

For Review Only

APOLOGETICS
FOR A
New Generation

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APOLOGETICS FOR A NEW GENERATION

by Sean McDowell

The voice on the other end of the phone was familiar, but the question took me by complete surprise. “You teach your students to defend their faith, right?” asked John, a close friend of mine. “Tell me, how do you know Christianity is true?” John and I have had a special relationship for more than a decade, but this was the first time he had shown any real interest in spiritual matters. And he not only wanted to talk about God, he wanted an apologetic for the faith—he wanted proof, reason, and evidence before he would consider believing. John later told me his interest in God was piqued when his younger brother was diagnosed with a brain tumor at 16 years old. His younger brother has since had surgery and experienced complete recovery. In John’s own words, this experience “woke him up to his own mortality.”

A few weeks after our phone conversation, John was heading back to school in northern California, so we decided to meet for a chat over coffee. As we sat down at the Starbucks across from the historic San Juan Capistrano Mission, John jumped right in. “I’m scientific minded, so I need some evidence for the existence of God and the accuracy of the Bible. What can you show me?” For the next hour and a half we discussed some of the standard arguments for the existence of God, the historical evidence for the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the basis for the reliability of the Bible. I did my best to answer his questions, trying to show that Christianity is rationally compelling and

provides the most satisfying solution to the deepest longings of the heart. John didn't become a Christian at this point, but he confessed that he was very close and just needed more time to weigh the cost of his decision.

When I reflected on this discussion, comments I have heard over the past decade by young leaders came rushing to my mind:

"We live in a postmodern era, so apologetics is not important anymore."

"Young people no longer care about reasons for the existence of the Christian God. What matters is telling your narrative and being authentic."

"New generations today no longer need 'evidence that demands a verdict' or a 'case for Christ.'"

"Conversion is about the heart, not the intellect."

Of course, these statements are oversimplifications. Still, we must ask, is scientific proof an important part of faith? Do we live in an era in which people still have questions that demand a truth-related response? Is John the exception, the norm, or somewhere in between? If we are going to be effective in reaching a new generation of young people, few questions, it would seem, are more pressing and important than these.

Postmodernism

In the early 1990s, interest in postmodernism exploded in the church. Bestselling books and popular conferences featured seminars about doing ministry in a postmodern world. People disagreed about exactly what is meant by "postmodernism"—and they still do!—but many agreed that the world was leaving the modern era behind and wading into the unknown waters of the postmodern matrix.

According to many, postmodernism marks the most important cultural shift of the past 500 years, upending our theology, philosophy, epistemology (how we know things), and church practice. Some compare postmodernism to an earthquake that has overturned all the foundations of Western culture. Thus, to be relevant in ministry today,

we must shed our modern tendencies and embrace the postmodern shift. According to many postmoderns, this shift includes replacing a propositional approach to the gospel with a primarily relational methodology.

To be honest, for the past 15 years I have wrestled profoundly with this so-called postmodern shift, reading books about postmodernism, attending conferences, and engaging in endless conversations with both Christians and non-Christians about the state of culture today. As much as the next guy, I want my life and ministry to be biblically grounded and culturally relevant. If the world is really undergoing a profound shift, I want to embrace it!

The world is certainly changing fast. Advancements in technology, transportation, and communication are taking place at an unprecedented rate. But what does this *really* mean for ministry today? Certainly, as postmoderns like to emphasize, story, image, and community are critical components. But does it follow that we downplay reason, evidence, and apologetics? Absolutely not! In fact, as the contributors to this book all agree, apologetics is more important than ever before.

Postmodern ideas do influence the worldview of youth today, but their thinking is most deeply influenced by our predominantly modern, secular culture. This can be seen most clearly by comparing the way they think about religion and ethics with the way they think about science. Youth are significantly relativistic when it comes to ethics, values, and religion, but they are *not* relativistic about science, mathematics, and technology.¹ This is because they have grown up in a secular culture that deems science as the superior means of attaining knowledge about the world. In *Kingdom Triangle*, philosopher J.P. Moreland writes, “Scientific knowledge is taken to be so vastly superior that its claims always trump the claims made by other disciplines.”² Religion and morals, on the other hand, are considered matters of personal preference and taste over which the individual is autonomous. This is why, if you’ve had a discussion with a younger person, you’ve probably heard her say, “That may be true for you, but it’s not

true for me,” “Who are you to judge?” or “If that’s what they choose, whatever.” This is not because of their postmodern sentiments, but because their thinking has been profoundly shaped by their modernist and secular culture.

Popular writers such as Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Richard Dawkins have written bestselling books attacking the scientific, historic, and philosophical credibility of religion in general and Christianity in particular.³ Their writings have wreaked havoc on many unprepared Christians. This has taken place while many inside the church have neglected the need to be able to defend the faith intellectually. Christians today are regularly being challenged to set forth the reasons for their hope. And with the ubiquity of the Internet, difficult questions seem to be arising now more than ever before. As professor David Berlinski writes in *The Devil’s Delusion*: “The question that all religious believers now face: Show me the evidence.”⁴

I am convinced that C.S. Lewis was right: The question is not really *if* we will defend the Christian faith, but if we will defend it *well*. Whether we like it or not, we are all apologists of a sort.

The Apologetics Renaissance

During research for *The Case for Christ*, Lee Strobel was told by a well-known and respected theologian that no one would read his book. Lee was informed, “People don’t care about historical evidence for Jesus anymore. They’re more persuaded by experience and community than facts and reason.” Disappointed and frustrated, Lee returned home and told his wife that his efforts were seemingly in vain. Yet according to Lee, the largest group of readers who became Christians through his book has been 16- to 24-year-olds!

Philosopher William Lane Craig’s 2008 cover story for *Christianity Today*, “God Is Not Dead Yet: How Current Philosophers Argue for His Existence,” is a sign of things to come. Craig ties the awakening of apologetics to the renaissance in Christian philosophy that has taken place over the past 40 years. Science is more open to the existence of a Designer than at any time in recent memory (thanks to the intelligent

design movement), and biblical criticism has embarked on a renewed quest for the historical Jesus consonant with the portrait of Jesus found in the Gospels.⁵

The apologetics awakening can also be seen in the number of apologetics conferences that have sprouted up in churches all over the country. Tens of thousands of people are trained at apologetics events through efforts of various church denominations and organizations, such as Biola University, Southern Evangelical Seminary, Focus on the Family, and more. Resources on apologetics have also exploded in the past few years. This is good news because America and the church continue to become more and more secular. Those who describe themselves as “religious nonaffiliated” have increased from 5 to 7 percent in the 1970s to 17 percent in 2006.⁶

Why Apologetics Matters

To say that apologetics is critical for ministry today is not to say that we just continue business as usual. That would be foolish. Our world is changing, and it is changing *rapidly*. More change has happened since 1900 than in all prior recorded history. And more change will occur in the next 20 years than the entire last century.⁷ But God does not change (Malachi 3), and neither does human nature. We are thoughtful and rational beings who respond to evidence. People have questions, and we are responsible to provide helpful answers. Of course, we certainly don't have all the answers, and when we do provide solid answers, many choose not to follow the evidence for personal or moral reasons. But that hardly changes the fact that we are rational, personal beings who bear the image of God.

People often confuse apologetics with apologizing for the faith, but the Greek word *apologia* refers to a legal defense. Thus, apologetics involves giving a defense for the Christian faith. First Peter 3:15 says, “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense [*apologia*] to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and respect.” Jude encouraged his hearers to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all

handed down to the saints” (Jude 3). The biblical evidence is clear: All Christians are to be trained in apologetics, which is an integral part of discipleship. This involves learning how to respond to common objections raised against the Christian faith and also how to positively commend the gospel to a particular audience.

We have certainly made mistakes in the way we have defended our beliefs in the past (as chapters in this book will illustrate), but this hardly means we should abandon apologetics altogether. Rather, we ought to learn from the past and adjust accordingly. Beyond the biblical mandate, apologetics is vitally important today for two reasons.

Strengthening Believers

Apologetics training can offer significant benefits in the personal life of Christians. For one thing, knowing *why* you believe *what* you believe and experiencing it in your life and relationships will give you renewed confidence in sharing your faith. I have the privilege of speaking to thousands of young people every year. Inevitably, whenever I speak on topics such as moral relativism, the case for intelligent design, or evidences for the resurrection, I get e-mails and comments on my Facebook page from students who were strengthened in their faith. One recently wrote, “I was at the [youth event] this past weekend and absolutely loved it! All the information was so helpful, but I connected the most with yours. All the scientific proof of Christianity and a Creator just absolutely amazes me!”

Training in apologetics also provides an anchor during trials and difficulties. Emotions only take us so far, and then we need something more solid. Presently, most teens who enter adulthood claiming to be Christians will walk away from the church and put their emotional commitment to Christ on the shelf within ten years.⁸ A young person may walk away from God for many reasons, but *one* significant reason is intellectual doubt. According to the National Study of Youth and Religion, the most common answer nonreligious teens offered for why they left their faith was intellectual skepticism.⁹ This is why David Kinaman, president of the Barna Group, writes in his book *unChristian*,

“We are learning that one of the primary reasons that ministry to teenagers fails to produce a lasting faith is because they are not being taught to think.”¹⁰

The church is failing young people today. From the moment Christian students first arrive on campus, their faith is assaulted on all sides by fellow students and teachers alike. According to a ground-breaking 2006 study by professors from Harvard and George Mason universities, the percentage of agnostics and atheists teaching at American colleges is three times greater than in the general population. More than 50 percent of college professors believe the Bible is “an ancient book of fables, legends, history, and moral precepts.”¹¹ Students are routinely taught that Darwinian evolution is the substitute creator, that the Bible is unreliable, that Jesus was like any other religious figure, and that any Christian who thinks differently is at best old-fashioned and at worst intolerant, bigoted, and hateful. These ideas are perpetrated in the classroom through reason, logic, and evidence. The church must teach students to counter these trends.

This was exactly the experience of Alison Thomas, a recent seminary grad who is now a speaker for Ravi Zacharias Ministries (and the author of the chapter “Apologetics and Race”). As a college freshman, her faith was immediately attacked from every direction. Combine the intellectual challenges with the lack of nutrition, sleep, and Christian mentors, and according to Alison, it was a recipe for disaster: “I almost abandoned my faith in college because I was not sure if the difficult questions people asked me about Christianity had satisfying answers.”¹² Alison is absolutely convinced that had she been prepared for the attack on her faith, she could have been spared much doubt, sin, and heartache. Her story could be multiplied thousands of times, but unfortunately, too often with different results.

Reaching the Lost

The apostles of Christ ministered in a pluralistic culture. They regularly reasoned with both Jews and pagans, trying to persuade them of the truth of Christianity. They appealed to fulfilled prophecy, Jesus’

miracles, evidence for creation, and proofs for the resurrection. Acts 17:2-3 says, “And according to Paul’s custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.’” Some were persuaded as a result of Paul’s efforts.

According to pastor Tim Keller, this is similar to the method we should adopt today. Keller is the avant-garde pastor of Redeemed Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and the author of *The Reason for God*, an apologetics book which has soared atop the *New York Times* bestselling nonfiction list. In an interview for *Christianity Today*, Keller responded to the claim that rationality is unimportant for evangelism: “Christians are saying that the rational isn’t part of evangelism. The fact is, people are rational. They do have questions. You have to answer those questions. Don’t get the impression that I think that the rational aspect takes you all the way there. But there’s too much emphasis on just the personal now.”¹³ Tim is right: Evangelism today must be both relational and rational.

Greg Stier agrees: “Any claims concerning the death of apologetics have been greatly exaggerated. . . . Those who believe apologetics aren’t important for evangelizing postmoderns have misdiagnosed this generation as purely relational; these young people are rational, too.”¹⁴ According to Greg, this generation of young people is more open to spiritual truth than any generation in recent history. (See my brief interview with him on page 124.)

Does this mean young people are walking around with deep spiritual questions at the forefront of their minds? Not necessarily. But it does mean that many young people are open to spiritual truth when motivated in the right way. The problem is not with apologetics but with our failure to motivate people. Much ministry today is focused on meeting a felt need, but the real difficulty is to take a genuine need and make it felt. If done in the context of a relationship, apologetics can be one effective means of accomplishing this. For thoughts on how to motivate young people in this regard see

the chapter “Making Apologetics Come Alive in Youth Ministry” by Alex McFarland.

In my experience, people who criticize apologetics have often had one or two unsuccessful attempts and written off the entire enterprise. Rather, we need to put apologetics into perspective. Considering that a minority of people who hear the gospel choose to become followers of Christ in the first place, we shouldn’t be surprised that many people are unmoved by reason and evidence. It’s unrealistic to expect most people to respond positively to apologetics, just as it is unrealistic to expect most people to respond to a presentation of the gospel. The road is narrow in both cases (Matthew 7:14).

If only a few people will respond, why bother? For one thing, those who respond to apologetics often become people of significant influence who are deeply committed to the faith. This has certainly been the case in the life of my father, Josh McDowell. He became a believer as a pre-law student while trying to refute the evidence for Christ. I’m deeply humbled by the number of doctors, professors, politicians, lawyers, and other influential professionals who have come to Christ through his speaking and writing. He has spoken to more young people than anyone in history, and his books have been printed in millions of copies and translated all over the world. Honestly, I can hardly speak anywhere without someone from the audience sharing how instrumental he was in his or her coming to Christ. I’m proud to be his son.

Apologetics for a New Generation

Apologetics is advancing like never before, and a few characteristics mark effective apologetics for a new generation.

The New Apologetics Is Missional

There is a lot of talk right now about being missional, that is, getting out of our safe Christian enclaves and reaching people on their turf. This mind-set must characterize apologetics for a new generation. Each spring Brett Kunkle and I take a group of high school students to the

University of California at Berkeley to interact with leading atheists from northern California. We invite various speakers to challenge our students and then to participate in a lively period of questions and answers. The guests always comment that our students treat them kindly, ask good questions, and are different from stereotypical Christians. This is because, in our preparatory training, we emphasize the importance of defending our beliefs with gentleness and respect, as Peter admonishes (1 Peter 3:15).

In Western culture today, Christians are often criticized for being exclusive, closed-minded, and intolerant. Missional apologetics is one way to help shatter this myth firsthand. Interestingly, one of the atheistic presenters from Berkeley spent 45 minutes arguing that the skeptical way of life is the most open-minded and the least dogmatic. I kindly pointed out that it was us—*Christians!*—who were willing to come up to their turf and give them a platform to present their ideas.

This is not the only perception of Christians that can be softened by missional apologetics. In his book *unChristian*, David Kinnaman paints a sobering view of how Christians are viewed by those outside the faith. For example, nearly half of young non-Christians have a negative view of evangelicals. Six common perceptions characterize how young outsiders view Christians: hypocritical, too focused on getting converts, anti-homosexual, sheltered, too political, and judgmental.¹⁵ To help overcome these perceptions, says Kinnaman, Christians must build meaningful, genuine relationships with non-Christians and live out their faith consistently. It is in the context of a loving relationship, says Dan Kimball in his chapter, “A New Kind of Apologist,” that we most effectively reach the lost today.

The New Apologetics Influences How We Live

Though I do not agree with his philosophy of pragmatism, one insight of William James has practical importance for apologetics training today. James said that when considering any idea, we should always ask, what difference does it make? If it makes no existential difference

to the way we live whether it is true or false, then according to James, we should not bother with it. When training in apologetics, we must regularly ask, so what? How does belief in the historical resurrection of Jesus affect my relationship to myself, to others, and to God? How does belief in creation influence my view of the environment? How does the Incarnation affect my self-image?

Much of the criticism today is not with apologetics per se but with our failure to connect apologetics to the way we live. Some of this criticism is deserved. If we don't apply the truth to our relationship with God and others, what's the point? Brian McLaren, a leading voice in the Emergent church, is right: Having right answers that don't lead us to better love God and our neighbors are more or less worthless.¹⁶

A remarkable number of outspoken critics of Christianity have backgrounds of personal disappointment with Christians and the church. Pastor Tim Keller explains how our personal experience influences our evaluation of the evidence for Christianity:

We all bring to issues intellectual predispositions based on our experiences. If you have known many wise, loving, kind, and insightful Christians over the years, and if you have seen churches that are devout in belief yet civic-minded and generous, you will find the intellectual case for Christianity more plausible. If, on the other hand, the preponderance of your experience is with nominal Christians (who bear the name but don't practice) or with self-righteous fanatics, then the arguments for Christianity will have to be extremely strong for you to concede that they have any cogency at all.¹⁷

The great philosopher Frederick Nietzsche once commented that Christians have no joy. No wonder he found the evidence for God unconvincing. The sad part about his observation is that Christians, of all people, have the best reason to be joyful. If Christ has not risen, says Paul, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1 Corinthians 15:32). But if Christ *has* risen—and the evidence for this is compelling—then even though we go through pain and difficulty in

this life, we will share eternity with Him. Christians joyfully living out their faith in the power of the Holy Spirit provide one of the most powerful apologetics at our disposal.

The New Apologetics Is Humble

I failed miserably to act humbly a few years ago when getting my hair cut in Breckenridge, Colorado. The hairdresser noticed I was carrying a copy of *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* by Leslie Newbigin. So she asked, “Are you a Christian? If so, how can you explain all the evil in the world?” I proceeded to give her a ten-minute lecture about the origin of evil, the nature of free will, and the Christian solution. My reasons were solid, but I lacked humility and sensitivity in my demeanor. I had a slick answer to her every question, but I missed the fact that her needs went beyond the intellect to her heart. Eventually she started crying—not because she became a Christian but because she was so offended by my callousness. To be honest, it was a bit unsettling having a hairdresser, who held sharp scissors in her hand, crying and lecturing me while cutting my hair. But the point was well taken.

In retrospect, I should have first asked her some questions to try and understand why evil was such a pressing issue in her life. What pain had she experienced that caused her to question the goodness of God? Sometimes questions are primarily intellectual, but more often than not they stem from a deeper longing of the heart.

From the beginning, Christian apologists have exemplified the importance of humility in presenting our defense of the faith. There is a reason why 1 Peter 3:15 begins with “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts” and ends with “gentleness and respect.” Before presenting a case for the Christian faith, one must first submit to the lordship of Christ. The heart of the apologist is the basis of all apologetic training. People still don’t care how much you know if they don’t know you care. The only way we can truly demonstrate the love of Christ to people is by first having our hearts humbled by God. When our hearts are not right, we can do more harm than good.

As you will see throughout this book, these are not the only factors characterizing the emerging apologetics awakening. The rest of the chapters in this book will spur you to think creatively about how apologetics fits into the many critical components of effective ministry today. Authors will tackle issues such as race, gender, media, homosexuality, Jesus, brain research, culture, youth, spiritual formation, and more—all with an eye on how we can effectively minister to new generations today.

Conclusion

In the fall of 2007, Christianity Today International and Zondervan partnered to conduct attitudinal and behavioral research of American Christians. *Leadership Journal* discussed the findings with leading pastors and religious experts to ascertain implications for ministry today. Three critical issues emerged:

1. The local church is no longer considered the only outlet for spiritual growth.
2. Churches must develop relational and community-oriented outreach.
3. Lay people have to be better equipped to be God's ambassadors [apologists].¹⁸

The third point on this list took me by surprise, not because I disagree with it, but because it's refreshing to hear leaders emphasize the renewed need for apologetics. In the article, Joel Hunter, senior pastor of Northland church in Longwood, Florida, said, "We need to preach with apologetics in mind, with a rational explanation and defense of the Christian faith in mind."¹⁹ One of the best ways to counter biblical illiteracy, claims Hunter, is to equip active Christians as teachers, ambassadors, and apologists. Yes! Ministry today certainly includes much more than presenting a case for our hope, but this is one critical piece we must not neglect. The time has never been greater for a renewed focus on apologetics.

You may be wondering what happened to John, my friend I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. He has not become a Christian yet, but he is still inching along. We continue to have good discussions about God and the meaning of life. I trust and pray that someday he will choose to follow Jesus. Had my youth pastor, parents, and teachers not trained me in apologetics, I couldn't have helped him at all. You and I can't be ambassadors without having answers to tough questions. So I've assembled this team of (mostly) young apologists to help you develop a biblical and culturally relevant approach for reaching this new generation. Let's go!

A DIFFERENT KIND OF APOLOGIST

by Dan Kimball

Apologetics is desperately needed more than ever in our emerging culture. But I believe that a different kind of apologist may be needed.

I realize that some may disagree with me. I hear fairly often from some church leaders that emerging generations are not interested in apologetics: “In our postmodern world there isn’t interest in rational explanations regarding spiritual issues.” “We don’t need logically presented defenses or offenses of the faith.” These kinds of statements always confuse me. The reason is simple: In my dialogue and relationships with non-Christian and Christian young people for more than 18 years, I am not finding less interest in apologetics, but actually *more* interest. The more we are living in an increasingly post-Christian and pluralistic culture, the more we need apologetics because people are asking more and more questions. We desperately need to be ready to answer the tough questions of today’s emerging generations.

This increased interest and need for apologetics in our emerging culture fits very nicely with one of the classical and well-known Bible passages on apologetics:

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, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander (1 Peter 3:15-16 NIV).

Over the past couple of years I have heard apologists emphasize “gentleness and respect,” which is an absolutely wonderful shift. Some Christians who are drawn to apologetics can have temperaments which may not always come out with gentleness and respect as they engage non-Christians. But this passage includes something else that, oddly, we don’t hear much about. Yet it is critical for our discussion of apologetics for new generations.

People Can’t Ask If They Don’t Know Us

The passage in 1 Peter 3 says “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” Let me ask you, have you ever been standing on the street or in line at the supermarket and had a stranger walk up to you and say, “Excuse me. Can you tell me the reason for the hope that you have?”

That doesn’t happen, because strangers do not generally walk up to people they don’t know and ask questions like this. Strangers also don’t know the other person, so they wouldn’t be able to know if someone has hope or not. So how does someone know and trust Christians well enough to see the hope that they have and trust and respect them enough to ask them about it?

This is the biggest missing component in many of our approaches to apologetics today. It is one of the biggest shifts we are seeing with emerging generations. Apologetics is still needed today, but the apologist isn’t necessarily trusted in our culture today. In the 1960s and 1970s, many younger people left the church because they (rightly) felt the church was often irrelevant. The critical questions that younger generations had at that time were not being answered. The music and various approaches to preaching and worship were becoming outdated and not speaking to new generations at that time. So when churches revamped their approaches to worship and preaching and developed

clear answers for some of the questions people had, many people (even if they weren't Christian) became interested.

The culture still had a general respect for Christianity. So it was easier to communicate and also have a voice that folks would listen to. For those who grew up in a church but walked away, answers to their critical questions were extremely valuable. But today, Christians and the church aren't trusted like they were. Before, we were hoping to see people return to the church. Today, many have never been part of a church in the first place.

Times have changed. But the Spirit of God is still alive and active. People will always be created with questions about life, meaning, purpose, and God. Apologetics are still important today for new generations, but our approach must change.

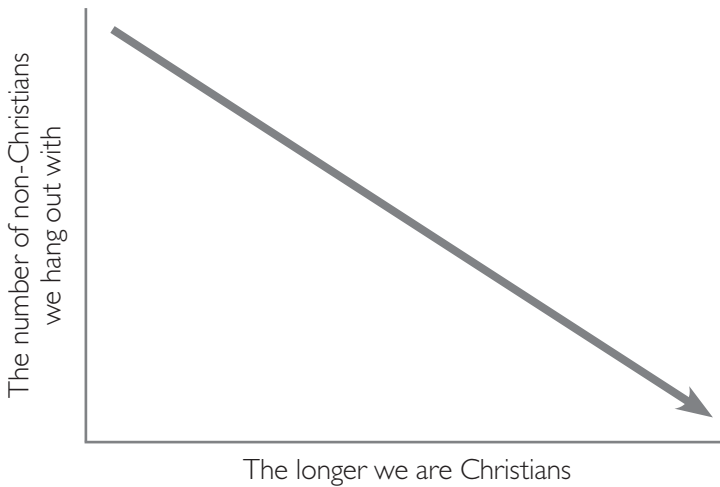
Hanging Out with the Wrong People

In my early days as a Christian, I constantly read books on apologetics so I could share with my non-Christian friends about my newfound hope. My friends were concerned that I was following a religion and reading a book (the Bible) that they felt was written by primitive, ancient, and uneducated people. So this challenge kept me studying to respond to their concerns. The more I read and studied, the more my confidence in Christianity grew.

I eventually joined a large, wonderful church and made some friendships with others who also liked apologetics. We spent hours talking about theology, reasons why we could trust the Bible, and ways to respond to common objections such as the problem of evil. I bought almost every apologetics book available and attended many apologetics conferences. I loved having Christian friends whom I could talk to about apologetics, but something slowly dawned on me: I wasn't really talking to any non-Christians anymore about apologetics. I realized that I was hanging out all the time with Christians who loved discussing apologetics and the tough questions about the faith. But I wasn't spending time with the non-Christians who were asking these tough questions.

As I began exploring this further, I discovered that many people who like apologetics primarily socialize with other like-minded people. Certain temperaments and personalities cause some Christians to become more interested in apologetics than others, and they connect with each other. Having community with other Christians who share common interests such as apologetics is a wonderful thing. But I realized that my Christian friends and I weren't using apologetics to engage non-Christians. We were only talking with each other.

I discuss this in *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, where I included this diagram, which lays out a typical pattern: The longer we are Christians, the less we socialize with non-Christians. We may work with non-Christians or have neighbors who are non-Christians. But the types of conversations we have and the trust that we build changes dramatically when we actually befriend and socialize with those outside the faith.



The danger is that we don't do this on purpose. It happens unintentionally. But because we have limited time and we enjoy hanging out with others who think like us, we can remove ourselves from the very ones we are sent by Jesus to be salt and light to (Matthew 5). As

the Spirit molds us to be more like Jesus, the majority of people who benefit from our growth are already Christians. We are salt and light to each other, not to the world. The more skilled in apologetics we get, the fewer people we know who actually need it.

You may resist hearing this, and I hope I am wrong about you. But let me ask you a question or three:

1. Think about discussions you have had about apologetics with people in the past six months. How many have been with Christians, and how many have been with those who aren't Christians yet?

Let me make this more direct and personal:

2. Who are your non-Christian friends?

When was the last time you went out to a movie or dinner or simply hung out with a non-Christian? If people are to trust us in order to ask us for the hope we have, we must spend time with them and build relationships. The typical answers I get from Christians quite honestly scare me. Again, I hope I am wrong about you. Do you intentionally place yourself in situations or groups where you will be likely to meet new people? For me, music often provides an open door. So whether I'm with the manager of a coffee house I frequent or the members of local bands, I try to have the mind-set of a missionary and meet new people. This sounds so elementary and I almost feel silly having to type this out. But this leads to a deeper question:

3. Who are you praying for regularly that is not a Christian?

Our prayers represent our hearts. What we pray for shows us what we are thinking about and valuing. When the unsaved become more than faces in the crowd, when they include people we know and care for, we can't help but pray for them. And we must remember: We can be prepared with apologetic arguments, but the Spirit does

the persuading. Are you regularly praying for some non-Christian friends?

Again, I feel almost embarrassed asking this. But when I started realizing that I had fallen into this trap, I wondered if I was alone. As I began asking other Christians about this, many seemed to be like me. I even asked an author of apologetics books to tell me about his recent conversations with non-Christians that included apologetics. But he couldn't remember any recent examples. He was talking only to Christians! This isn't bad, but it raises an important question: How do we know the questions emerging generations outside the church are asking if we are only talking with Christians?

I recently talked with a person who teaches apologetics to young people. As we talked, he shared how interested youth are in apologetics (and I fully agree). I asked about the types of questions he is hearing, and I was surprised that his experience seemed quite different from mine. I was working with non-Christian youth at that time, but he was speaking primarily with Christian youth at Christian schools and youth groups. Nothing is wrong with teaching Christian youth how to have confidence in their faith through apologetics. This is an important task we need to be doing today in our churches. But if we are focusing our energy and time listening mainly to Christians, how do we know what the questions non-Christian youth or young adults have? This brings me to my next point.

Providing Answers Before Listening to Questions

The effective apologist to emerging generations will be a good listener. Most of us have been good talkers. We Christians often do the talking and expect others to listen. But in our emerging culture, effective communication involves dialogue. Being quiet and asking questions may not be easy for some folks, but those are critical skills we need to develop in order to reach new generations.

A 20-year-old Hindu became friends with someone in our church. Eventually she began coming to our worship gatherings. I got to meet with her at a coffee house, and because I was sincerely curious, I politely

asked her some questions. How did she become a Hindu? What is Hinduism to her? What does she find most beneficial in her life about it? She eagerly told me stories that helped me understand her journey and her specific beliefs. As much as I wanted to, I didn't interrupt her or jump in to correct her when I felt she was saying things that may have been inconsistent. I didn't interrupt and tell her that there cannot be hundreds of gods, that there is only one true God. I simply asked questions and listened carefully.

Eventually, she asked me about the differences between Christianity and Hinduism. I gently and respectfully tried to compare her story and what she said with the story of Jesus and the narrative of the Bible. But I didn't try to discredit her beliefs or show why what I believed was true. She asked me about the origins of Christianity, and I was able to draw a timeline on a napkin that included creation, the Garden of Eden, and the fall. I explained that people eventually began worshipping other gods or goddesses, not the original one God. I then walked her through a basic world religions timeline I had memorized and explained where Hinduism fit in that timeline. It truly was a dialogue, as I would stop and see if she had any input or comments.

I didn't show her why I felt Hinduism was wrong; rather, I let our discussion speak for itself. The differences between Christianity and Hinduism became obvious. A few weeks later, she told me in a worship gathering that she had left Hinduism and chosen to follow Jesus. My talk with her was not the turning point. She had many conversations with other Christian friends in our church. They knew her beliefs, loved her, invited her into community, and lived out the hope they have. She could see it and experience it, and eventually she wanted to know the reason for the hope in her friends. I definitely needed to be ready with apologetics when I met with her. But the reason she even met with me was that we built trust first. Trust was built with some of her Christian friends. Trust was built during conversations I had with her when she came to our worship gatherings. Eventually, this trust led to her being open to dialogue specifically about her Hindu faith and to ask questions. First she was valued as a person and listened to,

and then came the questions about the hope we have. Let me ask you a few questions about this:

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate yourself as a listener in conversations about faith?
2. What are some of the questions you have been asked as a result of building trust and listening? Would anyone have asked those questions if you didn't build trust and listen first?

Stockpiling Ammunition or Building Trust

I recently heard of someone who was taking church groups on the street to walk up to total strangers and strike up conversations and then use apologetics with them. I respect the passion to reach lost people, but I was saddened by the methodology. The leader chose this area because it was highly populated with homosexuals. From my perspective, this is almost the opposite of the methodology that is effective with new generations. We may have our apologetics gun loaded, but we haven't built trust. We haven't gained a voice in their lives, so they don't trust us enough to listen to us. Walking up to total strangers and asking them questions about very personal things immediately puts them on the defense. The discussion begins in a semi-confrontational way. This reinforces some of the stereotypes of Christians we need to break. Non-Christians are often open to discussing personal beliefs about religion and worldviews, but this normally occurs in the context of trust and friendship.

I recently met a guy in his twenties who was working at a coffee house. I did my usual thing: I selected one place to frequent and eventually got to know those who work there. We eventually started talking about all kinds of things, mainly music at first. Eventually I told him I was a pastor at a church and began asking his opinion on things. I asked about his impressions of church and Christianity. I shared that I knew about Christians' bad reputation and that I wanted to know how he felt about that. This wasn't the first

thing we talked about, and we had begun to build a friendship, so he was happy to talk to me about this. One of his main issues was that the Christians he met knew nothing about other religions, but they would tell him he should be a Christian. His concern was that Christians were naive about anything but what they believed, and he didn't respect that.

As I listened, I didn't try to butt in and comment when he would say something I disagreed with. Instead, I listened, asked clarifying questions, took notes, and thanked him for each opinion. I asked him what he believed and why he believed what he did. And then the inevitable happened—he asked me what I believed.

Knowing his beliefs, I was able to construct an apologetic that catered to his story and specific points of connection. As with so many people, the issue of pluralism and world religions was a major point of tension that he felt Christians are blind about. Eventually our conversation moved to the resurrection of Jesus, which he saw as a myth. I used the classical Josh McDowell resurrection apologetics, explaining various theories of the stolen body and why they fell apart upon scrutiny. I shared about the guards at the tomb and how they would defend the sealed tomb. I was ready (thanks to Josh McDowell), and my friend was absolutely fascinated by that. I could tell he had never heard this before, and as we ended our time together, he thanked me. I didn't press him for a response.

The following week I went back to the coffee house, and he told me that he now believed in the resurrection. He had been totally unaware that there are actually good reasons to believe it is true. Over the weekend he got a copy of the Bible to read the resurrection story and had no idea it was repeated in each of the Gospels. This is why I am convinced that regardless of how postmodern emerging generations may be, they receive apologetic arguments when trust is built. Of course, it is the Holy Spirit who does the work in someone's heart—not clever arguments. But God still uses apologetics in our emerging culture.

Consider these questions:

1. When you are studying apologetics, does your heart break in compassion for the people you are preparing to talk to? Or are you stockpiling ammunition to show people they are wrong?
2. When you have used apologetics with those who aren't Christians yet, do you find your tone being humble, broken, and compassionate, or is your tone argumentative and perhaps even arrogant (although you would not like to admit that)?

Critical Apologetics Issues

I know that most apologists are not arrogant, ammunition firing, non-listening people who don't have any non-Christian friends and only talk to other Christians. But at the same time, a little hyperbole may raise up some ugly truth we perhaps need to admit. As I shared, I know I have been guilty of these very things. We must all examine ourselves and be brutally honest about it. Too much is at stake not to.

As statistics are showing, we are not doing a very good job of reaching new generations. Our reputation is suffering. But at the same time, I have so much optimism and hope. Apologetics is a *critical* factor in the evangelism of new generations. That is why I was thrilled to be part of this book.

If you are a leader in a church, I hope you are creating a natural culture in your church of teaching apologetics and training people how to respond to others when asked for the hope that they have. But again, *how* we train them to respond is just as important as the answers themselves. The attitudes and tone of voice we use as we teach reveal what we truly feel about those who aren't Christians and their beliefs. Our hearts should be broken thinking of people who have developed false worldviews or religious beliefs and don't know Jesus yet. How we teach people in our church to be "listeners" and build friendships is critical. Here are some of the key things we must be ready to answer today:

- *The inspiration and trustworthiness of the Bible.* Everything

comes back to why we trust the Bible and what it says about human sexuality, world religions...everything. Why the Bible is more credible than other world religious writings is critical.

- *Who is Jesus?* Emerging generations are open to talking about Jesus but for the most part, they have an impression that He is more like Gandhi than a divine Savior. This gives us a wonderful opportunity to share why Jesus is unique and to provide an apologetic for His resurrection.
- *Human sexuality.* We need to be well-versed in why we believe what we do about the covenant of marriage between a man and woman, about human sexuality, and about sexual ethics in general.
- *World religions.* We must have an adequate understanding of the development and teachings of world religions. I don't meet many younger people who are hard-core Buddhists, but many are empathetic to Buddhist teachings. Many pick and choose from different faiths. They are often surprised to see that many religions are mutually exclusive.

The Most Important Apologetic

As I close this chapter, I want to remind us that the ultimate apologetic is really Jesus in us. Are our lives demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5), such as gentleness, kindness, patience, and love? Are we being salt and light with our attitudes and actions toward people? Are our conversations filled with grace and seasoned with salt (Colossians 4:6)? Do our lives show that we are paying attention to the things Jesus would, including the marginalized, the oppressed, and the poor? People watch and listen. If they trust the messenger, perhaps they will be more open to listen.

We can have all the answers ready to give people who ask, but are they asking us? If not, perhaps we have not yet built the trust and

relationship and respect that lead them to ask us for the hope we have. Maybe that's where we need to start—with our hearts and lives. If we will, I can almost guarantee that others will ask us for the hope we have.

May God use us together on the mission of Jesus as we are wise as serpents but as innocent as doves. May God use our minds and hearts to bring the reason for the hope we have to others. And may God put others in our lives who will ask for the hope as they watch us live it out.

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