

# Apologetics for Everyone

David Limbaugh | [dlimbaugh@thechapel.com](mailto:dlimbaugh@thechapel.com)

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**Big Idea:** Apologetics is about impacting people intellectually so that they have more of the beliefs that Jesus has. Sometimes we do this by using arguments, and sometimes we don't. This means that sometimes we do apologetics, for example, by give our non-believing friend the Kalam Cosmological Argument to consider, and sometimes we do apologetics by inviting him or her to church. It depends on the situation.

**Important:** Prayer is a chief discipline of the apologist and humility is a chief virtue.

## What Is Apologetics?

According to Christian Philosopher [J.P. Moreland](#), “apologetics is a ministry designed to help unbelievers overcome intellectual obstacles to conversion and believers to remove doubts that hinder spiritual growth.”<sup>1</sup>

Apologetics is evangelism or discipleship depending on the situation.

Three scriptures (among many) that show that apologetics is an important ministry:

1. Matthew 28:20
2. Acts 22:1-21
3. 1 Peter 3:15

The job of an apologist is to affect a person intellectually such that the great truths of Christianity have a greater work in that person's life. An apologist helps others to have the beliefs that Jesus has.

## To Affect Intellectually

To *affect someone intellectually* is to affect their belief-making faculties. It's that simple. You might add to someone's beliefs, you might weaken someone's beliefs, or you might strengthen someone's beliefs. You might move someone to engage in thinking hard about the validity of his or her beliefs, and so on.

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<sup>1</sup> J.P. Moreland, Love Your God with All Your Mind, pg. 131

## How to Affect Someone Intellectually

You can affect someone intellectually by either giving them arguments or by affecting their perceptions.

### Arguments

The use of arguments in apologetics is called propositional apologetics. An argument is a series of sentences that is an attempt to use a person's beliefs to:

1. Cause them to form a belief, or
2. Cause them to lose a belief, or
3. Cause them to raise or lower confidence in an existing belief.

Though arguments for Christianity are *very* important, arguments are only one set of tools that the Christian apologist should be using. They should not be the only set of tools. Doing apologetics is more than giving arguments to someone.

### Perceptions

The use of non-arguments in apologetics is called non-propositional apologetics. You can affect someone intellectually by putting that person in a situation where his or her perceptions:

1. Cause them to form a belief, or
2. Cause them to lose a belief, or
3. Cause them to raise or lower confidence in an existing belief.

Consider what happens when you look at a red piece of paper. You form the belief, "That piece of paper is red." Thus, the paper affected you intellectually through the formation of a perception that caused you to form a belief.

## Non-propositional Apologetics

Whenever we are Christ-like, we impact those around us intellectually. This means that whenever we are Christ-like, we are potentially doing apologetics. For example, if I forgive someone who wronged me grievously, then that person might form a perception that causes him or her to form the belief, "Forgiveness is profound, and I need more of it."

### Sense of Divinity

As Christians, we should believe that all people have a perceptual sense called a *sense of divinity*.

This is suggested in Romans 1:20:

*For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.*

Paul teaches here that we should perceive God when we encounter nature.

John Calvin interprets Romans 1 like this:

*the structure of the world, and the most beautiful arrangement of the elements, ought to have induced man to glorify God.<sup>2</sup>*

Thomas Aquinas expresses a similar idea:

*to know in a general and confused way that God exists is implanted in us by nature.<sup>3</sup>*

Christian Philosopher [Alvin Plantinga](#) has the most well worked out defense that we have a sense of divinity. Here is Plantinga commenting on Calvin and explaining our sense of divinity:

*I'll take Calvin as suggesting that there is a kind of faculty (like sight or hearing) or a cognitive mechanism — what he calls a “sensus divinitatis” or sense of divinity — which in a wide variety of circumstances produces in us beliefs about God.<sup>4</sup>*

In short, we have a sense of God, a sense of the Divine, like we have a sense of smell. And, like how our sense of smell manifests when we smell roses, if we are put in the right situation, then our sense of the Divine manifests, and we acquire a perception of God that then results in beliefs about God.

Here's an example of the sense of the Divine in the life of the theologian and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer: In 1924, at 18 years old, Bonhoeffer was so moved by a Palm Sunday service that he attended in Rome that he wrote in his journal, “I am beginning, I believe, to understand the concept of ‘church’.”<sup>5</sup> Fascinatingly, Bonhoeffer seems to have begun to develop his theology of the Church through the triggering of his sense of the Divine, experienced while attending a church service.

### **Sin Caveat**

Importantly, sin has damaged our sense of the Divine. Because humanity rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden, we have inherited a sin nature, and a consequence of our sin nature is that our belief forming faculties are damaged. So, our sense of the Divine doesn't always work as it should.

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<sup>2</sup>John Calvin and John Owen, Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans, 67.

<sup>3</sup>Summa Theologiae I, q. 2 a. 1, ad 1.

<sup>4</sup>Alvin Plantinga, Knowledge and Christian Belief, pg. 33

<sup>5</sup>Eric Metaxas. Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy. Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition. 2010. pg. 53.

Thankfully, God has sent his Spirit to work to repair our belief forming faculties. Though, we are each still a work in progress who doesn't perceive God as he or she should.

## **Doing Non-Propositional Apologetics**

The best way to practice non-propositional apologetics is to live boldly like a follower of Jesus:

1. Be loving when others would hate.
2. Be kind when others would be cruel.
3. Forgive those who wrong you.
4. Repent to those whom you wrong.
5. Sing your heart out when you worship at church.
6. Sit silently when you spend time with someone who is grieving.
7. Invite others to church.
8. Tell others that you are a follower of Jesus.
9. Tell others how God is moving in your life.
10. If God has given you a reason to celebrate, then tell others that God has given you a reason to celebrate.

Doing these things provides an opportunity for those around you to be in a situation where they may take on more of the beliefs that Jesus has, and they may also experience a perception of the Divine.

There is no one who isn't prepared to do something on this list. As such, there is no one who isn't capable right now of practicing apologetics. It's true that doing the items on this list well requires training, but, because of Christ's work on the cross and the work of the Holy Spirit, we are all capable of engaging in such training. We just have to make a plan, find a mentor, or seek out a friend to help us. This is apologetics for everyone.

## **Four Resources to Get You Started**

These resources and these authors will help you begin to explore the vast world of Christian apologetics. You are encouraged to research these materials. By doing so you'll find other resources and authors.

*Knowledge and Christian Belief* by Alvin Plantinga

*Love Your God with All Your Mind* by J.P. Moreland

*Philosophical Foundation for a Christian Worldview* by J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig

*Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* by Greg Koukl