

## WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION TO APOLOGETICS; FAITH AND REASON

### Opening Questions:

- What has been your experience with apologetics (giving reason for the hope you have in Jesus)?
- Have you needed to defend your Christian belief in the past?
- Are faith and reason incompatible?
- If you believe, how did you come to faith?
- If you do not believe, what parts of the Christian faith and/or life is holding you back?

### For Discussion:

*There may be many things in life you do not understand. But that does not stop them from being true or real. Some things you cannot reason, cannot take apart by our wills or fully comprehend with our intellects or give verbalization to—things like love, death, time—but they are nonetheless real.*

- What are some questions you have about faith in God?

### A Scenario (pick 2 readers to be Jill and Mom)

**Scene:** Jill, a junior at a Christian college, is home for the summer. Jill is a Christian, and she came to faith through a youth retreat held by a local church when she was in high school. Jill's Mom is glad her daughter has a community that is energizing and growing her, and she has noticed the joy and sense of purpose her daughter has, but she admits she doesn't really get what the buzz is about. Jill longs for her mom to understand and experience for herself who God is, who Jesus is, and what life in faith is.

**Jill:** Mom, in one of my classes at school, we learned about the kingdom of God—how through Jesus Christ, God is restoring and renewing life, renewing creation, restoring relationships. We read this book called *Surprised by Hope* by N.T. Wright<sup>1</sup>, where he describes what God is doing in the world, what Jesus means for history, what salvation means and doesn't mean, what heaven is and isn't—it's brilliant.

**Jill's Mom:** What *does* Jesus mean for history, honey?

**Jill:** Well, it means that Jesus is the one all of this centers on—his life and death and resurrection are the most significant events in human history, and it means life now can be lived in a way that's good.

**Mom:** Well, honey, can't I live a good life now anyway? Wouldn't you say I'm doing that now? Can't I be a good person who's kind and loving to others, even if I don't believe in Jesus or this kingdom?

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<sup>1</sup> Available at the Campus Store: fantastic book on understanding the New Testament conceptions of heaven and the new creation.

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**J:** Yes, mom, you can—you can be a good person, but being a Christian isn't first about being a good person.

**Mom:** It's not?

**Jill:** Well, no—yes—no, not first. It's about faith in Jesus, first.

**Mom:** You're losing me, honey....

Can anyone relate? Have you tried explaining your faith to someone who doesn't share it?

When you try to give reason for the hope that you have,<sup>2</sup> you are using apologetics.

**What is “apologetics?” And why are we spending time studying it as a community?**

Christian apologetics is when a Christian gives reason for the hope that is within her. For those who believe, Christian apologetics grows us in our faith, and it draws others to faith.<sup>3</sup>

You join in the ancient and rich tradition 2000 years strong of Christians articulating and making sense of their faith. You do not have to figure out the answers all alone; there are mothers and fathers in the faith who have gone ahead of us and have good insights to teach us.

You cannot argue someone into faith or into the kingdom of God (only the Father can draw people by the Spirit to faith in Jesus Christ),<sup>4</sup> but God can use believers who give reason for their faith to draw others to it. A good way to go about doing this is:

“Apologetists should (1) listen to and try to understand those with concerns about Christianity, (2) seek common ground with those with whom they disagree, (3) be open to the possibility that the reasons they give for their faith are in need of improvement, and 4) put alternative positions against which they argue in the best possible light.”<sup>5</sup>

Apologetics is the discipline and practice of Christians thinking through and giving reason for why they have faith, for the sake of drawing others to faith. Apologetics is a particular way of

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Peter 3:15

<sup>3</sup>Department of Apologetics, hbu.edu

<sup>4</sup> John 6:44

<sup>5</sup> James E. Taylor, *Christian Apologetics: Cultivating Christian Commitment*, 24

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loving God with our minds.<sup>6</sup> Apologetics is also a way that we bear witness. If you are using apologetics well, that means you are cultivating excellent relationships, as well as excellent knowledge in doctrine—the two go hand-in-hand.<sup>7</sup> It is hard to speak to someone about your faith with any credibility if you do not have a good relationship with them.<sup>8</sup> Trusting a Christian is the first threshold someone who does not believe needs to meet before conversations about Jesus can begin.<sup>9</sup>

If you are a believer, the study of apologetics helps you think through and be able to articulate why you believe, why you are a Christian. That is what we hope to do with this study—to give you tools to be able to articulate your faith.

If you are not a believer, apologetics is a means to understanding why Christians believe as we do. We hope this study will also give you tools to explore this faith and why Christians believe.

### **Why does this matter?**

As Christians, we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that God is reconciling all things to God's self through Christ. That means the brokenness in the world—the Syrian civil war, millions of refugees being displaced, institutional racism, environmental crises, broken relationships, environmental degradation, wounded bodies and souls—all of these things will find their answer, their restoration in Christ; in the kingdom of God that will come in its fullness when Jesus returns.

The God of creation seeks you, has made a way for relationship with you. We are made for relationship with one another, and for relationship with God. "Relationships are really exciting. And the most exciting relationship of all is with God."<sup>10</sup> God loves you, wherever you find yourself on the belief spectrum. God loves your family member and friend who does not yet believe—and God desires that your loved one come to know God through Jesus Christ. You

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 10:27; Mark 12:30

<sup>7</sup> "Meet the Women Apologists," *Christianity Today*.

<sup>8</sup> Don Everts and Doug Schaupp, *I Once Was Lost*, 29-48.

<sup>9</sup> Everts & Schaupp, *I Once Was Lost*, 29-30.

<sup>10</sup> Nicky Gumbel, Alpha Course, Week 4,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ae2e8Qedw5c&t=449s>.

never have to worry that God does not care if you do not yet know God<sup>11</sup>—you are made in the image of God, you are already beloved.<sup>12</sup>

This faith that Christians hold to, if it is true, it is the most magnificent thing, and it needs to be shared. We believe it is true. That is why it is important to study apologetics and think through what we believe—so we can articulate it to others, so those who do not believe can hear.

## Faith and Reason

### Questions:

- Are faith and reason incompatible?
- Does having faith necessitate giving up reason? Can one have faith and be reasonable?
- **Faith** is when you are convinced of something emotionally, intellectually, volitionally—with our whole selves. For Christians, the object of faith is God and what God has revealed in Scripture.<sup>13</sup>
- **Reason** is seeking to understand, discover, or prove a proposition or reality with our minds, our intellects.<sup>14</sup>

So, are faith and reason incompatible?

No, they are not, thankfully. Our capacity to think deeply and critically about all manner of things in life, including our faith in God and belief in Jesus Christ is a gift of God. Our minds and our intellects are a gift. We are commanded to love God also with our minds.<sup>15</sup> We can love God with our minds by thinking deeply about our faith, and our faith can be strengthened by this practice.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Timothy 2:3-6.

<sup>12</sup> Genesis 1:27, 31;

<sup>13</sup> Kreeft & Tacelli, *Handbook*, 29-30.

<sup>14</sup> Kreeft & Tacelli, *Handbook*, 32.

<sup>15</sup> Mark 12:30

<sup>16</sup> Taylor, 12.

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In western society since the Enlightenment, an emphasis on reason has taken hold of the western imagination, such that reason has become 'king' and if you cannot reason something, it is thought of as unreasonable, incoherent. The sentiment that *If you cannot reason or verbalize it, it must not be real or true*—is the air that we breathe, whether we acknowledge it or not. Hence, if you cannot understand something about your faith, it might then cause a faith crisis.

Here is an alternate proposition: there are and will be many things in life you do not understand, but that does not stop them from being true or real. Some things you cannot reason, cannot take apart by our wills or fully comprehend with our intellects—things like love, death, time—but they are nonetheless real.

Similarly, God and faith in God—are true and real, though you may not always understand God or faith or be able to reason them. This does not mean you should stop trying to understand God or faith, but it does mean realizing that *you may not always* understand. Likewise, if one stops believing (perhaps because one does not understand), one's unbelief does not change the "realness" of the object; one's subjective disbelief doesn't change the objective reality of God (yes, that in itself is a claim needing evidence, but the claim that God is *not* an objective reality *also* needs evidence).

The point is—faith is a mystery. It is a gift of God by the Holy Spirit. God reveals himself to us through Scripture and the Spirit impressing it upon our hearts and minds that it is true. Yet, we do not know all there is to know of God. There is mystery in faith.

### **Faith Seeking Understanding: A way to think about apologetics**

The theologians St. Augustine (4-5<sup>th</sup> cent.) and Anselm of Canterbury (11-12<sup>th</sup> cent.) have both expressed the relationship between faith and reason as "faith seeking understanding," or "I believe in order to understand." Faith informs the reasoning, and reasoning informs the belief. We must take care not to overemphasize faith or reason against one another. To reason without faith can lead to misunderstanding the mysterious nature of faith when the limitations of reason are reached. And yet, to insist on faith without allowing for reason can lead to crises of faith when you come upon honest intellectual questions of the Christian faith. So, it is

important to hold faith and reason together, understanding that *we believe in order to understand*, and that we understand more as we believe—“faith seeking understanding.”<sup>17</sup>

**Humans are believing creatures:**

Human beings all put their faith in something. If you profess faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and God as triune, then you have put your faith in the triune God. If you profess *not* to believe in God, then you are sure of your belief that God does not exist—that is also faith.<sup>18</sup>

Human beings are believing creatures. John Calvin called it the *seed of religion* in all of us, that we are implanted with a “seed” that makes us aware of and seek after God.<sup>19</sup> Human beings are faith-seeking creatures and reasoning creatures.

In conclusion: faith in Christ is life-changing and world-changing, hence it is important to talk about faith; faith seeking understanding is a posture we can take; and it is possible to have Christian faith and to be reasonable.

**Concluding Question:**

What are some questions you have about your own faith?

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<sup>17</sup> Taylor 12.

<sup>18</sup> Refer to Timothy Keller’s *The Reason for God*, esp. *Introduction* for understanding faith and reason.

<sup>19</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book I, ch. 4.

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**Resources Used, Referenced:**

Department of Apologetics, hbu.edu

Don Everts and Doug Schaupp, *I Once Was Lost: What Postmodern Skeptics taught Us About Their Path to Jesus*.

James E. Taylor, *Christian Apologetics: Cultivating Christian Commitment*.

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Nicky Gumbel, Alpha Course, Week 4 (Youtube).

N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*

Peter Kreeft & Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*.

Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*.