Christianity over reason. The history of Christianity in the ensuing decades was dark indeed. Those who professed faith in Christ were ignorant of what Scripture taught, and they blindly followed their religious leaders, questioning nothing.

In the 1300s, a group of men known as "scholastics" or "school men" attempted to define a relationship between faith and reason using Aristotelian reasoning. Some of their assumptions were that:

É God governs the world by uniform law.

É History is not cyclical or chaos.

É God gave us a mind to understand.

É You can use the scientific method to understand God.

The result of such assumptions was a tremendous advancement in the sciences, inventions and knowledge in general. It was during this period that men began to study the Scriptures from a historical standpoint, sowing the seeds for the Reformation of the 1500s. Prior to that, though, towards the end of the 15th century, many religious scholars attempted to divorce faith and reason in favor of fideism (a blind faith apart from any proof). Religion, they asserted, required blind faith. Only the secular required reason. So faith and logic were split. The adherents of the Roman Catholic Church were expected to follow by blind faith. The other extreme was rationalism, the belief that reason is the source of all knowledge and there is no such thing as miracles or the supernatural.

By the time of the Enlightenment (the "Age of Reason" of the 1600s), the theologian Immanuel Kant could write that it is "impossible to know God intellectually or to prove His being." In fact, he said we cannot even know God partially. In contrast, John Locke (1632-1704) taught that all religious belief must have a rational foundation. Anything contrary to reason could not be accepted as divine revelation. Reason was given priority over faith. Faith and reason remained separated through the twentieth century. Karl Barth (1886-1965) taught that God completely transcends human thought or logic (Isaiah 55:8-9), so that Christianity required a "leap of faith" with no rational proof or evidence. His contemporary, Rudolph Bultmann (1884-1976), argued that rational evidence is contrary to faith: "faith, in order to be faith, must exist in an evidential vacuum."

Can you see why we are in such a predicament today? For hundreds of years the church has been telling the world that our faith is unintelligible! Why would we expect anyone to come to Christ when we present Christianity as a fairy tale and offer no substantial proof of its validity? Most people aren't willing to "assassinate their intelligence" to put their faith in something that is so uncertain.

Apologetics attempts to answer people's basic questions, to put faith and reason together in such a way that the claims of Christianity become clear and its authority, evident. People deserve at least that much.

## 2. Because God and His followers used apologetics.

**Mark 2:10-11** *But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . .* He said to the paralytic, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

**John 5:31-36** *If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid. There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is valid. You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved. John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light. I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me.*

**Acts 2:22** *Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.*

**Acts 19:8-10** *Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went **on for two** years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.*

**1 Peter 3:15** *But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,*

**Philippians 1:7** *It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me.*

**1 Corinthians 15:4-8** Paul taught "...that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

The very nature of the Gospels themselves (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) is apologetic. They recounted the teachings, miracles and resurrection of Jesus Christ to elicit belief. John explained his reason for including the miracles of Jesus: "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). Our faith in Christ is not without foundation. The early disciples defended Christianity on the basis of Christ's miracles and resurrection, and on the basis of His fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and eyewitness testimony. They used apologetics, and so should we.

### 3. Because it removes stumblingblocks to faith for unbelievers.

There are two contrary methods of thinking when it comes to faith and reason. One is that we must see in order to believe (we must have faith first, and then we will understand it), the other is that we must believe in order to see (we must understand first, then faith will follow). References from Scripture can be found to support both sides. The only other alternative is to choose to believe nonsense.

A) We must believe in order to see.

**1 Corinthians 2:14** *The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

**Hebrews 11:1** *Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*

B) We must see in order to believe.

**John 8:32** *Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*

**John 20:25-27** *So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."*

So which is it? Theologians argue continually concerning these two ways of thinking. But, could it be that belief is really a matter of both? Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, one of the greatest apologetic works of the Middle Ages, taught that some things can be proven by reason, but other doctrines must be accepted on the basis of faith. For instance, we can prove by empirical evidence that God exists, but the doctrine of the Trinity is unprovable to the rational mind (apart from Scripture). While the fact of the resurrection of Christ can be proven, the promise of the future resurrection of believers must be accepted by faith, since we cannot prove what is yet in the future. So, both faith and reason work together. What we learn by reason gives us confidence to accept the rest by faith. Cognitive knowledge can lead to belief, which in turn produces intimate knowledge. This is seen most clearly in Paul's words to Timothy:

**2 Timothy 1:12** *That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.*

Cognitive knowledge can't save you, but it can remove stumbling blocks to salvation. There are some people who, like the disciple Thomas, naturally doubt what they cannot see and touch. While acknowledging that those who believe without seeing are blessed (John 20:29), Jesus still offered proof to His doubting disciple. Such proof helped Thomas to overcome his unbelief. Many people today also need intellectual evidence to remove stumbling blocks to belief. It is crucial that we provide answers.

“The average Christian does not realize that there is an intellectual war going on in the universities and in the professional journals and scholarly societies. Christianity is being attacked from all sides as irrational or outmoded, and millions of students, our future generation of leaders, have absorbed this viewpoint.

“This is a war which we cannot afford to lose.”<sup>5</sup>

“In High School and college Christian teenagers are intellectually assaulted on every hand by a barrage of anti-Christian philosophies and attitudes. As I speak in churches around the country, I continually meet parents whose children have left the faith because there was no one in the church to answer their questions. For the sake of our youth, we desperately need informed parents who are equipped to wrestle with the issues at an intellectual level.”<sup>6</sup>

We acknowledge that reason, by itself, cannot save us. We can give mental assent to every fact mentioned in the Bible and still never embrace it or have our lives changed by the power of Christ. But apologetics is needed to break down barriers to faith. Apologetics is also necessary for Christians. A faith based on nothing is really no faith at all. We must have faith IN something – in the facts recorded in the Bible. The greater our understanding, the greater our passion and love for the Christ of Christianity.

“The mind has a primacy of *order*, while the heart has a primacy of *importance*. By this we mean that one can have no meaningful love or passion for that which is utterly unintelligible to the mind. Man is so constituted that his heart is to follow his head, just as love blossoms in the fertile ground of understanding. Though the mind is first in temporal and logical order, it does not settle our standing before God. Christianity recognizes the real possibility of a cognitive understanding of doctrine and philosophy which is held captive by a cold and recalcitrant heart. To have a lucid understanding of the things of God without a heart burning with affection toward Him is to be exposed all the more to His judgment. It betrays the most deadly form of schizophrenia. On the other hand, to be flowing with love toward Him, even when confused or less than precise about doctrine, is to be numbered among His children. Were we to be forced to choose between mind and heart, between reason and faith, we would say, “to the gallows with reason, that we not miss the kingdom. But such would be a false dilemma, an illegitimate rupture of that which God has joined together, each enjoying its particular kind of primacy.

“We affirm reason without rationalism, personal love without personalism, faith without fideism. It is because we believe that the capacity of the heart to increase its passion for God is inseparably bound up with the increase of the understanding of the character of God that we care so much for the intellectual dimension of faith. The more we know of God the greater is our capacity to love Him.”<sup>7</sup>

A note must be made here about the nature of apologetics and overcoming the skepticism of the unbeliever. You need to know that it is impossible to prove any historical claim with 100% certainty. You see, historical and scientific claims are not proven the same way. Science always involves verifiable data from repeatable events. Historical events are not repeatable and can only be proven to a high degree of probability. Let's say you tell me you had a delicious steak dinner last Wednesday night. How would you prove that to me? You might show me the receipt from the grocery store to prove that you bought a steak. Maybe you'd supply a witness that actually saw you eat that steak. All your evidence would make it highly probable that you did in fact eat the steak, but it wouldn't prove it with 100% certainty. Perhaps your memory was faulty and you only *think* you ate your steak on Wednesday. Now, if you videotaped it, you, in a sense, made it a repeatable event and we might consider it scientifically true.

In courts all across our country evidence is offered concerning whether or not certain historical events took place (a robbery, a murder, etc.) and how those events transpired. No court case is ever proven with 100% certainty. Evidence is offered and a preponderance of evidence is usually needed to raise the probability of someone's guilt or innocence to the highest possible degree. To expect more from the proponents of Christianity than from a

court of law is unreasonable.

Seventeenth-century French philosopher and physicist Blaise Pascal wrote, "There is enough evidence to convince anyone who is not set against it." Most people don't reject Christ because of a lack of evidence. Some reject the claims of Christianity because of ignorance, but most do so because of pride (they don't want to admit they've been wrong) or because of immorality (they don't want to have to change their behavior). Jesus recognized this when He said, "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). Try this test the next time you're in a heavy discussion with a friend. Ask, "If I could prove with 100% certainty that Christ rose from the dead (or whatever other topic you may be discussing), would you believe it?" You'd be surprised how many times that answer is "no."

## *How do we use apologetics?*

Apologetics should not be used to beat someone into agreement with you. The ultimate goal is not to win an argument, but to win a soul. You don't always have to have all the answers, but you must show a willingness to find them. Many times apologetics isn't even necessary. When witnessing, offer the Gospel first. Use apologetics only if your friend has legitimate questions that are a hindrance to the faith. Another important time to use apologetics is when you encounter a person (Christian or non-Christian) who is in error. We have an obligation to correct them. Here is a suggestion for using apologetics:

1. **Pinpoint** the misunderstanding or objection. Sometimes we spend a lot of time defending the wrong truth. Be certain you understand the question before you try to give an answer.
2. **Study.** Don't pretend to have all the answers if you don't. "That's a great question. Would you mind if I did a little research so I can give you an adequate answer?" isn't a cop-out. People deserve the best answer we can give them. Take the time to study or to ask your pastor for information.
3. **Confront.** Make an appointment to discuss your findings.
4. **Explain,** with deep concern and respect. Tell the person what you've learned. You might need to point out the logical implication of their presuppositions (e.g. was it possible for Jesus to have been just a good person?) "But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15c). "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7).
5. **Invite** to further discussion. Keep open dialogue and make yourself available to answer questions.
6. **Don't discount the role of the Holy Spirit.** For us as Christians, it is the Holy Spirit who ultimately bears witness with our spirits as to the truth of what we profess. And it is the Spirit who will draw others to Him. You don't have to worry that your inadequacy to answer a question will forever ruin a person's chances of finding Christ. The Holy Spirit will reveal the truth to the heart of the person who is truly seeking for answers.

**John 7:16-17** *Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.*

**John 14:26** *But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*

**John 16:7-11** *But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.*

**Romans 8:15-16** *For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.*

**1 John 2:20, 27** *But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the*

*truth... As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.*

### ***Our course of study...***

Since this is only an introductory course, we will be covering only the basics of apologetics. In our next chapter we'll discuss why Christianity is so offensive by looking at the claims of Christ. We'll also discuss why these claims are so vital & what's at stake. We'll make a case for the existence of God so that even the atheist will have to admit to the possibility of the supernatural and divine intervention. Next, we'll cover the historical evidence for Jesus and evidences for the truth of Christianity apart from Scripture. It does no good to argue from Scripture if the person you're talking to doesn't believe in it. But, ultimately, Scripture is our most reliable source of information, so we must prove its reliability. We'll do that by showing how the Bible we have today is an accurate replica of the original and that it is historically accurate. In fact the only part of Scripture that historians disagree with is the divine and miraculous. Since most modern historians have concluded that there is no such thing as miracles, they automatically discard the Bible. But everything about Scripture proves it is accurate and reliable. We'll also study the evidence of divine inspiration of the Scriptures from both internal and external evidence. Once we've proven the Bible to be reliable, we can use it in our apologetics. We'll offer proof for Christianity's one verifiable truth claim & the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If Jesus did in fact rise from the dead, the probability that everything else He said is true rises to a very high degree indeed! And, since Jesus claimed to be God, we'll examine the deity of Christ in conclusion.

### ***End Notes***

<sup>1</sup> Richard S. Taylor, Ed., *Beacon Dictionary of Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1983), p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* (c. 200); quoted in *Documents of the Christian Faith*, Henry Brettonson, ed., (NY: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Immanuel Kant in "The Critique of Pure Reason" (1781); quoted in *Classical Apologetics*, R.C. Sproul, et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1984), p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. xiii

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. xv

<sup>7</sup> Sproul, p. ix-x