

Practicing Apologetics in an Age Uninterested in Logic

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Reading Time: 6 minutes

In America, many historical leaders in the church of Christ have been skilled logicians. Because of the works of men like Alexander Campbell, Guy N. Woods, and Thomas B. Warren, many members of the church are acquainted with and have been exposed to various logical syllogisms and the use of reason to come to sound conclusions. I'll say at the outset that I do not believe in any way that this is a bad thing. Logic was woven into the fabric of reality by God Himself and speaks to His existence, intelligence, provision, and rationality. We should be familiar with logic and be able to use it as one of the several tools at our disposal to help us discover truth.

In fact, the use of logic and reason in an effort to get to the bottom of the truth is biblical. Jesus used impressive logical reasoning on several occasions (cf. Matt. 21:23-27) and Christian preachers like Paul and Apollos were known for their ability to logically reason with others (Acts 17:2-4, 22-31; 18:24, 27-28). It can even accurately be argued that God

expects us to use logic as Christians (2 Cor. 10:5; 1 Thess. 5:21).^[1]

Nevertheless, the use of logic is not appreciated by everyone. In fact, I think it is fair to say that the average person is largely unfamiliar with formal logic. Though people use logic every day without really thinking about it, a syllogism that we might think of as proof for the existence of God is likely unimpressive for many without any additional explanation or dialogue. So, how does the church adapt? Before we answer this question, there are a few things that need to be said.

I am not advocating that the church abandon logic. I believe that we couldn't if we wanted to. Even those who eschew a "rigid" emphasis on reason and logic are dependent on the very tools they hope to retire. Though we should never emphasize logic to the extent of becoming prideful or ignoring what God has done for us (like making the use of logic possible, giving us our minds, gracefully revealing Himself to us, etc.), we cannot and should not abandon logic altogether. Logic positively demonstrates the existence of God and is an extremely powerful instrument for helping people come to Christ.^[2] Abandoning logic is not an option. Instead, Christians must be willing to use logic in creative ways and truly invest in the lives of others.

People Don't Care How Much You Know Until They Know How Much You Care

The old adage is true. In today's day and age, we can hardly expect to walk up to somebody whom we've never met and never invested in and help them change their entire worldview with a syllogism. Is Christianity rational and does logic support it? Absolutely, but people need more than syllogisms if they're going to change their minds and in turn their hearts.

For most non-believers, before a logical defense of Christianity is effective, we need to make in an investment in their lives. We ought to befriend them (Rom. 12:18; Mark 2:15-17), show hospitality to them (Rom. 12:13; Heb 13:2), help them through their difficulties (Rom. 12:15; Gal. 6:10; Prov. 3:27), and just be genuinely good people around them and to them (Matt. 5:16; 1 Pet. 2:11-12; 1 Cor. 16:14). This will likely soften their hearts, make them more open and honest regarding the truth of Christianity, and this approach is biblical. I think I speak with many others when I say that my journey to Christianity didn't start with a syllogism; it started with a friendship. Once I knew I was genuinely cared for, I became more interested in the pure religion of the carers. Soft hearts lead to open minds.

Are We Trying to Win or Trying to Help?

It is tempting to view the unchurched and skeptical as enemies who need to be proved wrong. When this is our mindset, logic and rationality is our ammunition and words are our weapons. Make no mistake, there is a spiritual war going on and we do need to be prepared (Eph. 6:10-18), but our main battle is with ideas, not people (2 Cor. 10:5). When we view those who don't believe in God simply as somebody to prove wrong, we can end up abusing logic instead of using it as a tool to bring others to Christ.

We need to decide if our main interest is in proving others wrong or helping them to a place of understanding. It can be tempting to allow our pride to get in the way and to view defending the faith in an unbalanced way. People may be less interested and less familiar with logic, but when logical arguments are coupled with a Christlike attitude, it can cause people to pay more attention. Most Christians are probably familiar with 1 Peter 3:15 where we are commanded to always be prepared to “make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you....” But we cannot forget the latter part of this verse—“...yet do it with gentleness and respect.”

People may be burnt out on logical arguments for the existence of God in part because it always seems to be coming from people who are aggressive and disrespectful. If we desire to have an impact in our culture, it is imperative that we pair reason with respect and are more interested in helping the skeptic instead of merely proving him wrong. One of the factors that had the biggest impact on my conversion from atheism to Christianity was the attitude and approach of the Christian who studied with me. Instead of viewing me as a debate partner or some kind of enemy, I was made to feel like I was going on a journey to truth with a friend. I was told that we will go wherever the truth leads, and he was even humble enough to admit that if I could prove him wrong he would change. Of course, I couldn't prove him wrong, and I ended up becoming a Christian—but this humble, friendly approach does a lot of good and yields itself to conducive conversations even with people who don't believe in God and aren't interested in debates or logic.

Combining Syllogisms with Stories

I think a largely un-tapped apologetics area in the church is the use of what some people refer to as imaginative apologetics. Today's culture is less interested in syllogisms and more interested in stories. We live in a society obsessed with buzzwords and phrases like “meta narrative,” “my story,” and the like. Narrative sermons have even become the main preaching style in some churches as people move further away from an affinity for deduction and toward a love of narrative.

Some may roll their eyes and scoff at such a transition. But, while such a transition certainly has its downsides, instead of lamenting a culture change, Christians ought to capitalize on whatever they can for the gospel's sake. Paul was willing to become all things to all people that by all means he might save some (1 Cor. 9:22). Who are we willing to become to those who prefer stories to syllogisms? Again, I am not suggesting that we abandon the use of logic, but we can use logic and reason in a creative way.

Certainly, not all (or probably any) of us are able to write a Tolkien or Lewis novel, but we can still embed apologetics material in creative ways. We can embed our syllogisms into stories and hypothetical scenarios. We can talk about times when the logical arguments for God's existence were made evident through our own experiences (i.e. a child's complicated homework points to a smart teacher, a bicycle accident points to the law of cause and effect, etc.).

If we are willing to put in a little extra energy and use the supercomputers God gave us between our ears, we can surely come up with creative ways to introduce the people around us to the supporting arguments for the existence of God in creative ways. When we are able to take a creative approach, not only are people more interested, but this gives them the opportunity to discover the truth of the syllogism themselves.

Overall, Christianity is true, and God does exist, but the way in which we demonstrate these facts should include both our head and our heart. Apologetics is still a needed discipline in an age uninterested in logic. Such an effort cannot be merely an academic exercise or only a faculty of the mind. Apologetics in the modern era is much more powerful when it involves an investment in the lives of others, uncompromising Christlikeness, and a bit of creativity when needed. Let us pray for the courage, wisdom, and opportunity to change the world for Jesus. Then, let us act on what God has blessed us with and get to work.

^[1] For more on this see Thomas B. Warren, *Logic and the Bible*. National Christian Press, 1982.

^[2] It was after all a logical syllogism that began to open my eyes to the fact of God's existence. The Kalam cosmological argument goes as follows: 1) Everything that begins to exist has a cause. 2) The universe began to exist. 3) Therefore, the universe has a cause. 4) That cause is God.