

Apologetic Approaches to Evangelism



By Dave Geisler

Introduction:

What I would like to do in this article is to suggest a framework for how you can better use Christian Evidences (Apologetic elements) in your evangelism that could be helpful in witnessing to some of the more skeptical non-Christian friends and acquaintances.

Joan Osborne came out with a song a few years ago called "one of us" that talks about God. There is one line in her song that is very revealing about why some people don't believe in God. It says, "If God had a face what would it look like and would you want to see if seeing meant that you would have to believe in things like heaven and in Jesus and the saints and all the prophets." "One of us" *Joan Osborne 1996*

I think this song illustrates a very important point. And that is that people in general don't reject Christianity because there isn't enough evidence. They reject it because of what it would cost them personally. They don't want to see the truth because of what it would mean in terms of how they live! Jesus pointed out this same idea in his parable about the Rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:31 when He said, "if they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead." Luke 16:31.

One day I had a very honest conversation with a grad student about religion and a belief in God and this is what he said to me, "It would be hard for me to change my world view in favor of a belief in a Theistic God because I would then have to admit that I was wrong in my thinking and I tend to be too arrogant to allow that to happen" *Math Graduate Student*.

The Apostle Paul made it clear in Romans 1:18-20 that everyone has evidence of who God is just from creation itself, but that they suppress that evidence (See illustration **Suppress truth**).

But having said that, I think there are some very good reasons why you and I ought to know something about Christian evidences (or Apologetics). Apologetics is not, contrary to what some people think, "The art of apologizing" (See illustration -Not Apologizing).

The word for Apologetics comes from the Greek word Apologia which is used in I Pet 3:15 and refers to giving a reason or reply for our faith. This word is a legal term that describes what a lawyer would do in defending his client. "Apologetics is offering each person evidence and reasons for the truth of Christianity that turns the gears of his/her mental machinery." ^[1] (See illustration Mental Machinery)

^[1] Koons, Robert *Notes Effective Apologetics workshop ISI June 1998*



However, even more than knowing something about apologetics I think we need to also better understand how to actually use Apologetics to help in the evangelistic process. Why is it that you can go into any Christian bookstore and find many different kinds of books on Evangelism and many different kinds of books on Apologetics, but not many on how to actually use Apologetics to do Evangelism?

I suspect that one reason maybe that people are not quite sure how to keep a balanced perspective when it comes to using Apologetics in the Evangelistic process. I think we need to remember that, on the one hand giving evidence for our faith alone may not do anything to change the perspective of some people who are comfortable with where they are at. Luke records for us in Acts 28:23-24 that though the Apostle Paul had argued persuasively to the Jews that Jesus was the promised Messiah, there were those who would not believe.”

Yet on the other hand we must realize that there maybe some people who have legitimate questions about faith issues that they feel have never been satisfactorily answered, which may have contributed to their rejection of Christianity. Thus, we need to develop discernment in determining when to use Apologetics in the presentation of the Gospel. However, not only is there a need for a balanced perspective when it comes to apologetics and evangelism, I think there is also a desperate need today for people to share their faith and why they believe, yet do it with a great amount of compassion. We need more compassionate Apologists. Those who can persuade others of the truth of Christianity and yet do it in a gently way (with meekness and reverence I Pet. 3:15). The Apostle Paul was not ashamed to speaking the truth and yet he did it with a real deep compassion for the lost.

It says in Acts 17:16-17 that “While Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy in Athens, "he was greatly" distressed" to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the market place day by day with those who happened to be there (Acts 17:16). *NIV* Paul's spirit was so disturbed by all the deception that he was motivated to speak out and challenge their thinking process.

The Apostle Paul said in I Cor. 9:22 that "I have become all things to all men so that I might by all means save some." The apostle Paul was willing to do what ever it took to reach others. No sacrifice was to high because he deeply cared about people. So, in a similar way we need to care so much about reaching people for Christ that we are willing to help them overcome any intellectual obstacle that keeps them from coming to Christ.

Now please understand what I am saying. I am not only saying that you and I should know something about Apologetics or that Apologetics is important. I am also saying that there are practical reasons why you and I should learn how to better use Apologetics in witnessing situations.