

Why Study Apologetics?

Apologetics is the study of how to make a case for the faith. We need apologetics for at least three reasons. It helps us answer doubts, build confidence, and change lives.

The study of apologetics can answer doubts and give us solid intellectual ground on which to stand. Paul Little pointed out that, “even committed Christians question their faith and wonder if it’s true. (Paul E. Little, *Know Why You Believe* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 19.)

When John the Baptist questioned his faith in Jesus (Luke 7:20-22), Jesus didn’t rebuke John. Instead, Jesus provided evidence of His identity. He made a case (a defense) to establish His identity. To have doubts is OK, but we need to take sufficient steps toward alleviating them. We can make a case for belief in God.

The term *faith* has become somewhat convoluted in our culture. It seems to mean believing something is true despite the evidence or lack of evidence. However, a faith not based on knowledge of God, including physical as well as supernatural evidence, is not the faith described in the Bible. How many people have a weak, anemic faith because they haven’t feasted on the evidence? Theologian J. Gresham Machen said it this way:

“Faith is indeed intellectual; it involves an apprehension of certain things as facts; and vain is the modern effort to divorce faith from knowledge. But although faith is intellectual, it is not only intellectual. You cannot have faith without having knowledge; but you will not have faith if you have only knowledge.”(J. Gresham Machen, *What Is Faith?* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 203.)

The study of apologetics helps us answer doubts. It also builds our confidence. After I began to answer some of my most pressing questions, I discovered that Christianity had the best answers to my toughest questions. When I began comparing, I found that Christianity made the most sense as a worldview. When I began comparing other worldviews, I learned to ask how these systems of thought answer such questions as:

- 1) How did the universe and creatures come into existence?
- 2) Is there such a thing as good and evil?
- 3) What is the problem of mankind?
- 4) What is the solution to mankind’s problems?

Once I realized I had the best answers to these questions through my belief in the Christian God, I became much less intimidated to talk to other people about what they believed. Through talking to others about their beliefs I found out that not a lot of people have studied what they believe and/or why they believe it.

When we answer doubts and build confidence, we see God change lives. As I began to learn about my beliefs and discuss them with people of different backgrounds, I made a shocking discovery. I began to change in some aspects of my own personality. This was something I did not expect, that actually having to defend what I believed and why I believed it would change me from the inside out.

I think my daughter best expressed the change when she told me that I wasn't "petty" anymore. She said, "Mom, it seems like you've figured out what is important and what's not important."

Wow. My daughter was a preteen at the time and I didn't even know she knew what "petty" meant.

Hebrews 11:6 says to draw near to God, we must believe that He exists. To experience the fruit of faith, we have to get back to something as fundamental as believing in God's existence because: "People may not always live what they profess, but they will always live what they believe." (Neil T. Anderson, *Victory Over the Darkness*, Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990, 124.)

I couldn't live out a belief in God that wasn't real to me. I had to find out why Jesus was worthy of my trust and confidence. So I studied apologetics, and now every time a sneaky suspicion rises in my mind that this might all be some grand hoax, I have a whole body of evidence to the contrary. Further, God began to change me as I made a public case for my belief in God. As I began to defend what I believed, I came to understand more clearly why I believed in God. I found myself forced to grow because I needed to answer the questions and challenges.

In the process I have seen more and more that my trust in God is well placed. This in turn has given me confidence to speak to others about beliefs. So the potential in studying apologetics doesn't just lie in the changes possible for the individual but for all those who come into contact with the individual.

Mary Jo Sharp is a former atheist from the Pacific Northwest who thought religion was for the weak-minded. She now holds a Masters in Christian Apologetics from Biola University and is the first woman to become a Certified Apologetics Instructor through the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. A clear communicator with a teacher's heart, Mary Jo finds great joy in discussing the deep truths of her Lord and Savior.