

Apologetics Methods

Apologetics - Defending and Declaring the Evidence for Biblical Christianity

"15 ...if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it [Greek - "apologia"]. 16 But do this in a gentle and respectful way..." 1 Peter 3 15-16 NLT

Before a big game in football or any other sport, a team must prepare itself for the competition. This may include watching films of the opposing team looking for weaknesses and strengths; It will include deciding on the plays for the team's offense and defense; plus much more. In short, a game plan is developed.

Apologetics methods deal with *how* we do apologetics, that is, how we start defending and declaring the evidence for Biblical Christianity. In short, it is deciding on an apologetics game-plan.

There have been several different game plans that have been used throughout history. Not everyone will do apologetics the same way. At times there has been sharp disagreement between those who practice a particular method.

Also, it must be understood that each method is a "family" or "group" within a given method. For example, within the Classical Apologetics family, there are a variety of similar presentations and approaches. Not everyone who utilizes the Classical approach takes the same identical steps or present the same specific information although it is similar. The same is true for Evidential Apologetics, Cumulative Apologetics, and the other apologetics methods. This study will look at some of the most popular apologetics methods.

1. Classical Apologetics (If God, Then Christianity)

This method is called "classical" because it is the oldest approach going back to Saint Augustine (354—430), Anselm (1033–1109), and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). It has a **two-step approach** based on (1) reason and (2) evidence:

- (1) **Step one: Reason**—Philosophical reasons for the existence of God—cosmological, teleological, etc.
- (2) **Step two: Evidence**—Historical, archaeological, prophetic, and other evidence to show that Christianity is true **or the best explanation**. Some who use this approach major on evidence for the resurrection of Christ in step two (such as, William Lane Craig).

Q1. *How important is it to you to first be convinced of the existence of God before believing anything else about Christianity?*

Q2. *If a friend asked you why you believe in the existence of God, what would you say?*

2. Evidential Apologetics (Reasons to Believe)

This is similar to Classical Apologetics but without the first step. It is a **one-step approach**. It stresses rational, historical, archaeological, prophetic, and experiential evidence to show Christianity is true **or the best explanation**. Evidence for the

resurrection of Christ is the most common emphasis for the Evidential approach (Gary Habermas is one example).

Some suggested topics for this approach could be—

- How do we explain the Bible? (Evidence for the supernatural nature of the Bible).
- Who is Jesus? (Evidence that he was a real person in history and was more than human, God in human flesh).
- Fulfilled prophecy (Evidence that a supernatural intelligence was in control of human history and is the author of the 66 books of the Bible).
- Was the Resurrection of Jesus a historic fact?

Q3. *What do you think is the strength and weakness of focusing on one main evidence for Christianity when talking to a questioning person?*

Q4. *In your opinion, from the list above, what do you think would be the strongest one line of evidence for Christianity? Explain why?*

3. Cumulative Apologetics (also called inference to the best explanation) (Piling On)

This approach is a **multi-step approach**. Since most skeptics (or atheists) resist the idea of "proof," this approach does not seek to "prove" that Christianity is true but to show that it is **the best explanation**. The goal is to show a combination of different arguments for God suggesting it is **more probable**. This approach has been likened to what a lawyer does when making a brief—a series of evidence cumulating to the best explanation.

- (1) Philosophical reasons—cosmological, teleological, etc.
- (2) Historical evidence for the deity of Christ
- (3) The Resurrection
- (4) Life-change stories
- (5) Fulfilled prophecy, etc.
- (6) = The best explanation: Biblical Christianity is true!

Q5. *If someone were trying to convince you of a new idea, what would be more persuasive—to say "here is proof" OR "here is the best explanation"? Explain why.*

4. Presuppositional Apologetics (Believe before You Believe & Take A Test Drive).

This approach thinks it is useless to present evidence for the Christian faith. Why? Because a non-Christian's ability to reason and evaluate Christian evidence is damaged by sin from the Fall (Genesis 3).

Why is this approach called "Presuppositional Apologetics"? Because everyone has "presuppositions," which are beliefs that are taken for granted and usually not questioned. Those who take the presuppositional apologetics approach suggest that a non-Christian must be encouraged to set aside their presuppositions and **assume** that Christianity and the Bible are true, to see if it is true. He must start with belief to be able to eventually believe. That is, the non-believer is encouraged to **presuppose** Christianity is true and try it out, that is, **take it for a test drive**. As they test-drive Christianity, it is believed that the non-Christian will see that belief in God, Jesus, and the Bible **make better sense of the world and life than any other non-biblical way** of life and belief. Hopefully, they will continue to follow Jesus.

Q6. *In your opinion, do you think the minds of non-Christians have been so affected by sin that it prevents them from being able to evaluate evidence for Christianity and be converted? If so, how would we explain how people like Lee Strobel and Josh McDowell, one-time atheists, have come to faith in Christ?*

Q7. *How likely do you think it is that an atheist, agnostic, or Muslim would presuppose that Christianity is true and test it to see if it makes better sense than the beliefs they currently hold? Explain your answer.*

5. Reformed Epistemology Apologetics (Predestined to Believe or Disbelieve)

In Reformed Epistemology Apologetics, the word "Reformed" points to the Protestant Reformation and the teachings of John Calvin. The word "epistemology" is a term in philosophy that refers to the study of knowledge.

This approach is similar to presuppositional apologetics in that it rejects evidence as being effective in persuading non-Christians to believe in Christ. Also, it has a core concept called "**properly basic**" which means beliefs, such as the existence of God, are reasonable, necessary, and need no proof. Based on Calvin's teachings, it believes that every person has an innate perception of God in their heart. Because of this, presenting evidence for God is unnecessary. Furthermore, because of the influence of Calvin and the Reformation, ultimately people come to Christ because of God's sovereignty.

Q8. *If people come to faith only because they have been predestined by God, why is apologetics needed?*

6. Fideism (Blind Faith).

This approach gets its name from the Latin *fides* which means 'faith.' It states that we cannot prove Christianity. Faith and reason have no relationship to one another. Rather, we must just believe as a 'leap of faith' or as some say, "a leap into the

dark." In other words, people should believe without any basis. Critics say this is the weakest apologetics approach. It is too subjective and does not provide any certainty.

Q9. *What is your thoughts about expecting people to believe something without knowing if it is true? With all the religions in the world, how would people know which one is true based on Fideism?*

The Apologetic Method of the Apostle Paul

Acts 17:2-4 NLT

"2 As was Paul's custom, he went to the synagogue service, and for three Sabbaths in a row, he used the Scriptures to reason with the people. 3 He explained the prophecies and proved that the Messiah must suffer and rise from the dead. He said, 'This Jesus I'm telling you about is the Messiah.' 4 Some of the Jews who listened were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with many God-fearing Greek men and quite a few prominent women."

Q10. *According to verse 2, what indicates that Paul DID have an apologetic method?*

Q11. *Verse 2 tells us that Paul talked in the synagogue for three consecutive Sabbaths. What does this imply about Paul's approach to apologetics?*

Q12. *According to verse 3, what apologetic emphasis did Paul make from the Scriptures? Which apologetic method does this best describe?*

Q13. *What was the ultimate point Paul sought to make, in verse 3?*

Q14. *In verse 4, what were the results of Paul's apologetic effort?*

Q15. *Which apologetics method appeals to you most? Which one do you think would help you best to answer the doubts of people seeking spiritual answers?*

Q16. *Which apologetics method appeals to you least? Explain why.*