This is the start of a series I’ve been wanting to do for a while on Apologetics. It is not meant to be an exhaustive study of apologetics or even the questions that I will raise. This is more of an introductory level start which is meant to get you started in studying apologetics for yourself. So much of what I go through in this series will be simplified and not as in depth as it could be dealt with. But I do hope it will at least give people a good starting point on which to continue further study. However, it is essential to first understand what truly Christian Apologetics is—so this first article will be laying a foundation upon which the rest of articles in this series will be based. So let’s get started!

What is apologetics?

Definition:

The word comes from the Greek word ἀπολογία [apologia - pronounced “ah-pol-oh-gee-ah”] which means "a verbal defence." It comes from ἀπό, "from" and λόγος, "intelligent reasoning"—properly, a well-reasoned reply; a thought-out response to adequately address the issue(s) that is raised. This "reasoned defence" was the term for making a legal defence in an ancient court. Today, “biblical apologetics” is used for supplying evidences for the Christian faith. An “apology” in classical times had nothing to do with saying, ‘I’m sorry,’ but rather was a reasoned argument (defence) that presented evidence (supplied compelling proof).

1 Biblehub.com, "ἀπολογία" - #627
The call to Apologetics...

Before we start into answering apologetic questions, I think it is important to address how we go about giving this defence. The Biblical mandate for apologetics has some clear guidelines for us. We’ll take a look at the most well-known passage for apologetics. In 1 Peter, he’s writing a general letter to the church and he commends all the believers to this task of apologetics. It isn’t something just for the theological elite, but rather the responsibility of every follower of Christ.

"But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame."
(1 Peter 3:14-16)

Sanctify Christ in your heart...

So every single Christian should firstly, honour Jesus as holy—as Lord of all our life. This is the first prerequisite to doing apologetics and where every Christian should start. This may come as a surprise to some that this is where I would start, and not an argument as why we should be able to give a logical argument to convince someone of the truth of Christianity. Actually, scripturally speaking, the basis for distinctly Christian apologetics is honouring Christ as holy. So we have to take a look at what that means for us practically first before we can look at how to fill out the second part of giving an "apologia."

The verse uses the imperative command ἁγιάσατε [hagiasate]—which means sanctify, make holy, set apart, hallow. The word ἅγιος [hágios]—"holy"—implies something that is "set apart, sacred, unlike, other" and therefore "different, distinguished, distinct" because it is special to the Lord. So we are commanded first to sanctify, make holy, set apart Christ in our hearts. The use of heart here refers to the centre of our being involving the totality of our minds, souls, emotions, actions, etc. Therefore, sanctifying Christ in our hearts is something which

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2 Biblehub.com, "ἁγιάζω" - #37
3 Biblehub.com, "ἁγιος" - #40
Involves every aspect of our life. It is putting Christ not only as first, but as our everything. Paul puts it this way, "for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." (1 Cor. 6:20) Or our Lord said it this way, quoting from Deuteronomy 6:5, "And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'" (Matt. 22:37)

This Divine mandate is central to the call of Christianity itself. If we have truly been saved, we have died with Christ and been raised to new life so that we no longer live to ourselves (Gal. 2:20). So this first command to sanctify Christ in our hearts is to live a life that is utterly and totally sold out for the cause of Christ. This is the starting point for apologetics and one which many want to skip over. However, any other methodology is bound to failure as a merely human attempt. So then, the first question for us is, am I sanctifying Christ in my heart in this manner? Does my life reflect one which is totally sold out for Christ? Have I truly counted the cost, realizing that the Gospel is not adding Christ on, but rather exchanging my life for His? It is after all the Great Exchange—he takes our sin, and gives us His righteousness—but there is another part which our Lord makes clear in Luke 9:23 and Matthew 16:24, that we must deny ourselves, take up our crosses daily and follow Him. This is a call to nothing else but full-out, dead to self, totally submitted, all or nothing discipleship—and this is the basis for truly Christian apologetics. Anything short of this will be a merely human effort in futility. A proclamation of the Gospel from a person whose life does not reflect the truth of that Gospel—that they really believe what they’re trying to preach—will just come off as hypocrisy.

But why start here? Three reasons.

The expectation for most believers in the early church was to be persecuted and suffer for the sake of the Gospel! So much so that Paul explicitly promises persecution for ALL who want to live a godly life in 2 Timothy 3:12. We can see clearly why this first part is vitally important by the verse's immediate surrounding context of 1 Peter. Peter had just been talking about suffering for righteousness sake in the preceding verses and told us to have no fear, nor be troubled. The only way this is possible is for a person who has truly sanctified Christ in their hearts—that is, truly given all of themselves to Him. They don't view Him as just a way to life, but that in Him is life and He is their life! This is the only way the apostle Paul in Philippians could exclaim that dying is gain, only if living is Christ! This sort of treasuring of Christ truly makes one fearless—what can possibly threaten the Christian whose life is
totally found in Christ? Threaten them with death—dying is gain. Threaten them with suffering—I don't count the sufferings of this world worth comparing the glories to come (Rom. 8:18). Threaten them with loss of material things—I've counted all loss and like dung for the sake of Christ (Phil. 3:7-8). Throw them in jail—they convert your jailer and sing hymns (Acts 16:25-40). We cannot fulfil verse 14 without truly sanctifying Christ in our hearts.

Secondly, the latter part tells us to always be ready to give an 'apologia' to “anyone who asks you for a reason.” Notice what it is NOT saying. It is not saying to go around shoving proof down people's throats who don't have any interest or don't want to hear about Christianity. A lot of excited, young (especially male) apologists may watch a YouTube video or two—and with all the gusto and enthusiasm of misdirected youthful zeal storm the streets or schoolyards armed with their 'irrefutable evidence' to show those stupid atheists, Muslims, or whomever who is really right! ...and I saw, that this too is vanity and a chasing after the wind... This is NOT what the Biblical mandate to apologetics is. Calm yourself. Go read and study your Bible. If you're getting into Christian apologetics to win arguments, show off your theological prowess, or get involved in endless Facebook comment wars—just stop right now and go check your heart.

The 'apologia' we give is a response to a question. The text literally says to give a defence to "everyone asking you." Well, that changes a lot—doesn't it? Now, before some lazy persons think this is an easy way out, saying, “well no one is asking me, so I don't have to worry about all this learning and apologetics stuff”—let’s look closely at the implications of this verse. Peter is assuming that people should be asking you about the hope you have. They should be noticing something different about you, something which makes you stand out from a crowd. You're salty, you shine—and this flavour and light is not something simply humanly explainable. I seem to remember our Lord saying something about how useless salt that lost its flavour or a light under a bushel is... hmmm. Far from an excuse for indifference, this is an expectation that our lives should be lived so sold out that people would want to know why! Paul says it this way:

"But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these
things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God’s word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ." (2 Corinthians 2:14-17)

For the Christian who has sanctified Christ in their hearts, he leads them to spread the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere. This fragrance is going to stink to some—as their sinful lifestyle is convicted by our commitment to holiness and sanctification, our joy in the Lord, etc. However, for some—this fragrance is going to be so attractive, so delicious—it's going to smell like life and they're going to want to know more. Note that this also doesn't give license for a Christian to assume that they can just live the Gospel without words, as that horribly misused quote by St. Francis Assisi goes, “preach the Gospel, if necessary use words.” That’s as one quip by Babylon Bee put it, like a person “feeding the poor, and using food if necessary.” Utterly ridiculous!

Thirdly, the verse commands us to give a response to those asking us for the "hope that is in you." Again this comes full circle to sanctifying Christ in our hearts. Such a life is filled with the hope of glory. As Christ is treasured supremely, as we are most satisfied when God is most glorified in us, as we patiently endure suffering for righteousness sake—hope erupts—and this hope does not put us to shame (Rom. 5:2-5). Indeed, if we look to some of the examples of the early martyrs for the faith who were put in front of crowds to entertain them by their deaths, we see their testimony unto death inspired awe in others of the glory of the Gospel which they held more dearly to than their very lives. Thus Rome, in killing one Christian, ended up creating four more. It was so much to the extent that Tertullian wrote that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." Hope. Hope which doesn't put us to shame, hope which holds up boldly a Gospel proclamation in word and deed, hope which compels us to live lives not centered around ourselves. This is only the hope of those who have sanctified Christ in their hearts. This is the hope that those being drawn to the aroma of Christ in us will ask us about.

The Starting Point of Christian Apologetics

We come to know Christ through the Scriptures—so a passionate study of God's Word is essential and I would argue, the starting point for every apologist. We are mandated to give reason for the hope we have, which is found in the Bible—not to give a defence for a whole host of other periphery issues and speculations. I can tell you from experience that a majority of apologetics has to do with defending the Word from misinterpretation and misuse—how else are we to do this than to study it? A lot of people start off with trying to establish complex evidences for various scientific creation models or other such strategies—however, this is not the major concern of the average person you encounter. Why go there if it's not necessary? More importantly, that's not the focus of the scriptural mandate for apologetics. Our approach to apologetics must reflect the truth of
what we say we believe and what the Bible says about the state of sinful man. Greg Bahnsen puts it well:

"Because the clear revelation of God in nature’s and man’s constitution is suppressed in unrighteousness, it is impossible for theology or apologetics to base their efforts in a rebellious understanding of the world or history, independently working up to a verification of God’s written revelation. Faith must necessarily start with the clear, authoritative, self-attesting, special revelation of God in Scripture coordinated with the Holy Spirit’s inner testimony to the regenerated heart."  

Start with the Word. That’s where the Gospel is. This is your first mandate before you go off learning complicated arguments or memorizing data about manuscript evidence, or the statistical impossibility of star formations coming out of pure chance (all of which are valid apologetic truths). Calvin wrote in his commentary on 1 Peter 3:15, “Contentious disputes arise from the fact that many think less honorably than they ought of the greatness of divine wisdom, and are carried away by profane audacity.”  

If you have not devoted yourself to a disciplined and thorough study of the Word, and living in submission to it, you have no business trying to memorize complicated evidential arguments. All you will accomplish is a whole lot of nothing fast. If you’re not treasuring Christ above all else, you’re more prone to burn out, laziness and losing sight of the real goal. Christ must be at the center of our motivation for studying apologetics, not winning arguments. The learning of facts and arguments are important—don’t get me wrong—but they are only supplementary to our study and application of the Word which is the true starting point of apologetics.

Your Testimony is not the Gospel nor an apologia

Apologetics is then a requirement for ALL Christians if we are really serious about spreading the Gospel. How you became a Christian and why are you a Christian are two different questions. Sometimes people mix up their testimony—which is how you became a Christian with why—which is your ‘apologia’ or reason. In fact, I know people who get radically saved but all they know is that something major has happened in them. They can spend the rest of their life trying to figure out what happened! That’s because salvation is ultimately a supernatural act of God to regenerate a person dead in sin, blind to the light

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and deaf to the truth. So, although many think of apologetics primarily geared towards unbelievers, it actually plays a big role in understanding our own conversion and deepening our understanding of our faith so that we can share it effectively.

We must be careful to answer the questions people are asking, because you can tell them HOW—your experience, etc.—and it will do them no good if they are asking about the hope—the WHY. Peter is interested in Christians being able to answer the question why and communicate it in an effective and respectful way. This is our reasoned defence of the hope we have. We must understand that behind every question, is a questioner—a lot of the questions that you will be asked, are not just asked as mere intellectual pursuits, but have deep emotional connections to the person asking it also. A person who asks about evil in the world, was most likely scarred by some evil, and this is their soul’s cry from hurt and wanting justice or meaning for their pain. You can win the argument but lose the person. Understand that sometimes the right answer is not a logical point-by-point refutation of the person’s worldview error, but sometimes it’s a response of compassion and acknowledgement of the real sorrow of evil and suffering in the world (which by the way is an amazing lead into the Gospel's hope). Now, a person will eventually need to wrestle with logical problems of worldview, however this is just a warning to be sensitive to the context.

Acts 26 – Paul and Agrippa: Truth demands a response.

Paul is brought before King Agrippa and has to present his “apologia”—you can read it for yourself later because it’s a very interesting exchange. After Paul gives his defence for his faith, Agrippa asks him this question:

“In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?” (Acts 26:28b)

Notice the point, Paul was trying to convert Agrippa. It is important that we keep that the focus, we don’t just argue with people for mere intellectual debate. It is easy to “academize” apologetics and evangelism, instead of doing it out of our genuine love and concern for people. It is quite easy for those who are intellectually minded to end up just having ‘scholarly conversations’ or philosophical debates instead of doing truly Gospel-driven ministry, calling sinners to repentance and faith. Our goal is to see them truly converted, to have their eyes opened up to the glorious Gospel of our Lord—that we are hopeless
sinners, guilty before a Holy God in need of His redemption. Sometimes we can get caught up in mere intellectual and philosophical speculations, but it is important that after we establish reasons for belief, we bring it back to demanding a response in the hearer. While we won’t reason anyone to salvation—God can and does use these means to draw people to Himself. The Spirit can use arguments for the reliability of the Bible, evidence from creation, and other apologetic information to break down the walls people have up. This is one of the means by which a person may be irresistibly drawn in by the grace of our Lord.

So, we’re not after mere intellectual ascent to an idea, but recognition of our broken condition, willing submission to the Lordship of Christ, and genuine repentance and turning away from sin. This is can only be accomplished through the work of the Spirit applying the Gospel to people’s hearts as we open up these truths. We confront people with the fact that the information we present to them demands a response, how will you live in light of the truth I just exposed to you? How does it apply? All of this must be done out of a heart that cares for, is broken for and loves the person. If you want to be a better apologist, be a better lover of people—this too comes when Christ is sanctified in our hearts. It is out of love that we are inspired to study more to answer their questions out of genuine concern for their souls.

I love how bold Paul is in his response to Agrippa’s question:

*And Paul said, “Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains.” (Acts 26:29)*

Paul is unapologetically after this guy’s soul. This should be our passionate pursuit. All apologetics is to and from the Cross of Christ—it is the reason we have hope. We’re not out to just win arguments, we’re out to see the Lord save people who are created in His image who are in wilful rebellion to Him, blind to the truth and are on their way to a Christ-less eternity. There is a certain urgency in our apologetics and evangelism which must be communicated. Do you have this burden?

**The Apologetic Frontline**

"*For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ*" (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)
Our battle takes place a large part of the time in the mind. We wage war against ideas, arguments, worldviews, theories and philosophies which rise up against the knowledge of God. Our war is not against people, we’re waging war against the chains of wrong thinking and ideas which hold them back from seeing the truth. It’s also important for us as Christians too! James talks about the double-minded person:

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” (James 1:5-8)

That word δίψυχος [dipsuchos] "double-minded" is actually a Greek word he invented by smashing two words together. It is derived from δίς, "two" and ψυχή, "soul/mind." It means that you are caught between two opinions and you don’t know what to think and what to believe. Such a person James says, is like a wave tossed in the sea—spiritually unstable in all they do and even their prayer life is ineffective. Not primarily because they are living incorrectly, but because they are thinking incorrectly. Right living stems from right thinking. They still haven’t decided in their own mind where they stand. We have so many Christians who struggle with doubts, but instead of working and studying to seek answers for them, we renounce our God-given ability to think. Far from being a suggestion to check our brains out at the door, or just ignore our doubts and pretend like they aren’t there—what we are to do is to work them out. Far from a call to blind faith—this is a cry to open your eyes! We need to have strong convictions with understanding why we hold our position. The best time to get answers is before you need them. This is vitally important, especially for those who have kids who will one day go off to college and University and have professors and colleagues who will mercilessly drill them, test and ridicule their faith.

All throughout the Bible is language commanding us to think, study, meditate, test and approve the truth. We are not supposed to be intellectually lazy. Studying apologetics deepens our own faith by showing that there are substantial evidences to back up what we believe. When I read the gospels, I realized that Jesus’ call was a call to bet it all on him—to come and die to find that I might truly live. If I’m going to have that kind of radical commitment to something, I better be very sure it’s true otherwise that would be foolish! So I’d encourage you to do your own study because a lot of these things, you will forget. However, the truth that you find for yourself tends to stay with you longer. That Christians
are anti-intellectual is one of the worst critiques of the church from atheists. This should not be so—especially when all truth is God’s truth.

**Do's and Don’ts of Apologetics**

Be careful with using “Christianese” with people who did not grow up in the Church. Church culture has its own internal language that for us who have grown up in it and we inherently understand and speak it. However, for people not familiar with it, you might as well be speaking Greek. Words such as sanctification, propitiation, justification, born again, regeneration, even how we speak of “the flesh” and the blood of Christ can be really strange sounding to an outsider without some bit of explanation. Saying things like, “I covet your prayers,” “divine appointments,” “fishers of men,” “Jehovah Sneaky,” “knee mail,” “missionary dating,” “the lost,” “vacationary” and of course our favourite “WWJD” are all foreign inner speak to outsiders that can make them feel lost in the conversation or totally misunderstand what you’re saying. Avoid using them, or if you must—explain it.

As we’re on the topic, also some words are starting to be redefined in culture. So what we mean by hope, faith, or even love may not be what people understand and we end up speaking past each other. The common slang of the world is often different to that of the Church—especially if you’ve lived a sheltered Christian life. So sometimes we can inadvertently be talking past someone unknowingly, thinking they understand the same thing we do by these words. Things such as naturalism, Darwinism, Hedonism, and all these other “isms” have made their mark on culture—so we would be wise to at least have a periphery understanding of them so we can communicate effectively. Our goal is not necessarily to become experts in these varied topics. Our goal is clear communication of Gospel truth, not to further confuse people with lofty sounding speech. This is why Paul said to the Corinthians:

"And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but
in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)

Lastly, there are effective and ineffective ways to do apologetics. Jamming facts down people’s throats usually provokes a gag reflex. I tend to take a cue from how I see Jesus engage with questioners. He often responded to them with questions of His own to get to the heart of the matter. If we learn how to ask good questions, we can become better apologists. I’ve found it’s a lot less about knowing all the facts and data—although those are important also—but a large part of it is asking questions that will challenge people to critically analyse their preconceptions. Get them to think. I’ve found it’s way more effective if I can guide someone via the right questions to admit the truth out of their own mouth or see the folly of their arguments for themselves. It’s a lot less intrusive, and you don’t have as much of the gag reflex response. This is not to say that people won’t get upset or offended though. At the end of the day, the Gospel is an offense to the carnal man as he comes to terms with his own sinful nature and helpless estate. But it should not be an offense because we’re being jerks. What we pray for is what Paul talked about in 2 Corinthians 7:10—Godly sorrow for sin, which leads to repentance and life.

What I will be presenting here in the rest of this series will only be introductory responses to the questions. The articles which follow this one will tackle one apologetic question at a time. The goal will be to take away the gist of the argument and the reasoning behind it, then you can research and memorize the numbers and facts at your own discretion later. However, my main point here in this introduction is that, "A truly Christian defense of the faith must never fail to exalt Christ as Lord over all, including argumentation and reasoning. An apologetic that builds on any other rock than Christ does not honor the greatness of divine wisdom; it is foolishly and audaciously erected on the ruinous sands of human authority."  

Let us continue to study to show ourselves approved workmen unto God, continue to research and equip ourselves to always be ready to give an “apologia,” and to be bold in our witness and proclamation of the best news in the Universe!

Some of the questions which I hope to tackle (Lord willing) in upcoming articles will be:

- Faith vs Science
- The Problem of Pain
- Relative vs Absolute Truth
- The Trustworthiness of the New Testament

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Some good resources to get started in Apologetics:

- **Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry**
- **GotQuestions.org**

**Christian Apologists:**

You can click their names for a link to their website or search their names on YouTube for free lectures and debates.

- **Dr. James White**
  (Reformed Apologist addressing numerous issues including Islam, JWs, Mormonism, Catholicism)
- **Dr. Gary Habermas**
  (Evidence for the Resurrection)
- **Dr. Ravi Zacharias**
  (International itinerate speaker and apologist)
- **Dr. Daniel B. Wallace**
  (NT Manuscript scholar)
- **Dr. Hugh Ross** (Scientist/Astrologist)
- **Dr. Os Guinness**
- **Dr. John Lennox**
- **Dr. William Lane Craig**
  (Scientific Philosopher)
- **Michael Ramsden**
- **Dr. Nabeel Qureshi**
  (apologetics to Islam)
- **Dr. Alister McGrath**
  (Christian thinker and theologian)
- **Dr. Francis Collins**
  (Former Director of the Human Genome Project, Current Director of National Institutes of Health)
- **Lee Strobel**
- **Dr. Frank Turek**
- **Jeff Durbin** (Apologia Church)

**YouTube Channels:**

- **Theology, Philosophy and Science**
- **The One Minute Apologist**
- **Apologetics Canada**
- **Apologia Studios**
- **Dr. Oakley (James White)**
- **Acts 17 Apologetics**