

Apologetics¹ for Dummies

by Chuck Gianotti

In the course of living the Christian life, there will be times when spiritual issues come up in conversation with non-believers. This may happen when you are purposefully sharing your faith in evangelism, for example. But, most of the time, the Christian who is concerned about his faith and walk with the Lord, will find spiritual things come up in conversation quite naturally. Maybe at a community function, while working in the backyard, during coffee break at work, or playing sports.

Most of us know the fear of being asked a question that we couldn't answer! We want to witness or speak up when someone raises a criticism or objection or misconception about Jesus Christ or Christianity. But, fear sometimes paralyzes us because we "just know" someone will ask or say something that we cannot answer. It's like getting your face rubbed in the mud. Not a pleasant feeling. Only later do we think up the perfect response -- but it's way late.

After 24 years of being a Christian and witnessing to all kinds of people, both young and old, I have found that there are only relatively few questions that keep coming up. And there are answers and responses to each one. We fear, though, because we feel there are 100's of questions and we need to be a theologian to successfully answer every objection. But, there are really only a few, and if we can master how to deal with those, we will be much further down the road in being effective witnesses for Christ.

Our ultimate goal is to be channels of the Holy Spirit to reach people's hearts. Winning an argument will not necessarily convert a person. But, the Holy Spirit can (John 16:8)! We want to deal with these questions in a way that will help remove the intellectual barriers that stand in the way of the unbeliever's heart.

¹ The term "apologetics" means "defending what you believe", a study of our faith with a view to defending it before non-believers.

We must "prepare our minds for action" (1 Pet 1:13), "ready in season and out of season" (II Ti 4:2). First, in preparation, we must note a few foundational principles that are helpful in our responses:

1. Don't argue - the goal is not to win an argument. A person can have all the right answers and know the truth and still be lost for eternity. Satan is a good example of that. Sometimes, people just like to argue and are not really serious about spiritual things. But, underlying everyone's outward appearance, there is a soul that wrestles with separation from God. They might not put it those terms, but it may be experienced as guilt, loneliness, fear, defensiveness, insecurity, drive for things that make them feel significant, like sex, money, status, popularity, etc.

So the goal is to be a channel of God's Spirit that reaches into their soul. Dealing with their objections and questions must never be a debate or competition. Eternity is on the line for the person's soul! This is one for whom our Lord Jesus Christ died. Win arguments - NO! Reach souls - YES!

2. You don't have to know everything. You just need to know how to give a good responses to the few most common objections. Giving an answer is one of several good responses.

3. Sometimes the objection raised is not the real issue, but a concern for something far deeper. For example, someone may say, "I couldn't believe in a God who would send people to hell!" Before you launch into a long sermon, you might ask the person, "Why do you feel so strongly about that?"

If they say, "It just doesn't make sense", it is probably an intellectual issue.

If they say, "My church doesn't believe that," it is probably an issue of authority.

If they say, "My father died last year and if what you are saying is true, then he is in hell." -- now, this is a completely different issue altogether!

If they laugh off your question, then you know they haven't really given it any thought and meant it as a flippant remark

to shut you up. You are best not to pursue answering that question.

4. God can use your boldness to affect bystanders. If an objection is raised in a group setting, for example at work or during a community gathering, it takes extra boldness to respond. But, God can use your boldness to speak to everyone present -- since you will have done something that everyone recognizes takes much conviction -- to speak up when you know it goes against the crowd. That lends credibility to your witness. I still remember young people who witnessed to me in high school and university -- ones I laughed at. And I remember at the time secretly admiring them for their boldness in standing up for what they believed.

5. If you don't know the answer to a question, don't try to fake it! People can spot a phony a long way off. Simply say, "That is a very good question, and I don't know the answer to it. But, I'll tell you what -- give me a few days, and I'll find an answer and get back to you." Then, keep your word and do it!

6. Some people mimic what they have heard others say. For example, we have all heard the statement: "The Bible is full of contradictions." You see, this is the most common "objection" to Christianity raised, but the easiest to respond to.

Very few people who have made this statement have ever looked to find out for themselves. A simple response is, "That's interesting, I have been reading the bible for ___ years, and I haven't found any contradictions. Sure there are some things that are hard to understand, but they aren't contradictions." If appropriate, you could ask the person which "contradictions" are the most bothersome to him or her. Many times there isn't anything specific. But, if there is, you would do well to interact with them, provided this is a legitimate concern they have.

7. Some people respond critically or harshly in front of their friends, but differently when alone. In this case, find a time when you can discuss the person's objections with them alone. For example: "You brought up some interesting concerns the other day about my faith. Could we have lunch together -- I'd like to

interact with you about those things, in a way that we can really understand what each other is getting at."

What, then, are these most frequently asked questions? From my experience they fall into five categories. They may be worded differently than below, but if you can work through responses to each of these, you will be able to handle most situations.

Keep in mind, these are the initial or "barrier" questions rose by non-believers. As the Lord begins to work in their heart and they begin to genuinely inquire about your faith, there will be more in-depth questions that follow.

In developing responses, there are three things you should strive for:

- 1) Find out the real concern being raised in each situation.
- 2) Understand what the truth of the word of God has to say about these issues.
- 3) Learn *how* to effectively communicate that truth in ways that the non-believer can understand.

The questions or objections fall into these categories:

1. ABOUT GOD

- a. You cannot prove God exists. Isn't He whomever you want Him to be for you? (*Ro 1:19-23, Gen 1:1*)
- b. If there is a God, how come there is so much suffering in the world? (*Gen 6:5, 9:11, Matt 11:28-30, Luke 4:16-19*)
- c. How could a good God damn someone to hell for eternity? (*Jer 2:19, 2 Pet 2:20, Hab 1:13, Ro 2:4*)

2. ABOUT THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRISTIANITY

- a. Is Jesus really God? (*Col 1:19, 2:9, John 1:1 compared with Isaiah 42:8, 43:11, 44:6*)
- b. To say Christianity is the only way is narrow minded. Don't all religions really believe the same basic things? (*Prov 14:12*)

c. What about the native in deep, dark Africa who has never heard of Jesus? (*Ro 2:12-16, Heb 11:6, John 14:6*)

3. ABOUT THE BIBLE

a. Doesn't the Bible contradict itself? have errors? (*II Tim 3:16, II Peter 1:20-21*)

b. Doesn't science contradict the Bible? (*Gen 1:1-2, John 1:1-5, Col 1:17*)

c. I simply do not believe the Bible. (*John 7:17, 12:46, I Cor 1:18*)

4. ABOUT US

a. I am or can be good enough to get to heaven (*Luke 18:10-14, Matt 9:13, Ro 3:10-11, Ro 3:23, Luke 13:3,5, Jeremiah 17:9*)

b. I am too bad to be forgiven (*I John 1:9, Is 1:18, I Tim 1:13-15*)

5. MISCELLANEOUS

a. Doesn't God help those who help themselves? (*Ro 3:10, Is 64:6, Matt 15:25*)

b. Isn't the church full of hypocrites? (*Is 45:22, Mt 24:51. We're all hypocrites -- some of us attend church -- it is a good place for us to learn not to be hypocrites*)

c. I have my own religion (*Jo 14:6, 20:31, Mk 16:16, Prov 16:25, Jo 12:48*)

Books that provide some answers to these questions:

Answering the Tough Ones, by Dave De Witt

I'm Glad You Asked, by Larry Moody, Victor Books

Know What You Believe, Paul E. Little, InterVarsity Press

AS with everything else in life worth doing, responding to people objections or questions about the Christian faith takes work and time. Like riding a bike -- early on in your learning process you fall quite often, but you keep getting back up and trying again. Before long you are racing down the street, hopping over curbs -- even maneuver it down a set of stairs at the local park. Obstacles

that may have been barriers before are not as difficult anymore.

It is the same way with defending what we believe. With practice and persistence we can learn to effectively respond to most objections and concerns raised against our faith. And in the process we can begin to reach the souls of men and women for Christ.