

Norm Geisler International Ministries

Study Guide on Faith, Reason, Apologetics, and Evangelism

by Dr. David Geisler

Part 1

Misconceptions Christians May Have...

Lies and Distortions Directed Towards Christians

In the movie *Norm Geisler: Not Qualified*, (normgeislerthemovie.com) one of the things that stood out to me is an incident that happened shortly after my father accepted Christ. When he tried to witness to someone who had questions, he realized that he did not have answers. Eventually, my father learned that many solutions could be found with a better understanding of Philosophy. Through his study of philosophy, he discovered the Medieval Christian scholar, Thomas Aquinas. Through Aquinas' writings, my father learned a better way to see the relationship between faith and reason.

Through his study, Norm Geisler came to three specific conclusions:

1. He believed that all truth was God's truth. So he trusted that he could find common ground when he witnessed to others.
2. He believed that faith and reason were more compatible than many Christians realized.
3. He came to understand the proper use of apologetics in witnessing to others.

Why is There a Problem?

Observation:

The devil has a plan to distort the truth about what we believe in order to weaken our faith and dilute our witness to others.

“The god of this world has blinded their minds so that they cannot see the light of the gospel” (2 Cor. 4:4).

Gen. 3:1-5: The Temptation of Adam and Eve

- In the story of the temptation of Adam and Eve, the devil told Eve that if she ate the fruit, her “eyes will be opened... you will know good and evil.”
- The devil told half of a truth; the first couple did see the world differently after taking a bite.
- He also told a lie — “It will make you like God.”

Apostle Peter says,

“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.” (1 Pet. 5:8-9)

Observation:

- One of the devil’s strategies is to find a way to lead us to skew our thinking about faith and reason.
- Specifically, he doesn’t want Christians to have the proper perspective of what scripture teaches, especially about the value of Christian evidence to strengthen our faith and increase our witness to others.

Apologetics and Evangelism

Are apologetics and evangelism different paths for different Christians? What can we learn from the Bible?

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” (1 Pet. 3:15, NKJV; most versions translate this as “gentleness and respect.”)

Observation:

- Giving an answer for the hope we have is an imperative – not a suggestion.
- Giving an answer for the hope we have is one way we can make Christ the Lord of our lives.
- 1 Peter 3:15 ties apologetics with evangelism. That is because it joins giving answers (apologetics) to our hope as believers.

Have you ever used apologetics in a way that connects to our hope in Christ?

The Bible commands us to do several things:

- We are commanded to give an answer for our hope in Christ (1 Pet. 3:15).
- We are commanded to knock down bad ideas that go against faith in Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).
- We are commanded to discern the true from the false, to test the spirits (1 Jn. 4:1).
- Paul commanded that an elder understand and refute those who speak against sound doctrine. (Titus 1:9).
- Paul commanded church leaders to rebuke those in error (Titus 1:13).

Question:

If the Bible commands all these things, why do so many Christians consider apologetics something assigned to those trained in a specific discipline (and not for ordinary believers)?

Why do so many assume that apologetics has nothing to do with evangelism?

Answer:

That is because the devil works very hard to get Christians to misunderstand what God has taught about apologetics and evangelism. There are many aspects of authentic biblical faith. We must recognize that we should effectively blend different parts of what it means to be a disciple of Christ. The devil is a master of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). It's a big part of the enemy's strategy. Remember the devil seeks to weaken our faith and dilute our witness to others.

Question:

Why is it that many of those trained in apologetics don't seem to care about evangelism? Conversely, why do those who care greatly about evangelism not seem to care as much about apologetics?

Answer:

Some Christians are attracted to apologetics because they enjoy winning arguments. These misguided souls have lost the goal of all Christian activity, to glorify God. Specifically, they have forgotten the goal of using apologetics in our witness to others. The goal is to remove the obstacles, so that we can help others take a step closer to Christ.

Other Christians who care greatly about evangelism and have a strong heart for the lost, yet they lack the knowledge to make their approach more persuasive to their skeptical friends. Furthermore, without lowering some intellectual barriers that people may have, it can be more difficult for the Holy Spirit to penetrate their hearts with the truth of the Gospel. The sad truth is that both of these kinds of Christians are missing out on what God says in His word about the purpose of apologetics and evangelism.

Correcting 10 Misconceptions That Can Weaken Our Faith and Dilute Our Witness

Misconception 1

The only thing that matters is that we have faith.

Clarification:

Is that the complete truth?

While having faith is very important, it's also essential we have a suitable object to our faith. People from other religions have faith too. The content of our faith is of utmost importance. If the resurrection did not really happen, then it doesn't matter what we believe.

1 Cor. 15:12-19 "Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty, and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also,

those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.”

- Our faith is only as valid as the object in which it is placed (Verse 14).
- Christians are to be pitied if Christ did not rise from the dead (Verse 19).

Misconception 2

Faith and reason are not compatible.

Clarification:

There's a proper way to understand the relationship between faith and reason. It starts with understanding the distinction the Bible makes between a belief **that** and a belief **in**. (James 2:19)

- Demons **believe that** there is one God, but they don't **believe in** the one God.
- **Believing in** implies placing one's trust in someone. **Believing that** only means that we agree with an idea.
- Apologetics bears on the question of “belief that” not “belief in.”

Implications of this Truth

- You can't use apologetics to argue someone into the kingdom (Luke 16:31). Even if we can convince someone of the truth of the Christian faith, the decision to give their lives to Christ takes more than agreement with an idea.
- You need more than objective evidence to win someone to Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4; Acts 28:24). Their hearts are involved with the decision, and if their hearts are enslaved to sin, no amount of evidence will change them.
- What is *that something else* that you need? The ministry of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 6:65; 1 Cor. 12:3)
- You need to keep a balanced perspective, using your persuasive words yet relying on the Holy Spirit (Acts 14:1). We are commanded to give an answer for the hope that is in us (1 Pet. 3:15).

- Metaphorically apologetics can bring the horse to the water, but only the Spirit of God can convince it to drink! (See John 6:65; 1 Cor. 12:3)

Misconception 3

You can use apologetics to argue someone into the kingdom.

Clarification:

Remember, apologetics can only get you so far: it helps with *belief that* but not *belief in* (James 2:19)

Misconception 4

The natural man cannot know God, so there's no point engaging others in apologetic dialogue.

Clarification:

What is the truth? The natural man can perceive some of the truth of God, but he cannot receive (welcome) specific truths about Christ, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word for accept or receive is "*dechomai*," which means "welcome" or "embrace." To want to receive the things of the Spirit of God is not natural for people.

How do we know the natural man can understand some things about God?

The Bible teaches this. (Romans 1:18-19; 2:14-15). The Bible clearly says that man is without excuse because the existence of God is obvious. So people, apart from God's special revelation, can know that He exists, but they do not welcome Him.

Misconception 5

Just confront others with the truth no matter if they are ready to hear it or not. You don't need to be sensitive in how you use apologetics.

Clarification:

You should give answers for the hope you have with a posture of meekness and fear (1 Peter. 3:15).

- The word for meekness, “*prautetos*” in 1 Pet. 3:15 carries the idea of “not being overly impressed by a sense of one’s self-importance . . .” It implies that one does not have any personal agenda with people. We are not trying to speak down to them; we are merely beggars that found bread.
- Meekness describes the condition of the mind and heart. It means more than gentleness, as gentleness better describes outward actions. Meekness is the opposite of self-assertiveness and self-interest.

The implication of giving answers with meekness

- When we present people with the truth of the gospel (Jn. 8:32), we must be mindful of our goal: to remove the obstacle and help others take one step closer to Christ.
- We could win the initial battle but lose the war and damage our testimony if we are not careful in how we speak to people about Christ (2 Tim. 2:24-25).
- Someday we will have to give an account of our life. So we should keep that in mind when we think about how we are giving answers for the hope we have! We should specifically be mindful moment by moment of our accountability before God, so that our posture is the very best when we explain the hope that we have. We should give an answer with meekness and fear!

Misconception 6

As Christians engaged in apologetics, our responsibility is only to answer people’s questions if we are first asked.

Clarification:

Your apologetic responsibility involves much more than contained in 1 Pet. 3:15. See also 2 Cor. 10:5; 1 Cor. 9:22; Matt. 13:19-23.

Question:

When it says “to be ready to give an answer,” what does it mean to be ready?

Answer:

- The Greek word for ready in 1 Pet. 3:15 (*Hetoimos*) is also used in Matt 24:44 and Luke 12:40. It means that as Christians, we need to anticipate Christ's return eagerly.
- If we combine 1 Pet. 3:15 with 2 Corinthians 10:5 and 1 Cor. 9:22, it is clear that our responsibility as Christians is also to eagerly remove barriers whether they ask us a specific question or not!
- This attitude was the Apostle Paul's practice! (Acts 17:16-17, 22-29).

Acts 17:16 – 17 “Now, while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.”

Norman Geisler:

“Being ready is not just a matter of having the right information available; it is also an attitude of readiness and eagerness to share the truth of what we believe.”

(Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics, p. 37)

- We need to do the apologetic task as stated at 1 Peter 3:15, but we should not forget the broader discussion in Matt. 13:19-23:

“When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand *it*, then the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands *it*, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

- When we talk about removing barriers, we are talking about the need to do pre-evangelism or cultivate good soil in the lives of our pre-believing friends.

Misconception 7

People's primary barriers to faith in Christ are intellectual.

Clarification:

- Intellectual barriers to faith are never the primary reason people reject Christ. Rather, the primary barrier is volitional. (John 12:37; Rom. 1:18-20; Eph. 4:18; Jer. 17:9)
- It's the Holy Spirit that convicts their hearts, even if he uses our persuasive words. (Jn. 6:65; 1 Cor. 12:3; Acts 14:1)
- Don't be so quick to give people answers to every question. Overwhelming them with information is not helpful.
- We should be more strategic in how we go about using intellectual evidence for the truth of the Christian faith when we witness to others.
- We should remind our seeking friends that even after getting the evidence they were looking for, taking steps to the cross may not be as easy as they think!
- Their primary barrier is volitional (willfulness) and spiritual, but God can change their sinful heart (Phil. 2:13; Jer. 17:9).

A question you may want to ask:

“You mean to tell me if right now I could give you an answer to your question...you would repent...turn around 180 degrees and invite Christ to come into your life...and ask Him to take control of your life from this day forward?”

Misconception 8

There is no real connection between apologetics and evangelism.

Clarification:

- Apologetics and evangelism go hand-in-hand in the New Testament.
- Christian evidence normally accompanied the presentation of the gospel in the New Testament. (Matthew 4:23; John 5:36, 10:37-38, 20:30-31; Acts 9:22, 14:1, 17:2-3, 26:28-29, 28:23).
- While there is a distinction between apologetics and evangelism, there should never be a complete separation.

Understanding the Goal of Using Apologetics in Evangelism

“To remove the obstacle so that we can help others take one step closer to Jesus Christ every day!... Apologetics should be viewed not as a wrestling contest whose goal is to metaphorically twist our non-Christian friend’s logical arm to get them to cry, ‘Uncle!’ Our goal is rather to help them to see the truth about God that has been clearly revealed to them so that they will cry out ‘Abba’ Father.” (Romans 1:20; 8:15)
(*Practical Apologetics*, by David Geisler, Don Deal, and Brian Henson.)

Misconception 9

Christian faith is blind faith. It is what we believe because of how we feel. In contrast, reason has to do with thinking.

“Faith is now understood as a blind act of will, a decision to believe something that is either independent of reason or that is a simple choice to believe while ignoring the paltry lack of evidence for what is believed.”

(J.P. Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind*, p. 25.)

Clarification:

- Faith and reason are compatible.
- God’s truth goes beyond reason but not against it. Just because we cannot reason to some of the central beliefs of Christianity doesn’t mean that they go *against* reason.

Example: Trinity, the Christian belief that God exists eternally as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To say that God is three persons in one person would be a contradiction. To say that God has three natures in one nature is a contradiction. But it is not a contradiction to say that God is three persons in one nature or essence. God is three “who”s in one divine “what.”

Incarnation, the Christian belief that the Son of God assumed a human nature, along with His existing divine nature. God didn’t cease to become God when God the Son became man. He didn’t change His nature; he couldn’t. God cannot change (Mal. 3:6). Jesus is one *who* and two *whats*. He has a divine nature and a human nature.

None of these statements are contradictory. It is a reasonable faith!

So rather than being a leap of faith, Christianity is a *step* of faith! It is a step of faith into the light—the light of sufficient evidence. But it is certainly not a leap of faith into darkness! Consider the following illustration:

“A person wants to ascend to the top of a building. He pushes the button, and two elevator doors open. The interior of the first is so dark that you cannot even see the floor clearly, and no one gets off it. The second is well lit, and a large man emerges from it. Which is the safer elevator? Which one provides you with the best evidence that it can get you to the top floor safely? True, it still takes a step of faith to get into the second one. But it is a step of faith in the light of good evidence. The other is a leap of faith in the dark. Christianity is like the second elevator.”

(*Conversational Evangelism* by David and Norman Geisler, p. 161.)

- I can trust God for what I don't know because of what He has revealed to me that I do know.
 - Example: How will I be able to be happy in heaven when I know I have a loved one in Hell? While I do not concretely know the answer to this question, I know the true things that God has already revealed to me. Therefore, I can trust him when his Word says, “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes... neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore...” (Rev. 21:4).
 - I can know that God exists from reason alone. But I cannot know He is a triune God from reason alone. But, again, I have good reason to trust him in the things I cannot be certain about.

What is the right way to think about Faith and Reason?

- Reason cannot be contrary to the truth of faith.
- Reason in itself cannot provide the basis for believing in God.
- To believe in God, one must have the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit.
- Faith is supported by, although not based on, evidence.
- Faith is reason with an assent of the will, a submission of desires.

(See *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical appraisal* by Norman Geisler, p. 57-64.)

- Sometimes we need to step out in faith before gaining a greater understanding. This idea is sometimes called “faith seeking understanding.” We do not and cannot have complete knowledge for everything that we believe. This is as true of the Christian faith

as it is about everything we believe, down to whether our spouses love us. The only question is, “are our beliefs rational?” For Christians, the answer is yes!

St. Augustine on Faith:

- The mysteries and secrets of the kingdom of God first seek out believing men, that they may make them understand. For faith is understanding’s step, and understanding is faith’s reward.” - *Sermons on New Testament*, Lessons 126.1, 3.
- Our faith goes deeper than knowing things about God, it goes to the level of knowing God!

The proper role that evidence can play:

“Let’s say you’re going to see if your boss is in the office. You see his car in the parking lot. You ask the secretary if he’s in, and she says, ‘Yes, I just spoke with him.’ You see light from under his office door. You listen and hear his voice on the telephone. Based on all this evidence, you have reasonable grounds for concluding that your boss is in his office. But you could do something entirely different. You could go to the door and knock on it and meet the boss face to face. At that point, the evidence of the car in the parking lot, the secretary’s testimony, the light under the door, the voice on the telephone—all of that would still be valid, but it would take a secondary role because now you’ve met the boss face to face. And in the same way, when we’ve met God face-to-face, so to speak, all of the arguments and evidence for his existence—though still perfectly valid—take a secondary role.”

(Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith*, p.85)

“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” Rom. 8:16

Misconception 10

Christians should feel uneasy about believing that Christianity is true and every other religion is false!

Clarification:

Christianity is a system of truth in the big picture, but with some possible errors in non-essential matters (the little picture). All other religious beliefs are a system of error in the big picture with some truth in non-essential matters (the little picture).

I mean that, “Christians can have an error in some of the minor areas.” Although all Christians should believe that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone, Christians differ in minor areas. For

example, not all Christians have the same understanding of the gifts of the Spirit. Also, not all Christians have the same interpretation of reconciling God's sovereignty and man's choice. So, some Christians have minor disagreements, which means they can't be all right on all these secondary issues. Some of these views on the non-essentials have to be wrong. But all people rightly called Christians do agree on the essentials of the faith.

It is also true that most religions contain some truths. Most religions, for example, teach that we should be loving and kind to one another. Many religions teach some form of the golden rule. So there is some truth with which we Christians agree in almost all religions. But religions other than Christianity don't teach that Jesus is the only way to God. Indeed, some teach Jesus is one of the ways, but certainly not the only way.