Seminar in Apologetics

Fellowship Bible Church

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1. Introduction and Definition

A. Definition of Apologetics

Apologetics refers to the defense of the faith. See Phil. 1:7, 1:17, 1 Pet. 3:15, and related passages in Jude 3, Titus 1:3, 9, 11.

A more elaborated definition says that apologetics is the justification and vindication of true, biblical Christianity, both in its defense and propagation.

The Greek source for the English word *apologetics* is apologia (απολογία). It is used by Paul several times to indicate his defense of his conversion or other situations that need it (Acts 22:1; 25:16; 1 Cor. 9:3; 2 Tim. 4:16). More to the point of these notes are the uses indicating the defense of the gospel message in more general terms (Php 1:7, 17; 1 Peter 3:15).

B. Purposes of Apologetics

- 1. To answer particular objections like supposed contradictions, higher criticism of the Bible, and harmonizing science to the Bible;
- 2. To account for foundations of Christianity like the existence of God or evil, revelation, and epistemology;
- 3. To defend the faith in light of non-Christian thought;
- 4. To challenge those systems of thought:
 - 4.1. Showing inconsistencies in those systems;
 - 4.2. Challenging assumptions of those systems;
 - 4.3. Showing those systems have no moral right to exist;
 - 4.4. Demonstrating those systems cannot account for true knowledge;
 - 4.5. Making it clear those systems are opposed to Christianity;
 - 4.6. Show that adherents of those systems are "fools" in the Biblical sense of the term: they think they are autonomous, they don't take God into account;

5. To persuade of the truth.

C. Relationship of Apologetics to Evangelism

Note that apologetics is closely tied to evangelism. We could say that **apologetics** gives the justification of the faith; **evangelism** gives the content of the faith and attempts to persuade the unbeliever to believe it. **Evangelism** is more concerned with the proclamation of the truth of the gospel (the *what*). **Apologetics** is more concerned with the justification or defense of the truth claims of Christianity (the *why*). As such, we cannot say that they are exactly the same task. However, we cannot separate them either, for in defending the faith, we must declare it; and in declaring the faith, we must defend it.

Apologetics and evangelism are also related in the sense that both are tasks in which all believers must engage, to some extent. Neither is a job for "professionals" only. (It is not correct to object on the basis of Matt. 10:19.) Evangelism is strengthened by proper apologetics, and apologetics strengthens the believer's faith as well (defending Christianity to yourself).

D. Qualifications of One Practicing Christian Apologetics

First, one must be a Christian. Second, he must be in subjection to the Bible. Third, he has to be taught by God's Spirit (1 Cor. 2).

We have to be ready to use the Scripture, and we have to have a consistent Christian life that is above reproach (1 Peter 2:12, 15). See also the later exposition of 1 Peter 3:15 about our preparation and attitude.

E. Use of Apologetics in Evangelism

I cannot emphasize enough the need for us to directly present the gospel and its justification to people. Any lack of clarity is dangerous. With the things we will learn, we will see a need to confront the unbeliever directly to deal with his independent attitude, his wrong philosophical assumptions about knowledge, morality, etc., and his (other) sins, and then tell him that he needs to put his faith in Jesus Christ. We have to rely on the Spirit of God to use the Word of God. Our clever arguments will not get someone to believe.

2. Various Approaches to Apologetics

A. Fideism

Christian philosophy and apologetics are solely a matter of faith; reason and argument are invalid.

B. Mysticism

Mysticism appeals to personal experience instead of the Bible; we are not to use reason. Revelation is basically from an "inner light" like the Quakers; it takes priority over the Bible. The apologist witnesses to his experience of God.

Proponents: Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, Chicago; Watchman Nee, Pat Robertson, A. W. Tozer.

C. Total Rationalism

Rationalism in general believes in the ability of human reason to acquire or create knowledge; the mind can generate the support for Christianity from "first principles."

Example: Inductivism is reasoning from independent particulars to general conclusions to arrive at support for Christianity.

D. Empiricism

Empiricism uses senses and measurements as support for Christianity, based on the scientific method. In general terms, science, sense or experience is the basis of knowledge. This approach emphasizes natural theology and suggests that the human mind is a tabula rasa (a clean slate) at birth. Everything we know is learned by empirical means.

Example: Evidentialism uses objective, historical evidence to attempt to support Christianity.

Proponents: J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., John Gerstner, Millard Erickson (?), Institute for Creation Research (but see Doug Phillips from Vision Forum).

E. Rational Empiricism

Kant synthesized rationalism and empiricism and said that knowledge comes from a combination of senses and the mind. We know what we experience, but only indirectly through the categories of the mind. So, we only really know things as they appear to us, not the reality of them. We can never really know the "noumenal" realm of reality, but we can know our sense of it, the "phenomenal realm." The mind is not a tabula rasa, but instead is pre-programmed with various forms.

Proponents: Kant, Stuart Hackett, Norman Geisler, R. C. Sproul, B. B. Warfield

F. Semi-Rationalism

This is the idea that you cannot prove, but you can verify to some level of probability, the support for Christianity.

There is a big problem with this notion of probability not only with semi-rationalism, but with all of the above views. When I mentioned "support for Christianity" in the rationalist or empiricist systems, I meant something like this: "proof, verification, or evidences of varying levels of probability." An argument or evidence can give you proof at a certain level of probability, but does not necessarily convince the unbelieving mind.

Exercise: Think about proving the resurrection, given its evidence, and the implications of proving it only to a certain level of probability.

Proponents: Gordon Clark (presuppositional rationalism), Carl F. H. Henry, Edward J. Carnell (semi-rational verificationism), C.S. Lewis, Josh McDowell, Clark Pinnock, Bernard Ramm, Francis Schaeffer (note below); Wheaton College. Be careful to note differences among these folks.

G. Presuppositionalism – The View This Author Takes

This view says the Bible is self-authenticating support for Christianity. It is not subject to authorities outside of God for its verification. It can be illuminated with other information but there is no higher authority to which one can appeal to verify the Bible. This is distinguished from pure fideism, because it very strongly believes in the role of reason and logic in Christianity. The faith is not non-cognitive at all.

Proponents: Cornelius Van Til, Greg Bahnsen, John Frame, Robert L. Reymond, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, Francis Schaeffer (between here and semirationalism), John Whitcomb.

3. Some Basic Principles Regarding Presuppositions

- A. It is impossible to be totally objective, neutral, or presupposition-less.
 - 1. If you claimed to be neutral, this itself would indicate you hold a presupposition, namely that "It is possible to be neutral." This presupposition is obviously open to question.
 - 2. If you claim that there are no absolutes, this in itself is a presupposition, and the question must be asked, "Isn't the statement 'There are no absolutes' itself an absolute statement?"
- B. Everyone has presuppositions (the flip side of the above).
 - 1. In philosophical terms, these presuppositions are called "properly basic beliefs." They are beliefs beyond which there is no appeal to some other more basic belief in support of it.
 - 2. All worldviews have primary convictions about reality, man, the world, knowledge, proofs, behavior, morals, logic, reason, facts, etc.
 - 3. If you are witnessing to someone, it is helpful to think in terms of "What are this person's presuppositions or properly basic beliefs?"
- C. It is not only impossible to be neutral, it is also deceptive and immoral to try to be neutral, or to portray yourself as such, because you are not. You are committed to Christianity. Frankly admit that you are a Christian, and that you look at things from a Christian theistic perspective. Don't be ashamed about it!

4. Theological Foundations

A. The Bible

Matthew 7:24-27 teaches us that the foundation for life, including apologetics, is the Word of Christ. This foundation is the inspired, inerrant, enlightening Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Psalm 119:105). It is the Divine revelation that gives us all that we have as Christians. Nothing founded on that rock can be moved ("and it did not fall"). Using anything else, particularly the opposite of Christ's Word, will be in the end disastrous ("and great was its fall").

The Bible is also one of the things that we defend in apologetics. But note that we do not build a foundation of human reason underneath the Bible to attempt to support it. Human reason cannot sustain such a load. We must, in apologetics, bow to the Bible in its method of defending the faith if we want to do it rightly.

B. Creation

God created everything (Ex. 20:11, Acts 4:24). Therefore, there is a fundamental creator-creature distinction. There will forever be a difference between God and His creation. Even those people who are in Heaven with God will never be little gods.

God is independent of creation. Consider Acts 17:25. He is not disconnected, however, as he sustains it. On the other hand, **creation is dependent** upon God for everything. Consider Rom. 11:36, Col. 1:17, and Heb. 1:3. Man is a subset of creation, and so

man is also dependent on God for everything. Man's knowledge (Ps. 36:9, John 14:6, Col. 2:3) and morality are dependent on God, for example.

C. The Revelation of God

God decided to reveal Himself to mankind through creation and through special channels such as prophets and visions. For us today, the Bible is God's only special revelation. Because of the nature of general revelation and the nature of man, we must have the Bible in order to interpret nature correctly. See Romans 1:18-32.

The Bible begins by assuming God. It does not attempt to prove God.

D. Supernaturalism

We are saying that Christianity is based on miracles—God doing things that are outside of the realm of normal laws of nature. We do not do to appeal simply to naturalistic explanations, for Biblical Christianity is full of miracles. In fact, the two previous categories—Creation and God's Revelation—are replete with miracles (creation *ex nihilo* and inspiration primary among them).

E. Man

In order to practice apologetics properly, we have to understand "what we are up against." The person you are talking to has a background or "baggage" that we should carefully understand so that we can defend the faith to that person in the most Biblical way.

1. Gen. 1:26-27. Before the fall, man was created in the image of God.

Man was sinless, but finite, and able to reason. Logic, however, is part of creation, and man's finitude limits his reasoning capability. He needs revelation from God.

2. Gen. 5:1, 3. After the fall, man retained God's image, though in marred form (Gen. 9:6, James 3:9)

Now man is sinful, still finite, and still able to reason. However, now sin *and* finitude are limits to man's reasoning ability. Sinful man tries to be independent of God and thus his knowledge of the truth is "borrowed." In other words, at the same time he rejects God, he holds some true things to be true. He is thus inconsistent in holding truth—rejecting the Source but accepting the product.

3. Col. 3:10, Rom. 8:29. After salvation, man is renewed according to the image of Christ, and is destined to be conformed to that image fully.

Man is still sinful, though effects of sin are being mitigated. He is still finite and still able to reason. Sin and finitude are still limits to man's reasoning ability. But Christians can truly understand the things of God (1 Cor. 2), and they affirm their dependence on God for everything.

4. The Point of Contact.

We cannot appeal to man's mind as if it is functioning properly. The point of contact is not logic or nature, because man's sinful and finite mind does not process those things correctly.

However, the Bible tells us in Romans 1 that every man has the image of God and at some level knows God. This is the point at which we can appeal to them in the apologetic effort.

An inadequate point of contact is so-called "common ground," that is, supposedly neutral facts that both believers and unbelievers can objectively analyze and determine the truth or falsehood of Christianity. The truth above about man's sinfulness should cause us to highly doubt this. Some examples of "common ground" that people try to use include logic, values, morality, love, history, archaeology.

5. What Are Our Presuppositions?

A. The Most Basic Presupposition

Reymond, *The Justification of Knowledge*, p. 72: "The one living and true God has self-attestingly revealed Himself in the Christian Scriptures of the Protestant Canon."

Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, p. 179: "A truly Protestant apologetic must therefore make its beginning from the presupposition that the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, speaks to him with absolute authority in the Scripture.

B. Broken Down a Bit

We can discuss the presupposition above at greater length under these headings: The Bible, God, Truth, Reality, Knowledge, Faith and Reason. There are others, but this is a start.

6. The Existence of God: Traditional Arguments (TACO)

A. The Teleological Argument

The purpose, order, design, and highly tuned nature of the universe **require a designer** and planner. The chances of the universe coming about and functioning at all on its own are slim to none (and slim is on vacation).

This argument is effect when it focuses on the design of the universe "in the large," that is, the overall order of things, especially humankind. It is also effective when it focuses on the design of the universe "in the small" in the sense of irreducible complexity of living systems.

B. The Anthropological Argument

The several facets of humankind (life, morality, consciousness) demand some explanation as to their origin and argue for the existence of a being who has similar but greater attributes than man's.

C. The Cosmological Argument

The universe is an **effect** which **requires a cause**. The cause must be outside of the universe. This presupposes that a) every effect must have a cause; b) the caused thing depends on the cause for its existence; and c) things cannot originate themselves. We are looking for the Uncaused Cause, or the Unmoved Mover with this argument.

Either the universe came from **nothing** or it came from **something**. It makes little sense that either a) it **created itself** (a logical contradiction) or b) it came from **chance**

(the universe is complex and ordered). Either position takes more faith than belief in God. We conclude it came from God.

Most people understand that the universe had a beginning, that is, that the **universe is not eternal** itself. However, some intellectuals will say that causes do not need effects, appealing to recent discoveries in atomic physics. Or, they will ask why a first cause is even necessary at all. Maybe there is an infinite regression of causes.

D. The Ontological Argument

The idea of God exists and man universally believes that He exists. How can we account for this other than by the existence of God?

E. Evaluation

In my view, the coupling of the cosmological argument and teleological argument are the most effective and easily understood lines of argument. These arguments are not sufficient to bring man into a proper relationship with God, though creation is sufficient to reveal to man that a god does exist. The Bible contains the fuller revelation of God.

The deeper problem is that these arguments are not sufficient to prove that the Christian God exists. They may be convincing to certain people that "some higher power exists" but they do not say that the designer or ultimate cause is the God of the Bible. The designer could be the God of Islam or of the Mormons or one of the Hindu gods.

7. The Existence of God: Transcendental Argument

A proof for God's existence which is better than the traditional arguments is called the transcendental argument for the existence of God. We will refer to it by the argument TAG. Let me develop this proof in several steps as it is somewhat hard to understand at first look.

A. The Goal of the Proof

With the TAG, we intend specifically to argue for Christian Theism, that is, the God of the 66-book Bible. We are not arguing for Allah or the god of the Mormons, or just a god-concept in general.

B. General Methods of Proof that Cannot Work

Building on what we saw earlier, we know that proofs that rely on supposedly neutral argumentation will not work, simply because no one can be neutral. For one thing, all men are sinners and their reason is clouded by sin. Further, the facts themselves used in such a supposedly neutral way are themselves God-given facts!

Related to this, the Christian Theist is often accused of circular reasoning, which is claimed to be invalid. In response, it should be noted that any coherent system will have presuppositions that, when you get down to it, are part of the logic of the system. Circularity means consistency. Christians (should) presuppose God and come back to Him in their proofs. Non-Christians presuppose not-God and, not surprisingly, do not end up with God in the end. The problem is, they say they can reason without circles, but this is utterly impossible. That would be the same as saying they have no presuppositions. But all do have presuppositions, as we mentioned earlier. As someone has said, "I prefer reasoning in a circle to not reasoning at all."

Proofs that rely on naturalistic methods will not work, because God is metaphysical. He is not corporeal. He is not nature or limited to nature as to His existence, say like the atom is.

C. Statement of the Transcendental Argument

We prove that God exists by the impossibility of the contrary. That is, it is impossible for God not to exist.

Stated another way: Without God, it would be impossible to prove anything.

D. Explanation

As Christians, we know that God created everything and is before everything. We use this truth to construct our proof. If God were not, nothing else would be either, because there would have been no God to create. We would not be here.

Furthermore, if God did not exist, none of the preconditions necessary for proofs in general would be available.

What we are doing is proving God's existence by showing how impossible it would be for God to not exist. We hypothetically assume the opposite of what we are trying to prove and demonstrate that this resolves into an impossible situation in one way or another.

E. Key Observation

A key factor to keep in mind is that the unbeliever proceeds in his argumentation from an independent mindset. All people are dependent upon God in all areas; the Christian acknowledges that, but the unbeliever does not. Therefore, he argues from an independent basis which is a notable weak spot in his defensive armor.

Why is this? In going about life on a philosophically-assumed (but false) independent basis, his thinking is double-minded. On the one hand, he claims absolute independence and certainty in what he is saying. On the other, his independence means that he cannot verify the claims that he makes and has no solid ground to stand on. His position is reduced to futility and foolishness.

F. Examples

The atheist will say with great certainty that God does not exist. The believer should respond, "Are you certain of that?" If he replies yes, ask if he has looked everywhere for evidence that God exists. He must admit that he has not done so. Therefore, his position resolves to folly because he is at once absolutely certain that God does not exist, but at the same time is uncertain that God does not exist. As Christians, we expect such a "schizophrenic" response, for the unbeliever's understanding is darkened (Eph. 4:17-18).

The agnostic will say that we cannot know if God exists or not. This is perhaps more plausible, or intellectually neutral or honest than the previous position, but it is actually just as untenable. The agnostic cannot say that he has examined all the evidence to know if he can be sure of that conclusion. Therefore, once again, he is certain of his conclusion, but has admitted he cannot be certain of it.

8. The Problem of Evil

A. Statement of the Problem

This is a common objection to the Christian faith and the existence of God. The basic argument is this: if evil (or suffering) exists, God must not. Why? Because if God is all-powerful, he can stop evil; and if God is all-loving, he would not desire evil for his creation. Since the Christian God is supposedly both all-powerful and all-loving, then evil should not exist. But evil exists, therefore God must not exist.

B. Solution

The Christian believes that God is both omnipotent and loving. However, he also believes that God has sufficient reasons for the permission of evil. These reasons may not be known to us now, but they are known to God. The unbeliever has not heard all the possible reasons God may have allowed evil, and thus cannot with certainty conclude that God does not exist on that basis.

We can suggest some reasons for God allowing evil—such as further honor accruing to His name, or the improvement of believers through trials produced by it.

C. The Problem of Morals

Taking the argument even deeper, we can investigate the basis for the unbeliever's insistence on the definition and existence of evil. He presupposes that some evil exists—and he is right in that. And he may be right to some extent as to what is the definition of evil (say, the Holocaust, an obvious evil to most). But how can he believe in morality apart from God? How can he justify his outrage at evil and resultant claim that God must not exist?

Christians know that morality comes from God. He gave us a sense of right and wrong. His character is the very definition of right and wrong.

Unbelievers, however, are committed to a independent stance. They believe that apart from God, there is morality. But we must ask, from where does it come? Is it just "out there?" Then the unbeliever has not justified it and his position sinks. Is morality a concept that arises from cultural common consent, something that society has found necessary to regulate itself? But what makes that absolute? What is wrong for one person might be very right and pleasurable for another. His independence has killed his argument, for he has no justification for why he believes what he believes.

Therefore, we see that atheists who use the problem of evil against God are actually using morality that has been given to them by God to try to disprove His very existence! It is obviously nonsensical. Without God, their position becomes impossible. Without God, it is impossible to account for many things, morality among them.

9. Key Biblical Texts for Apologetics

A. 1 Peter 3:15 – Prerequisites for Defending the Faith

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But sanctify [set apart] the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense [apologia, apologiva] [where] to everyone who asks you
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[what] a reason for the hope that is in you,

[how] with meekness and fear.

1. The first prerequisite of defending the faith is to set the Lord God apart in your heart.

This indicates that the Christian is walking properly with the Lord. He is not flippant in His Christian life. We are to set the Lord in a high and hallowed place in our hearts. We are to properly acknowledge Him at the center of our life (the heart is the center of our life, see Prov. 4:23) so that all the other things will fall into their proper order.

A consistent walk with the Lord is an important prerequisite to proper evangelism and defense of the faith. Consider the tele-evangelists or others who have lived a shameful life. Does their witness amount to much?

2. The second prerequisite of defending the faith is to be prepared.

This means that we must give diligent effort to the study of our faith and the reasons we have for it in order to be able to give a proper **defense**. Have you put as much effort on this as, say, a 4-credit class at the University? Why are you a Christian? How did you become one? Why do you believe those "fairy tales" anyway?

Notice that the concern of the verse is not so much the **hope**, but the **reason for the hope**. Recall our definition of apologetics: there is some distinction between the evangelistic and the apologetic aspects of the presentation to an unbeliever.

By the way, this applies to **everyone**. No matter who that person is, there *are* reasons for the hope that we have. We *can* defend Christianity successfully.

3. The third prerequisite of defending the faith is to learn how to give the defense in the right manner.

Both of these words indicate the **manner** in which the defense is given. For some, it can be easy to become combative or harsh in their approach.

Meekness indicates the gentleness and humility of spirit with which we carry ourselves in conversation with unbelievers. 2 Tim. 2:25 says that the servant of the Lord must "in humility correct those who are in opposition..." This does not mean waffling or being indirect to be somehow nice to the person. It is a disposition you hold while presenting the truth of Christianity in an unashamed way.

Fear indicates reverence. This can be toward God, but in this context it can also mean reverencing the other person in a proper way. Don't treat the person as an idiot but with respect.

B. Prov. 26:4-5 – Method of Defending the Faith

4 Do not answer a fool according to his folly, Lest you also be like him.

5 Answer a fool

according to his folly, Lest he be wise in his own eyes.

1. Who is the Fool?

In the Bible, the fool is one who has rejected God and His Word and wisdom: Psalm 53:1, Prov. 1:7. It is not a "name calling" title like we might think of it today. It is making a evaluation about the moral character of the person.

2. Apparent Contradiction?

On the surface, there may appear to be a contradiction between the two verses, but there is not really. The word "according" is used in a slightly different sense in each verse. In verse 4, we are told **not** to answer a fool on his terms. His folly is rejecting God and His Word. We are not to join the fool on those grounds and try to answer the fool apart from God and His Word. In terms of apologetics, we are not to abandon our ground in the Word of God and in God Himself. We cannot eliminate our presuppositions without giving away the farm. In other words, we answer the fool on our terms.

On the other hand, we **are** told to answer a fool in such a way to show him his folly. We are to give an answer that deals with his folly directly, to show the bankruptcy of his terms. We can do that by arguing hypothetically from his terms to logical conclusions from them and show that in the end his folly is exposed for what it is.

So in summary, we are to answer a fool on the basis of our terms in such a way as to show him the folly of his terms. Our terms are "God and the Bible." The fool's terms might be "atheism and secular humanism."

C. Other Texts to Consider

Study these also: Prov. 1:7, 26:4-5; Matt. 7:24-27; Acts 17; Rom. 1:18-32; 1 Cor. 1:20; 2 Cor. 10:5; Col. 2:3, 2:8, 4:5-6; 1 Tim. 6:20-21; 2 Tim. 2:23-26; Titus 3:1-2; 1 Peter 3:15-16.

10. The Proper Use of Evidences

Christian evidences (like *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell) are properly used to clarify and explain the Bible. They help us interpret the Scriptures.

Negatively speaking evidences:

- Cannot cause believers to grow by itself (the Holy Spirit through the Bible does that, and apologetics may help us understand the Bible better)
- Cannot eliminate all stumbling blocks to the gospel (only the Holy Spirit can do that)
- Are not the basis of saving faith (only Jesus Christ is where faith must rest, and that is told us in the Bible)

11. Extra-Biblical Resources

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