



7

Starting with Scripture

Key Themes

- God's Word is the standard we use to judge every thought.
- God's existence makes sense of the entire universe.

Key Passages

- 1 Peter 3:14–17; 2 Corinthians 10:1–6; Acts 17; Proverbs 26:4–5

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Distinguish between evidential and presuppositional apologetic approaches.
- Explain the “Don’t Answer-Answer” apologetic strategy.
- Recognize that it is the Holy Spirit who brings conviction leading to salvation.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

As students arrive, provide slips of paper to mark 1 Peter 3:14; 2 Corinthians 10:1; Acts 17; Proverbs 26:4. Write this multiple choice question on the board before class begins: The goal of Christian apologetics is to A. persuade people to believe in the Bible. B. apologize for the wacky things Christians believe. C. persuade people to believe in Christ. D. give a reasoned defense for Christian beliefs.



Studying God’s Word

page 4

Apologetics is the defense of the Christian’s hope in Christ. All believers are called to give a reason for the hope they have. We should unashamedly use the Bible to make our defense.

- Study the Prepare to Share section.
- Go Before the Throne.
- Recommended: watch the video *The Ultimate Proof of Creation*.



Activity: Foolproof Apologetics Video

page 9

View the two *Foolproof Apologetics* video segments.

- TV and DVD player or computer
- Resource DVD-ROM to show video clips



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

To prepare for this lesson, read and meditate on 1 Peter 3:14–17; 2 Corinthians 10:1–6; Acts 17; Proverbs 26:4–5.

The Bible is the only revealed Word of God. We trust that it contains truth from the Creator of the universe. When God created, He made a universe that was perfect, but that perfection was short lived. The Fall of mankind into sin is chronicled in Genesis 3. Sin's impact in the world is so extensive that it has even corrupted the thinking process. Man is not inclined toward God but has actually set his mind against God (Romans 8:5–8). The natural man's mind cannot understand spiritual things because the Holy Spirit is not present within him (1 Corinthians 2:14). It is extremely important that we keep this in mind as we seek to share the truths of Scriptures with people living in a fallen state.

Scripture tells us that we are called to share the gospel with the world (Matthew 28:19–20), to defend the faith and hope we have in Christ (1 Peter 3:15), and attack the arguments made against God (2 Corinthians 10:1–6). We are to speak words of truth to a lost world, but it is not our words that bring about salvation—it is the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciples that the Helper would come to convict the world of sin (John 16:7–11). It is also the Spirit who brings new life as someone repents and puts his trust in Christ (John 3:5–8). While Christians are charged with speaking the words of life, the Holy Spirit is solely responsible for enabling the sinner to repent and believe in Christ. We should not place the burden of conversion on ourselves—it is the work of God the Spirit.

We might present piles of evidence and an articulate case for the existence of God, but the unbelieving mind is blind to the spiritual truths we are proclaiming, and they will reject the truth. There are many examples of people rejecting the evidence that was set right before them. This is because everyone interprets evidence in light of his or her worldview. Many people saw Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead. Many believed in Him, but some went away in unbelief (John 11:43–48). As Jesus explained the account of the rich man and Lazarus, He made it clear through Abraham's words that even if one rises from the dead, people would not believe. Abraham

appealed to Moses and the prophets (an allusion to the Scriptures) as the source of truth for the living to look to (Luke 16:19–31). Scripture contains the words of eternal life. Even after Christ's resurrection and appearance, some doubted (Matthew 28:17). What makes us think that our arguments should be placed above the truths of Scripture as we defend the faith?

As we look for a model for defending the faith, we should appeal to the Bible. Paul used Scripture. Peter used Scripture. Jesus used Scripture. Even when addressing the pagans at the Areopagus, Paul presented biblical doctrines of God as the Creator as the very foundation of his argument. He then moved directly to a call to repentance and the Resurrection of Christ (Acts 17:19–34). He did not shy away from presenting biblical truths in the face of a pagan audience—he used Scripture from the beginning of his argument. We would do well to follow his example.

APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

Many people have a misunderstanding of Christian apologetics. This curriculum is different from most in that it specifically intends to weave apologetic principles into the concepts being studied. Apologists are not interested in providing "I'm sorry that . . ." statements about biblical beliefs. Apologetics comes from 1 Peter 3:15 where believers are called to "always be ready to give a defense" for the hope they have in Christ. We take the term apologetics from the Greek word *apologia*—a reasoned defense of the hope we have. Likewise, Paul calls believers to tear down strongholds and cast down arguments that are set forth against God (2 Corinthians 10:1–6).

Knowing that we are to be prepared to give a defense for our faith, we must consider how we give that defense. There are many different apologetic methods, but we want to make sure that the method we employ comes from Scripture. The many approaches fall into two basic camps: evidential and presuppositional. The evidential approach uses probabilities and natural revelation to attempt to persuade the unbeliever that there is a god and that the most reasonable answer to who that god is can be found in the Bible. This is the approach of the Intelligent Design Movement, classical apologetics,

and various other forms that make the initial arguments without calling on Scripture.

The presuppositional approach is not against the use of evidence, as is commonly claimed, but starts with the assumption that the Bible is true. Rather than setting the Bible aside because the unbeliever doesn't accept its truthfulness, the Bible is put forward as the standard of truth and arguments are made from that truth. Rather than attempting to reason to God, presuppositional apologetics reasons from God's Word. Romans 1 makes it clear that everyone knows that God exists from the creation that surrounds them. If the biblical God did not exist, even making an argument would be impossible. Only the biblical God can explain the existence of natural laws, logic, and the ability to know anything.

The basic concept of this apologetic method is found in Proverbs 26:4–5 which says, “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.”

On the surface, these verses seem to contradict one another. However, they actually offer a biblical method for apologetics. This has been framed by Dr. Jason Lisle, a speaker and apologist for Answers in Genesis, as the “Don’t Answer-Answer” strategy: don’t accept the unbiblical reasoning of an unbeliever lest you think like him; answer the unbeliever using his own philosophy (worldview) and show him how it leads to foolishness.

When defending the faith, we must draw attention to the heart of the matter—the different starting points of the arguments. Remember that everyone looks at the world through a set of lenses—a worldview. We must not accept the idea that there is neutral ground to argue from. We must rely on Scripture as our anchor when defending the faith.

Please consider watching the video The Ultimate Proof of Creation, which is available from the Online Resource Page, for more explanation of this topic. A portion of this video will be used in this lesson.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

From its very beginning, the church has given a defense for the hope that believers have in Christ. Peter

stood among the crowds on the Day of Pentecost and from Scripture boldly defended what was happening among them (Acts 2:14–41). Stephen presents another example, giving a defense before the council who would condemn him to death. Paul also gave a defense from Scripture as he traveled through Europe and reasoned in the synagogues and marketplaces. All of these men used Scripture as the foundation for their defense of the faith—their apologetic.

As the church grew, many great men rose up to defend the faith. Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Irenaeus, Thomas Aquinas, Jerome, and many others wrote in defense of the faith; however, they used different forms of argument. Some started from nature attempting to demonstrate that God was necessary. Some began from the philosophy of causes (cosmological argument); some from apparent design and purpose in the universe (teleology); and others from various points of philosophy. Many abandoned the authority of Scripture in their arguments.

Although many of those arguments have merit, they cannot be divorced from the truths of Scripture. We must start with the presupposition of God’s Word as the ultimate truth. If we only convince someone that there is a god, we have failed to share the truth of Scripture. We must communicate who God is and what He has done through Christ—truths found only in the Bible.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Lord God, I humbly come before your throne of grace and thank you that you have been pleased to send Christ into this world to pay for my sins. I know that it is only because of His work that I am accepted, and you see His righteousness when you look at me. Thank you that you have been pleased to reveal yourself in the Bible. Help me to handle it correctly and to teach it in a manner that is honoring to you. Help the students embrace your Word and honor it in their lives. May we handle your truths rightly and allow them to conform us more and more into the image of Christ.

► **Pace your lesson!** You can use the provided clocks to indicate the time each section should be completed to keep the lesson on schedule. While teaching, you can compare your anticipated times with the actual time and shorten or drop sections as necessary.





Review

Last week we talked about three biblical tests that could be applied against any claims to new revelation from God. We have previously discussed the 66 books of the Bible and described their authority as coming from God.

- ? Who can remember one of the tests and give an example of how it can be applied?

Work through the three tests to review the principles from last week's lesson:

- Does it make false predictions?
- Does it add to or take away from the 66 books of the Bible?
- Does it make statements that contradict the Bible?

Today's lesson is a bit of a change. We are going to be stepping back to take a look at the nature of apologetics.

- ? Can anyone tell me what apologetics means?
Apologetics is the defense of the Christian faith.

Throughout our study in *Answers Bible Curriculum*, apologetics principles will be included. To understand what biblical apologetics is, we need to take a look at the passage of Scripture that gives us the basis for this practice. Depending on the amount of time you have, you may want to summarize the points taught from the 1 Peter passage to allow time for the video at the end of the lesson.



- As students arrive, provide slips of paper to mark
1 Peter 3:14, 2
Corinthians 10:1, Acts
17, and Proverbs 26:4.

1 Peter 3:14–17

- Write the following multiple choice question on the board:
The goal of Christian apologetics is to A. persuade people to believe in the Bible; B. apologize for the wacky things Christians believe; C. persuade people to believe in Christ; D. give a reasoned defense for Christian beliefs.



Studying God's Word

READ THE WORD

Let's read 1 Peter 3:14–17 together. Have someone read the passage aloud

EXAMINE THE WORD

Many of you are probably familiar with verse 15, but it is rarely put in the context of suffering for the sake of Christ, and the last four words of verse 15 are often left out.

Observe the Text

Refer to the Bible Study poster to remind your students how to dig deeper into God's Word by asking the right questions.

- ? Who is Peter writing to in this epistle? Looking back to verse 2:21 and following, Peter is addressing believers.
- ? What does suffering lead to in verse 14? Blessing.
- ? Rather than being afraid, what two commands appear in verse 15? Sanctify God and be ready to give a defense.
- ? Who is the defense to be given to? Everyone who asks about our hope.
- ? How is the defense to be delivered? With meekness and fear.

- What are the results of answering in meekness and fear? *Having a good conscience and bringing shame on those who defame you.*
- What is the historical context of the epistle in which we find this passage? *According to chapter 1, Peter is addressing dispersed Christians who are facing various trials (1:6) from those outside the church.*
- What is the main point of the passage? *We are to offer a defense to those who ask about the hope we have in Christ.*

Discover the Truth

Let's focus on seven words and phrases in verse 15: sanctify, always, ready, defense, reason, "hope that is within you," and "meekness and fear." Write these words and phrases on the board.

- What does it mean to sanctify God in our hearts? *We are to set God apart. God is to be the most important thing in our hearts.*

This is the first step in apologetics. If we do not begin by having a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and if our relationship with Him is not the center of our lives, the rest of this discussion is meaningless.

- What does the word *always* mean? *Always means all the time.*
- What are we to do *always*? *To be ready.*

Apologetics is something we must always be ready to do. Being ready implies preparation. Some translations such as the NIV and ESV have the word *prepared* instead of the word *ready*. We must study God's Word ahead of time if we are going to always be ready to follow God's command in this verse.

- How often are we to be ready? *Always.*

As you came in, I had a question on the board for you to consider. Since you probably didn't bring a Greek lexicon to class with you, I would like to give you one of the words in this passage in Greek. The word *defense* in Greek is from the root *apologia*. This is the word from which we get apologetics. Its basic meaning is a reasoned defense of beliefs or actions. This same root is used when Paul stood before Festus in the book of Acts and provided a defense against the charges being brought against him.

- What are we to defend? *The hope that is in us.*
- What is this hope that Peter is speaking of? *It is the hope of salvation in Christ and the future hope of glory in heaven.*
- Why is this verse on giving a reason for our hope surrounded by mention of suffering? *As we represent the truths of Scripture and the person of Christ, the world will hate us just as it hated Him. Standing for truth will be costly in a world that is hostile to the message of the Cross.*
- What does the phrase "meekness and fear" mean? *Allow students to answer.*

This does not mean that we are to be afraid of those we are talking to, but rather that we are to speak without boasting or arrogance. We must be confident but not full of pride.

?

What might happen if we do not respond in meekness and fear?

Unbelievers would have a right to defame us and we should be ashamed of our actions as ambassadors for Christ.

?

Which of the answers to the question on the board

seems to be the most accurate in light of this passage? D.
give a reasoned defense for Christian beliefs.



READ THE WORD

So apologetics is providing a reasoned defense for the faith that we have in Christ and the hope that it gives us. We must be prepared to engage in apologetics, and we must approach people with humility, not arrogance. Typically, we would practice apologetics as we interact with people who have questions about what we believe. It is different from evangelism—sharing the core of the gospel—but often interconnected with it. Evangelism and apologetics could be considered two sides of the same coin.

This leads us to the question of how to properly engage in apologetics. Does the Bible give us a framework? Are there examples of biblical figures practicing it? Are there different schools of thought? *Ask these as rhetorical questions to frame the following discussion.*

When we look at the types of apologetics, there are basically two kinds: evidentialists and presuppositionalists. These are unfortunate terms since evidentialists have presuppositions and presuppositionalists use evidence.

?

What is a presupposition? *Something believed in advance; the starting point of our thinking.*

The basic difference is that evidentialists tend to leave the Bible out of their reasoning, at least to begin with, but presuppositionalists demand that the Bible be the foundation for every argument presented in defense of the faith. Evidentialists do not presuppose the truth of the Bible in their arguments, but presuppositionalists do.

For example, If you know anything about the Intelligent Design movement, they argue in an evidential manner. They purposefully leave the Bible and any specific “creator” out of their arguments against naturalistic evolution. They argue without starting from the truth of Scripture. However, believing in a generic “designer” does not bring someone to salvation. Paul took an opposite approach and states very clearly that it is the gospel, not arguments about blood-clotting and DNA, that is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16).

Acts 17

Let's read Acts 17 together to see how Paul approached a crowd of unbelievers when they called him to give a defense for the teachings he

was proclaiming in the synagogues and the public square. If you have time, read the entire chapter. If time is short, focus on verses 1–4, 10–12, and 16–34.

EXAMINE THE WORD

There is a lot in this passage to process and we could spend many lessons drawing wonderful truths from this text. But we are trying to focus on defending the faith, so let's try to frame some questions to draw out those ideas.

Observe the Text

- ? Who is the author and audience? As discussed in an earlier lesson, Luke is the author of Acts and he wrote the account to a man named Theophilus (Acts 1:1–2).
- ? What type of literature is this passage? It is a descriptive, historical narrative.
- ? Where did this take place? In Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens.
- ? In what specific locations did Paul preach? The synagogues (verses 1, 10, and 17), the marketplace (verse 17), and the Areopagus (verse 19).
- ? From what did Paul reason in the synagogues? The Scriptures/Word of God (verses 2, 13, and assumed in 17 and 18 from the pattern).
- ? According to verse 18, what was Paul preaching that intrigued the Athenian philosophers? He was teaching about the Resurrection of Christ (verse 18).
- ? Paul begins his speech to the men in Athens in verse 22. How long does it take him to acknowledge God as the Creator? By his second sentence, Paul has identified the source of his message as the Creator God and goes on to describe His character.
- ? What does Paul call the listeners to do in response to the message he is proclaiming at the Areopagus? He calls them to repent.
- ? How does this passage point to Christ and the gospel? Paul preached Christ from the Scriptures whenever he had opportunity.

Discover the Truth

Now that we have asked questions about the text, let's talk about the main idea and try to understand how Paul preached his message in these different settings.

- ? In Thessalonica and Berea, Paul went to the Jewish synagogues and reasoned with them from the Scriptures (the Old Testament). It is clear that the audience contained both Jews and Greeks (verse 12) and the same is likely true of his preaching in the marketplace in Athens. While in the synagogues, was it necessary for Paul to explain to the Jews who God was? No, they already had that background.
- ? Did Paul teach on the Resurrection of Christ in the synagogues? Yes, verse 3 makes this clear. This is confirmed by Paul's assertion in 1 Corinthians 2:2.

? Did Paul teach on the Resurrection of Christ in the Areopagus? Yes, verses 31 and 32 make this clear.

? Paul does not directly quote the Bible in his speech to the philosophers of the Areopagus. Does this mean he did not use the Bible in his presentation? No. He used biblical language and themes that we could trace to specific passages in Scripture. He did not intentionally avoid identifying the Creator and His character—including the coming judgment.

We don't have an exact record of what Paul preached in the synagogues of Thessalonica and Berea, but there was likely one difference from his speech to the philosophers of Athens. Notice that he starts his speech with the fact that there is a Creator God. This was not necessary to the Jewish audience who accepted the existence of the Creator God. As Paul continued, he described how God is to be worshipped, His character, man's relationship to God, the coming judgment, the need for repentance, and the work and Resurrection of Christ—that's all he says. This was not a watered-down sermon that used evidence from science or secular history. It was a clear proclamation of the truths of Scripture. As Paul moves on to Corinth in Acts 18, we see the same pattern in his message and delivery.

We could look to many more examples in Scripture that would demonstrate the same pattern—Peter on the Day of Pentecost, Stephen before the Sanhedrin, Jesus at any occasion. Rather than presenting piles of evidence and hoping that will persuade the unbeliever, the biblical model is to proclaim truth and then answer the questions that arise from there. That is the difference between an evidential and a presuppositional approach to apologetics. Rather than calling the unbeliever to evaluate the evidence, using his fallen, sinful mind, we should use the truths of Scripture and allow the Holy Spirit to do His work of conviction. After all, “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

? If we make an elegant speech using convincing arguments, should we expect an unbeliever to put their trust in Christ as Savior? No, unless the Holy Spirit has brought conviction of sin, the unbeliever is not able to come to repentance. It is our job to proclaim the truth and God's job to bring salvation (Romans 10). Piling up evidences apart from the Person and work of Christ will not lead to salvation. It may remove some intellectual stumbling blocks, but it is the gospel that is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16).

That is why apologetics and evangelism are so interrelated. We explain the hope we have in Christ—the gospel—and make ourselves ready to defend the faith in the face of questions that arise—apologetics.





Foolproof Apologetics Video

MATERIALS

- Foolproof Apologetics video clips from the Resource DVD-ROM—"Neutral Ground" (6:29) and "Don't Answer–Answer" (5:02)
- TV and DVD player or computer

INSTRUCTIONS

We are going to watch two video segments that speak more on the methods of apologetics. It will compare the evidential and presuppositional views and then give a specific strategy for applying the presuppositional method. You will hear about the myth of arguing on neutral ground and the "Don't Answer–Answer" strategy. These clips are from a video titled *The Ultimate Proof of Creation*, which you can watch in full by going to the Online Resource Page. Play both video clips.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

To some of you, this might be quite a new way of looking at things. The Bible clearly teaches that there is no such thing as neutral ground.

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Why should we never leave the Bible out of the argument? If it is the basis of all truth, and if we agree to set it aside, we have told the person we are arguing with that the Bible really isn't that important in the discussion.

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Who can summarize the "Don't Answer–Answer" strategy? Don't answer the opponent by accepting his unbiblical philosophy, or you will fall into the same mistakes he is making, rather explain the biblical position. For the sake of argument, step into his shoes and show him the problems with his line of thinking by answering according to his unbiblical philosophy.



Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

I know this has been a lot to digest today, but understanding these principles is very important as we face challenges from a world that is hostile to the true gospel. We have looked at three primary ideas today, so let's summarize them and then talk about how to put them into practice in our lives.

- ?
- What is the basic goal of apologetics?** To provide a defense for the hope that we have in Christ.
- ?
- What are the two basic approaches to apologetics and how are they different?** Evidential tends to reason from evidence and then brings in the Bible later. Presuppositional starts from the truths of Scripture and explains the evidence in light of those truths.
- ?
- Whose role is it to make arguments and whose role is to bring conviction of sin?** We are to provide the arguments from Scripture, and the Holy Spirit is to bring conviction of sin and enable the unbeliever to repent unto salvation.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? Does the idea that we are called to always be ready to give a defense for our faith challenge you in any way? *This may be overwhelming to some; to think that they must be ready to defend every challenge they may face.*
- ? How does understanding the role of the Holy Spirit in apologetics and evangelism give you a degree of relief? *We are not responsible for the salvation of others, but we get to cooperate with God in the work He empowers us to do in the Spirit. The same Spirit that brings conviction to the unbeliever gives us the power to proclaim the gospel and defend the faith.*
- ? How would you respond to someone who asked you a question that you didn't know the answer to? *Humbly admit that you are not certain, but that you are willing to look into the matter and get back to them with an explanation. No one can expect to know all of the answers all of the time. Being willing to research the issue and follow up with an answer will help confirm the sincerity of your belief and be a great witness to the unbeliever.*
- ? Suppose you are on a bus reading a Christian book and another passenger asks you about the book. You explain the book and follow up with a question about his beliefs (e.g., "This book is about the Resurrection of Jesus. Do you think that really happened?"). He replies that he doesn't think the Bible is true because it contains lots of contradictions and anyone who believes it is wrong. How could you employ the "Don't Answer-Answer" strategy, with meekness and fear, to defend the hope you have in Christ? *Allow students to respond.*



MEMORY VERSE

Psalm 19:7–11 The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Pray for clear understanding and application of biblical apologetics.
- Confess sins of complacency in defending the faith.
- Pray for opportunities to share the gospel and explain the hope found in Christ.