

Apologetics

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[0:00] I want to talk to you this morning about apologetics. And you might ask, why are we going to talk about that?! And there's a couple reasons.

The first is that I've already done quite a bit of reading and quite a bit of writing and thinking about this subject. And so when I needed to fill in this morning, it was kind of ready-made and ready to go. And the second is, our pastors have identified evangelism as a weakness in our church. And one area that is very closely related to evangelism is apologetics.

And so it's my hope that this lesson will at least start us thinking about how we can evangelize and defend the gospel and the world around us in hostile conditions that we find ourselves in.

Apologetics, for those of you who don't know, is simply the defense of the Christian faith. The defense of the Christian faith against its adversaries. And these adversaries come from all over the map, from every field.

[1:13] In the early Christian church, one of the greatest evangelists was a fellow named Justin Martyr. And he defended the Christians and the Christian faith against the Roman emperor, the Romans.

Those people who thought the Christians were fomenting rebellion, were trying to set up a new kingdom, were doing really sick and crazy things.

And Justin Martyr said, no, they're not. And he gave lots of reasons why Christians are good citizens. Irenaeus was another apologist.

He was a pastor. And he wrote a big book called *Against the Heretics*, which, believe it or not, was a book that he wrote against every single heresy that he could think of that was popping up in Christianity.

And that's all to say that the Christian faith has been born, was born, and lives in an environment of hostility where people don't believe it, and they believe opposing things.

[2:16] And really, the enemies of the gospel are just that. They're enemies. They are not ambivalent, but they really do strive to tear down the Christian faith.

So we've always needed to defend the Christian faith against intellectual enemies and spiritual enemies and even political enemies. And apologetics is the area that deals with that defense.

So the question is, what does that have to do with you? None of you, I probably, not any of you anyways, are going to write any books or be involved in any sort of formal debate with atheists or Gnostics or something like that.

But nevertheless, you in your day-to-day life are going to run into people, and you probably live with people, who are antagonistic to the Christian faith.

There are, and there always will be, unbelievers who believe a lie, who don't believe the Bible, and instead believe and think all sorts of other things.

[3:25] we live in an increasingly pagan culture. We used to be a mostly Christian culture, but believe it or not, we are moving back towards paganism.

If you go to Barnes & Noble or Borders or some bookstore like that and look in the New Age section or in the religious section, you can look and you can see the tarot cards and the books on witchcraft.

And you'd just be surprised at what is being published and what is being believed in the world today. You don't have to go to Harry Potter's Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry to learn how to cast spells or to make potions.

You just need to go up to Grape Road and you can look on the shelves there. And if the stores are selling these books, then you better believe that people are believing them.

They don't sell books that don't make them money. And judging by the largeness of the section at these bookstores, a lot of people are believing and turning towards witchcraft and New Age philosophy.

[4:41] So paganism is coming back in force in our culture. And then on the other hand, you have what seems to be the opposite of paganism and witchcraft and things like that.

And that's scientism. And what I mean by that is there's people that believe that science is the end-all of end-all, that science is the only way we know truth, that science really is the great hope of mankind, that science is going to solve our problems.

If we could just do better science and more science, then we could actually keep people from dying, that we can make people live forever and ever and cure all their ills and dry all their tears.

Science will save mankind. And if you look out there with the people that you work with and your neighbors, you'll find that that is very common, that instead of holding to a faith in the living God, they're holding faith in this process that we call science.

But, best of all, and I say that sarcastically, we have now what C.S. Lewis called the materialist magician. The materialist magician.

[6:01] Many, many people believe that both of these things are true, that all things must conform to the laws of science, that science is the way that we know the world, that there's only matter, chance, and natural laws.

And, at the same time, these people believe in witchcraft, and magic, and fortune-telling, and things like that.

And that's sort of an odd combination. And if you think it's ridiculous and irrational that you could hold two totally opposed viewpoints, you're right.

It is. It doesn't make a lot of sense. Last week, Pastor John mentioned the screw tape letters. And C.S. Lewis wrote those. In letter seven of that book, C.S. Lewis, or we'll say screw tape, writes this, I have great hopes that we shall learn in due time how to emotionalize and put this as the background.

The screw tape letters, for those of you who weren't here last week, are a senior devil writing to a younger tempter how they can tempt Christians and cause people to remain in their blindness.

[7:17] So this is screw tape, the senior tempter writing. I have great hopes that we shall learn in due time how to emotionalize and mythologize their science to such an extent that in effect, what is a belief in us, that is the devils, will creep in while the human mind remains closed to belief in the enemy, that's God.

The life force, the worship of sex, and some aspects of psychoanalysis may here prove useful. If once we can produce our perfect work, the materialist magician, then the end of the war will be in sight.

When I first read that some time ago, a long time ago now, I never really thought that I would see a materialist magician in my life, someone who believes in science and in witchcraft at the same time. But I was wrong. I was wrong. I had a discussion with a person at work just the other day or a couple months ago now actually. And in the same discussion, we argued, or he argued, that Noah's account of the flood couldn't be true because how could all those animals fit into the ark?

It's scientifically impossible that all those animals could fit into the ark. And then, not one hour later, he mentioned that he visited a fortune teller.

[8:47] And this fortune teller told him what things are going to happen in his life. And he believes her. He's living his life based on what she said.

My friend is both a materialist and a magician. He thinks everything must be scientific, but at the same time, magic is really a way to know and live your life.

So that's our world. This is our culture that we live in. Other cultures have other problems, but these seem to be the things that are informing our culture now.

And so we're called to evangelize and make disciples in this world. And sinners are not just ambivalent towards the gospel, they're actually antagonistic.

And so we must be prepared to defend the gospel against these people. And Satan has built strongholds, spiritual strongholds, philosophical strongholds that defend his followers against the gospel.

[9:54] And if we are to evangelize, we must learn to demolish those arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God and take captive every thought to make

it obedient to Christ, as Paul said in the book of 2 Corinthians, I believe.

So how do you defend the Christian faith? How can we as normal Christians tear down Satan's strongholds and those philosophical ideas that are holding his believers and followers captive? We have three points this morning and they're really easy points so we can really all understand them. They're rigorous enough though at the same time to require all the grace that God can give us.

We're going to have no problem understanding what we need to do, but we are weak and when it finally comes down time to it, it's going to demand so much wisdom and so much grace when you're in the situation that you will be thrown on God and you must learn to trust him in these apologetic situations.

So the three points are these. Believe the truth, do the truth, or live the truth, do the truth, speak the truth. Turn with me to 1 Peter 3 15.

[11:26] 1 Peter 3 15. First we're going to talk about believing the truth. Believing the truth. 1 Peter 3 15. 1 Peter 3 gives us the basic heart condition that is required if we're going to have an effective apologetic witness.

Follow along with me as I read. But in your hearts set apart 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.

All good apologetics start at this point. That in your hearts you set apart Christ as Lord. So, while we're talking to unbelievers, while we're having those one-on-one conversations with an unbeliever, we have to believe that Christ is Lord.

Lord. And that must mean that our assumption, our presupposition, if you will, is that Christ is Lord. So, what does it mean to set in our hearts Christ as Lord?

Well, it means all sorts of things. It means all sorts of things. It means that Christ is God. It means that Christ is King, and He rules over all things. It means that when He speaks, His word has authority.

[12:57] It is to be obeyed. And if Christ died, it means now that He is the resurrected one because He is the Lord. He wasn't past tense the Lord, but He is the Lord still.

We have a God that has raised Christ from the dead. And it means that when He tells us what to think, we are to think that way. And so, and most importantly, it means that Christ is my Lord. my personal Lord. I consider Him Lord. I think of Him in that way. And that gives me hope.

I'm assuming that He is Lord, even as I am trying to prove that He is Lord. But unbelievers, and even some apologists will say, that's not fair.

You can't assume what you're trying to prove and then prove it. That's not being honest. that's not being intellectually honest. You can't assume and prove the same thing at the same time.

[14:04] And of course, you can't expect the unbelievers to think that way either. You can't expect them to assume that Christ is Lord because that's what you're trying to prove.

And those other people say, well, we need to have some common ground, a neutral territory, where we can meet and we can rationally discuss these things.

Honestly and fairly, consider what you as a Christian are claiming. And if we don't at least agree for the moment to at least pretend that Christ isn't Lord, then we're not going to be really able to have any kind of argument.

So do you understand what I'm saying? That they want to say, these other apologists and even unbelievers, that we have to assume that Christ isn't Lord, and then we have to think about Him, and then if we find out that He is Lord, then that's okay.

But with all due respect to those Christian thinkers, and there's been many, many Christian thinkers who think that we have to assume that Christ isn't Lord, and then start to reason our way to find out that He is.

[15:18] But all that kind of thinking is to deny the truth, and is really to disobey 1 Peter 3.15. Peter says, we are to set apart Christ as Lord, and that is the first thing that we do when we are giving a defense of our faith.

And if we even pretend to take Christ off the throne of our hearts while we're having a conversation, then we are disobeying and being intellectually dishonest.

So if we're called to defend the faith, we have to assume that Christ is the Lord. And when we do, like I said earlier, that gives us lots of hope. It opens up all sorts of avenues for comfort and joy to fill

us in our apologetic situation.

When we by faith say, whatever happens in this conversation, however this argument goes, I know that Christ is Lord. And in a real sense, Christ does not need to be defended.

We might defend him intellectually, but in reality, Christ is on the throne. And he has the key to that unbeliever's heart. And the moment that Christ wants to open that door, he can.

[16:38] And the moment he wants to use one of your arguments, he can. He is not weak. He is the Lord. And so I don't have to sit there as a person in this apologetic situation where it's kind of tense anyways, and I'm trying to think on my feet, I don't have to worry about trying to fix this person, or I don't have to really convince this person, because Christ has the key to his heart.

And the moment Christ wants to open the door, he can open the door. He is Lord. But, it is true. It is true to a certain extent that we do have to have some sort of common ground with the unbeliever if we're going to have a conversation with them. Some similarity between the two of us if we're going to have a meaningful conversation.

The point of contact is just not that Christ is Lord. That's just not the area that we are going to give in on, or the truth of the gospel. If we pretend to deny the truth, to advance the truth, then really we're just fighting against ourselves.

So let me ask you, and this is for you to give me some input, what kind of similarities or points of contact are there between a Christian and an unbeliever?

[18:07] What areas do we have some common ground on that maybe we could use to have a good conversation, an intellectual, meaningful, apologetic conversation?

If we can, if someone must argue for the defense of faith, you would think that, or I assume that they are searching for what is the truth.

I don't know if that else or not. What are you saying? Try to rephrase that. Sorry.

If you're having an offensive faith, and someone shows an interest in what you believe, then that commonality, I would think, is that someone genuinely seeking the truth.

that's a possibility. But that's, don't you think a lot of times people are just wanting to get into an argument with you because they don't like your faith?

[19:05] So, Dad? The sin that makes Christ all that one word that you have that common with everybody, and you can share that with the person that you have common around and you are no better than being.

Very good. I'll talk about that later. Dave? It's just an matter of the part of getting with the odds that I'm not caught up in contention and frustration and pressure with my co-workers and people that I'm supposed to be with.

And it's at that point that I could that I should go back to your service as our practice Lord before that. Give my hope that this I feeling all the same time you're feeling but now I can bring back the back Christ before and that and that there is then a college problem.

Right. There are trials and adulations and everyone at the same time. Okay. Is there someone else?

We all have the common human experience families and desire for certain things and certain things and certain drives and certain questions that walk with.

[20:45] We all have that in common. Okay. Someone Aaron. That's right. There's we read the same area along the same lines and we have some of the logs.

I think that is good. Okay. That's good. Yeah. Mark. We both use logic to reason things out. Yep. Okay. Let me why do you use logic to reason things out both of you? The unbeliever and the believer. Because we live in a rational universe. Okay.

But so do animals. So do animals. They don't use logic. They don't have intellect. Okay. Why do you have intellect? God made us that way.

How did God make us? His image. Actually, I think that's okay. Roger. I want the spiritual and that's the whole purpose of the conversation between this other person, right?

[21:51] The spiritual desire, the spiritual need is a need for knowing the superior being that exists. Right.

I think that comes from that we are made in the image of God. We have to get moving on, but I think everything everyone said falls under these two fields of commonality.

We are both made in the image of God. The unbeliever and the believer are both made in the image of God, and we both experience sin. And all of our experiences fall under those two

categories.

We live in this world as image bearers of God, but we live in this world as sinful image bearers of God, and so we have brought destruction and tension and problems into our lives that we all experience.

God made us in His own image. We don't have time to talk about, I was going to ask you, what does it mean to be made in the image of God? That's a huge category.

[22:59] Let me just give you some brief points of what it means to be made in the image of God that both unbelievers and believers share. It means that we are rulers over God's creation.

We are representatives of God's authority. We are children of God in a generic sense. There is a sense that all men everywhere are what could be called the children of God.

We share a lot of the same attributes as God does. that allow him to rule in the universe. We hold those attributes in some way.

Like Roger said, we are spiritual beings. Like Mark said, we're rational beings. We think about things and we have a moral sense to us.

We are able to think through ideas and arguments. We can look at this world and figure out and understand things. we don't enjoy contradictions.

[24:00] We're rational. So when we find that our thinking is totally against ourselves, then generally we try to find at least some sort of solution to that.

We don't enjoy intellectual absurdity. So this means that we do have the ability to talk to one another. Men can understand from arguments that there is a God.

They can understand and see God's revelation. They can see the wonderful creation and know that there is a divine, omnipotent creator.

They can understand these facts. The fall has not so destroyed the image of God that it's so ruined his faculties that they don't exist anymore, that they don't work in some way.

And so, we do have to make an important distinction though. I want to make this important distinction. Though the fall hasn't ruined men's faculties in that way, it really has twisted and perverted his intellect and his reason.

[25:07] They are truly blind to God's glory. But it's not because they can't see, it's because they won't see. And because they won't see, they can't see.

Does that make sense? That they've made a choice. They have a heart problem that has ruined the way they think. It's not that their brains have been ruined and so now their hearts go astray.

Men from the very beginning go astray in their hearts. And then that causes them to think all sorts of stupid, irrational things. Paul says, the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven.

God has been known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

[26:12] For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God, nor gave thanks to Him. God's revelation is plain to men everywhere.

They can see and they can understand, and that's where the problem comes in. They are guilty because they won't see, and they suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

So is that clear? We're kind of skipping a lot because of time, but is that kind of clear, that tension there, that fallen people understand, but it's foolishness to them.

They see, but they're blind at the same time. It's sort of a hard thing to nail down and put into words because I think at the bottom of it, fallen men are irrational.

They really are. They know the truth and they reject it and they believe the truth, but they disobey it. They're even like Satan.

[27:18] Satan knows that his cause is futile, but does he stop fighting? No, he doesn't. It makes him fight all the more. So we're talking about believing the truth.

We are both made in the image of God and the second area that we have in common with the unbeliever is sin. And I can only go over this briefly. You know what it is to be a sinner.

You know what it is to fall under the judgment of God. You have in your heart, even as a Christian, the sense that you are not perfect, that things are not right altogether, you're not doing what you're supposed to do.

and the unbelievers share that. Romans 13:2 says, although they know God's righteous decree, they know the decree, it's written in their hearts, that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things, but they approve of those who practice them.

Unbelievers everywhere know that God will judge them, that God is going to destroy them for their sin, and they know it in their hearts, they just keep sinning anyways.

[28:34] Romans 2:15 says, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences are also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.

So, unbelievers have in their heart, in their conscience, the sense that, a sense of right and wrong, that sometimes when they do right things, their conscience defends them, and says, what you're doing is a good thing.

And at the same time, they have the conscience that says, what you're doing is a wrong thing. And brothers and sisters, you know what it is to be a sinner, and so do they.

And the gospel has the way of dealing with their sin. Their sin is like the landing zone that we can go in and have a real meaningful conversation with them.

Because our worldview accounts for sin. It makes sense of sin and misery. And it also has a good solution for that sin problem that we have.

[29:41] We must believe the truth. So we must believe that Christ is Lord. We also have to believe that all of us, sinners and saints alike, share the image of God, and that those sinners out there, they can think in some way, they can understand in some way, and that we all know what sin is and what God demands for sin.

So we've talked about believing the truth, and now I want to talk about doing the truth and speaking the truth. I have a lot less to say on these things, mainly because all of you know what it means to do the truth.

If you're seeking to obey God, then you all are doing the truth. And I can't speak very much about speaking the truth, because all those things are so very situationally dependent, that there's thousands and millions of different ways of saying things, and things that you might want to say, or need to say, that I can't even really talk about them very specifically.

Doing the truth, then. If you're still back in 1 Peter, look at verse 16. 1 Peter 3, 16. We are to keep a clear conscience so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

so we set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts. It says, keeping a clear conscience so those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

[31:28] Our behavior as Christians is a great defense for the gospel. And our lives need to be so exemplary that when someone accuses you as a Christian, says, Christianity is worthless, it's wrong, it's a lie, they should be doing it in the face of our beautiful Christian life.

They should have to say, you know what, Christianity may be wrong, but it sure does make for a good person. And so we need to remember, and you need to remember, that your life speaks volumes to this world, to the unbelievers.

If you go to work, and your work is shoddy, and you don't do a very good job, and you come back late from lunch, and if you gossip, and you slander, and you just participate in the general pettiness that goes on in the workplace, that is speaking to this world about what is right, and what is true, and what is not.

And if you do all those things, you put Christianity into the shadows, and you make whatever you say, and whatever you believe, quite irrelevant.

It doesn't matter what you say, and what you think, and what you believe, if you are no different than I am. So, we are called to the highest ethical standards.

[33:01] In our neighborhoods, the way we treat people, the way our children treat people, and the way we treat things, our neighbors' houses, our neighbors' yards, and the way our children treat our neighbors in our neighbors' yards, all those things are really basic ways of having a very good Christian witness that you live a good, upright, decent life.

And I don't have time to talk about all the other things, all the fruit of the Spirit that should fill your life, that you should be living day today by the Spirit's help that make the Christian life beautiful.

1 Thessalonians 4:12 summarizes very well what I'm trying to say. Make it your ambition, this is quite an ambition, doesn't sound very Christian sometimes, make it your ambition to lead a quiet

life, to mind your own business, to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of the outsiders, so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

So people are watching. Are you minding your own business? Are you doing good work? Are you winning and gaining respect from the outside world?

If you are, you are defending the Christian faith. And then when it comes time to speak, you're someone that they want to listen to, that your opinions are important because of the way you live your life.

[34 : 37] So without a good life, believing the truth and speaking the truth is pointless. So you have to have a good life. You have to be doing the truth.

But now that we've come to it, if we know the truth and we are acting the truth and doing the truth, but we don't speak, then we're no good to anyone.

We really are no good to anyone. Now, speaking the truth apologetically centers generally around arguments. And I'm not saying like heated passionate battles, I'm saying intellectual arguments.

And so you are going to have to familiarize yourself with at least some of those arguments if you're going to speak the truth. You might ask, let's say you're talking with a person who doesn't believe there's a God, an atheist.

atheist. You might ask, well, how do you explain all these things around us? How do you explain this world? Or how do you explain persons? I mean, how does impersonal matter make something like me that cares and feels and desires things?

[35 : 51] Or if you're talking to someone who believes in evolution, which is very likely, if you're talking to someone who believes in evolution, evolution, you could use arguments about, well, look at this animal.

How could it have evolved? Look at this chemistry and this biochemistry. It's way too complex for just time and chance to have created. If you're talking about, well, Jesus didn't rise from the dead. Well, do you have proof of that? There's a lot of proof that suggests that he did rise from the dead. There's the empty tomb, and it's still empty. There's no one that's proven it otherwise.

So, brothers and sisters, if you're going to speak the truth like that, if you're going to speak apologetically and sort of at that level, then you're going to need to familiarize yourself with those things.

And I'm not saying, and I hope no one thinks I'm saying, that you need to be this intellectual genius and you have all these arguments sort of all filed back there, and in an instant you can just pull it out and you know exactly what to say to all those unbelievers out there.

[36 : 57] It's not like that. Those people are not as smart as you think they are, and you're not as smart as you think you are either. And so, if you just have sort of some good arguments, some good lines of thinking, then that comes in handy when it comes time to speak.

You have to know the truth, at least to some extent, if you're going to speak the truth. So, those are some traditional sort of like what we normally think of as apologetical ways of speaking of those sort of arguments.

But all of you, no matter how young or old or smart or not so smart, have an argument that is at your disposal.

And your argument is your personal testimony. 1 Peter talks about giving the hope that, giving a reason for the hope that you have in you. And at the bottom of it, the reason we have a hope is because God has come into my life, and He has saved me, and He's changed me, and things are different.

I'm not perfect, but I'm definitely different. Things are things go better. Things are going better. Maybe my outward life is not so hot right now, but I have Jesus, and He makes my life good.

[38 : 27] And when we can talk about that, when we can talk about what Jesus has done for us, and what He is doing for us, and the hope of what He is going to do for us, that when I face death, that when I face sickness, and trials, and troubles, and I'm under persecution, and under attack, that's the context of 1 Peter, even when they are attacking me, they should be wondering, why is He still so hopeful?

Why hasn't He given up? And the bottom line is, you are not giving up, you're still keeping your hope, not because of all these arguments, but because Christ is in you, and He is living your life through you, and He is giving you hope, and I have this personal, close relationship with Him, and this is my defense, and that defense is powerful, the gospel defense.

So, as you can see, apologetics is not just merely an intellectual activity. Like, the last two minutes, we talked about some intellectual arguments, but it's very much a personal thing.

It has to do with who you are, and how you live, and the kind of relationships that you have. It's, are you a godly person worthy of respect?

Are you worth listening to? And when you talk, do you make sense? So, let us strive for a holy life that recommends us to this fallen world, unbelieving world, and we need to speak the truth in gentleness and respect.

[40 : 16] Peter says, be prepared to give an answer for the hope that you have, but do this with gentleness and respect. The way you treat the unbeliever is a marvelous defense of the Christian faith.

If you treat them with gentleness and respect, if you take their ideas and you actually respect them and then you deal with them, then you're doing a great favor for the Christian faith.

You're someone that is worthy of respect and the Christian life is worthy of being followed. Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you that you do give us grace in our weakness.

We are all faced with many, many enemies. We live in this world that does not love you. I pray that you would give us grace that we might speak the truth in love, that we might do the truth, that we might be obedient and faithful to your word, and that we would hold on to the faith with a clear conscience.

We are not sufficient for these things. And if we don't know that, we will soon know that more when we have to talk with other people about our Christian faith and talk with those who don't agree with us.

[41 : 36] Will you give us grace in those hours to defend your name and your glory? Will you please help us to do that for Jesus' sake? And it's in his name I pray.

Amen. Amen.