

Theme: In cultural apologetics we defend and commend the Christian faith in terms that answer the questions and objections of the culture in which we live, building bridges where our culture has links with the truth and critiquing the culture with biblical truth where needed so that people can respond to the Gospel.

I. Intro - Glad to be here!

- A. It is a great privilege to be with you all today
- B. Glad Rob asked me to speak on this very important topic
- C. What is apologetics? What is cultural apologetics?

II. Our Call To Apologetics

- A. Peter calls us to apologetics
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, 1 Peter 3:15
 - 1. The word 'answer' is ἀπολογία - apologetics
 - 2. In apologetics, we are "defending" the faith - answering questions people may have to help them understand the faith.
 - 3. This "defense" or "answer" is not pictured primarily as a public debate or lecture, but rather something that happens in personal conversation.
- B. All Christians are called to apologetics
 - 1. Peter's command is not given to just leaders but to all Christians
 - 2. The command is not restricted to those with particular gifts, or a special level of intelligence - it is a task given to all Christians.

III. The Basic Parts of Apologetics

- A. Apologetics is built upon our personal walk with Christ
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, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. 1 Peter 3:15–16
 - 1. Apologetics begins with my personal submission to the Lordship of Christ in my own life.
 - 2. I can not commend what I do not cherish!
- B. Apologetics is built upon my own growth in the faith
 - 1. 'Always be prepared' - I know what I believe and why I believe it
 - 2. This is a major part of the fellows program at CSLI!
 - 3. I can not commend what I do not know!
- C. Apologetics is built upon consistent godly character
 - 1. The hope you have - evident hope no matter the circumstances
 - 2. Our conversation, even with those with whom we disagree, is marked by gentleness and respect
 - 3. This is a GREAT need today in our age of rage when conversation is so often marked by a harsh and disrespectful tone
 - 4. We are to have good behavior - even if others speak evil of it.

5. This is not about perfection - but it is about a consistently growing Christlike character.
6. I can not commend what I do not live!

IV. The Need for Cultural Apologetics

A. Paul tailored his preaching to the culture of his audience

So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. Acts 17:17

1. Paul is preaching in the synagogue and also in the marketplace - two very different contexts
2. Also, compare and contrast his sermons to Jews in Acts 13 with his sermon in Acts 17
 - a. Acts 13 - a direct appeal to Scripture; assumes the truth of God's Word; knowledge of God's covenant
 - b. Acts 17 - no direct appeal to Scripture; does not assume audience believes in the truth of God's Word as a whole; assumes little to no knowledge of God's covenant promises and plans
3. A different audience called for a different way to proclaim the same truth

B. Paul's example of cultural apologetics

1. Paul is studying the culture of Athens

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. Acts 17:16

- a. He notes that the city is full of idols
- b. It can be painful to see, hear, and understand what is happening around us, but this is essential.

- c. We must take time to listen, read, and observe our culture so we can see what is shaping it and to understand the questions the culture is asking.
2. Paul starts by connecting their culture with the Truth

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious." Acts 17:22

 - a. Religious - they are idolaters! It grieves him!
 - b. But we were made to worship - so Paul uses this to establish a point of connection.
 - c. We need to begin where people are to build a bridge to the truth.
 3. Paul builds on their culture to proclaim God & Truth

For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. Acts 17:23

 - a. Again, he uses gentleness and respect to build a point of connection
 - b. He moves from their acknowledgment that there is a God they do not know to proclaim to them the One True God.
 - c. A key part of apologetics and evangelism is asking questions, listening, and then finding points of contact where we can proclaim the truth.
 - d. CS Lewis & Francis Schaeffer were both masters at doing this!
 4. Paul then gives key points of the biblical narrative, but includes points of contrast with the prevailing culture

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. Acts 17:24–25

- a. There is a God Who created everything
- b. God is the Lord and Ruler of heaven and earth
- c. But God does not live in Temples - a real point of contrast he is bringing out.
- d. God is not even served by our hands - He does not need us. This is a far more transcendent view of God than many Greeks held.
- e. Apologetics certainly seeks to find common ground to build bridges, but it must also point out the real differences between our culture and God’s Truth.

5. Paul is conversant with Greek poets and culture and quotes from them to drive home his points

‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’
As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’ Acts 17:28

- a. Quotes from Epimenedes and Eratus (a Stoic philosopher)
- b. These men were pagan polytheists, and Eratus’s poem was a worship song to Zeus!
- c. But Paul shows that these particular ideas were true - as a bridge to the real Truth and the One True God.
- d. To reach our culture we must not become so isolated from its ideas that we can not understand it or its language,

6. The point of apologetics is evangelism - calling people to Christ

God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us... ³⁰ In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.” Acts 17:27, 30–31

- a. Paul is using these connection points to show them that God is reaching out to them and that they need to turn to God.
- b. Paul does not shy away from the call to repentance and the coming judgment. These may be unpopular, but they are essential to the Gospel and our apologetics must eventually land with this call.
- c. Paul’s mention of the resurrection - which is again essential to the Gospel - was an affront to many of these Athenians. But Paul could not avoid it. He built bridges - but never compromised the truth.

C. The key points of cultural apologetics

1. We must tailor our way of communicating the Gospel to our intended audience, speaking in a way that makes the Gospel clear to them.
2. To effectively speak to our culture we must study it, noticing both where it has echoes of the truth and where it is embracing error.
3. In defending the faith, we should begin with points of connection, showing that the culture has echoes of the Truth.
4. We must eventually move to points of contrast between the culture and the Truth, clearly presenting to Truth of the Gospel.
5. Apologetics should always have the goal of a clear presentation of the Gospel and call to repentance and faith in Jesus.

V. Cultural Apologetics Today - Examples

A. The culture of radical relativism

1. "There is no such thing as truth"
2. "There is no such thing as good and evil"
3. "What I know for sure is speaking your truth is the most powerful truth we have." - Oprah Winfrey
4. All of these appeal to our desire and experience as the arbiter of "truth"
5. We should acknowledge that we all do have unique experiences and struggles.
6. We can also acknowledge that people have often used power to deny the lived experience of those with less power, crushing them underfoot.
7. The biblical prophets and Jesus spoke a lot about this, calling out the hypocrisy of the religious leaders who wielded "truth" as a weapon to crush the poor and marginalized.
8. But this is a self-refuting philosophy. There is no truth - except my statement that there is no truth.
9. No one actually lives this way - we all believe certain actions against us or those we care about are WRONG. This is inescapable and should be brought into the light.
10. If a philosophy can not be lived in the real world, it is not true but is merely an excuse to avoid hard questions or examination of my own life.
11. We should gently but consistently point out these inconsistencies.

B. The sexual revolution

1. Our culture has utterly rejected the biblical sexual ethic of the distinction between male and female, and that sex is reserved for a man with a woman within the covenant of marriage.
2. The only rule for sexual ethics is the desire of the individuals and consent if it involves others.
3. This has included second-wave feminism, the heterosexual revolution of the 1960s and beyond, the gay liberation movement, and now the transgender movement.
4. Christians can and should acknowledge that women, homosexuals, and others have often been mistreated, mocked, and ridiculed in ways that are unbiblical.
5. We should also acknowledge that historically our culture "winked" at male heterosexual sin but harshly condemned women who broke the sexual rules, and also homosexuals. But the Bible condemns all forms of sexual immorality.
6. But there have been glaring inconsistencies within the march of the sexual revolution.
 - a. Second-wave feminism is built on the distinctions between male and female.
 - b. In the original gay rights movement, biology was sexual destiny - you were hardwired biologically to be heterosexual or homosexual and had no choice in the matter.
 - c. But in the modern transgender movement biology means nothing - one chooses their sexuality; male and female are merely social constructs, and one may choose their gender and their sexual expression.

- d. This is why there is a war within the community, which occasionally breaks out into the open (JK Rowling; Martina Navratilova)
- 7. This sexual free for all has led to the #MeToo movement, sexual confusion among pre-teens and teens (especially girls), and skyrocketing depression and suicide among teens (especially girls).
- 8. Christians need to respond with love, not disgust or mockery, but we must also speak the truth that God made them male and female and has given specific context for human sexual activity.
- 9. Take heart - in many ways this mirrors the culture in which the church first reached out to Gentiles. And the utter sexual depravity and confusion led many to the Gospel! The same may happen today!

VI. Resources for Cultural Apologetics

A. Resources that practice cultural apologetics

1. *Mere Christianity* by CS Lewis.
This was Lewis's attempt to explain the faith to his British culture in the 1940s. Originally these were broadcast on the BBC and became wildly popular and Lewis eventually turned them into a book. Some of the issues have changed, but the book remains very relevant today in how it builds a bridge from our postmodern culture to the Gospel.
2. *The God Who Is There; Escape From Reason; He Is There and He Is Not Silent; Back To Freedom and Dignity* by Francis Schaeffer
Schaeffer's early apologetic works are a superb example of cultural apologetics. He is addressing what we now know as postmodernity. Again, some of the material is a bit dated, but Schaeffer addresses the key questions we face today.

3. *The Reason for God* by Tim Keller
In many ways, this is like *Mere Christianity* for the 21st century. Keller founded Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and his ministry saw many modern, urban, educated young people find answers to their questions and embrace the faith. This book is a look at many of the questions he most commonly heard. It also gives Keller's reasons for why he thinks Christianity is the truth - not only defending against objections but putting forth evidence for Christianity.

B. Resources to understand our culture

1. *Mars Hill Audio* hosted by Ken Myers
This is an app that can be downloaded to your phone. It contains much free material, and with a subscription you can get interviews with authors and thinkers on a variety of topics about our culture. This is a deep dive with profound thinkers on the shape of our culture and how Christians should think about it. This resource has had a profound impact on my thinking and understanding of culture and humanity for over 25 years now.
2. *The Briefing* by Albert Mohler
Mohler is the president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and a conservative theologian. This daily podcast covers current events from a conservative Christian and conservative political position. Mohler tries to help Christians understand the movement of our culture from major current events, and works through how Christians should respond. Mohler is definitely politically conservative and a Baptist, but it is a good overview of current cultural events and tides and helps think through the issues.

3. *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* by Carl Trueman

This book is a deep dive into how we arrived at our current cultural moments, especially as it relates to the LGBTQ+ revolution. The book requires careful reading and thought, but it is a tour de force in explaining how we got to our current moment, and why modern Westerners think, speak, and act as they do. Many of our neighbors do not even understand why they think as they do, but Trueman lays it out masterfully and will help you understand how to address this important area.

Cultural Apologetics (CS Lewis Institute Lecture)

1 Peter 3:15-16; Acts 17:16-34

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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, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. 1 Peter 3:15–16

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, “What is this babbling trying to say?” Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? ²⁰ You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean.” ²¹ (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.) ²² Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going

to proclaim to you. ²⁴ “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. ²⁶ From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. ²⁷ God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸ ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’ ²⁹ “Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone — an image made by man’s design and skill. ³⁰ In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.” ³² When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.” ³³ At that, Paul left the Council. ³⁴ A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others. Acts 17:16–34