

OpenTheo

S1E4 - Why is Christian Apologetics Important?

November 19, 2018



Risen Jesus - Mike Licona

Why do some Christians throw shade on Christian apologetics? Listen to Dr. Licona discuss some of the ways the Bible addresses apologetics and why every person should be prepared to give an answer for the hope within (1 Peter 3:15). Be sure to subscribe to catch every episode of the podcast.

Transcript

[MUSIC] Hello and welcome to the Risen Jesus podcast with Dr. Mike Lacona. Dr. Lacona is Associate Professor in Theology at Houston Baptist University, and he is a frequent speaker on university campuses, churches, retreats, and has appeared on dozens of radio and television programs. Mike is the President of Risen Jesus, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

My name is Kurt Jarrus, your host. On today's episode, we're talking about the importance of Christian apologetics. Mike, over the last couple episodes here, we've talked about issues in Christian apologetics.

In the past, spoken on a variety of topics, you've honed in more sort of on specific areas within Gospel studies as you've devoted yourself to research. And in general, you are a Christian apologist. You've involved yourself in that work.

Some scholars, however, abhor Christian apologetics. Even Christian scholars, they don't like it. Why is this? Well, I think it's probably because when you were doing scholarship, and those who would abhor Christian apologetics, there's probably two reasons for it.

One reason, I'll tell you the story, I was having lunch with a New Testament scholar who I have a lot of respect for. We were at SBL a few years ago, and we were sitting there at lunch talking, and this guy was telling me how a number of his colleagues and himself, they looked down on Christian apologists because they just saw this kind of arrogance, and that they didn't think that there was any kind of fruit, spiritual fruit that came as a result. And so I started to say, "Well, I understand what you're saying."

There are certain Christian apologists that gives the discipline a bad name. They come across as no-it-all, that they're not really open-minded to things. It's their way in a highway." And I said, "You know, some of the biggest names in Christian apologetics aren't that way.

People like William Lane Craig and Gary Habermas, they may come across as confident, but it's a, these are in, I'd say in my experience, my personal knowledge of them, both Habermas and Craig are dear friends of mine. They're some of the most humble people you ever meet." Yeah, there's a difference between confidence and arrogance. Yeah, JP Morlin, another guy that I admire, we don't agree on everything, but he's a great guy.

He's a humble servant of Christ, least robo. Mark Middelberg, Alex McFarland, you name him, Frank Turic, Sean McDowell, and Brett Conkel, Greg Cokel, Josh McDowell. These guys are, they're confident, but they aren't arrogant.

You know, Tim Stratton, a good friend of mine, he's just a rocketing in apologetics. Very humble guy. Hey, you're a humble guy.

You're not arrogant. Now you're just, you know, enough with things, Mike. Yeah, but the thing is, yeah, people will confuse that confidence with it.

And I said, in terms of fruit, I started to name some of the things like people who had contacted me after debates. They had either attended or watched online, how people would become Christians, how people who had left the Christian faith came back to the faith, how people were encouraged and moved closer to the Christian faith and meaningful dialogues that I ended up with. And I had a lot of dialogues that I ended up, I've had over the years with people involved who had viewed one of my debates.

And this guy was just shocked. He said, I had no idea. And I said, that's just some stories for me.

Every one of us who are involved in Christian apologetics, apologetics can tell you story after story after story. So that's one thing. When it comes to other scholars, another major reason why they don't think or they don't like apologetics is because, and the right on this part, this point, that most Christian apologists are not doing original research.

They are doing research like, for example, Lee Strobel, good friend of mine, great guy, he's very intelligent. He reads the same kind of books that I read. So I mean, he's very well informed on these things.

He studies apologetics, but he's doing it for the sole purpose of sharing it to defend the Christian faith. He's not interested in doing that original research. He's consulting others to use what they feel like.

What they find to defend the truth of the Christian faith. Hey, there's nothing at all wrong

with that. But that is different from a scholarship that says, look, I am my primary interest is to do research here to find the answer to different things.

And so they see a conflict of interest between I'm doing this to find an answer to solve attention that's going on, whereas someone apologetics, a scholar doing it may be doing it in order to solve the dilemma to present it to defend Christianity. So it's kind of like they already have the end result in mind or the end goal in mind and that's going to corrupt their investigation. It's not true research, whereas you really can do both.

I mean, I know William Lane Craig very well. And right now he's doing some work on the historical Adam. And I know that Bill is open to wherever his research is going to lead.

Now he wants it to lead to a historical Adam, something like similar to what we find in Genesis. But if it doesn't lead him to that conclusion, he will go where the evidence leads him. That's just on its scholarship, whether you have apologetics in mind or not.

But many don't have that. And those same scholars who put down apologists, you know, they could turn around and do that with most skeptical scholars as well because most skeptical scholars likewise have objectives in mind. They want to discredit the Gospels.

So rather than being apologists, they're the opposite. They're iconoclasts. They're trying to pull down the icon of the reliability of the Gospels of the biblical accounts and the truth of Christianity.

And that is no less a biased position than apologetics is. It's just the you have opposite goals in mind. That was just the point I was going to make that some non-Christians might accuse Christians of being biased and being unable to see the truth.

But they themselves would have biases. And perhaps in this case, anti-Christian biases. So it's not like we're all, you know, objective or completely neutral.

Each of us has our biases and we have to recognize these biases in the pursuit of objectivity. Yep. And you're absolutely right.

And you see this in atheists as well as you see it in Christians. Christians are guilty of it. Atheists are guilty of it.

I'm not going to mention any names here. But when Anthony Flue announced that he was leaving atheism and now believed in God's existence, I was accidentally included in a group email list. And this particular atheist scholar said, "I want to assure all of you that I have already begun working on an answer.

Some of the things I already have in mind is Flue is old. He doesn't understand what he's talking about here. But I will come up with an answer and respond to Flue now announcing he believes in God and it will be very soon." And then someone responded to

the group to this, did a reply to all, and it said, "Did you know that you included Mike Lacona in on this?" And then I never got another email.

But what that showed is here was this prominent atheist scholar who already had an answer to Flue without having any idea of why he had given up his atheism and now believed in God's existence. So it wasn't a matter of, "I'm going to investigate why he has given up atheism and now believes in God's existence. I don't care what his evidence is.

I already have an answer to it." So atheists can often be just as biased as Christians. So that leaves us with this question then. When we're trying to reach atheists, we're trying to reach skeptics and while they might have their biases, nevertheless, we've got to reach out to them and recognize what those biases are.

And that's part of the task of the Christian apologists, either the big A or the little A, whoever might be doing it. So why is the task of, or enterprise of Christian apologetics, important? Well, I've found a couple of benefits to it when I lecture I share them. So the first thing is there are a number of people out there who are truly seeking.

They're truly seeking to see what's up in terms of does God exist? If he does, what is it? Is it a he, she, it? What is it? What is God? Is there a creator of the universe? How was the universe created? How was life created? Does this God require me to believe the correct things about him? Who is this correct God? So these are people who are truly seeking. They're open-minded. They just want evidence.

Okay? So apologetics, done in the right way, can inform those seekers. The very first time I spoke on a college campus was on the resurrection of Jesus and at the very end there was this Jewish student, a girl. And she said that what I had been saying about the resurrection of Jesus would have been very offensive to those in her family, fellow Jews, because her mom had said you were never to talk, bring up the name of Jesus in the house.

She said, but what I've heard tonight in terms of the evidence, I believe Jesus rose from the dead, that he's Messiah, and I want to know how I can become a Christian and maintain my Jewish heritage. Now this girl had been invited to church on several occasions, had gone to church with her friends, and she thought the story was nice, but she didn't become a Christian. Why? Well, the story could be nice, but why give up your family and end up being ostracized by those that you love most in life, just because you like a story, a narrative, the Christian narrative better maybe than the one you've been taught.

Well, the only reason you would sacrifice is because you think Christianity is true. Well, how would you know if it's true unless you actually heard evidence that it was true? So it does inform seekers. That's one of its benefits.

When I'm giving talks, it's mostly at churches where people are already believers, and I certainly hope that what I'm sharing people will go and then share with others, but it seems to that another role of Christian apologetics is in reaching those that already are believers. Yeah. Is that just preaching to the choir, or is that still a worthwhile benefit? Now, that is, well, let me tell you, if that's not it.

The reason that we are talking today, and that I'm a Christian, is because of Christian apologetics. It's because Gary Habermas took some time out and shared evidence with me and pointed me to different sorts of resources, and I could look up these things myself. That he helped me past my times of doubt.

That's why I'm a Christian today. I didn't become a Christian based on the evidence. I became a Christian at the age of 10.

My epistemological process, these weren't fully developed at that point. But when I started to question my faith, it was the evidence that kept me in the faith. And there are many Christians like that.

I get lots of emails, or people who send me a message on Facebook or Twitter that says, "Thanks for your ministry because you have been due, because of your debates, because of your lectures, I have remained a Christian today. You've saved my faith." So, yes, apologetics has a very profound benefit for believers who are doubting their faith. It sounds like you and I have had similar life experiences.

For me, I prayed the Lord's Prayer at a Christian camp and sort of made my faith my own at a young age. I think I was maybe about eight. It was in high school I asked these deep questions of life.

And I began to read Paul Copan and I listened to Ravi Zacharias. And I never had left my Christian faith, but apologetics helped keep me in the faith for sure. I think without those guys, I probably would have become agnostic at some point.

And then who knows what would have happened after that? Yeah, we wouldn't be talking now, would we? Yeah, that's right. So interesting journeys we've both led. Wow, that's cool.

There are a lot of stories like that. Yeah. A lot of stories.

So because of Christian apologetics, you're doing this, what you're doing. I'm doing what I'm doing. I mean, there's a lot out there, a fruit because Christians needed it and it has ministered to them and they've been able to either keep their faith or have a stronger faith because of it.

Yeah, this would be a good plug to request stories from our listeners here, Mike. I guess if you're listening to this and you've had a similar experience or something different

pertaining to apologetics, we'd love to hear from you and hear your story of how apologetics says brought you to the faith or kept you in it. Now, Mike, there's still yet a third or maybe even fourth purpose, we might say for Christian apologetics, why it's important.

I've fleshed this out maybe a little bit differently and you might have your own take. I talk about 2 Corinthians 10-5. We demolish arguments and every thought or we take every thought captive that sets itself up against Christ.

So that's another aspect to apologetics is tearing down those false arguments. Yeah. You've done quite a bit of that in your debates, haven't you? Well, I try to.

And thinking along those lines, look, you'll be familiar with these quotes. I'm only vaguely familiar, so please, you can tell me where they're from and what they say precisely because I will probably botch them here. But it seems to me there was someone who said that's all that's necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.

That sounds like Edmund Burke. Okay. And then there is a good people just stay silent than evil triumphs.

And there's another one. It's something about not long with philosophy. Whether it was Lewis or someone else that said good philosophy must be given so that bad philosophy is answered.

Does that sound familiar? Yeah, I think that is C.S. Lewis. Okay. So and think about our political process right now.

Okay. What if the far left were just unopposed? What would happen in our culture? It's because that people who aren't on the far left oppose them and present and promote a different view that the far left does not get its way at least most of the time. And I'd say the same thing applies to why we should have Christian apologetics.

If Christian apologetics was not given, if everybody was just silent on it and the evidence weren't provided, then people would go off to school. They'd go off, you know, kids, parents would send their kids off to the secular universities and the professors would get up and say, "I'm the objective of this semester is to destroy your faith." And nobody would be responding to it. Think of what would happen in terms of the exodus of believers.

But because of Christian apologetics, Christians are strengthened in their faith. They remain in the faith. Some of them go into full-time Christian ministry and it impacts our society in a real way because Christianity isn't just this fairy tale that is only reserved for a few anti-intellectuals.

It involves intellectuals and they present it because it's true. And we can know it's true. Here are some reasons it's true.

It presents an alternative to say atheism and the hopelessness that comes along with atheism. Because what if atheism is true? You don't believe Christianity or embrace religion because of it makes you feel better. At least that shouldn't be the reason.

But you think about if atheism is true. Wow, that means when our parents, our spouses, our children, our loved ones die, we're never going to see them again. They just perish.

They become worm food. And the person they were just becomes entirely forgotten that the evil people, the wicked get away with things, the righteous and the innocent suffer by these wicked people, and there is no reckoning. There's no justice that's done.

Now that's just a terrible thought. But if it's true, we need to live with it or at least commit suicide and die with it. Such depressing thoughts.

But if atheism is true, it is a sad state of affairs. But if Christianity is true, it is a very, very good state of affairs. And it is true.

Why? Because we've got good evidence. We can know it's true because we have good evidence to support it. That's what Christian apologetics is all about.

It helps the seeker. It helps the believer. It demolishes the false arguments of those who won't accept the gospel message.

And it has, as you're describing here, this impact on society. Where we're going even now from just these intellectual issues to these are real applicable ideas that have consequences for how we live our lives, for the justices, and injustices in our society, how we create our laws, etc. There's this ripple effect that occurs when we do apologetics.

And you know what Kurt, I heard William Linkrecht just a few years ago. He has been interviewed by Lee Strobel and Bill said that it's an exciting time to be involved in Christian apologetics and that we have entered. We have now entered into a golden era of Christian apologetics.

So it's an exciting time to be discussing these things with you. Let's hope I'm certainly blessed to be joined with a golden apologist here on this podcast. So thank you, Mike, for talking to us about the importance of apologetics itself.

Cool. Thanks, Kurt. If you'd like to learn more about the work and ministry of Dr. Mike Lacona, please visit RisenJesus.com, where you can find authentic answers to questions about the resurrection of Jesus and the historical reliability of the Gospels.

You can also check out free resources like ebooks, watch videos such as debates or

lectures, or simply read some articles. If this program has been a blessing to you, would you consider becoming one of our partners? You can learn more and start your partnership by going to RisenJesus.com/donate. Please be sure to subscribe to this podcast and follow us on Facebook and Twitter. This has been the RisenJesus Podcast, a ministry of Dr. Mike Lacona.

[Music]

[Music]

[Music]

[Music]

[Music]

[Music]