ACTS 3057 Lectures 1-2: Introduction to Apologetics

Course Objectives

1. To **understand** the need to defend our precious Christian faith in today's age
2. To **learn** the current cultural challenges that we, as Christians, face in today's world
3. To give a **defense** to everyone who asks us for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15)
4. To know how we ought to **answer** each one (Colossians 4)
5. To **reason** with others on matters pertaining to the Christian faith (as St Paul did in Acts 18)

Apologetics

- Christian apologetics is a branch in Theology concerned with methods and arguments that proclaim the truthfulness of the Christian Faith.
- In the Scriptures:
  - "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;" (1 Peter 3:15)
    - This verse makes at least seven assumptions, which are pillars of Christian Apologetics:
      1. Every believer has hope
      2. There is a reason for this hope - our faith
      3. There will be questions about the reason that we have
      4. We are called to give a defense (ἀπολογία)
      5. We should be ready to give a defense
      6. Preparation for giving a defense is by sanctifying the Lord God in your hearts
      7. Give the defense with meekness and fear
  - "*Let* your speech always *be* with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one." (Colossians 4:6)
  - "And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks." (Acts 18:4)
- The Lord Jesus was a master Apologist
  - Appeals to evidence in Matthew 11
  - Appeals to witness testimony in John 5
  - Appeals to imagination by using parables throughout the Gospels
  - Appeals to Reasoning and Logic
    - Syllogism in Matthew 6
    - A fortiori arguments in Matthew 6:27

    - Ad hominem in Matthew 9
    - Law of excluded middle in Matthew 12
    - Law of non-contradiction in Matthew 7
- In the Church Fathers
    - St Justin Martyr (Apologist in Rome)
    - St Irenaeus (Against Heresies)
    - St Clement of Alexandria (Exhortations)
    - St Athanasius of Alexandria (On the Incarnation of the Logos)
    - Eusebius (Proof of the Gospel)
    - Tertullian (Apology)

Apologetics and Evangelism

- Apologetics is sometimes called (in academic circles) pre-evangelism
- Apologetics is like taking out the weeds, Evangelism is like throwing in the seeds
- Before laying the seeds of Truth, you must remove the weeds of Falsehood
- Both are an essential part of the mission of the Church
- Every Christian is called to be an Apologist and Evangelist (to some degree)

The Seven Principles of Apologetics

1. Apologetics does not and cannot convert people
    - Apologetics does not heal - it points to the Healer
    - People are converted by responding to the work of the Holy Spirit
    - Apologetics opens a window to the Creator by removing obstacles

2. Do not neglect the work of the Holy Spirit in Apologetics and Evangelism
    - "And my speech and my preaching *were* not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." (1 Corinthians 2:5)

3. Apologetics must first be seen before heard
    - People must SEE Christ in your life before they hear about Him from your lips
    - Three steps:
        1. Know your faith
        2. Live your faith
        3. Share your faith

4. Apologists are not after winning arguments, but winning souls
    - "he who wins souls is wise" (Proverbs 11:30)
    - I don't care about the debate or winning, I care about you
    - If I lose the debate but I got you to think, then I have been successful
    - The goal of most arguments is to destroy your opponent; the goal of apologetics is to win your opponent.

5. Apologists are not reapers, they are sowers

- "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." (1 Corinthians 3:6)

6. Ask Questions
   - Expose hidden assumptions
   - Clarify the real barrier
   - Helps them articulate what they believe in
   - The Lord Jesus Christ answered almost every question with a question

7. Avoid Contentious Argumentations
   - Anything that sounds like you're arguing or attacking the person with contention
   - Remember "with meekness and fear"
   - Remember "speak the truth, in love" (Ephesians 4:15)

Apologetic Methods and Techniques

- Classical Apologetics
  - Using Logic
  - Acts 18:4

- Evidential Apologetics
  - Using Evidence to persuade
  - Evidence around the Scriptures, around the Resurrection, etc.
  - Acts 1:3 - "He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."

- Presuppositional Apologetics
  - Starts with a presupposition

- Experiential Apologetics
  - Using experience to persuade
  - "Come and see" (John 1)

- Imaginative Apologetics
  - Imagination - storytelling, irony, paradoxes, etc.
  - Can powerfully communicate difficult concepts

- Relational Apologetics
  - Apologist establishes a relationship with the other person to build trust and credibility

Questions to Ponder

- Why should we defend our faith?
- How do we practically defend our faith?
- What hurdles one ought to overcome to share their faith with others?

Why should we defend our faith?

1. God commands it
    - 1 Peter 3:15
    - Philippians 1:17
    - Colossians 4:6
    - Jude 3

2. The world needs it
    - The culture we live in is becoming less Christian and more secular
    - 30% of American results are "unaffiliated" - the "nones" (who choose "none of the above")
    - Many anti-theistic books on Best Seller Lists
        - The God Delusion by Richard Dawkins
        - The End of Faith by Sam Harris
        - God is not Great by Christopher Hitchens
        - Not just atheistic books, but anti-theistic books
    - Christianity was seen as irrelevant many years ago... today's generation is being taught that Christianity is dangerous and should be eradicated
    - Culture Crisis
        - Death of Truth
        - Rejection of moral absolutes
            - Emergence of Moral Relativism
        - Philosophical Skepticism
            - Led by Scientism (Scientist is my only source of truth, and the vehicle from which I can derive truth)
        - Religious Pluralism
    - The Creed of our Culture:
        - Darwinian Evolution is the substitute creator and the explanation for my origin and the origin of the universe
        - The Bible is an ancient book of fictional stories
        - Jesus was a very nice man who said wonderful things, but is not God
        - The Resurrection is a nice story, but it is not true since we haven't seen anyone rise from the dead
        - It's good to be good for goodness' sake
        - Christians are intolerant, judgmental fanatics
        - You can experience God and can become god - each one of us can unlock their potential
        - We believe in Human kindness, love
        - Science is my only source of truth
        - I am spiritual but I am not religious
            - I don't believe in organized religion
            - I practice my religion in my own way
            - Churches are full of hypocrites
            - As long as you're sincere in your faith, you're okay
            - All religions have something to teach us

        - I don't go to church, I am spiritual at home
    - This is prophesied in 2 Timothy 4:3-4
        - For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.
        - St Augustine says "we love the truth when it enlightens us, but we hate the truth when it convicts us"

3. Our Purpose Demands it
    - Each person has their own unique distinct purpose that will use their own God-given gifts for the building of the Kingdom of God
    - For all Christians, their purpose in life is:
        - To know God
        - To make God known
    - You are the light of the world
        - Light gives sight
        - Light gives life
        - I am called to be the sight of the spiritually blind
        - I am called to be the life of the spiritually dead

How do we Practically Defend our Faith?

- Know your faith
    - To defend your faith, you must first know what it is...
    - Knowing not only WHAT you believe, but WHY you believe what you believe
    - "[6] As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, [7] **rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith**, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. [8] Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ." (Colossians 2:6-8)
    - Study at least these Ten Apologetics Subjects
        1. The Existence of God
        2. The Authenticity of the Holy Scriptures
        3. What is so Unique about Christianity?
        4. Evolution and Creationism
        5. Ethics and Morality
        6. Science and Faith
        7. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ
        8. The Problem of Evil and Suffering
        9. Do All Religions Worship the Same God?
        10. Is there Absolute Truth?

- Know Your Enemy
    - Two Battlegrounds

    - Moral: The enemy comes to us through our Ethos (i.e. ethics, behavior, conduct, morals, etc.)
    - Intellectual: The enemy comes to us through our Logos (i.e. intellect, logic, etc.)
  - Intellectual Ideologies
    1. Atheism
    2. Pluralism
    3. Relativism
    4. Humanism
    5. Existentialism
    6. Hedonism
    7. Agnosticism
    8. Pantheism
    9. Skepticism
    10. New Atheism
    11. Deism
    12. Naturalism
  - Respond to:
    - Growing influence of our culture on our faith
    - Decreasing influence of our faith on our culture

- Know Your Audience
  - The audience who is receiving our message is NOT the enemy
  - The identity of the audience shapes my apologetics approach, but they are NOT the enemy that I want to defeat or tear down!
  - Each audience has its own questions, objections, difficulties, and openings for the faith
    - Compare the Apologetics of St Peter in Acts 2 (to the Jews) with the Apologetics of St Paul in Acts 17 (to the Greeks)

- Refine Your Approach
  - "There must be no mismatch or contradiction between the message that's proclaimed and the tone of the messenger's proclamation. It is one thing for the Gospel to give offense. It's quite another for its defenders to cause offense" (Seth Payne)
  - "Sharing our faith is like music. The words of the gospel are like lyrics, but your lifestyle is like the melody. The melody enhances the words, as our life enhances the message." (Joe Aldrich)

Discussion Post 1

Apologetics is providing a defense of our faith, and it is a part of our calling as Christians. My Christian Faith is more than just a "religious belief" or "something I do on Sunday" - but rather it is the source of the hope that is in me. And when I am (inevitably) asked about the reason for this hope, I must be ready to provide a defense. This is what St Peter teaches us in 1 Peter 3:15. We see that Apologetics was utilized by the Apostles in the book of Acts and in the Epistles of St Paul,

by several of the Early Church Fathers, and most importantly by the Lord Jesus Christ - the Master Apologist.

As an Apologist, I must abide by seven foundational principles. To summarize them: We recognize that Apologetics does not convert people, but rather it is the Lord who gives the increase through the work of His Holy Spirit. We must acknowledge the work of the Holy Spirit in every step of the Apologetics and Evangelism processes. As an Apologist, I must know my faith to live my faith and only then will I be equipped to share my faith. I should ask questions to expose hidden assumptions and clarify the real barrier to faith. I should avoid contentious arguments.

There are different techniques to Apologetics. Most often used are the methods of Classical Apologetics and Evidential Apologetics. There is also Presuppositional Apologetics, Experiential Apologetics, Imaginative Apologetics. In all of them, your position is best served when you have established a relationship with the other person and built trust and credibility with them.

This introductory lecture was very easy to follow, and I got to attend the last third of it live. In my local parish, we have started an annual Apologetics Convention for Middle and High School. One thing I was really thinking about as a result of this lecture is that we are focused on giving them all the different answers, and equipping them with data and information and knowledge... but we are not equipping our youth with the **methods**, or even the **basic principles** such as "it's not an argument" or "try to win the soul" or "the Lord will bring the increase." I am looking forward to the rest of the semester to pick up these basic methods and learn how to *think* about Apologetics.

Discussion Post 2

We answered two questions this week: Why should we defend our faith? How do we defend our faith?

We should defend our faith for three reasons:

1. God commands us to (as is represented throughout the Scriptures).
2. The world needs it (as the world becomes more secular, and faces a crisis of culture, and makes for itself a Creed that opposes Christianity).
3. Our purpose in life is to know God and to make Him known to others, and thus: our purpose demands it.

Defending our faith starts with knowing our faith. Knowing not only WHAT we believe, but WHY we believe it. This includes many different areas of apologetics. We should know why we believe that God exists. We should know why we believe the authenticity of the Scriptures. We should know what separates us from other religions. Etc. George gave 10 Topics in Apologetics that we, as Christians, should study at least to some extent.

The next step in the apologetics process is to know our enemy. In the lens of apologetics, the enemy, which is Satan, attacks on two battlegrounds: the moral/ethical and the intellectual. We should familiarize ourselves with, and be able to give a response to, the intellectual ideologies that are plaguing our culture. George gave 12 examples of these including Atheism, Pluralism, Relativism, etc. In doing so, we will be able to respond to the growing influence of our culture on

our faith, and the decreasing influence of our faith on our culture.

The third step is to know our audience. Our audience (i.e. the receiver of our message) is NOT the enemy. The audience helps shape my apologetics approach, but my goal is neither to tear them down nor to defeat them. This goes back to the fourth principle of Apologetics (from Lecture 1) which is that Apologists are not after winning arguments, but winning souls.

The last step is to refine our approach. Our approach will be determined by our audience and the enemy they are deceived by. But most importantly, our approach will only be effective if it matches our tone and our lifestyle. As Joe Aldrich wrote, "The melody [in music] enhances the words [of the song] just as our life enhances the message"

This lecture really gave me a point of circumspection - how often did I focus on the intellectual, and learning all of the answers, and learning the methods, etc. but I ignored what I was doing in my life? Or how often did I deliver a message in Sunday School - to believers, nonetheless - and in the same sentence shout at them for being noisy or inattentive? I pray that in the future, my words be full of grace and seasoned with salt.

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