

Others live not for a someday-in-the-sky, but for the pleasures they can experience today. For these people, their job is a tool to finance their pleasure-seeking lifestyle. Some live for immorality. All of these are walking dead men (1 Timothy 5:6).

But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives.

The believer is commanded to make Christlikeness his constant pursuit.

Others want to spend their lives pursuing the pleasure of drink or drugs. They are throwing their lives away (Ephesians 5:18). Many are seeking less obviously sinful pleasures. They spend all their spare time 4-wheeling or fishing or racing or rooting their favorite sports team on to victory or maybe even just sleeping in on the Lord's Day. When they willingly sacrifice their service to Christ to pursue these pleasures, they are in effect making these earthly pleasures their gods. They are not disciples of Christ (Luke 14:26-35).

If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.

There are many passages in the New Testament that warn the believer against these spiritual traps. We are warned in Philippians 3:17-21 that many professing believers are really unsaved people who are living for their appetites. They have "set their minds on earthly things" (v. 19). They do not know it, but their ultimate destiny is destruction (v. 19). Believers are admonished not to follow their example (v. 17).

Colossians 3:1-4 addresses this issue further:

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

This passage tells us that if a person is saved, he is to have only one goal in life: "the things above" (v. 1). By that expression Paul is referring to things of eternal value – Christlikeness. Philippians 3:7-21 explains in detail what that entails. Earthly treasures are to be considered rubbish in comparison (v. 8). The believer is to pursue the resurrection power that enables a mere man to behave as Christ would (v. 10). He is to seek a personal relationship with Christ that shares in His sufferings and knows what it is to have Christ comfort and strengthen him in his suffering service for Him (v. 10). His ultimate desire is to attain "the out resurrection from among the corpses" (the literal Greek of v. 11) and to share the glorious perfections of Christ.

This heavenly-mindedness is an act of the believer's will. The believer is commanded to make Christlikeness his constant pursuit (Colossians 3:2, present tense). Earthly treasure must no longer be allowed to charm the believer. After all, when the believer accepted Christ, he died to his old life (v. 3). In his repentant faith, the believer died to his former manner of life with its perverted value system. He was crucified with Christ (Galatians 6:14). He died to the world; the world died to him. And now he enjoys a life hidden with Christ in God (v. 3). While unsaved men look upon his outward form, he shares a common life with Christ and the Father. They cannot see the yet to be revealed new man (1 John 3:1-3). Christ will soon appear, and the believer's glorious life with Christ will be apparent for all to see (v. 4).

So what is your ultimate purpose in life? A comfortable retirement? Weekend pleasures? To spend your life on a bed of leisure? God says these things are nothing more than garbage. If these things are your ultimate pursuit, you are not a disciple of Christ. For the true Christian there is only one goal – Christlikeness. His vocation is only a means to an end. His priority is for those things that will transform him into the image of Christ.

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Putting Theology Back in the Pew

June, 2004

Defending Your Faith, Part 1

Michael P. Riley

Late one night you are awakened by your young son who adamantly claims that there is monster under his bed. Attempting to calm his fears, you inform him that monsters do not exist; he responds with a list of evidences for the existence of the monster under his bed. You, however, are not moved by this evidence. Convinced that monsters do not exist, you believe that there are better explanations for your son's evidences than a monster. You might believe that he is merely imagining the whole thing, or that the sounds he heard came from the drier in the laundry room below his bedroom.

This is a simple illustration, yet it points out some of the difficulties that believers face in presenting a defense of their faith to an unbelieving world. At this point, you might question the comparison between a boy proving the existence of monsters and a Christian proving the existence of God, yet they share an important similarity: in each case, one is trying to prove the existence of something that the audience's worldview does not allow for. If we understand this difficulty upfront, it will help us understand the practical difficulties that face the believer who is trying to do apologetics.

For many readers, it might be helpful to begin by defining the word *apologetics*, because the term itself has been a cause for confusion among modern English-speaking believers. In common usage, when I offer an apology to someone, I admit that I am wrong and request pardon. In contrast, when I offer an apology for Christianity (that is, when I do apologetics), it is not that I am asking forgiveness for my belief in Christianity or that I am ashamed of its teaching; rather, I argue in defense of my faith. The source of this misunderstanding is rooted in the etymology of the term *apologetics*; in

ancient Greek, the word *ἀπολογία* (*apologia*) was a technical legal term for the defense that a person would offer when accused of a crime. For example, in Acts 25:16, Festus says, "...it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over any man before the accused meets his accusers face to face and has an opportunity to make his defense [*apologia*] against the charges." It is from this legal sense of the term, that of offering a defense, that the modern discipline of apologetics derives its name. Thus, doing apologetics has nothing at all to do with apologizing; an apologist is one who defends Christianity against its detractors and enemies.

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particularly the key verse on apologetics, 1 Peter 3:15: "But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense [*apologia*] to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence." The command to be ready to give an answer to those who ask is applicable to all believers. If all of us have a biblical obligation to do apologetics, then we should recognize that we must defend the faith in a biblical and excellent way. But how should we approach the task of defending our faith?

Throughout history, the common method of doing apologetics has been to find some sort of common ground between the believer and the unbeliever, and use this common ground as a basis upon which to build an argument for Christian theism. This approach to apologetics

can be loosely referred to by the term *evidentialism*. What is the neutral ground between Christianity and unbelief, however? Two candidates for this role are prominent in the evidentialist literature on apologetics. The first is reason, and the second is evidence or facts.

When reason is considered to be the neutral ground, apologists have offered logical arguments that demand the existence of God. Most people are at least familiar with these proofs for God. The two most popular theistic proofs are the cosmological and teleological arguments. The cosmological argument can be informally formulated like this:

Major Premise: All that exist must have a cause.

Minor Premise: The universe exists.

Conclusion: Therefore, the universe must have a cause, and that cause is God.

As appealing as this type of argumentation is, it is hopelessly faulty. At least two problems are immediately obvious. The first is that if all things need a cause, why doesn't God need a cause? If God does not need a cause, the major premise is flawed (that is, not everything needs a cause) and perhaps the universe also does not need a cause. The second problem is that even if the argument does work, it does not come close to proving a biblical notion of God. A pantheon of gods working together might have created the universe. Perhaps a very powerful being, but not the omnipotent God of Christian theism, created the universe. It is a terrible jump in logic to move from the notion of finite creation to an infinite Creator. The teleological argument, which argues for the existence of God on the basis of the design so evident in nature, suffers from similar flaws: if something that exhibits design needs a designer, wouldn't God, who exhibits even more design, need an even greater designer? If not, it can reasonably be concluded that the universe does not need a designer, either.

If reason fails as common ground between the believer and the unbeliever, perhaps facts and evidence can act as a neutral judge of the truth. After all, we live in a scientific age, and if we can prove the existence of God or the truth of Scripture through an examination of the evidence, we should have a respectable position in the eyes of the world. However, while it is true that the world is full of

evidences for the existence of God, these evidences will not be accepted by the unbeliever if he remains consistent with his own principles. If the unbeliever is convinced of naturalism, for example, no amount of evidence for the supernatural will dissuade him. C. S. Lewis summarizes the impossibility of using miracles as historical proofs for Christianity.

For this reason, the question whether miracles occur can never be answered simply by experience. Every event which might claim to be a miracle is, in the last resort, something presented to our senses, something seen, heard, touched, smelled, or tasted. And our senses are not infallible. If anything extraordinary seems to have happened, we can always say that we have been the victims of an illusion. If we hold a philosophy which excludes the supernatural, this is what we always shall say. What we learn from experience depends on the kind of philosophy we bring to experience. It is therefore useless to appeal to experience before we have settled, as well as we can, the philosophical question.

Unbelievers do not simply need better reasons to believe. Their own being testifies to the existence of the one true God.

There is even a remarkable passage in Scripture that points to the same truth that Lewis identified. In Matthew 28, the disciples gather to witness the parting words of Christ before his ascension. But notice verse 17: "When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful." Even when faced with visible evidence of the resurrected Christ, there were some who could not bring themselves to believe what they knew was impossible. The same difficulty faces the apologist who would use fact to bridge the gap between belief and unbelief. Consider the example of the monster under the bed; no amount of evidence presented by your son would convince you that there is indeed a monster under the bed, because your worldview does not allow for such things.

Essentially, we are faced with the option of doing apologetics in one of two ways: either as if Christianity is true (an approach known as *presuppositionalism*), or as if Christianity *might be true* (*evidentialism*). There is a world of difference between these approaches. If Christianity is true, the unbeliever not only knows that there is a god, but he knows God. Romans 1:18–21 is particularly clear that all people everywhere are born with, and are surrounded by, evidence for the existence of God. It is equally clear that unsaved people "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom 1:21). Contrast this position with that of doing apologetics from the perspective that Christianity might be true. From this point of view, unbelievers are honest seekers of the truth. Christianity is just one out of many possibilities. The contrast in methodology here should be obvious. Unbelievers do not simply need more facts or better reasons to believe. The knowledge of God is inescapable; the unbeliever himself is in the image of God. The unbeliever's own being testifies to the existence of the one true God.

This article has dealt primarily with the weaknesses of evidential apologetics. In the next issue of *Sola!*, I will attempt to show the value of presuppositional apologetics. Presuppositional apologetics, in contrast to evidentialism, begins with the presupposition that Christianity is in fact true and argues from that perspective. In this way, it is much more faithful to biblical Christianity in the way it attempts to defend the faith.

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Recommended Reading

Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith by Greg Bahnsen

Provides a very readable introduction to presuppositional apologetics. If you are interested in reading about apologetics, start with this book.

Val Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis by Greg Bahnsen

The single most helpful and comprehensive treatment of presuppositional apologetics.

What Are You Doing With Your Life?

Steven Owen

Probably the most frequently asked question at graduation time is "What are you going to do with your life?" Most often the person answers that he is going to pursue a vocation in some field: medicine, engineering, or some kind of trade. While this answer might be technically correct, for the Christian the answer does not go deep enough. Besides a vocation, what else are you going to do with your life? Is your job really your main purpose for living? Is your ultimate purpose in life really to repair automobiles or build houses or teach school?

In reality, most people do not live for their job. Their job is simply a tool to help them reach their ultimate goal. That goal for some is to accumulate riches. They are working and saving for retirement. If that is your ultimate purpose in life, the Bible describes you as a fool (Luke 12:16-21).

And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry." But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Money has a way of making one forget the time. (vv. 18-19). A person can get so busy accumulating riches that he forgets God and his upcoming appointment with His Creator, as well as the fact that no one can take his riches with him past the grave (vv. 20-21). The desire for riches can lead a man to make the wrong decisions in life (1 Timothy 6:3-10). Temptations become stronger (v. 9), Satan's traps become more cunning (v. 9). The pursuit of riches strips a man of his ability to control his passions and desires (v. 9). Ultimately the lust for more plunges a man into despair, ruin, and even hell (vv. 9-10).