

## INTRODUCTION

**N**ot long after I began my apologetic ministry, I was asked by a Sunday school teacher to visit her class in order to deal with some questions she could not answer. I thought her request was odd. She taught fifth and sixth grade boys and girls. What theological questions could possibly interest ten- and eleven-year-old kids or be too difficult for their teacher to handle?

I agreed to the visit but suggested she have the children write in advance the questions they wanted answered. At their age, I assumed it would be difficult for them to think of relevant questions on the spot. I envisioned them asking such questions as, Were dinosaurs on the ark? How did Jesus walk on water? How old is God? Does God have a beard? Does God eat dinner? When I received their list, I realized how wrong I was.

I saved their questions, and I would like to share with you word-for-word what some of the children asked. It turned out that virtually all their questions were apologetic in nature. That is, they were concerned with a rational understanding and defense of the Christian faith. For example, they asked, “How will we know [Jesus] is real?” “How do we know that Jesus is the true Son of God, and He died on the cross?” “How will we know the Bible is real?” “How do we know that God really wrote the Bible?” “Who made God?” “If Adam and Eve did not sin, what would [the world] be like?” And my favorite, “Who made the maker of the maker of God?”

I was surprised at how sophisticated these questions were and how they parallel the kinds of questions adults usually ask. Later I shared them at a Christian education meeting. The teachers’

responses didn't surprise me at all. Many of them remarked, "I would like to know the answers to those questions myself!"

I have discovered over the years that the vast majority of Christians, even biblically literate ones, are virtually ignorant when it comes to understanding and applying the evidences for historic Christianity. Today's average Christian is easily plowed under by arguments of skeptics, critics, and cultists. This is a dangerous situation. Over the centuries, apologetics has played a crucial role in protecting the church against intellectual attacks and fraudulent religious claims. Every generation has witnessed renewed challenges to the faith, often spawned by prevailing misbeliefs, and every generation has witnessed the Lord raise up faithful apologists to defend orthodoxy.

In our time the average Christian has access to an amazing amount of diverse information. Knowledge and claims to truth wash upon us through educational institutions, newspapers, television, movies, magazines, radio, the internet, and other forms of communication. Through social media outlets, such as Facebook and Twitter, anyone can spout off as factual their personal religious beliefs, political perspectives, and moral preferences with little regard for truth. Sometimes these sources do convey truth and support Christianity. But more often they are used to propagate false theologies and philosophies. These beliefs are frequently dressed in appealing—if not deceptive—garb; many of them claim to be kindred souls of Christianity, the very worldview they seek to undermine while appealing to it to give them credibility.

It would take superhuman effort on the part of local churches to confront every spurious religion or philosophy that comes down the pike and to warn believers of their dangers. Consequently, at no time in church history has there been such a need for you—ordinary Christians—to rally to the defense of Christianity. We are confronted by a host of counterfeit religions, anti-Christian philosophies, and unsubstantiated scientific claims that seek to discredit

biblical truth. All such assaults demand that each of us be prepared to “contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people” (Jude 3).

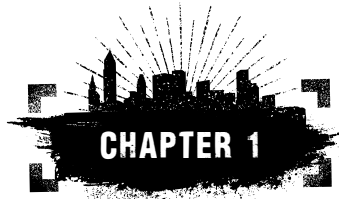
The vast array and spread of information is not the only factor which has led to an unprecedented proliferation of non-Christian ideologies and anti-Christian attacks. The other critical factor is the intellectual climate and shifting values in modern society. We no longer live in a society that filters deviant worldviews through the objective sieve of Christianity. We live today in what many historians refer to as a “pluralistic” and “post-Christian” world. What they mean by this is that Christianity has ceased to be the dominant force influencing Western culture’s religious beliefs and practices, moral standards, and other social norms. A host of other religions and philosophies are demanding cultural recognition and vying for the position Christianity once held.

As a result, more and more non-Christians (and even believers) are questioning Christianity’s authenticity and demanding proof of its truthfulness. They want to know why we believe Jesus Christ is God and what evidence we have for the biblical plan of salvation. They want to understand the Trinity, know why evil exists, and know what happens to people who never heard of Jesus when they die. Many are convinced that evolution refutes divine creation, and want to know why Christians disagree. If Christians are not prepared to answer these and other questions, non-Christians will assume we don’t have the answers. Unfortunately, most of us are unprepared to answer such questions. In fact, we want answers to the very same questions!

So I have written this book for two reasons. First, I want to help Christians such as yourself to see that Christianity is a reasonable and intelligent faith grounded on objective, verifiable evidences. I pray the Holy Spirit will use the contents of this book to reaffirm and strengthen your faith, to remove any doubts you may have about the authenticity of Christianity. In this way apologetics can spur you on to spiritual maturity.

Second, I have written this book as a tool for evangelism. Its information is designed to be shared with family members, friends, and coworkers who are critical of Christianity or who simply want honest, reliable answers to their questions about the truthfulness of our faith. If you feel uncomfortable or unequipped “to give a defense” (1 Peter 3:15 NASB) but have a heart to share and defend our Lord Jesus Christ, this book can help you.

What lies ahead in the following chapters is not exhaustive; every answer to every challenge against Christianity is not laid out here. However, you will find good, reasonable, honest answers to the questions and issues most often raised. If you strive to master this material, you will be prepared to defend your faith against the vast majority of criticism you’ll ever encounter. So let’s press ahead. A dying world needs answers, and we have the answers it needs.



## WHY DOES GOD WANT OUR DEFENSE?

**W**hen I became a Christian, all of my closest friends and most of my extended family were non-Christians. As you can imagine, it wasn't long before I was confronted with skepticisms and questions that, as a new believer, I couldn't answer. This, along with a desire to get answers to my *own* questions, prompted me to embark on a study of apologetics.

What I learned was so spiritually fulfilling and affirming to my faith that I wanted to share it with other believers. So I began a class to teach apologetics in my home church. One of the couples attending the study was preparing for the mission field. On the first night, after I explained what is apologetics, the husband raised the issue of why does God want our defense? He put it this way: "Why do we *need* apologetics? We have the Holy Spirit to convince unbelievers. I don't see why apologetics is even necessary." His comment illustrates the fact that the role of apologetics in the Christian life and its importance in evangelism are foreign to many believers.

Before we go any further we need to understand one thing: God *doesn't* need anything from us, much less our defense. The Bible is very clear about this. God gives to all people "life and breath and everything else" (Acts 17:25). We need Him, even to keep breathing moment by moment, since He sustains all of creation in existence (Col. 1:17). But there's nothing we have that He needs.

So let's rephrase the question. Does God *want* our defense? Does He want us to exert time and energy offering evidence to support the validity of Christianity?

If not, apologetics is at best a waste of time and at worse interferes with the ministry of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, if the Holy Spirit uses apologetics to convict and convince people of the truth, it is vital that we arm ourselves from the apologetic arsenal accumulated by the church over the past two millennia.

Our first task, then, is to discover what apologetics is and what an apologist does, so we can answer the question, “Does God want our defense and, if so, why?”

### Coming to Terms

The term *apologetics* has nothing to do with giving an apology. It’s derived from the Greek word *apologia*, which is found seven times in the New Testament (Acts 22:1; 25:16; 1 Cor. 9:3; Phil. 1:7,16; 2 Tim. 4:16; 1 Peter 3:15). The English equivalent of *apologia* is “defense” (literally, a “speech for the defense”), and it’s translated that way in 1 Peter 3:15 in the New American Standard and New King James versions of the Bible. In the original Greek language, *apologia* had a definite legal connotation. It was a technical term in ancient Greek law.<sup>1</sup> When *apologia* is used in the New Testament, it describes a public defense of the gospel, as illustrated in Acts 22:1. Sometimes, in fact, this defense was carried out in a court of law (Acts 25:16; 2 Tim. 4:16).

Of course, apologetics didn’t die out in the first century when the apostles left the scene. Christianity came under attack from numerous sources; so many believers took up the challenges and answered them with all the intellectual resources available. Indeed, many church fathers, such as Justin Martyr (AD ca.100–167) and Irenaeus (AD ca.120–203), were both theologians and apologists. As a result of their courageous efforts, Christianity finally won political acceptance in the fourth century—a victory that allowed Christianity to spread throughout the world until even our own day.<sup>2</sup>

Over the centuries, the apologetic discipline has been understood in a variety of ways.<sup>3</sup> But perhaps one of the best definitions in our time flowed from the mind of the late Edward John Carnell, former Professor of Apologetics at Fuller Theological Seminary. According

to Carnell, apologetics “is that branch of Christian theology which answers the question, Is Christianity rationally defensible?”<sup>24</sup> In other words, can Christianity be defended (and therefore substantiated) by using the same procedures reasonable people everywhere use to determine the truthfulness of anything—whether it be a scientific, historical, legal, philosophical, or religious question? For example, can Christians defend the authenticity and authority of the Bible? Can they demonstrate that the Bible contains accurate and truthful information and does not contradict itself? Can Christianity defend the claim that Jesus Christ is God incarnate (that He took on bodily form) and that Jesus “died for our sins . . . , that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3–4)? In a word, can Christianity stand the test of critical scrutiny in all its truth-claims?

The answer is yes, and in the following chapters I’ll provide reasonable, verifiable responses to most of the questions and challenges raised by non-Christian skeptics and other critics. But first, let’s look more closely at why God wants our defense.

### **A Job Description**

The task of apologetics is to give a reasoned defense of historical, biblical Christianity. As the late theologian and apologist, R. C. Sproul, explains, apologetics demonstrates “why Christians are Christians and why non-Christians should be Christians.”<sup>25</sup> In order to do this, we need to learn what unbelievers believe and what obstacles are preventing them from seriously considering Christianity. Once we identify these obstacles, we can attempt to overcome them through the appropriate means. Intellectual objections require intellectual answers; emotion problems require emotional support and sensitivity. The apologetic job description is no mystery: communicate Christian truths to non-Christians in such a way that they will listen. The goal is always evangelistic—to lead non-Christians to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Apologetics is not preaching. But apologetics does clear the way for the proclamation of the

Christian message. This is why apologetics is sometimes referred to as “pre-evangelism.” You might say, if Jesus is the message, apologetics is the John the Baptist to Jesus; it rids the path of obstacles to the Savior as it points to Him as the one and only way.

I will expand on this job description as we move ahead, but I want to emphasize here that the responsibility of giving a reasoned defense of Christianity is *not* the job of a select few theologians who specialize in apologetics. The Bible makes it clear that the job of defending Christianity belongs to every Christian and that all of us should be prepared to do this at any time. In 1 Peter 3:15, the apostle Peter instructs us to always be “ready to make a defense (*apologia*) to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you” (NASB). Just as all Christians are called to evangelize, so all are called to defend their faith.

Jude supports Peter’s exhortation and expands on it too. He tells us to “contend for the faith that was once . . . entrusted to God’s holy people” (Jude 3). In his letter, Jude instructs his readers to defend Christianity against the false teachings that were arising in the church. So not only are we to defend Christianity against the attacks of those who distance themselves from Christianity (such as atheists and skeptics), but we are to defend it against those who call themselves friends of the faith while undermining its historic, orthodox teachings (two examples would be Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses).

Non-Christians deserve to hear and understand the case for Christianity. When unbelievers voice intellectual objections (real or imagined), or ask genuine questions, they should receive concrete, verifiable answers that support the authenticity and authority of Christianity. We live a world with many contradicting beliefs and claims. If we don’t provide legitimate answers to the non-Christian’s objections and questions, he or she will assume we don’t have any answers and will seek religious truth elsewhere. Too much is at stake to allow this to happen, especially when we have the evidential resources to provide adequate answers to honest questions.



### **Why the Effort?**

This may sound like a lot of effort. And frankly, it is. So why do it? Don't we have enough to do already? Trying to understand our spouse, raising our kids, hacking our way through school, maintaining our sanity on the job, paying bills, finding time to pray and study the Bible . . . and now you want to add one more responsibility? I'm afraid so. But please note this, and this is extremely important: *God* commands you and I to defend the faith; it's not my idea. The passages cited from 1 Peter and Jude are enough to confirm that.

"Okay," you might say. "Granted, God tells me to give a reason for my faith and answer challenges to it. If I do that, what's the payoff? What will it accomplish?" More than you or I could ever imagine, but let me give you a taste.

### ***Glorifies God***

The foremost purpose of apologetics is to bring glory to God by honoring and serving His Son, Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul tells us that "whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). Elsewhere he adds, "Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col. 3:17). By defending the truths of God, we defend His honor and name.

### ***Exonerates Christianity***

Because we live in a world that embraces a profusion of opposing worldviews, people have an incredible smorgasbord of options. When religious convictions clash—when contradicting beliefs all declare to reflect divine truth—logic says that only one side can be right. But which set of beliefs should someone accept? Without any clear, objective way of choosing, we might throw up our arms in despair and reject all religions, believing that there is no way to intelligently discern which, if any, really is true. Or we might arbitrarily choose one, or even sample several options to try and discover

what we like best. But then truth would be abandoned in favor of personal preference.

Challenges to the faith may come in the form of a false religion claiming to supersede Christianity as the one true religion. They may come from secular humanism or atheistic evolution, which claim God doesn't exist and all religions are human creations. They may come from postmodernism, which claims there are no absolute truths or objective moral values and that all religious beliefs are equally legitimate. They may come from Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses canvassing the neighborhood. Or they may flow from your next-door neighbor, a family member, college professor, or coworker in the form of objections to the Jesus of the Gospels. No matter what form challenges take, when apologetics confronts them effectively, it exonerates Christianity.

### ***Strengthens Believers***

Many Christians are comfortable in their faith and don't feel a need to corroborate it with evidence. This is certainly admirable. Jesus Himself said to doubting Thomas, who demanded "proof" that Jesus rose from the grave: "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). But even Jesus provided Thomas with the evidence he desired (vv. 24–27).

Likewise, many of us desire the affirmation of apologetics to strengthen our faith. Much of the world rejects Jesus Christ as God along with all the other major tenets of the Christian faith. Believers are confronted with non-Christian ideologies that contradict or attempt to refute our sacred beliefs. God can and does use apologetics to help believers whose faith is wavering and to ease the suffering caused by doubt. Apologetics can be especially reassuring to new believers seeking to rationally justify their step of faith. It is a wonderful and joyful experience to discover that our faith is firmly grounded on objective truths that are confirmed by sensible, verifiable evidences.

### ***Makes Christianity Relevant***

Although many of the current attacks against Christianity are the same as those that confronted the early church, nevertheless, each generation has its own set of particular objections. And Christians of each generation have a responsibility to address those objections.

Cultures and societies change, so we shouldn't expect the problems of this generation to be the same as the former one or the next. For example, second-century apologists debated pagans who accused Christians of atheism, incest, and cannibalism (because believers claimed to "eat" the body of Christ; see John 6:51–63). Obviously, second-century unbelievers either misunderstood or purposely perverted the true meaning of certain Christian beliefs and practices. Today, these accusations against Christians are nonexistent.

On the other hand, twenty-first century apologists deal with issues that didn't plague the second-century church. Today's unique apologetic challenges include philosophical naturalism (the belief that nothing exists outside nature and natural laws, including the supernatural) and various New Age philosophies that have evolved out of Eastern pantheism. More recently, aggressive attacks from the so-called "new atheism" have gained wide public attention, alongside a growing acceptance of moral relativism and religious pluralism. Both would like nothing better than to rid society of any remnant of Christianity. We also have to confront the swelling ranks of thoroughly unchurched, indifferent, non-religious people who have little outward concern for spiritual things and no interest at all in Christianity. We even have to deal with a host of heretical cults and aberrant theologies that try to appear Christian while subverting the orthodox understanding of the faith.

We certainly have much to handle, but apologetics provides the resources we need to meet these challenges head-on.

### ***Prepares Students for Secular College***

In today's post-Christian world, being raised in a Christian home and having a good foundation in the Bible are not enough to prevent

many young Christians from being seduced by the thoroughly secular philosophies and alluring worldly values of academia. Upon entering secular universities and colleges, kids are immediately confronted by professors who teach Darwinian evolution as scientific fact; who teach a reconstructed version of history that diminishes the importance of Western culture and deemphasizes the achievements of America's greatest heroes; who loudly decry traditional moral values; who expound their belief that absolute truth is non-existent in virtually all areas of knowledge; and who blatantly claim all religions are primitive superstitions that the world would be better off discarding. The distressing result is that up to 80 percent of evangelical Christian kids walk away from their faith during their college years.<sup>6</sup>

I firmly believe that apologetics can be a major factor in stopping this exodus of young Christians from their faith. Apologetic training, however, must be done *before* young people leave home to attend college or enter the secular workforce. Christian scholar Nancy Pearcey gives an insightful comment relevant to this: "A recent study by Fuller Seminary found that when teens graduate from high school, they often "graduate from God" as well. But the research also discovered one factor that proved most effective in helping young people retain their Christian convictions. What would you expect it to be? More prayer? More Bible study? As important as those things are, surprisingly, the most significant factor was whether they had a safe place to wrestle with doubts and questions *before* leaving home."<sup>7</sup>

Youth leaders *must* embark on a course of study that trains teenagers in the kinds of anti-Christian philosophies and worldviews they will encounter in secular universities and colleges—and how to refute them apologetically. If young people learn to recognize when their professors (and classmates) are peddling untruths and misrepresenting Christianity, it will provide them with a shield of protection against the anti-Christian rhetoric and false ideologies commonplace in modern academia.

### ***Evangelizes the Lost***

The final purpose I'll touch on is what apologetics does for evangelism.

Christianity has a lot of competitors. Many millions of people worldwide are bypassing Christianity and sampling as well as aligning themselves with cults and other false religions. Bouncing from one unhealthy and unfulfilling ideology to another, Christianity is just another item on the menu of available religions. So tempting is the smorgasbord of religious beliefs that even many Christians taste these religious flavors. Some Christians bring these erroneous ideas into the church, while others abandon the faith altogether.

In light of this, since all religions claim to provide spiritual fulfillment and to meet emotional needs, the purpose of apologetics is to lay a factual foundation for faith so non-Christians searching for spiritual truth will find good reasons to believe. We must, on the one hand, give convincing reasons why other religions are fraudulent, and, on the other hand, give convincing reasons why Christianity is authentic. Apologetics involves not only defending Christianity against skeptics and critics but also challenging the truth-claims of other worldviews and religions.

If we do our job well, we will present such compelling evidence for Christianity that if one chooses to reject Jesus Christ, he or she will know the reason why. No intellectual reasons will be cited because the overwhelming preponderance of evidence endorses Christianity. There will be a realization that rejection of the faith is based on an unwillingness to make the sacrifices that a commitment to Christ will ultimately convict them to make. Unbelief is ultimately moral and willful, not intellectual. Once a person sees this, we have done our job as apologists. And, hopefully, the unbeliever will be ready to hear why a person needs Jesus Christ and how Jesus changes lives—if Christ is allowed to.

### **What Does the Bible Say?**

Now that we know what apologetics is and what it can do, let's make sure it has a firm foundation in the Christian's most important book—the Bible.

Apologetics played an essential part in the spread and life of the early church and, as pointed out previously, many of the church fathers were theologians *and* apologists. But what may be surprising is that we can also see apologetics at work in the Bible. In fact the New Testament includes many responses to critics of an apologetic nature. We can see this in the evangelistic endeavors of the apostles and even in the ministry of Jesus. Let's take a look, beginning with Jesus.

### ***Jesus as an Apologist***

Unlike many Christians today, who think their only responsibility in evangelism is to give the plan of salvation along with their personal testimony, Jesus spent much of His time answering questions and rebuking the religious leaders of their distortion of God's Word. When Jesus was questioned by the Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, and others who wanted to discredit Him, He never hesitated to argue for the truth of Scripture. Throughout His ministry, Jesus endorsed His divine credentials with "proofs" (see John 5:36; 20:30–31). For example, Jesus proved His divine right to forgive sins by healing a paralytic (Luke 5:17–24). In another instance, when John the Baptist sent disciples to inquire if Jesus was the anticipated Messiah, Jesus responded: "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised . . ." (Luke 7:22). In other words, if you won't believe My words, believe My miracles (empirical evidences), which demonstrate My messianic credentials.

The most explicit example of Jesus offering evidence to support His claim to deity is His response to doubting Thomas. In John 20, Jesus first appears to the other disciples before He appears to Thomas (vv. 19–24). When the disciples tell Thomas they have seen the Lord alive, Thomas responds, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe" (v. 25). Thomas would not accept the good news of the risen Christ unless he had empirical proof.

How did Jesus respond? Did He ignore Thomas and turn away from him because he wanted evidence for belief? Did He say that Thomas's desire for proof was a sign of spiritual immaturity? Not at all. Instead, our Lord gave Thomas exactly the kind of evidences he requested; He responded specifically to Thomas's particular obstacle to faith. Jesus appeared to Thomas and invited him to examine the signs of His crucifixion. Thomas was immediately convinced and pronounced the very words that Jesus calls all unbelievers to utter: "My Lord and my God!" Afterward, Jesus reminded Thomas that he should have accepted the testimony of the other disciples, but Jesus first gave Thomas the evidence he needed to encourage a step of faith.

### ***The Apostles as Apologists***

Like Jesus, the apostles actively used apologetics in their evangelism. They gave their personal testimonies, not to evangelize or defend Christianity, but to *confirm* their message. In the book of Acts, the apostle Paul furnishes the most explicit examples of this.

Paul's custom was to "reason" with the Jews in the synagogues of the various cities he visited. In Acts 19:8, for example, Paul "entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, *reasoning* and persuading them about the kingdom of God" (NASB, emphasis mine). In Acts 26:1, Paul stood before Agrippa and "began his defense" (see also Phil. 1:16). Perhaps the best example of New Testament apologetics is Paul's defense of Jesus's resurrection before the Greek philosophers at the Areopagus (Acts 17:16–31). Paul methodically builds his case for Christ by appealing to the Greeks sense of the divine, the fact of creation, and even their own poets (v. 28).

The apostles used many other apologetic techniques as well to make their case. They referred to eyewitness accounts (2 Peter 1:16; 1 John 1:1), careful research and documentation (Luke 1:1–4), the common knowledge of their audience (Acts 26:26), fulfilled Old Testament prophecy (v. 22), and legal reasoning (25:16). The apostles

also instructed their followers to defend the gospel as they did (see 2 Tim. 2:24–26; 4:2–5; Titus 1:9–14).

### **Is Apologetics Necessary?**

In spite of all this support for doing apologetics, some Christians hold on to the belief that apologetics is anti-faith and anti-Holy Spirit. These Christians think apologetics is unnecessary because they claim that (1) non-Christians don't need it as a foundation for a step of faith, and (2) in evangelism the Holy Spirit works only as an agent of conviction when one gives their personal testimony and shares the plan of salvation right from Scriptures.

These claims disturb me. They reveal a lack of understanding of apologetics' role in evangelism and the Holy Spirit's work in the lives of unbelievers. This is such an important issue that I want to spend some time commenting on it. Here's why I reject this.

Consider the first objection, that apologetics plays no important role in an unbeliever's step of faith. Underlying this is confusion between the relationship of faith and reason. The argument goes something like this: A person becomes a Christian by accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior only by faith. If reason is involved, the faith element is missing. Consequently, any attempt to reason a person into accepting Jesus is at best a useless endeavor and at worst unspiritual—it usurps the power and authority of the Holy Spirit. A person cannot be argued into the kingdom.

I do not deny that people are ultimately saved by a step of faith. Nor do I question the fact that innumerable people have become Christians without ever questioning the truth of Christianity. Moreover, it's also true that the most sophisticated and thorough apologetic arguments provide probable, not air-tight, evidence for Christianity's truth-claims. On the other hand, it's simply untrue to say that no one needs apologetics as a foundation for a step of faith. Many notable Christian scholars and apologists, such as C. S. Lewis, John Warwick Montgomery, Josh McDowell, and Lee Strobel, to name a few, came to faith after examining the evidences for the



Christian religion. The fact is, reason and faith are inseparable—you cannot have one without the other. Let me explain what I mean.

First, Christianity affirms that we were created with a free will, the ability to choose. Therefore, any of us can refuse to accept evidences for Christianity no matter how compelling they are. Furthermore, if people insist on having absolute proof that Jesus is Lord and Savior, they will never get it. Absolute proof, in the sense that most critics mean it, would necessitate Jesus Himself physically confronting every unsaved person face-to-face and demonstrating, as He did to Thomas, that He really is the risen Lord. That just doesn't happen. So somewhere along the pilgrimage to salvation, a person must accept Christ on faith.

However, God is the author of human reason just as He is the author of our faith. Although because of the fall, human sin has weakened our ability to reason (see Eph. 4:18), this faculty is not so impaired that we cannot make rational decisions or discern truth from error. Otherwise, any attempt God would have made to communicate to us would have been in vain, for none of us would ever have been able to understand Him.

The foremost commandment, according to Jesus, is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your *mind* and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30, emphasis mine; see Deut. 6:5). Our minds are an important part of our love and acceptance of the Lord. God created us as rational creatures capable of processing and understanding data. In fact by virtue of being created in God's image, our ability to think rationally is a God-given attribute that separates human beings from all other creatures. This is why things need to make sense to us if we are to accept them. We violate our created human nature when we try to embrace something that our mind rejects as irrational. This is one source of nagging doubts.

Am I saying that faith is dependent on reason? No. But I am saying that faith is impossible without knowledge, and knowledge comes through our ability to reason. Faith and knowledge are

bedfellows; they are not enemies. Is it possible to become a Christian without understanding what Christianity is all about? The apostle Paul didn't think so: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? . . . Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ" (Rom. 10:14, 17). The Bible clearly teaches that knowledge is needed prior to salvation; the church has never separated knowledge from belief.

To sum this up, faith doesn't exist in a vacuum. A person must have knowledge *about* Jesus before they can believe *in* Jesus and accept Him by faith as Lord and Savior. This knowledge comes from the Bible, is confirmed by the Holy Spirit, and demonstrated by apologetic evidences. The goal of Christian apologetics, then, is not to coerce people into accepting Christ on blind faith but to lead them to make an *informed* decision for the Lord. The kind of faith believers receive from the Holy Spirit is an intelligent faith. Our apologetic job is to help unbelievers arrive at saving faith by appealing to their God-given capacity to rationally evaluate legitimate evidences for the Christian faith—and then respond accordingly. When a person takes the step from intellectual understanding and acceptance to subjective certainty, he or she has taken a step of faith. Not blind faith, but faith empowered by the Holy Spirit and resting on a foundation of facts.

Faith	Reason
God the Source	God the Source
Act of Will	Act of Mind
Believes Truth	Knows Truth
Involves Trust	Involves Logic and Evidence
Founded on Facts	Deals with Facts
Rejects Contradictions	Exposes Contradictions
Consistent with Reason	Consistent with Faith
End of Reason	Beginning of Faith
Guides Reason	Affirms Faith

Now let's consider the second and closely related objection: the Holy Spirit acts as an agent of conviction only when believers share their testimony and witness directly from Scripture. There are no biblical grounds for this belief, and it flies in the face of what we observe in the ordinary world. Untold numbers of Christians can testify to the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives through unpleasant circumstances and other life experiences, through Christian literature other than the Bible, through observing the lifestyles of Christians, and through a variety of other methods. In other words, the Holy Spirit convicts anyway He deems best for the individual He is calling.

Christians, then, need to understand that the Holy Spirit can also work just as effectively and actively through the medium of apologetics as He can through the "Four Spiritual Laws" or any other structured presentation of the biblical plan of salvation. As Professor Carnell put it, "when one defends his faith, he is not in competition with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God draws men *through* the convicting power of evidences."<sup>8</sup>

What a preacher or an apologist says doesn't bring a person to saving faith or cause a sinner to repent, no matter what a fine orator one is or how trained in theology or the art of evangelism one happens to be (see John 16:7-15). The Holy Spirit is the agent of salvation, and He can just as easily use a well-presented apologetic defense to overcome an obstacle to faith as the most eloquent sermon. The words of a preacher or an apologist are only as good as the degree to which the Holy Spirit has prepared a person to receive them (see Acts 16:14; 1 Cor. 3:5-7). Consequently, the claim that apologetics is void of the Holy Spirit is simply naïve. The claim puts God in a box by limiting the ability of the Holy Spirit to work through any circumstance or message He chooses. Our responsibility is to create an environment in which the Holy Spirit is set free to work in the lives of non-Christians regardless of the obstacles that separate them from accepting the love of Jesus Christ. We must convey saving truth to them. The Holy Spirit's responsibility is to open their hearts and minds so they will be willing to receive it.

### The Bottom Line

Christianity is not a *mystical* religion, such as many Eastern religions and their New Age clones. Neither is it a *mythical* religion with idols and man-made gods. Nor is Christianity a *misinformed* religion, such as the various cults. Rather, Christianity is a historical religion, and its truth-claims are grounded on objective, historical facts.

When God came to earth as the incarnate Son, Jesus, He did so in a discernible way. It was a space/time advent perceptible by ordinary senses. Jesus was a physical man, and His deeds, including His resurrection, were witnessed by ordinary people (see 1 Cor. 15:6). His coming was not an esoteric event seen by a privileged few. His advent and the documents that record and comment on it can be checked out by normal methods of investigation, the same methods that are applied to other areas of knowledge.

This book is written to do just that. In the remaining chapters, I will present historical, legal, scientific, and other concrete, verifiable evidences for the central claims of Christianity. And you will be able to take these evidences into the marketplace of religious ideas and philosophical assumptions and use them to defend the faith and the hope that lies in each of us who believe.