

**WHY A RATIONAL AND EVIDENTIAL *DEFENSE* OF THE FAITH IS
CONSISTENT WITH
A LIVING FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST**

Pastor Gary Jensen
St. Paul's of Shorewood Lutheran Church

1. It is commanded in 1 Peter 3:15, where the word "*reason*," in the Greek, is "*apologia*," which means to give "*a counter word*" when called upon to "*give a reason for the hope that is within you.*"
2. It is commanded by the Apostle Paul that, even in relation to the Word, one is to "*test everything*" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).
3. It is demonstrated by apostolic preaching and teaching as described in the Book of Acts where we are told that the apostles "*argued*," by the process of "*explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and rise from the dead.*" See Acts 9:23,29; Acts 17:2,3,4,11,13, and Acts 8,9,26. See also 2 Corinthians 10:5.
4. The Gospels themselves are "*apologetic and evangelistic*" in their essential purpose (C.F.W. Moule). See Luke 1:1-3 and John 20:31.
5. Examples are noted in the New Testament of people coming to faith after having *witnessed* a miracle (Thomas in John 20, The Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, and the healing of the "lame man" in Acts 3 and 4).
6. The early church followed apostolic preaching and teaching by producing apologists and apologetic materials (e.g. Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*, various Epistles of Ignatius, etc.).
7. A marshaled defense is consistent with the self-claims of Christ, which are **bold** (John 8:58, 10:30). Christianity is not merely about a set of values, broadly shared by the world, and which therefore needs no defense, but about the identity of the person and works of Jesus of Nazareth. It is significant that opponents of apologetics typically advocate a message that **falls short** of Christianity's bold claims, namely:
 - a. Jesus' self-claims and his personal focus on his identity (Mark 8:27).
 - b. His claim to be the exclusive way to salvation (John 14:6).
 - c. Jesus' *historical* resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1f).
 - d. Jesus' death providing *substitutionary* redemption (Romans 3:25).
 - e. Consider for example, the following headline from the *Seattle Times* newspaper, February 16, 2002, p.A13:

MANY VOICES, ONE TRUTH
Interfaith Chant Bypasses Reason, Wakens Hearts

8. It is consistent with the nature of the Gospel, which is **not** merely spiritual, but incarnational, meaning “*in the flesh*” (John 1:14, 1 John 1:1f.). The Apostle Peter, for example, was emphatic that the claims regarding Jesus were no mere myth (2 Peter 1:16). Since Jesus lived in flesh and blood history, it stands to reason that his works will be discernible by historical method.
9. It is consistent with the claim of the Gospels that Jesus’ mission included not merely incarnational elements, but also *supernatural* elements that we are called to behold (John 20:30).
10. Biblical faith in general is history oriented, as opposed to precept oriented (of course there are precepts too—Psalm 119). “*See what God has done,*” is repeated throughout the Bible in a variety of permutations. Elton Trueblood has described the whole Bible as a “Book of Acts.” Note also Psalm 136.
11. It is consistent with the Gospels, which state emphatically and variously that Jesus rose bodily and within time, and not merely spiritually within eternity (Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20, plus 1 Corinthians 15:4—the words “*buried*” and “*raised on the third day*” clearly imply a calculably discernible event).
12. It is consistent with the claim of the Apostle Paul that the events surrounding Jesus’ passion took place not only in space and time, but that they were right out in the open, implying a *publicly* discernible event (Acts 26:26). This factor is not negated simply because not *everyone* saw Christ after his resurrection.
13. It is consistent with the claim of Jesus that the resurrection stood as *the* sign before the world that He was God the Father’s heaven-sent messenger (Matthew 12:40). What possible meaning could the term “sign” have with respect to Jesus’ resurrection if this event were not perceivable to the senses?
14. It is consistent with the claim of the New Testament that His physical resurrection is a guarantee of our resurrection at the end of time, and that his rising from the tomb “on the third day,” is the guarantee that He is the Living Christ *today* (Romans 6:9, 1 Corinthians 15:4f). On what grounds are we supposed to regard His resurrection as our *guarantee* if that event is not discernible except by faith?
15. A defense of the Gospel is consistent with the high place that is given to the mind in Scripture. The Bible repeated demands clarity of thought and clear apprehension on the part of the audience (Mark 12:30, Romans 1:20-23; 12:2).

16. It is consistent with the rational character of God who, in turn commands us to turn from foolishness into rationality. Indeed, it is on the basis of an evasive irrationality that we will be judged (Romans 1:20f).
17. Christianity does not demand coerced conversions. Consequently, the only appropriate way of coming to faith in Christ is through persuasion, which is a rational act.
18. The demonstrated truth of the Gospel is consistent with the Gospel, which claims to be *the Truth* and not merely one salvific or lifestyle choice among many (John 14:6).
19. Consequently, it is consistent with the Gospel, which claims to be the truth in the *ontological* context—that there is a real judgment, a real substitutionary atonement, a real heaven, and a real hell--, and not merely the imparting of moral or “spiritual” principles.
20. It is consistent with the fact that believers receive Jesus for particular reasons, as opposed to believing in Him for no reason at all (Matthew 11:4f). Those who object to the citation of reasons for believing in Jesus obligate themselves to explain why they believe in Jesus as opposed to some other savior and lord.
21. It is consistent with the *nature* of faith. Faith defined in its broadest sense is neither a leap into the dark, nor actual sight. It is a reasoned confidence that the particular object of faith is deemed worth of such trust (Isaiah 55:2).
22. It is consistent with the proper *center* of faith, in the biblical sense of the term. Rarely is it the *character* of the subject’s faith (either in strength or quantity) that is the focus of the Bible’s attention. Rather, it is the *object* of the faith that is given central attention in the Bible. “*Where* is your faith placed?” In an imaginary or dumb idol, or in the true and living God?” (Isaiah ch. 40f).
23. It is consistent with the role of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit leads people neither into irrationality nor into confusion, but to clarity and conviction (Ephesians 5:18, John 16:8-11). The Holy Spirit does not make the irrational appear plausible, but rather breaks down the rationalizing power of sin which clouds our thinking, in order that we may wisely open up to the power of the Living God.
24. It guards the self-proclaimed particularity and the exclusivity of the Gospel, in a culture that is pluralistic and determined to challenge the Christian message (Acts 17:31—Paul at Athens).
25. Apologetics gives encouragement to those believers who find themselves in the midst of traumatic situations in which there is an apparent “NO!” from the

Almighty. In the absence of *objective* grounds for faith, such times are especially difficult for believers.

26. A reasoned defense gives boldness and encouragement to believers to share their faith with others.
27. If apologetics is not done at all, the rest of the Christian church is left defenseless in the face of the kinds of attacks that confront the Gospel from secularism, including skepticism and scientific naturalism (1 Peter 5:8).
28. The failure to do apologetics leaves the orthodox Christian faith vulnerable to the challenges of non-Christian sects and religions (1 Timothy 6:20). For example:
 - A. The Latter-Day Saints gain success in their distortions of the Gospel by the *suppression* of the rational grounds for religious faith (Moroni 10:3-5). Historic Christianity has everything to gain by subjecting the New Testament to historical tests.
 - B. Islam challenges the Gospel by *distorting* the historic grounds of Christian faith. For example, the Koran explicitly rejects the New Testament claim that Jesus is the Son of God (Surah IV:171), and that he died on the cross (Surah IV:157). These attacks need to be challenged, and in fact can be fully and effectively answered.
29. The failure to do apologetics leaves those who, for intellectual reasons, are hesitant to believe in Christ, without the grounds they need for seriously considering Him.
30. The failure to do apologetics leaves those who are attempting to “sift the field” without adequate grounds for discerning the truth of Christ, and choosing Him above all others.
31. Apologetics has a strong track record of bringing contemporary doubters to faith. Consider C.S. Lewis, Josh McDowell, John Warwick Montgomery, Lee Stroebel, and Mortimer Adler.
32. The New Testament and its claims for Christ win whenever they are subjected to cross-examination by historical analysis in a rigorous yet fair manner.
33. A *demonstration* of the truth claims of the New Testament gives weight to the moral imperative to repent and believe in Jesus Christ alone for salvation (Acts 2:22). Apart from this basis, the weight of the obligation vanishes. The suggestion that the Gospel story is in principle not defensible on its own stated grounds implies that it is irrational. An irrational Gospel renders the command to faith an irrational demand by an unjust god.

34. The irrational is the domain of the devil. Once reasons are abandoned as grounds for belief in God, people are left with diminishing reasons for rejecting their sins and lusts. See Romans 1:21-23.