

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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What is Apologetics?

by Dan Trygg

“...do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, ¹⁵ but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense (Gk., *apologia*) to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence, maintaining a good conscience...”
1 Peter 3:14-16

Apologetics? **What is apologetics?** No, ...it is *not* “apologizing” for our beliefs, or our commitment to Christ. The word “apologetics” comes from two Greek words: *apo* = from, and *logia* = reason. So, an “apology” originally was a **“reasoned defense” for one’s beliefs or actions**. In the ancient Greek lawcourts, a charge brought against a defendant by a prosecutor was called a *kategoria* (accusation). The defendant would then be given an opportunity to respond with a reasoned defense (*apologia*), ...an oral presentation to justify their actions or beliefs, and challenge or refute the prosecutor’s accusations. While our English word, apology, sounds like a statement of regret that may even admit fault, the original meaning of the word was to defend one’s actions or beliefs with reason. **In theology, the discipline of apologetics is about giving a rational defense for our faith**, ...including facts, reason, and clear explanation..., **and refuting the arguments of those who would either question or challenge our faith in Jesus Christ.**

With this definition in mind, it is clear that **there are many examples of apologetics being conveyed throughout the scriptures**. For example, there are many times when the scriptures point out the vanity of other so-called gods. Idols are ridiculed as being lifeless, unable to speak and move, ...and even formed from the same block of wood that the idol-maker used to cook his dinner over (Isa. 44:14-20). How ridiculous! The ten plagues God instructed Moses to bring upon the Egyptians were each directed against well-known Egyptian gods. They demonstrated the supremacy and superiority of Yahweh over these false gods. These events were recounted over and over throughout the OT to call to mind what God established at that time, and to call His people back to Him, the Most High God.

The Bible never attempts to “prove” the existence of God. It simply begins by stating that He was here before everything else, and created the heavens and the earth. **There are passages, however, that appeal to our observations of the world, our reason, or our inner moral sense of right and wrong, to direct our attention to consider and recognize God’s existence.** There are many examples of this, but some passages are more straightforward than others.

In theology, scholars have referred to “general revelation” or “natural theology” as information we can glean about God from the world around us. For example, the complexity and intricacy of what we have come to understand about virtually everything around us, ...from the tiniest particles of the atom, to the immensity of the outer reaches of the universe..., screams at us that this could not possibly have just happened by chance. The more we know, the more we discover about the design, geometry, balance and precision embedded in our world. **The design we find testifies to an intelligent Designer, who made it all. Below are just a few passages that testify to this “general revelation”:**

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because *that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.* ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, *have been clearly seen*, being understood (*perceived*) through what has been made, so that they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:18-20 NASB). This passage plainly teaches that **there is clear revelation displayed and evident to everyone who lives in this world.** The apostle Paul wrote that **God’s eternal power and divine nature are clearly displayed through the creation. Anyone with an open mind and heart, who will take the time to examine the world, will conclude that there is a God who made these intricately designed and beautifully fashioned things.** The apostle declared that these truths are clearly seen. Not only are they perceptible through the examination of the creation, but their own hearts recognize this. Why? Because God Himself makes it evident to them. **YET, even though people know the truth, they choose to suppress the truth. Why? Because they don’t want to think about God, or acknowledge Him, or give Him thanks.** The problem is not with the level of revelation, or the dullness of their minds. The problem is the unwillingness of their hearts. For our purposes, however, this passage is clearly a strong apologetic declaration by God.

Another passage is **Psalm 19:1-4**, “The heavens *declare the glory of God*, and the sky *proclaims the work of His hands.* ² Day after day they pour out speech; night after night *they communicate knowledge.* ³ There is no speech; there are no words; their voice is not heard. ⁴ Their message has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the inhabited world” (CSB). Again, **the declaration is made that the world around us clearly reveals the greatness and wonder of God.** Who has not been amazed at the splendor of a beautiful sunset, or the expanse of some glorious landscape? Who has not felt the awesome power of a storm? We find our hearts lifted up in wonder, ...or scurrying away for cover at these natural phenomena. **Yet there is a communication that goes beyond the surface experience.** The glory of the sky

is just a small glimpse of God's much greater splendor. The skies themselves, whether by splashes of color or by the multitude of twinkling stars, proclaim the handiwork of God the Artist, ...the Light Sprinkler. **Notice that these phenomena communicate knowledge.** It is not through voice or word, yet **this awareness and message of God's presence is clearly broadcast through the expanse of the skies.**

In Acts 14, when Paul and Barnabas healed a lame man, the people tried to offer a sacrifice to them as gods. The apostles were horrified, when they realized what they intended to do. They exclaimed, "Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you in order that *you should turn from these vain things to a living God*, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them." ¹⁶ And in the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; ¹⁷ and yet *He did not leave Himself without witness*, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:15-17 NASB). **Here, we see a different kind of revelation. Because God had blessed them with good things, they were to conclude that He Himself was good.** Through the timing of God's provision, they were to learn of His care and provision for them, ...and they should celebrate Him. **This was an additional revelation of His character.**

A few chapters later in the book of Acts, Paul was in Athens, and was invited to share his message with the philosophers and curious thinkers gathered together. He said, "For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you." ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it-- He is Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in shrines made by hands. ²⁵ Neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives everyone life and breath and all things. ²⁶ From one man He has made every nation of men to live all over the earth and has determined their appointed times and the boundaries of where they live, ²⁷ so that they might seek God, and perhaps they might reach out and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. ²⁸ For in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' ²⁹ Being God's offspring, then, we shouldn't think that the divine nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image fashioned by human art and imagination. ³⁰ Therefore, *having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent*, ³¹ because *He has set a day on which He is going to judge the world in righteousness by the Man He has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead*" (Acts 17:23-31 CSB). **This is an amazing example of using general revelation, apologetic argument, and special revelation to move his listeners from ignorance to questioning to exposure of new ideas, to seeking more, and, hopefully to be asking more.** There was an altar to "an unknown god", which had been erected years before, when there had been a plague against the city. The people thought that they had offended some god, but they did not know which one. So they built a number of altars throughout the city to this "unknown god" and offered a sacrifice on them. The plague stopped. **Paul used this lesson as a jumping off point for his teaching. He moved from their limited knowledge to tell them more about this god, ...the God who created the heavens and the earth.** He does not live in shrines, nor does He need to be served, as though He needed anything. He is the One who gives life and breath to us. **He wants us to seek Him, ...to reach out and discover Him.** Some of their poets had written, "For we are His offspring." Paul used that to say that **we should not think that God is something that can be fashioned by human craftsmanship** (an idol). God has overlooked the times of ignorance. Now He wants all people to change their perception about Him, because He will hold us accountable and has appointed a Man to judge the world. We know who this is, because God raised Him from the dead. **From ignorance, ...to refuting idolatry and vain religion, ...to focus on seeking God, and finding Him, ...Paul moved from general truths to more specific revelation, directing his argument to set the stage for the gospel.**

Another Bible passage that implies an awareness of God within us is Ecclesiastes 3:10,11. "I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves. ¹¹ He has made everything appropriate (beautiful) in its time. *He has also set eternity in their heart*, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end" (NASB). **This seems to indicate that there is an awareness of eternity innately placed within us.** Something inside of us testifies that there is more to reality than simply our physical life. **This seems to be borne out by the almost universal search for something beyond our natural lives that has been evident throughout history, and across cultures.** Why would this be such a prevalent experience, unless we were created by, and for, God? **This seems sufficient to motivate us to long for, or even seek to know more, ...but, it is limited.**

Finally, Romans 2:12-16 states, "For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law; and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; ¹³ for not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. ¹⁴ For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively (by nature) the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵ in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, ¹⁶ on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus" (NASB). **Could the near universal sense of justice and morality evident in human cultures be another indicator of God as the Designer and Creator?**