



Part Three
Lessons From Classical and
Evidential Apologetics
By
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I began this exciting journey more than five years ago (October 2012). The journey is explaining what convinced me to leave atheism for theism (Christianity).

Here's how I began the conversation:

“So, you don't believe there's a God. I understand. I didn't believe in God either, until May of 1971. Most atheists I've talked with about the existence of God during the last 40 years have expressed their concern for me in one way or another. Some have asked if I was ill and on heavy medication at the time of my conversion. Others said I must have been a very poor atheist because good atheists don't believe in God. I was not ill or on medication at the time and people who knew me said I was a 'good' atheist. Something happened that led me to look at various arguments for the existence of God, and once I looked I found something I had never seen before.”

The series, *Convince Me There's A God*, currently has 44 articles and there are many more to come. Why? Someone has said of the evidence for the existence of God, the historical reliability of the Bible, and the reality of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, that it is an “embarrassment of riches.” There is so much evidence available to investigate.

So far in the series, we've looked at the following arguments for the existence of God and historical reliability of the Bible:

- Cosmological Argument
- Design Argument
- Fine-Tuning Argument
- Causality Argument
- Thermodynamics Argument
- Morality Argument
- Archaeological Argument

We will soon move into the New Testament and evidence for the reliability of the writings and authorship along with evidence for the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Before we do, I'd like to share about the types of Christian apologetic arguments that helped convince me that God exists and Christianity is true.

Classical Apologetics

As I mentioned in the first part of our series, I was a broadcast journalist when I began investigating the truth claims of theism and Christianity. I met three Christian apologists during that time who answered the many questions I had as an atheist about the existence of God, the reliability of the Bible, and the reality of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. After becoming a Christian and learning about apologetics, I discovered that the primary method that led me to believe in God, the Bible, and Jesus Christ was a combination of Classical and Evidential apologetics. I'd like to look at Classical apologetics first and how it helped me in my investigation. Apologetics comes from the Greek word ἀπολογία (apologia), which means “a verbal, reasonable defense” and was used in ancient legal cases for the defense a person presented in answer to an “accusation” (κατηγορία – *kategoria*) made against them.

Here are examples of how the words are used in the New Testament:

Ἀπολογία

“Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now.” Acts 22:1

κατηγορία

“Pilate then went out to them and said, ‘What accusation do you bring against this Man?’ John 18:29

We see this ancient legal process in many of our courts today where a prosecutor presents an accusation (κατηγορία) against a defendant and the defendant responds with a defense (ἀπολογία). A judge and/or jury hears both the accusation and the defense and makes a determination (finding) with resultant decision (judgment) in favor of one side or the other.

Classical apologetics (faith defense) argues primarily from a two-step process.

- Prove Theism
- Prove Christianity

[Some classical apologists also use a third step of “evidential” apologetics, but we’ll look at that separately in this article.]

My radio interview with [Dr. Henry Morris](#) was primarily for the purpose of asking him questions about his planned visit to Turkey to search for Noah’s Ark on Mt. Ararat. However, my questions also turned to proving the existence of Noah’s God. Dr. Morris shared several basic arguments from classical apologetics including cosmological, teleological (design), causality, thermodynamics, etc. Other apologists added to Dr. Morris’ arguments including the ontological and moral, along with discussions about reality, truth, logic, purpose, and meaning. We also looked at the textual and historical reliability of the Bible and archaeological findings in the regions where the Bible was written. As we worked through the questions and answers concerning theism, I slowly found myself moving

from atheism to agnosticism to deism – then on to theism. My view of the world (worldview) was changing.

That's all well and good, but how do we know that "God" is the God described in the Bible? The next step in classical apologetics is to prove Christianity is true. I was learning about the historical reliability of the Bible, which included fulfilled prophecy. The prophecies concerning Israel and surrounding nations were impressive, but what became the most powerful arguments from prophecy concerned the promised Messiah. The birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ became the evidence that convinced me that the God who exists is none other than the Christian God. That is a "huge" step for an atheist to make from believing no god exists (a-theos) to God exists and He is the God revealed in the Bible.

Evidential Apologetics

I am a curious person. I remember as a young child asking question after question after question of family, friends and strangers. I asked them about their work, their thoughts, their travel, their hobbies, etc. I knew at the age of eight that I wanted to be a news reporter and often carried a recorder with me to get people's answers to my questions on tape. The nightly news programs and late-night radio shows I could hear were among my favorites as a child. I wanted to learn about things and tell people what I had learned. That desire to investigate and tell (report) what I learned led me into a career as a journalist. I worked in radio, television, newspaper and online media for more than 40 years.

I was taught in college that journalists should be objective and unbiased in their search for truth about every story. Anything less than that was an improper use of the First Amendment rights we had been given by the founders of our country. I took that seriously.

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” (First Amendment to the United States Constitution)

“Evidence” is foundational to journalism, especially what we know as “investigative” journalism. The investigative “method” includes the basics of focusing on facts instead of assumptions, thinking critically, using logic and reasoning, interviewing, detecting deception, documenting the investigation (written, photos, audio, video) and presenting the findings of the investigation in a professional manner.

Evidence was extremely important to me as a journalist, but I was surprised how the evidence for atheism didn't hold up well under scrutiny. As I talked with Christian apologists about their evidence for theism, I realized that the evidence I had for my belief that God did not exist was not strong in comparison. I became an atheist during my freshman year at college. I made new friends who were atheists and agnostics. I also met an atheist professor who wanted to make sure that all religious “nonsense” was removed from the minds of his students. I read recommended books by atheist philosophers and scientists and gained some insights into why they believed what they believed. That's what I held onto for several years.

As I investigated the truth claims of theism and Christianity, I thought back to the conversations I had had with atheist leaders on my radio talk show (e.g. Madalyn Murray O'Hair, Freethinkers) and the many atheist writers I had read (e.g. Bertrand Russell, Friedrich Nietzsche, David Hume). I considered the evidence for atheism they had given me along with the new evidence I was learning about from Christian apologists. The evidence for theism and Christianity was stronger.

My primary training for investigative research by the early 70's had come from combining what I learned from professors and senior journalists with whom I worked, my daily field experience with people in other professions (e.g. police officers, lawyers, detectives, judges, teachers, administrators, government leaders, etc), and regular feedback from my supervisors at the stations where I worked. I used that training and experience throughout the process of investigating the truth claims of theism and Christianity.

Becoming a Christian was not the end of my investigation into evidence about Christianity. I have been challenged on hundreds of occasions by non-Christians who do not agree with the truth claims of Christianity. If they are willing, we look at the evidence. Looking closely at the evidence and following the investigative method is not a quick way to determine what is true, but it is a sound way of doing that. The time invested seems well-spent in light of what's at stake.

Continuing to Learn

I moved from atheism to theism (Christianity) in 1971. My parents gave me a Bible and I began to read it. One of the apologists who had helped answer my questions had a rather large personal library and I read as many of his books as I could. I was curious about this new belief I had in the existence of God, the reliability of the Bible, and the reality of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. What I read in those early days of being a Christian helped me grow in my understanding of the “embarrassing riches” of Christian evidence.

Some of the authors I found helpful during my first several years as a Christian included [C.S. Lewis](#) (professor and former atheist), [Francis Schaeffer](#) (philosopher and theologian), [Blaise Pascal](#) (philosopher, mathematician and physicist) and [Josh McDowell](#) (apologist, evangelist and author). I also found the writings of [early church fathers](#) (1st – 4th centuries AD) to be helpful in understanding the progression of defending the truth claims of Christianity following the writings of the apostles in the New Testament.

If you are interested in learning more about Classical and Evidential apologetics, I recommend these authors to you (in addition to the authors mentioned above) in no particular order. The link for each author will take you to a listing of recent books. This list is by no means exhaustive, but it may help you build a personal or church library about using apologetics (faith defense) in ministry.

William Lane Craig

Norman Geisler

J.P. Moreland

John Lennox

Sean McDowell

Gary Habermas

Mike Licona

Lee Strobel

Paul Copan

J. Warner Wallace

Greg Koukl

Frank Turek

Ed Hindson

Peter Kreeft

Mark Mittelberg

Braxton Hunter

Alex McFarland

Mary Jo Sharp

Brett Kunkle

Stephen Meyers

Dan Wallace

One more note before I close. I've often been asked which apologetic method I prefer. My answer is simply the one that works.

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