

Introduction to Practical Apologetics

Two Basic Practical Functions of Apologetics

1. Strengthen our own faith / resolve doubts (**II Peter 1:5**) *“supplement faith with...knowledge”*
2. Respond to objections and defend the faith before unbelievers (**II Corinthians 10:5**) *“We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,”*

Outline

- I. **Be Ready (I Peter 3:15)** *“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.”* (**Colossians 4:2-6**) *“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison – that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.”*
 - a. Always be reading, listening, and learning for ideas to be fresh in your mind and on your lips
 - b. Study to show yourself approved, accurately handling the word of God (**2 Timothy 2:15**)
- II. **Beware / Be Careful (II Corinthians 11:3)** *“But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by His cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.”*
 - a. The Bible is the ultimate and final authority (no other standard)
 - b. John Frame’s warning – heretics have often arisen in church history from apologists (they wanted to make Christianity more appealing to unbelievers)
 - c. Jesus had to tell a friend, “Get behind me Satan,” because what he was saying wasn’t helpful.
 - d. Sometimes good Christian writers/spokespersons can promote harmful ideas that we shouldn’t use.
 - e. Beware of arguments that obscure truth in order to put off offending unbelievers.
 - f. **Example:** William Lane Craig (He defends a “real” Adam, but his view of Adam is that he developed from a population of developing hominids some 700,000 years ago. This is a distortion of the Bible).
 - g. **Example:** Tim Keller (He is a friend to Biologos and is dismissive of the importance of getting the Genesis and creation/evolution issue right – he says many different views are ok. What is his rationale? He wants to stay in the conversation with unbelieving people longer for the gospel to be heard).
- III. **Be Bold (Ephesians 6:19)** *“Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel.”*
 - a. We need this more than we need information (**Acts 4:13**) they “saw” the boldness of Peter and John
 - b. Prayer – the means of obtaining power from God (**Acts 4:29**) they prayed for boldness to speak
 - c. There is a temptation to be uninvolved – taking the safe course is more like the Levite and Priest and not like the good Samaritan.
- IV. **Be Knowledgeable (Proverbs 26:4-5)** *“Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you yourself will be just like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes.”*
 - a. Know something about Naturalism/Materialism/Atheism/Science/Religion
 - b. Know something about Creation/Evolution/Genesis
 - c. Know something about the Bible (Self-Authenticating, reliable, true)
 - d. Know something about the deity and humanity of Christ and the resurrection
 - e. Know something about current cultural and social issues (LGBTQ+, Racism, Abortion, etc.)
 - f. Know something about major religions (Islam, Judaism, Eastern Mysticism, Roman Catholicism, Cults)
 - g. Know something about the problem of evil

Streamlined Role Playing -

Where possible, it may be most productive to use **questions** to both engage the one you are speaking with and to help them become aware of the weakness of his or her opinions.

The two easiest questions to use encouraged by Greg Koukl of *Stand to Reason* are:

- What do you believe?
- Why do you believe that? / How did you come to that conclusion?

The following statements are assertions that typical unbelievers could make in a conversation with a Christian. For the statements below, I have provided a response in the form of a question or several questions. After reviewing the potential sample response posed as a question, try to think of an additional question or questions that may expose a weakness in the unbeliever's thinking or make the same point that an assertion could make.

(1)

Statement: Darwinian evolution (natural selection working on mutations) is a fact and can account for all of the change and diversity that we see all around us.

Question: What precisely is the information generating mechanism of Darwinism (i.e., the mechanism that can create both the language and the specific coded information in the DNA)? Or "where did the mutating replicator come from that is needed for Darwinian processes to get started?" Or "can Darwinism explain the origin of the first living cell from inorganic chemicals?"

(2)

Statement: Dr. Bart Ehrman has shown that the New Testament cannot be the inerrant word of God because there are so many variants among the thousands of manuscripts we have.

Question: Why do you think variants are a problem? Doesn't the fact that we have variants actually allow us to decipher where mistakes in copying were made and get back to the original text?

(3)

Statement: Science is what gives us factual objective knowledge; religion is just subjective opinions.

Question: If that is always the case, then why are we being told now by people who "believe science is real" that men can menstruate and become pregnant? What do atheistic scientists say when confronted with evidence that points to a designing intelligence? (They say it is only apparent design; their commitment to philosophical naturalism keeps them from following the evidence wherever it leads)

(4)

Statement: Mary was a perpetual virgin.

Question: Why then does the New Testament indicate that Jesus had brothers and sisters?

(5)

Statement: The Bible is full of errors and contradictions.

Questions: Have you ever read the Bible? Have you ever read the gospels and the Book of Acts? Could you give me an example of an error in the Bible that has not been answered by careful examination of the context?

(6)

Statement: I personally believe abortion is wrong, but I think it should be left up to the woman to decide.

Question: Why do you think it's wrong? (The person might say in answer: "Personally, I think it is killing a baby. That's why I would not do it myself. But I don't think I should tell others what they should do.") What reasons can you give as to why you should leave it up to the woman to kill (as you say) her unborn child?

(7)

Statement: The Bible doesn't teach that there is actual "hell fire." It only indicates that people will be annihilated who have not believed?

Question: Do you think I should believe you or Jesus when it comes to the issue of hell? Who is more trustworthy?

(8)

Statement: I can't believe in the God of the Bible – there is too much evil in the world.

Question: What exactly do you mean by evil? (They may answer: "things like pain and death.") If you assume no God (just matter), how do you decide what is even good or bad? Isn't it just what is? How would you make such a judgment?

(9)

Statement: Dinosaurs died off about 65 million years ago. The Bible is orders of magnitude off on the age of things.

Question: Really? – I'm curious about something. Why do many dinosaur bones still retain un-fossilized soft tissues and measurable Carbon 14 in them? Shouldn't all of that be gone if they are even a hundred thousand years old?

(10)

Statement: The fact that the New Testament has things in it like Jesus rising from the dead tells me that it is just a bunch of unscientific fairy tales and not serious history.

Question: That's interesting – how would you explain the basic facts pertaining to the resurrection accounts? - The ones that practically all scholars accept, including Jewish and atheistic scholars. Things like the fact of Jesus crucifixion by the Romans, the tomb being empty on the third day, the conviction by the early disciples that they saw Jesus alive after having been dead, and the transformed lives of enemies and unsympathetic persons like Saul of Tarsus and the formerly unbelieving James. What's your explanation for those facts? Is your explanation more reasonable or believable than the actual claims made in Scripture?

(11)

Statement: The Book of Mormon is another testament or witness just like the Old and New Testament.

Question: So, what do you do when the Book of Mormon directly contradicts the New Testament? Do you stick with the BOM or the NT?

Additional potential conversation starter questions:

- Do you believe what Jesus did is good news?
- Do you ever think about spiritual things like the forgiveness of sins? Is that important to you? If no – why not?
- Do you believe what Jesus said about himself is true? If no – why not?
- Do you ever think about why there is something rather than nothing?
- Do you think that modern scientific reductions of the human mind and consciousness to just chemistry and physics are rational? Aren't these claims self-contradictory or self-refuting?
- Have you ever wondered how Jesus knew that His words would never pass away since he wasn't a writer?