

Apologetics in the Manner of Jesus

a series by Dallas Willard

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- I. Apologetics as a Fundamental New Testament Ministry.**
The Biblical Example and Teaching About the Use of Reason as a Helping, Loving Ministry.
- II. Lifting Doubts About the Reality of God and the Spiritual World.**
Why the Physical (Natural) World Cannot Exist on Its Own.
What the Supraphysical World Must be Like.
Why Evolution Cannot Answer Such Questions.
History With and Without God.
- III. Lifting Doubts About Communication Between God and Man**
Purpose in Human History Implied by Its Creator.
Why There ***Would of Course*** be a Chosen People and a Bible.
Objections Raised to the Particular Form the Bible Takes—Turned to the Advantage of God's High Purposes with Humanity.
Doubts About God's Personal Word to individuals.
- IV. Lifting Doubts About Living and Acting with God in the Kingdom of the Heavens**
The Reasonableness and the Actualities of Prayer.
Acting with God ("Synergism") in the Kingdom Now.
Life in the Kingdom as the Only Ultimate Apologetic.

Session I. Apologetics as a Fundamental New Testament Ministry

1. **What a Biblical (Christlike) Apologetic Is:** The best use of our natural faculties of thought, in submission to the Holy Spirit, to remove doubts and problems that hinder a trustful energetic participation in a life of personal relationship with God. A service to both the converted and unconverted.

But isn't this philosophy and isn't that forbidden? Col. 2:8—"philosophy and vain deceit"? Being "puffed up"? (I Cor. 8:1, Prov. 3:5) How about "clothing and vain deceit"?

2. **What a Christian Apologetic Is Not:**
 - a. An attempt to prove WE are right
 - b. Intellectual bullying—or pooh-poohing
 - c. A way of getting people saved without God's grace
 - d. A treatment of intellectually interesting puzzles
 - e. "Christian Evidences" proving Christianity true

3. **The New Testament Context and Apologetic**

Luke 12:11 & 21:14; Romans 2:15; Acts 19:33, 22:1, 24:10, 25:8 & 16, 26:1-2 & 24; I Cor. 9:3; II Cor. 7:11; Phil. 1:7 & 17, II Tim. 4:16.

I Peter 3:10-16 (Please! Always Read the Whole Passage.) is THE charter of Christian apologetics.

Major Examples: Acts 2:7-36, 4:7

4. **The Christian Attitude in Apologetical Work is One of:**
 - a. Confidence in God and his truth
 - b. Generosity and openness toward all human beings
 - c. Humility
 - d. Wish to serve and be last
 - e. II Timothy 2:24-26

Session II. Lifting Doubts About the Reality of God and The Spiritual World

1. The Temptation To Believe That The Natural, Physical World Is All That Exists.

The strength and pervasiveness of it. The Second Commandment directed toward it. (Exodus 20:4-5) Those who believe in Jesus but not in God. "Secular Humanism" & despair.

2. Why the Space/Time, Visible/Physical World Cannot Be All There Is.

- i. Every physical event or thing dependent upon something other than itself, its 'causes'.
- ii. Inductively expanding, in space or time, to ever larger totalities of the physical reveals the same type of dependency without exception.
- iii. The causal series back of any given event is completed at that event.
- iv. Hence the series is finite. <Otherwise the causes would never 'reach' the event in question, and it could not occur.>
- v. Hence it has a first member which is self subsistent and so not a physical/natural event or thing.

CONCLUSION: THE PHYSICAL WORLD RESTS ON A SUPRA-NATURAL AND SELF-SUBSISTENT BEING.

3. The "Big-Bang" myth, and the myth of "Cosmic Evolution" are unsuccessful attempts to avoid this conclusion. Why they won't work. The Logical Limits of Evolution. Creative mind required.

4. It is by far most reasonable to believe in a personal being of unlimited power as the condition of the natural world.

5. The Biblical Testimony to This Position: Romans 1:19-20; Psalm 19

6. And to the Nature of the Cause of the World. Exodus 3:14; John 4:24, 5:26.

Creation by personal act. Gen. 1; Heb. 11:3.

Read $E=MC^2$ from left to right to get God's point of view in creating.

(Heb. 1:2-3; Col. 1:17; II Peter 3:11; Acts 17:28)

"One morning, as I was sitting by the fire, a great cloud came over me, and a temptation beset me; and I sat still. It was said, "All things come by nature"; and the elements and stars came over me, so that I was in a manner quite clouded with it. But as I sat still and said nothing, the people of the house perceived nothing. And as I sat still under it and let it alone, a living hope and a true voice arose in me, which said, "There is a living God who made all things." Immediately the cloud and temptation vanished away, life rose over it all; my heart was glad, and I praised the living God."

"After some time I met with some people who had a notion that there was no God, but that all things come by nature. I had a great dispute with them, and overturned them, and made some of them confess that there is a living God. Then I saw that it was good that I had gone through that exercise. We had great meetings in those parts; for the power of the Lord broke through in that side of the country."

(George Fox, The Journal of George Fox, Rufus Jones, ed., Capricorn Books, NY, 1963, p. 94)

"Good heavens!" says Epictetus, "any one thing in the creation is sufficient to demonstrate a Providence, to a humble and grateful mind. The mere possibility of producing milk from grass, cheese from milk, and wool from skins; who formed and planned it? Ought we not, whether we dig or plough or eat, to sing this hymn to God? Great is God, who has supplied us with these instruments to till the ground; great is God, who has given us hands and instruments of digestion; who has given us to grow insensibly and to breath in sleep. These things we ought forever to celebrate.... But because the most of you are blind and insensible, there must be some one to fill this station, and lead, in behalf of all men, the hymn to God; for what else can I do, a lame old man, but sing hymns to God? Were I a nightingale, I would act the part of a nightingale; were I a swan, the part of a swan. But since I am a reasonable creature, it is my duty to praise God ... And I call on you to join the same song."

(Works, book i, ch. xvi., Carter-Higginson translation, abridged.)

This is a note on p. 464 of James, Varieties of Religious Experience, Modern Library edition. This book was the Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh for 1901-2, and was originally copyrighted by James in 1902.

Epictetus is late 1st and early 2nd century A.D.

Session III: Lifting Doubts About Communication Between God and Man

1. As we move in apologetic work beyond the issue of God's existence and basic nature, our work becomes less a matter of proof., though that remains absolutely crucial at certain points, and more a matter of "making sense" of the elements of Christian faith, showing that of course it would be such.
2. All creative persons of whom we know: (A). Create for envisioned good, and (B) retain a personal interest and concern for the well-being of their creations. This seems to be a part of what it means to be creative. This is especially true the better the creator is in mind and character. (God is certainly not evil, for if He were the world would be much worse than it is: e. g. a perpetual concentration camp or worse.)
3. Hence there is a good purpose to human history and the individual life therein.— To develop, to contribute to, a glorious, triumphant community of unqualified love, understanding and freedom. (Eph. 2:4-7, 3:10; I Peter 1:12; Rev 21:1-22:5) God has continuing interaction with His creation to see to it that good comes of it.
4. HOW is God to do this? Force will not do. If it would, history would not be required. God could raise up biological children of Abraham from stones (Matt. 3:9), but not children of faith, which calls for free development of Christlike character.
5. His approach to man is one that allows man to hide, to not see Him, but also to seek Him. (Deut. 4:29; II Chron. 15:15; Jer. 29:13; Matt. 6:33; Acts 17:27)
6. He makes a friend and from him (Abraham) a covenant people, the Jews. (II Chron. 20:7; Deut. 4:32-37; Isa. 41:8, 42:5-7) No people like the Jews on earth, owing their continued existence through millennia to God Alone. An enduring historical monument to the hand of God in history. No equivalent revelation to that to the Jews. E.g. Psalm 23. No naturalistic principles (e.g. Hume, Freud) can explain the concepts in the 23rd Psalm.
7. Through this people he gives a book, the Bible. Like the people, there is no book that compares to this book in human history, for literary and historical value, as revelation of God's nature and purpose, or in terms of demand and personal influence. Inerrant in its originals, God has wisely not retained the originals in human life, though He certainly could have done so, but has left us with versions that can be legitimately criticized. Every Christian scholar admits that any Bible in our hands (see any established Hebrew/Greek text) falls short of perfection. But the enduring presence of God's spirit makes even paraphrases (Phillips, Living Bible) infallible guides into a saving relationship with Christ for those who humbly seek it. For others, the Bible will be their destruction. (John 5:39-40; II Peter 3:15-16) Normal standards of historical evidence authenticate it as a historically sound record.
8. God creates and sustains personal relationships to individuals by His individual word to them, within the confines of biblical teachings. HIS KINGDOM WORKS BY WORDS!

Session IV: Lifting Doubts About Living and Acting with God in the Kingdom of the Heavens

1. The hope that is in us (I Peter 3:15) is not based merely upon the objective reality of God or the objective truth of the scriptures, but upon our constant interaction with the rule of God from the heavens here and now.
 - The 23rd Psalm as real life
 - "I will never leave you!" (Heb. 13:5-6)
 - All needs met from God riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:9)
2. This interaction is both between us and God and between us + God and other things and persons. God speaks to us, we speak to God (praying), and under God we speak ("in Jesus' name") to other things and persons (saying). (John 15:5)
3. Some New Testament illustrations:
 - Matt 8:5-13
 - Mark 11:12-26
 - John 16:23-24 (& 15:7)
 - Acts 3:1-8 (3:16, 4:7, 10, 17-18, 30)
4. But WHY SAY AND PRAY? Why has God ordained that this should be substantial to the new life from above?

Because our lives are to count for something for God's purposes in creation and human history! They are to do so through our choice, our plans, our responsibility and character.
5. The ultimate, the indispensable, apologetic, or DOUBT LIFTER, is our interactive life in God. (John 11:15, Phil. 2:12)