

The
HARVEST
HANDBOOK™
OF
APOLOGETICS

JOSEPH M. HOLDEN
GENERAL EDITOR



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*To my teacher of apologetics, who loved me as a son,
inspired me to learn, and mentored me to serve,
Dr. Norman Geisler.*

JOSEPH M. HOLDEN

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We sincerely desire this work will glorify God and equip the next generation to share the gospel and defend the historic Christian faith.

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Foreword

Ravi Zacharias

The story is told of two Australian sailors who staggered out of a London pub into a dense fog looking around for help. As they steadied themselves, they saw a man walking into the pub—but evidently missed the military medals flashing on his uniform. One sailor shouted out to him, “Say, Mate, do you know where we are?” The officer, not impressed with this casual way of being addressed, snarled back, “Do you men know who I am?” The sailors looked at each other and one said to the other, “We’re really in a mess now. We don’t know where we are, and he doesn’t know who he is.”

As witty as the scene may be, it is an illustrative reminder of where postmodern thinking has landed us. From the days of a rugged rationalism and journeying through logical positivism or empiricism, through the challenges of existentialism, we have arrived at a postmodern view of life that in effect returns to “man being the measure of all things” without pausing to ask, “Which man?” Hence, we have entered the treacherous terrain of skepticism of truth, meaning, and certainty.

More than ever now, questions rise and answers seem vacuous. The truth is that without an ultimate frame of reference, we don’t know who we are in essence or where we are in the grand scheme of life. And yet whatever our station in life or perspective, each of

us has a worldview, whether we recognize it or not. A worldview basically offers answers to four haunting questions: origin, meaning, morality, and destiny. In attempting to answer these questions, it is imperative that the answers be correspondingly true on particular questions and, as a whole, all answers put together must be coherent. Correspondence and coherence are existentially and logically needed if one is to be legitimately persuaded.

The field of apologetics deals with the hard questions posed to the Christian faith. Having had deep questions myself, I listen carefully to the questions raised. Indeed, we must always bear in mind that behind every question is a questioner. So, answering difficult questions is not merely a theoretical exercise. It has personal ramifications for all of us. The convergence of intellectual and existential struggles drives a person to a brutal honesty in the questions they have, whether about God’s existence or His goodness. In fact, Jesus consistently drove this home. His one-on-one conversations were remarkably personal and left the questioner looking into his or her own heart and its spiritual condition.

Whether you are a Christian or a skeptic, the formidable volume you hold in your hands offers rational and existentially compelling answers to the very questions of life,

from the question of origin to the question of meaning. An incredible array of scholars has contributed to this work, and I am honored to write the foreword. From my professors Norman Geisler, John Warwick Montgomery, and Walter Kaiser to fellow apologists Josh McDowell and Gary Habermas—so many of these authors have shaped my own thinking and touched my life deeply. To read what they have to say is to find answers that go deep and motivations that are real. Having such an array of scholars in one volume is not merely a feast for the mind; it is energy for the soul. After four decades of traveling the globe, I have sensed how real these questions are across every culture. This is true especially for the young. “Why?” is not just a toddler’s response out of curiosity; it is also

a mature mind’s genuine pursuit to find life meaningful and significant.

The Harvest Handbook of Apologetics is a rich and unparalleled resource that will challenge you to examine your own beliefs with candor and in the light of counter-perspectives. I commend this volume to you with great appreciation for the labor and time involved in producing it. You will refer to it time and again and make it a companion for life. The writers here are among the best in this discipline and will add to your thinking in enriching ways. As Augustine heard the words “Take and read,” he took the Word of God and read. This volume takes those biblical truths and presents a brilliant defense in response to the legitimate questions in pursuit of the truth. “Take and read.”

—**Ravi Zacharias**
author and speaker

Preface

The Battle for Hearts and Minds

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, challenges to the Christian worldview have increased in both intensity and sophistication, challenging even the brightest among us. The skeptic's sharp criticism of Scripture, disbelief in God, promotion of postmodernism, and the social progressive's relentless push for special rights have created a formidable beachhead in the war of ideas. Collectively, these critical notions have spawned numerous questions and arguments that have been weaponized by our critics to bludgeon the very foundations of Christianity.

Make no mistake, this war has been raging for centuries, and has now reached a fever pitch, especially within academic institutions as well as the media. Their relentless pursuit has always been for hearts and minds. In the past, their tactics were to push tolerance and a progressive social agenda, to create an ever-widening divide between conservatives and liberal, left and right, and Christian and secular.

Today we are experiencing a change in tactics from skeptics who seek to take the moral high ground and from social progressives who are intolerant of all conservative speech not in alignment with their ideals.

The cry for "tolerance" is no longer needed because the culture they sought to establish in the previous decades has been realized and fully tolerated by America's institutions. Now, the threats of lawsuits and violence are marshaled against those who offer morally conservative voices that threaten the recently established successes of the left.

Instead of responding in like kind, Christians recognize that in order to change our world, we must prayerfully change hearts and minds (2 Corinthians 10:3-6) by presenting Christ, recognizing that the most difficult things to overcome are ideological in nature.

The current environment has made it necessary to double down our efforts in equipping the church, as well as informing seekers of truth from outside the Christian faith to intelligently wrestle with (Jude 3, "*contend* for the faith") and respond to the crucial issues confronting our world today.

C.S. Lewis recognized what is at stake in the battle of ideas when he insightfully reminded Christian leaders of their responsibility to defend the faith:

To be ignorant and simple now—not to be able to meet the enemies on their

own ground—would be to throw down our weapons, and to betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no defence but us against the intellectual attacks of the heathen. Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered.¹

Lewis's words reflect the spirit in which every chapter of this book was written. Each distinguished contributor is a scholar in their respective field and has followed in a long tradition of church leaders who took seriously the biblical command to defend the faith (1 Peter 3:15-16). Our goal is to equip you to make a difference in the marketplace of ideas, as well as broaden your toolkit for evangelism and responding to crucial questions that have the potential to change lives.

Each of the following 75 chapters have been carefully crafted using nontechnical language with a view toward not only answering a medley of important questions confronting believers today, but to serve as food for nourishing the soul. Because of the

varied challenges confronting the Christian worldview, our team of esteemed contributors were hand picked from a wide variety of disciplines, including science, philosophy, theology, apologetics, psychology, engineering, and law. Each essay is designed for learning, offering you useful content to employ in your apologetic evangelism.

What is more, it is our desire that you grow in both your relationship with Christ and your courage to offer fresh insight in a winsome and humble manner during your interaction with others. The final goal of this work is twofold: (1) to equip the church body to engage culture for Christ, and (2) the salvation of the lost. Our prayer is that you will have a life-changing experience with truth as you journey through this book!

In a world of doctrinal decay and the ever-present lure to compromise biblical truth, we would do well to remind ourselves of the eccentric, uncompromising, camel-hair-wearing desert preacher John the Baptist. The church needs more uncompromising leaders, faithful believers, and steadfast voices clothed in camel hair!

—**Joseph M. Holden, PhD**

President, Veritas International University
General Editor

Part One

**QUESTIONS
ABOUT
APOLOGETICS
AND TRUTH**

What Is Apologetics and Why Do We Need It?

Norman L. Geisler

Since the beginning of the church in the first century AD, the Christian worldview has been challenged at every turn. The earliest attacks often came from the Roman government, which sought to discover any hint of treasonous activity among the “strange” ideas and practices of the faithful. While other theological assaults emerged from the Jewish religious leaders (Pharisees), both kinds of challenges would often lead to persecution.

As the church spread throughout Asia Minor (Turkey) and Europe, it came into contact with rival religious belief systems such as emperor worship, the Roman mystery cults, polytheism, and the cult of Artemis (Acts 19:28) along with their magical incantation formulas known as the *Ephesia Grammata*. Christians were pressed to defend the faith and develop an apologetic response that could both clearly distinguish Christianity from the cults and withstand severe counterargument. Among these early apologists were the apostle Paul (Philippians 1:7, 17), Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and eventually Augustine.

However, as Christianity grew over the next few centuries, while at the same time clarifying its doctrines, it would be challenged with more sophisticated ideas emerging from Gnosticism (believed the creator god of the Old Testament is evil, matter is impure, and wrote false accounts of Christ), Arianism (Jesus did not have a divine nature), and from other heretics on the fringes of the church (e.g., the teachings of Cerinthus, Valentinus, Arius, Eutychius, and Nestorius). Because Christianity grew up in this intellectually challenging environment of Hellenistic philosophy and Roman religious practice, believers understood the need to defend, clarify, and present the gospel in understandable terms.

Today, the Christian worldview remains under attack on an industrial scale as the world searches for meaning and significance. These assaults come primarily through print publications, entertainment media, false religious movements, and in academic instruction, and they originate from various sources such as atheists, skeptics, critical theologians, proponents of evolutionary

theory, and from liberal progressives seeking to advance their social agenda of abortion and gay rights. If there was ever a time to defend the faith, that time is now!

Apologetics is the discipline that deals with a rational defense of the Christian faith whether the challenges comes from inside or outside the church. The word *apologetics* comes from the Greek word *apologia* (1 Peter 3:15), which means to give a reason or defense. Thankfully, in last few decades, we have experienced a resurgence of lay interest and scholarship in the area of apologetics, as this book will attest. Therefore, the church finds itself in a much healthier position now than it was 50 years ago to defend against its modern critics and to provide more powerful counterarguments.

The Purpose of Apologetics

As it has from the beginning, apologetics serves both an offensive and defensive purpose. Offensively, it builds a case for the Christian faith, which is accomplished through 12 basic premises:¹

1. Truth about reality is knowable.
2. Opposites cannot both be true.
3. It is true that the theistic God exists.
4. Miracles are possible.
5. Miracles performed in connection with a truth claim confirm the truth of God through a messenger of God.
6. The New Testament documents are reliable (textually and historically).²
7. As witnessed in the New Testament, Jesus claimed to be God.
8. Jesus's claim to be God was proven

by a unique convergence of miracles (e.g., resurrection).

9. Therefore, Jesus was God in human flesh.
10. Whatever Jesus (who is God) affirmed as true, is true.
11. Jesus affirmed that the Bible is the Word of God.
12. Therefore, it is true that the Bible is the Word of God, and whatever is opposed to any biblical truth is false.

Offensively, apologetics answers the crucial question, Why is Christianity true? To fully answer this question, it is important to cover all the points listed above, which are addressed throughout this book.

Defensively, apologetics answers any sincere objection or question about the Christian faith.³ For example, when objections arise to the existence of God, it is important to first explain the absolute nature of truth. Likewise, when someone asks questions about the resurrection, the answer needs to include mention of the reliability of the New Testament. To put it another way, apologetics is pre-evangelism. That is to say, it is done *before* evangelism *if needed* or when an objection or question is raised.

Why Apologetics Is Necessary

There are many good reasons why we need apologetics. First, God commands the use of apologetics. Second, reason demands a defense. Third, the world needs apologetics. Finally, results confirm the success of apologetics. Let's examine each in order.

God Commands the Use of Apologetics. Throughout the Bible there are verses that emphasize engaging in apologetics. Over

and over again the Scriptures exhort believers to defend the faith (Jude 3). The apostle Peter wrote, “In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15).

This verse communicates several important points. First, it’s our duty to *be prepared* in case a defense of the faith is necessary. We might never need to use apologetics, but being prepared to do the work of an apologist is a biblical command for all Christians. As a representative for Christ, a Christian is adequately prepared not only to understanding various arguments, but is also eagerly looking for opportunities to share the truth of Christ with others.

Second, we are to *give a reason* to those who ask questions (cf. Colossians 4:5-6). Not every conversation with unbelievers requires an apologetic response or pre-evangelism, but when necessary, the Christian apologist should possess the ability and desire to give others an answer.

Finally, 1 Peter 3:15 addresses the special place we ought to have for Christ in our hearts and lives in doing apologetics. Those who follow Christ should routinely “destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). Scripture clearly encourages us to address our own doubts as well as the faulty ideas that prevent others from knowing Christ as their Savior and the Bible as the Word of God. This is the essence and goal of apologetics.

The apostle Paul clearly stated that his mission was the “defense and confirmation of the gospel” (Philippians 1:7), and he reiterated in verse 16, “I am put here for the

defense of the gospel.” Some are hesitant to defend the faith because they believe they are not *gifted* as an apologist. However, we must recognize that though we may not feel gifted in this endeavor, we are certainly called by Scripture to do the *work* of an apologist. The half brother of Jesus (Jude) said, “Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Jude was concerned about those in the church who had been ravished by false teachers, encouraging them to defend what had been revealed to them through Christ—to the point of *agony*. Jude also addressed our demeanor when defending the faith when he wrote, “Have mercy on those who doubt” (verse 22). Apologetics, then, is a form of compassion.

Moreover, the pastoral epistles make clear that Christian leaders in the church should demonstrate knowledge of evidence that supports the Christian worldview. Titus said, “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9). Paul said, “The Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 2:24-25). The Bible has much to say about patience. This is particularly important when doing apologetics because we are all prone to losing patience with unbelievers. We need to remember our ultimate goal is to help them understand the significance of the gospel message of Christ’s death and resurrection.

Indeed, the exhortation to use reason is

part of the greatest command. For Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and *with all your mind*. This is the great and first commandment” (Matthew 22:37-38, emphasis added).

Logic Requires a Defense. In the beginning, God created us in His image; this included the power of reason (Genesis 1:27), which distinguishes human beings from animals (Jude 10). Throughout Scripture, we are encouraged to use reason (Isaiah 1:18) in order to discover truth (1 John 4:6), to discern what is moral and immoral (Hebrews 5:14), and to learn the difference between a true and false prophet (Deuteronomy 18:19-22).

A fundamental principle of reason is that we should have sufficient grounds for what we believe. An unjustified belief is just that—*unjustified!* Being created rational creatures and not “unreasoning animals” (Jude 10), we are expected to use the reason God gave us. In doing so, we fulfill part of the greatest command, which includes loving God with all of our minds (Matthew 22:36-37).

Unbelievers Need Apologetics. The world may have good questions, but Christians have good answers. However, many people refuse to believe without some evidence, as indeed they should. It makes sense that if God created us with the power of reason, we should think and behave in a rational manner. He desires us to seek and evaluate the evidence prior to taking a step of faith (John 3:12; Romans 1:4). Some have suggested that seeking facts destroys faith. It does not. Any rational person will consider the evidence prior to taking a step of faith. Not to do so is both dangerous and irresponsible. For example, no one dives headlong into a swimming pool before verifying the pool is full of water. To put it another way, no one comes

to faith in Christ because it is *contradictory* or *irrational!* Rather, we serve Christ because it is reasonable (Romans 12:1).

Further, the intellectual assent *that* something is true or exists is prior to belief *in* (volitional trust of the heart) something. Evidence and reason are important to establish belief *that* something is true. It is reasonable to assume unbelievers will want good reason to believe *that* Jesus is the Savior of the world prior to placing trust *in* Him.

Results Confirm Apologetics

There is a common misnomer among many Christians that apologetics never helps bring anyone to Christ. This is a serious misrepresentation of the facts.

The Results of Investigation and Reason. The great medieval theologian Augustine wrote about several significant rational turning points in his life before he came to Christ.⁴ First, he reasoned his way out of Manichaean dualism. To Augustine, a significant turning point in his change was the success of a young Christian debater of Manichaeans named Heliadius. Second, Augustine reasoned his way out of total skepticism by seeing the self-defeating nature of it, since Augustine would have to be *certain* of his skepticism. The only way he could be true to his total skepticism was to be skeptical of his skepticism. Third, were it not for studying Plotinus (AD 204–270), Augustine informs us that he would not even be able to conceive of a spiritual being, let alone believe in one.

Another success story is Simon Greenleaf, professor of law at Harvard, who is widely credited for writing the book on legal evidence. He was challenged by students to apply the rules of legal evidence to the New Testament to see if its testimony would stand up in court. The result was a book titled *The*

Testimony of the Evangelists,⁵ in which he expressed his confidence in the basic documents and truths of the Christian faith.

In addition, Frank Morrison, an unbelieving attorney, set out to disprove Christianity by showing the resurrection never occurred. The quest ended with his conversion and a book titled *Who Moved the Stone*.⁶ Ironically, the first chapter of his book was titled “The Book That Refused to Be Written”!

The Results of Debates. Many people have been led toward Christ as a result of debates we have had with atheists and skeptics. After debating then-University of California, Berkeley philosopher Michael Scriven on “Is Christianity Credible?” the University of Calgary audience voted three to one in favor of Christianity. The campus newspaper report read: “Atheist Fails to Convert Campus Christians”!

Following a debate on the rationality of belief in Christianity with the head of the philosophy department at the University of Miami, the Christian student leaders held a follow-up meeting. The atheist professor attended and expressed doubts about his view stated at the debate. It was reported that some 14 people who had attended the debate made decisions for Christ!

After a debate on the Moonie religion at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, a young woman who was a follower of Moonie asked some questions about Christianity. I could see that she had been convinced that the Unification Church was not teaching the truth. After talking with her briefly, I introduced her to a female seminary student who led her to Christ.

While sharing the gospel with Don Bly, he informed us that he was an atheist. After reasoning with him from atheism to

open-minded agnosticism, he agreed to read Frank Morrison’s book. The evidence for Christ’s resurrection convinced him, and we had the privilege of leading him to Christ. He has subsequently raised his family for Christ and became a leader in a church south of St. Louis.

The Results of Reading. Over the years, I have received numerous letters and reports of people who have been converted to belief that God exists or to belief in Christ after reading books on apologetics. God uses argumentative reasoning as an instrument to bring people toward God and to Christ.

One of the world’s most notorious atheists, Antony Flew, changed his mind about God and wrote, “Nor do I claim to have had any personal experience of God or any experience that may be called supernatural or miraculous. In short, my discovery of the divine has been a pilgrimage of reason and not of faith.”⁷

Noted former atheist Francis Collins said, “After twenty-eight years as a believer, the Moral Law still stands out for me as the strongest signpost to God. More than that, it points to a God who cares about human beings, and a God who is infinitely good and holy.”⁸

A college student wrote, “God sent me your book *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*... I opened the book thinking I would rip it apart with my superior viewpoint, and about one-quarter of the way through I ended up apologizing to God and accepting him into my heart. I have since grown exponentially in Christ, and I thought I would thank you for your inspiring book.”

Ready with an Answer

Christianity must be defended against attacks from within by cults and heresies,

and from without by skeptics and other religions. We have a reasonable faith, and the Bible has commanded that we give reasons for it. As perhaps the greatest apologist of the twentieth century, C.S. Lewis, said: “Good philosophy must exist, if for no other

reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered.”¹⁰

To be certain, utilizing apologetics helps the skeptic to recognize that it takes more faith to reject Christ than it does to receive Him!