

APOLOGETICS

Approaches for Reaching the Lost

Lesson # 2

Through the centuries, men have developed different philosophical approaches or methods for reaching the lost. Each method has a certain strategy and emphasis. The goal is to defend the faith and communicate the truth claims of Christianity with the lost. Every apologetic method has theological implications. In the first lesson we looked at man and sin. We did this to understand how sin has affected the human race and to understand that whatever method is used to try and reach people for Christ, it must take into account the affects of sin on mankind. Every method therefore must be compared to the Scriptures to determine its validity. Whatever apologetic approach we use, it must overcome the internal and external barriers which keep people from coming to Christ. In this lesson we will do a quick survey of the first lesson and then survey some of the basic apologetic approaches, comparing them to what we have already learned.

I. **SUMMARY OF LESSON ONE AND THE AFFECTS OF SIN ON MAN, INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL BARRIERS**

- A. **Definition of Sin:** Sin is insubordination, divination, iniquity, idolatry, not doing what you know is right, lawlessness, and unrighteousness.

- B. **Origin of Sin and Fall of Man:** Satan was created a holy being, rebelled against God in heaven, Eve was deceived by Satan, Adam willingly sinned.

- C. **How Men Sin:** Everyone is tempted and carried away by their own lusts, usually they look, lust, and then sin.

- D. **Original Sin:** The Bible teaches all men are sinners in Adam. Adam fell into sin and being the head of the human race, he could only produce sinful offspring. His curse and sin was reckoned to all the human race so that men are sinners from conception onward in Adam.

- E. **Origins of Personal Volitional Sin:** Men start sinning from birth.

- F. **The Degree to Which Men Are Sinners:** Every intent of man's heart is only evil continually. The hearts of men are incurably wicked, they can't stop sinning any more than a leopard can get rid of his spots, they are futile in their speculations, walk in the futility of their mind, their foolish heart is darkened, they are darkened in their understanding, ignorant of God, hard-hearted, calloused, given over to sensuality, impurity, greediness, fornication, theft, envy, slander, pride, drunkenness, coveting, wickedness, deceit, and foolishness.

- G. **How Sin Has Affected Man's Attitude Towards God:** Men will not believe, they love darkness rather than light, they hate the light, will not come to the light, they don't understand the truth, they don't seek God, they turn aside to sin, they don't do good, they deceive, poison, curse, murder, being hell-bent they have no fear of God.
- H. **Barriers Hindering Men from Coming to Christ**
1. *Internal Barriers:* The unsaved don't have the Holy Spirit in them which is necessary for understanding the truth. They are spiritually dead, deceived, and enslaved to sin and Satan. They think the gospel is foolishness. Their own minds are closed to the things of God.
 2. *External Barriers:* Satan snatches away the Word. He blinds the minds of the unbelieving, and deceives unbelievers. The worries of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, affliction and persecution choke the Word out so that it becomes unfruitful.
 3. Keep in mind that whatever apologetic method we use, it must take into account and be able to overcome the barriers that work to keep men from Christ.

II. DEFINITIONS OF APOLOGETICS

A. Common Definitions of Apologetics

1. "A *defense* and presentation of the truth claims of Christianity."
2. "A *scientific vindication* of the divine authority of the Christian religion."
3. "A *defense* of Christianity in the face of the various attacks made upon it by the unbelieving world."
4. "*Reasoning* for the existence of God, establishing the deity of Christ, *defending* the inspiration of the Scriptures."
5. The above definitions all have a similarity indicated by the words in italics. They all presuppose that you must "prove" the Bible is true *before* you can share the gospel with someone. The thought that we should first convince people of the truth of the Word of God before sharing the gospel with them is common but not biblical. The Word of God doesn't need proven, vindicated, or verified by science. We are never told in the Scriptures or have modeled for us that we must first convince people God's Word is true before we share it with them. Our task is to proclaim God's Word, not try to prove it. The Word of God is true whether people think it is or not, and the Scriptures teach we must first believe in order that we may know, not the other way around.

- B. **Our Definition of Apologetics:** “The philosophy or methodology of proclaiming the truth claims of the Bible or the Christian faith.” Notice, there is no “defense,” no “vindication,” and no “proving that the Bible is true.”

III. DIFFERENT APOLOGETIC METHODS

- A. **Rationalistic Approach** is the view that reason is the source of knowledge independent or apart from experience. An example might be using your reason and intellect to ask yourself, "Does God exist?" If you say, "no" - what reasons do you have? The fact that you are even discussing God shows that God exists. We are rational because we were created by a rational being. We don't need evidences or proofs, but logic tells us that God exists. Reason proves to us that God exists and that the Scriptures are true.

Assumptions:

1. Man's ability to reason is unaffected by sin.
2. Man is able to verify truth through reason and intellect.
3. Logic and reason compel a person to accept the claims of Scripture.
4. We must rationally understand that we may know.
5. How does this compare to what we learned about how sin has affected man? Is man able to determine truth through logic and reason? Can he think his way to Christ or can we attempt to help people think themselves to Christ? Does this method overcome the internal and external barriers which keep unbelievers from coming to Christ? Why or why not?

- B. **Naturalistic Approach** is the view that physical nature is sufficient to explain God and the truth claims of Christianity. It sees the whole of reality contained in objects and events occurring in space and time. An example might be: “How could anyone deny the existence of God? Obviously it can be seen in creation and what has been made that there is design and purpose in creation. The fossil record proves there was a flood. Different earth time clocks prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that the earth is only 6-10 thousand years old. How could all the planets orbit around the sun year after year if God was not holding them in place?

Assumptions:

1. God's creation is compelling evidence that God exists.
2. By observing creation we can understand that God exists hence we can come to believe in Him.

3. Man is able to look at nature and come to the conclusion that God exists.
4. The mind of man is not corrupted but functioning and able to sort through the facts without any bias.
5. We must first verify truth before we can believe in it.
6. Problems with this approach are apparent. The Bible teaches that creation does not compel men to believe it only serves to condemn them. Men look at God's creation with sin-cursed, corrupted minds and hence suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Therefore creation, though enough to condemn men, is not enough to verify truth and bring people to salvation in Christ.

C. **Historical Approach** uses rational historical information, events of the past, to validate the truth claims of Christianity through extra-biblical historical proofs. An example might be: "Josephus, the Jewish historian, talks about Jesus, hence, Jesus must have existed. The early church fathers claim some of the same things as do the Scriptures so the Scriptures must be true. Different ancient writings verify that certain parts of both the Old and New testaments are true and hence, they can be trusted."

Assumptions:

1. We must historically verify the Scriptures before we can believe in them.
2. Extra-biblical, historical proofs compel one to come to the conclusion that God exists and Christianity is true.
3. Unregenerate man is able to truthfully weigh historical proofs and not be biased in the process.
4. The historical records of men can be trusted above the Scriptures.
5. Does this approach overcome the barriers we have learned about already? Is the Bible only true if history recorded by men says it is true? Many men disagree or scoff at different historical truths in the Scriptures. Does that mean men are right and God is a liar? Men have rewritten history or presented a slanted view of history. Should we trust them more than the Bible? Do historical evidences compel no one to believe in the Scriptures? We have learned that the unsaved man is darkened, futile, ignorant, unable to understand the things of God. So is the historical approach a method we should rely upon to bring people to Christ? Why or why not? What is the difference between history recorded in the Bible and history recorded by men?

- D. **Empirical Approach** is an approach that says the only true source of knowledge is experience. Experience is usually limited to what we experience with our five senses. An example might be: "Science is able to prove by measurable phenomena that the earth is about 6 thousand years old. Therefore, the Scriptures must be true." "The medical profession can prove by blood analyses that all humans are related. Therefore, we know that the story of Adam and Eve must be true." "When I pray I feel the presence of God, I feel the peace of Christ, therefore I know the Bible is true."

Assumptions:

1. The physical can prove that the spiritual exists.
2. Measurability and repeatability provide compelling evidence that God exists and the Bible is true.
3. Our senses are unbiased and are able to determine truth from error.
4. Scriptural truths must first be proven experientially before we can believe in them.
5. Again the problems are apparent. Supernatural events cannot be proven by scientific method. Our senses are corrupted and biased and we do not have all the facts so we do not have the ability to determine truth or be objective, especially spiritual truth. Supernatural events also lie outside what is normal or natural and are not measurable or repeatable. The Scriptures never teach that experience is necessary to know truth."

- E. **Pragmatic Approach** is a view that says truth is determined by the practical consequences of ideas. Example: "We have discovered that those who pray have more peace in their life and feel closer to God than those who don't. This proves the Bible is true because we have experienced what the Bible says will happen when we pray." "We have done a survey and discovered that more Christians have happy marriages than non Christians hence the biblical teachings on marriage must be true."

Assumptions:

1. If it works, it must be true.
2. The means justify the end.
3. Man, his ideas, and their consequences compel one to believe that God exists and His Word is true.
4. The problem with this view is that the Bible teaches that truth comes from God, not experience. God is just as concerned about the means as He is

the end. It is not an either/or issue but a both/and issue. Pragmatism doesn't compel one to believe in God, the Holy Spirit leads men to God through the Word of God. Satan is willing to provide us with experiences in order to deceive us. We are willing to imagine experiences and have feelings based on our own corrupt thoughts.

- F. The above approaches are common methods many use today in their effort to reach fallen man. They all have serious flaws because they fail to overcome the internal and external barriers which keep people from coming to Christ. Truth can be found in each method but unregenerate men suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Christians can be encouraged by all of these methods but unbelievers cannot be saved by them. Unbelievers are corrupted, darkened, futile, twisted in their thought processes. They are unable and unwilling to see or accept God or His truth on their own.
1. Because the methods above cannot overcome the barriers that keep men from Christ, should we ignore them all together? Why or why not?
 2. For what reasons and in what circumstances might we employ the methods above?
 3. Regardless of what method we use, what is the means God has chosen to lead people to Christ?
 4. Why is information presented by the methods mentioned above often very encouraging to Christians but not unbelievers? Why must we consider this difference?