

Summer Apologetics Series : Kick-Off Session I

Intro

- We've got something pretty cool planned for the next 5 weeks
- We'll be doing an equipping series focused on apologetics that is intentionally going to feel more like a Sunday school environment than a church service
 - o I've been looking forward to this time with you for months
- A quick note before we get started
 - o Each week, You'll have an outline on your chair of the ground we'll be covering.
 - I'm a big believer in the value of the ground we'll be covering.
 - Additionally, a full copy of my teaching notes and the resources I've used to assemble them will be available online for those who want them. Koukl note

My Introduction to Apologetics

- I became a believer at 21 years of age
 - o Heard the gospel at a cafeteria at the University of Calgary & accepted Christ
- The man who led me to Christ disciplined me and after a few weeks challenged me to share my new faith
 - o I decided to tell my roommate Jeff about my decision
- I summoned up my courage & spoke to Jeff about my decision to become a Christian.
 - o As I was talking to Jeff, I saw a smile develop on his countenance
 - o Upon closer review, I discovered that his smile was actually more of a smirk
 - o When I asked him what the smirk was about, he said something like the following...
- A number of thoughts and emotions came over me in that moment
 - o I began to second guess the decision I had made for Christ. Did I make the wrong call?
 - What he said made perfect sense. Had I been duped?
- I went back to the guy who led me to the Lord and he walked me through this and I felt better
 - o I was hesitant to step out and share my faith again because I didn't feel confident navigating objections to Christianity that I didn't know how to answer. (timid)
 - o While I was proud to be a Christian and confident in being one, that experience somewhat tempered my enthusiasm to share my faith.
 - o Maybe some of you in the room can resonate with that

Fast Forward about 4 Years

- Living in California now and I see a poster on the wall at church promoting a guest speaker
 - o "Robust Christianity in an Age of Disbelief"
- For 90 minutes I heard a man give an intellectual defense for Christianity
 - o I felt my mind come alive
- That evening would turn into a certificate course on apologetics followed by a masters degree in the subject
 - o The next 5 weeks will be an into to the broad subject of apologetics

Apologia

- Apologetics comes from the root word apologia which is a Greek term meaning “Ready Defense”
 - o Apologetics is the ready defense of the Christian Faith

“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...”

(1 Peter 3:15)

- There is hope that is in us (the gospel of Christ). The world needs that hope
 - o Paul tells us to always be prepared to give an answer
 - That implies that people we come in contact with will have questions
 - As I discovered with Jeff, a lack of preparedness to provide an answer to some of these questions can result in the conversations not going very well
 - o Paul says to be ready to give reasons for the hope that we have
 - This is where apologetics can change the tone of the conversation with an un-believer
 - What happens if I say to an educated atheist, “I believe that Jesus rose from the grave”
 - He or she would say.... “Oh... how cute!”
 - vs saying, “I have excellent reasons for believing that Jesus rose from the grave”
 - They may say, “interesting..... you’ve got my attention, tell me more”
 - o (maybe with slightly more vinegar)
 - The first is a statement of belief, the second suggests a claim that can be defended.
 - o Paul also says to do this with gentleness and respect
 - Our candor in approaching these conversations is something we can never lose sight of
 - If you’ve ever come across an arrogant, know it all Christian you know what I am talking about. We don’t want to smell like a Pharisee
 - Its okay to be bold in our faith, but model Christ who while being bold was also loving and gracious and humble.
 - Make a stand for Christ, but do so with gentleness and respect.

Why Study Apologetics?

- 1) Apologetics is a tool that God uses to foster salvation decisions
 - a. Its not often that someone hears an intellectual argument for God and becomes a believer
 - b. I does happen and when it does, these converts often make a big impact
 - i. CS Lewis, Lee Strobel, Anthony Flew, Chuck Colson

“While in prison awaiting trial for my role in the Watergate scandal I was given a copy of Mere Christianity. I opened Mere Christianity and found myself face to face with an intellect so disciplined, so lucid, so relentlessly logical that I could only be grateful I had never faced him in a court of law. Soon I had covered two pages of yellow paper with pros to my query, ‘Is there a God?’” (Chuck Colson)

- 2) Apologetics can weaken an unbeliever’s confidence in their world view
 - a. Madeline Murray O’Hare Story

Ms O’Hair spoke at Whittier College

Q : Ms O'Hare in our time together today you haven't defined for us what an atheist is. I'm wondering if you could do that for us at this time?

A : Absolutely. There absolutely NO CHANCE that God exists

Q : Thank you Ms O'Hair. If I may ask a follow up question. Of All available knowledge, what percent do you suppose you possess? Before you answer I'd like to remind you that it is estimated that there are roughly 10,000 languages spoken on the Earth so if you knew 1% of all languages, you'd speak roughly 100 languages. Those languages emerged from various cultures with individual histories and political structures that we'd expect you to know about. To repeat my initial question... of all available knowledge, what percent do you suppose you possess?

A : TEN PERCENT (answered very emphatically)

Q : Thank you Ms O'Hare. Do you think its possible that knowledge of God could exist outside of your own realm of knowledge? (Followed by 20 seconds of absolute silence)

A : I'll give you a qualified "No"

Q : OK, what's the qualifier?

A : Next questioner please...

Note : Three well placed questions exposed some of the many flaws in her atheistic world view.

3) Apologetics can strengthen the faith of existing believers

- a. If apologetics only ever accomplishes #3 its worth its weight in gold
- b. It will make you more confident in your faith and help you work through any areas where you as a believer may have your own doubts or questions
- c. How many of you have heard stories of HS kids heading off to college where they abandon the faith of their childhood?
 - i. They enter a strong intellectual climate where smart people challenge their faith
 - ii. Their childhood faith folds very quickly because (like my early) faith, its not being supported by much intellectual muscle
- d. When Jeff posed a very simple and logical objection to the Bible, I was rattled and in the moment & I second guessed my decision for Christ
- e. Becoming familiar with answers to some of the hard questions you'll encounter can strengthen your faith & also improve your confidence in starting a conversation with an unbeliever

Transition

- With the time that remains today, I want to share with you about the preservation of the Bible
 - o I've mentioned my old roommate Jeff a few times and the objection he first posed to me
 - The Bible has been translated so many times, we've lost its original meaning
 - o Jeff is not the only person who puts forth this objection. Its surprisingly common
 - The Latter Day Saints believe our Bible has errors of transmission & translation

- Islam states clearly their belief that our scriptures have been corrupted
- Did our Bible come into our hands today through a process that resembles “telephone”?
 - Let’s go ahead and look at the evidence

The New Testament

- To accommodate time constraints today, lets just talk “New Testament”
 - Comprised of 27 separate documents written by 9 different authors over about a 50 year time
 - These have been bundled collectively into one book but they are 27 independent sources
- There’s one problem. We don’t have any of the original autographs.
 - An opponent to Christianity may say, well isn’t that convenient.
 - The reality is that we don’t have originals from any literature dating back to the ancient world
 - we only have copies
 - Why is that?
 - Ancient literature coming from this part of the world was recorded on **PAPYRUS**
 - A reeded plant that grows along the edge of the Nile river
 - I am going to hand some out and you tell me how you think it would hold up to 2000 yrs

Question : Will an absence of the originals prevent us from knowing what the originals said?

- All literature from the ancient world is reconstructed through common process called Textual Criticism
 - Textual Criticism takes surviving copies and compares their variants to be able to ascertain what the original would have said
 - To do this with a high degree of certainty, you need two friends (Any Guesses?)
 - First, it helps to have a large number of manuscripts to compare (quantity)
 - Second, you want them dated as close to the original as possible (age)
 - More manuscripts and earlier manuscripts will enable a more accurate reconstruction.

How do the NT documents fare in this regard? Extremely well, in fact better than anything else from the ancient world

Manuscript Quantity

- At the most recent count there are over 5,800 hand written Greek manuscripts of the NT.
 - Some of these manuscripts are **complete Bibles**
 - Others are books or **pages**.
 - Others still are just **fragments**.
- As you’ll see from **this chart**, nothing from the ancient world even comes close in terms of manuscript support.
 - Homers Illiad is the runner up with 1800 copies

What About Manuscript Age?

- An examination of the writing surface, the type of ink used and incorporating carbon dating, we can fairly accurately determine the age of the manuscripts and even the region it came from.

- When we apply this we discover that not only does the NT enjoy abundant support, but it also has manuscripts that originate extremely close to the timeline of the originals.
- The earliest undisputed manuscript is a segment of John 18 known as **John Rylands fragment**.
 - Scholars date it around 117 AD, some say it's even earlier.
 - It was found in Egypt, across the Med from its probable place of composition.
 - This shows that John's Gospel was copied and travelled quite a distance by the second century
- Earlier than John Ryland are nine disputed fragments dating from 50-70 AD
 - These were found with the dead sea scrolls.
 - These fragments are parts of six NT books (Mark, Acts, Romans, 1 Tim, 2 Peter and James).

Our oldest complete book from the NT dates to about 200 AD.

- Most of the NT including all gospels from about 250 AD
- **Complete NT from about 325 AD** (Vaticanus).
- If these dates trouble you please know that critical scholars think this outstanding
 - Most works from antiquity have a much more significant time gap
- If these manuscripts were all scholars had, they could reconstruct the original NT with great accuracy
 - But there's an interesting side note here that's worth mentioning
 - There is a secondary source that makes the NT reconstruction even more certain.

Insurance Policy

- Do you know that even if Diocletian had succeeded in wiping every last manuscript from the face of the earth he could not have destroyed our ability to reconstruct the NT.
 - Why?
 - **B/C the early church fathers**, were PROLIFIC WRITERS
 - Think disciples of the disciples : Clement, Ignatius, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian
 - They have quoted the NT some **36,289** times in their writings.
 - You could literally reconstruct the entire NT minus 11 verses from their quotations.
- This makes reconstruction of the New Testament text virtually certain

To answer my friend Jeff

- The Bible in your hand today is not passed down from a game like telephone
- It is a direct translation from the original Greek text from which we have copies dated closer to the original than any other document from antiquity
 - Between manuscript quantity and manuscript age in relation to the autographs, we have virtually certain assurance that this book reflects what was recorded when first written.
- Yeah but the Bible exists in over 150 languages today!
 - They are all derived from the original Greek and don't go through the hand me down process

You might be saying : Okay, the Bible is intact. It has successfully survived the passage of time.

But why do we think it is the word of God and not just some book written by man? Come back next week.