

# Getting a Grip on Christian Apologetics

by Alex McFarland

A few years ago I visited a high school in my native North Carolina during "See You at the Pole." Many teens were gathered around the flagpole to pray—still others to protest. Members of the Diversity Club held a banner that read: *Intolerance at the Pole*. I heard someone ask, "Why do Christians think everybody who doesn't agree with them is going to hell?" Experiences like that illustrate why Christian students need to become students of apologetics. It takes effort but can only enhance their Christian witness.

"Christian apologetics" is the practice of sharing reasons why we believe what we do. If you've witnessed to unbelievers you've probably heard various objections to the gospel message. Some people are under the false impression that the Bible contains errors. Others wonder how God (if He exists) could allow natural disasters. Whether a listener has a legitimate question about God or tosses out a thinly veiled excuse for unbelief, we must equip teens to support their faith with evidence and sound reasoning.

*Apologetics* means "a defense." Its Greek root, *apologia*, appears several times in the Bible. For example, 1 Peter 3:15 encourages believers to "be ready always to give an answer to anyone who asks you about the hope you have." Translated *answer* and *reason*, *apologia* is an ancient legal term meaning—you guessed it—"a defense." That same word is found in Philippians 1:7 where Paul said he was prepared to defend the gospel. The principle is also echoed in Jude 3 as believers are encouraged to "earnestly contend" or "stand up for" the faith.

Each of us has been given the assignment of not only presenting the gospel but also explaining and defending the truths of our message to the world around us. There is plenty of evidence to support what we believe. The Bible reminds us that the good news about Jesus is not just based on human opinion or someone's personal preference. Christianity is truth, not mere fables or myths (2 Peter 1:16). Romans 1:4 says that Jesus' resurrection shows He was the unique Son of God. Acts 1:3 says that, after His resurrection, Christ showed He was alive by many undeniable proofs.

Christianity is unique in that it is the only faith system based on historical facts that can be thoroughly investigated.

We have verifiable words and events, including the bold claims of Jesus Himself. When a non-Christian says "You have no right to judge me" they are absolutely correct. But Jesus has evaluated the entire human race and His Word sums it up for each of us: "You must be born again" (John 3:3-20). It's there in black and white, yet people risk eternity by trusting their own opinion about what it means to be in right relation to God. If we hope to reach them we need to be armed, not to win arguments but to win souls.

Categories of Christian apologetics include: (1) *Textual apologetics*—defending the trustworthiness of the Bible, then sharing what it says; (2) *Evidence-based apologetics*—presenting the many evidences in defense of the Christian faith (such as historical or scientific facts); and (3) *Philosophical apologetics*—exposing the flawed reasoning behind popular arguments against Christianity.

Respected Christian thinkers throughout history have recognized that every possible argument against Christianity is based on faulty logic and incorrect conclusions. Beliefs and religions include everything from atheism (there is no God) to polytheism (there are many gods) to pantheism (everything is part of God). But regardless of the label that describes an individual's view of the world, an effective presentation of the gospel often requires that we address certain assumptions that person may hold. Before the unsaved are willing to consider what Jesus taught, Christian teens may need to help them clear mental barriers that stand in their way.

In a culture known for its rejection of authority and a cynical "prove it to me" attitude, knowledge of apologetics is vital to young people serious about evangelism. It's a Goliath-sized challenge. That's why I'm committed to being here each month, using this space to tackle tough questions that will give teens the head knowledge they need to help them change hearts.

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## the asked editor

**You've always done a great job of analyzing music, movies and television. But an area that's been lacking is video game reviews. Why is that, and will that ever change?**

Video games pose a unique challenge. As you might imagine, they can take forever to work through. A CD, movie or TV show requires a few hours. They're linear and finite. But a comprehensive look at a video game can take days. Getting all the way through one?



A week or more ... assuming the player doesn't get stuck. Then, mark my words, some 13-year-old in Idaho will find a disturbing level or use a secret



cheat code we didn't know existed. It can be frustrating. Games today are so complex and time-consuming that—except for the occasional *Grand Theft Auto*-style phenomenon—we've been forced to invest our limited resources elsewhere. But I'm happy to report that that's changing (see pg. 5). Recently, *Plugged In* forged a partnership with several skilled, discerning gamers who will enable us to review one popular video game in every issue.