



**APOLOGETICS**  
FOR THE CHURCH

# GUIDING GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS



## **10 Principles** for Effective Gospel Encounters

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Discover practical steps to confidently engage in meaningful conversations  
that uncover worldviews and lovingly point to the truth of Christ.

# Welcome



"...In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect..."

—1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)

**E**very Christian is called to engage unbelievers with the gospel, but the common lament of many believers is that they simply do not know how to do so confidently and effectively. This short guide lays out a game plan that will enable you to very quickly gain the confidence and skill you need to talk to anyone about the gospel.



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# 5 FACTS



## FACT #1

# Every Christian Is Called To Do Apologetics

## It's Biblical

Some people question whether apologetics is necessary. “Just share your testimony,” they say. Or, “Just tell them about Jesus.” But is this all the Bible calls us to do? In 1 Peter 3:15 we are specifically called to prepare ourselves to “give an answer” or “defend” the reason for the hope within us.

The Greek word translated in this phrase is **apologia**, a legal defense against a false charge. The word is used multiple times in the New Testament (Philippians 1:7,16; Acts 22:1; 26:1) and builds on the Old Testament idea of defending God's glory (1 Samuel 17:45-47).

Without apologetics, the Christian has no way to answer the questions and objections that unbelievers raise against the Christian faith.



## It's for Every Believer

Others believe that apologetics is only for pastors and professors, or maybe for the intellectuals in the church. But 1 Peter 3:15-16 is given to every believer.

- 1 We are called, first, to not let **fear** overpower us.
- 2 Second, we are called to begin with a settled assurance that **Jesus**, and no one else, is Lord and the greatest need of every person.
- 3 Third, we are called to **prepare ourselves**. This requires an investment of time and effort to learn answers to the questions people are asking.
- 4 Fourth, we are called to engage others in a **winsome** manner that invites them into conversation. We do this by being gentle and respectful.
- 5 Finally, we make sure our own **lives do not contradict our message** of God's deliverance from sin. We assume a continual posture of repentance and humility, knowing that Jesus Christ accomplished redemption for us and calls us to a life of holiness.

## FACT #2

# Every Unbeliever Already Knows God & Actively Suppresses That Knowledge

We find a surprising truth in Romans 1:18-32. God says that every person knows him. How can this be? The text says that God's wrath has been revealed, so everyone knows they are guilty before a holy God. This knowledge is clear because God has made it plain. Again, how can this be?

## Two ways:

- 1 **First, every person is made in God's image (Genesis 1:27).**
- 2 **Second, this is God's world (Psalm 19:1-2).**

To deal with the awful truth about their guilt before God, unbelievers suppress the knowledge of God (Romans 1:18). They do this in a thousand different ways—through false religion, addictions, distractions, or outright denial of what they know to be true. Further, the text says that unbelievers make several disastrous exchanges: they exchange the glory of God for an image of something in creation, the truth for a lie, and what is natural for what is unnatural.

All this means that when you seek to share the good news of forgiveness available through Jesus Christ, unbelievers are already aware of their guilt. In other words, you are reminding



## LIKE HOLDING A BEACH BALL UNDER WATER

Although unbelievers daily push it down, the knowledge of God rises in them through both the knowledge he has implanted in them and the testimony of the created order.

them of something they already know and are seeking to suppress. Since everything in creation shouts the glory of God, they know what you are talking about when you explain their need for reconciliation with God. In other words, you are entering a conversation that is already going on between them and God. This is earth-shaking, isn't it?

## FACT #3

# The Gospel Has The Power To Dismantle Their Belief System (Worldview)



## Spiritual Battle

Paul reminds us that the battle we have against unbelief is not a physical one with swords and guns, but a spiritual one—a battle of beliefs. That is, when you engage unbelievers in gospel conversations, there is a spiritual battle occurring between their rebellious hearts and the truth of the gospel. Paul reminds us that this message has the power to topple even the most cherished beliefs and devastate fortresses of opposition to the truth.

## Sufficiency is from God

By the simple proclamation of the Christian faith and skilled answers to the objections raised against it, the Holy Spirit can overturn long-nurtured resistance to the good news. It should give us great confidence that the sufficiency for the task of evangelism and apologetics is not in ourselves (2 Corinthians 3:5-6). God can use even our feeble efforts to answer questions and present Christ to bring about a person's salvation.



## FACT #4

# God Is Doing a Great Work of Salvation in This World



Sometimes, Christians harbor mistaken ideas about salvation. Some believe salvation is a ticket to heaven or primarily an issue about where people go when they die. **The Bible portrays salvation primarily as reconciliation with God and regeneration to new life.** That is, salvation through the work of Jesus Christ brings a person into union with Christ, forgives sin, removes guilt, gives eternal life and a new heart, and begins a life-long process of transformation into the image of Christ. Obviously, only God can save people. We are not called to save them but to proclaim the message of Christ. God saves; we simply tell.

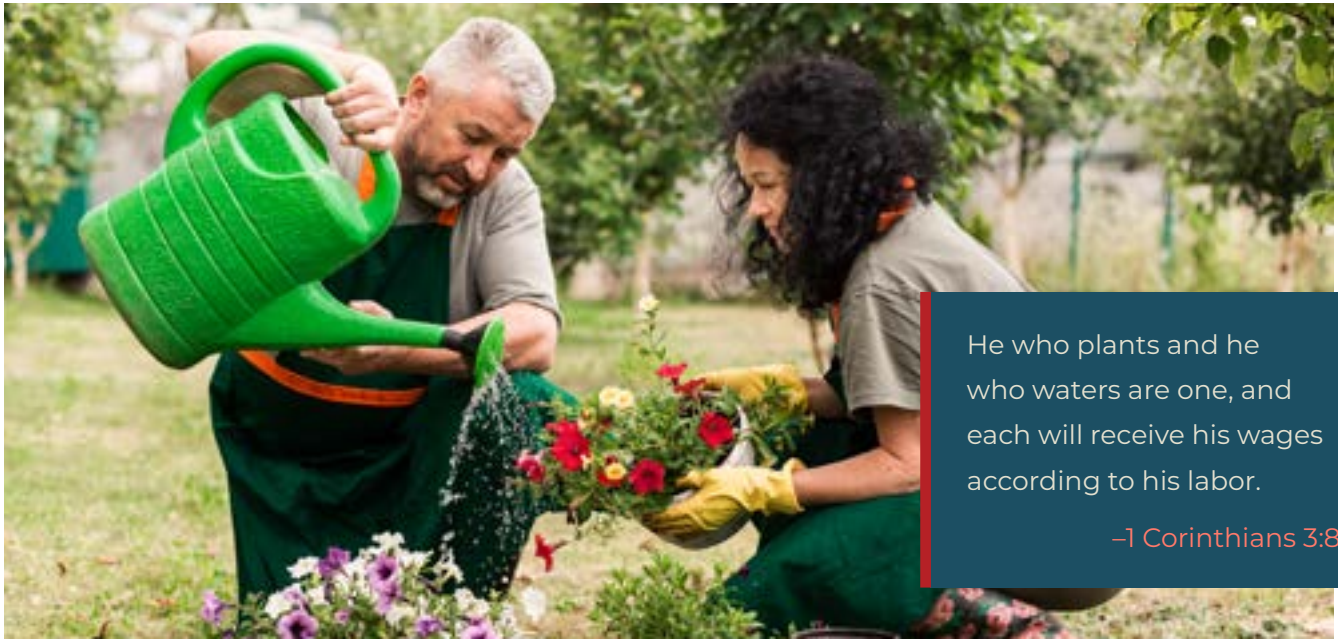
This has a number of implications for our witness. First, God is doing a great work of salvation in the world. He doesn't need us. Rather, God invites us to participate in evangelism and apologetics for our joy. If we fail to witness, our failure will not condemn anyone. God can use any number of means to save.

This is a glorious truth because it takes the pressure off us. We can freely share the good news of Christ wherever we go, knowing that the Holy Spirit is the power of our proclamation. Only he can convict people of their sin and open their eyes to their need of Christ (2 Corinthians 3-6). Only the Holy Spirit can open closed doors and closed hearts (Colossians 4:2-4). We pray for lost people as an expression of our dependence on God.



## FACT #5

# We Are Called to Plant and Water Seeds of the Gospel



He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor.

—1 Corinthians 3:8

Paul explains the secret to his boldness when he compares his work to a farmer's. He says, in effect, "God has simply called me to plant seeds of the gospel wherever I go." What a lovely analogy! If all God calls you to do is start conversations wherever you go and see where the conversations go, there is no pressure on you to *make a person believe*, which you can't do anyway. The work you are called to is planting and watering seeds of the gospel and trusting God for the results. God can bring a person to conviction of sin and the need for Christ. Your role is simply to speak the truth as effectively as you can.

The beautiful promise in this passage is that **God determines the harvest**. It is not a failure of method or technique if a person does not get saved in every gospel conversation. That is up to God. Any progress at all that you make in presenting Christ, challenging unbelief, or sharing what God has done for us is a success. And the glorious promise is that God will reward those who plant and water seeds of the gospel (1 Corinthians 3:8).



# 5 STEPS

## STEP #1

# We Aim for Conversation Rather Than Confrontation

Now that we have reviewed a biblical understanding of salvation and engagement, let's examine the steps in the apologetic process.

Many approaches to apologetics seem to encourage a confrontation with the unbeliever. While that may happen, more people are prone to engage in spiritual conversations if the approach is non-confrontational. This is best accomplished by ensuring that our demeanor is one of **gentleness and respect**, as commanded in 1 Peter 3:15-16.

When we treat people with respect and refuse to become argumentative, we encourage conversation. We draw people in through a winsome manner that does not take offense and demonstrates a genuine love for the other. When we see others as people made in God's image for whom Christ died, we can treat them as Jesus did.

Start by showing a **genuine interest** in the other person. Ask about his or her life, and then truly listen. Don't rush right into telling the gospel story unless they ask you to do so. If you listen well, you will communicate to the other person that you genuinely care and are not trying to "sell" anything. No matter how antagonistic or argumentative they may become, never respond in kind.





## STEP #2

# We Ask Questions to Understand Their Beliefs and Identify Their Authority

At some point in the conversation, you want to transition to spiritual matters. You can do this by asking questions like:

- ▶ “What is your religious background?”
- ▶ “Do you believe in any kind of God?”
- ▶ “What do you think is wrong with the world?”

**GOAL:** The goal is to **listen** to the unbeliever’s answers and **ask follow-up questions**.

The more you understand what he or she believes and upon what **authority** they base their beliefs, the more focused your presentation of the gospel will be.



It is hard to listen to expressions of unbelief without formulating a response in our minds while the other person is still talking. Resist this urge. Calmly and patiently listen with the goal of understanding. Ask questions, such as:

- ▶ “Why do you believe that?”
- ▶ “Where did you get that idea?”
- ▶ “Can you give me an example of that?”

**GOAL:** The goal here is to see **if the unbeliever can support his or her beliefs** with coherent arguments.

We rest in the confidence that any belief system built on anything other than Jesus Christ cannot withstand scrutiny.



## STEP #3

# We Do an Internal Critique of Their Beliefs to Expose Contradiction, Irrationality, and Unlivability

Imagine entering a large room in a castle for the first time. On the walls, you see paintings, animal heads, and gold fixtures. To take in the grandeur of the room, you must enter it and look around. In the same way, as the unbeliever is explaining what he believes, look around at his worldview and ask questions like:

- ▶ “In your view, what is the meaning of life?”
- ▶ “In your worldview, how do you make a distinction between good and evil?”
- ▶ “In your belief system, what is wrong with the world and what will make it all better?”

Because unbelievers are made in God's image and live in God's world, they will invariably get some things (at least partially) right. If so, seek to show how their right intuition makes more sense in a Christian worldview. If they get something wrong, show how the Christian worldview corrects the idea.

## Look Specifically for 3 Errors

- 1 **First, some beliefs will be contradictory.** For example, many believe the world came about through a random, unguided process of natural selection. Yet, they may want to retain a belief in the dignity of each person. That is a contradiction you can point out.
- 2 **Second, some beliefs will be factually wrong,** showing a willingness to be irrational to maintain a rejection of God.
- 3 **Third, they may hold beliefs that cannot be lived out in reality.** For example, some people believe that the only morality we need is empathy for others. However, this is unlivable because empathy is not specific enough to provide moral direction in most cases, and no culture has ever thrived with such a minimal ethical principle.



## STEP #4

# We Present Christ as the Answer to Their Questions



As you seek to tear down his or her confidence in unbelief, you also seek to present the glory and rationality of the Christian answer to the questions of life. The glory of the gospel is seen in the way it answers the longings of the human heart and the **universal questions** posed by all people everywhere:

				
Who am I?	Why am I here?	What determines good and evil?	Where am I going?	Is there anything out there?

The gospel is also **rational** in that no legitimate criticism or objection is raised against it, for which there are no good answers.

No matter what the unbeliever presents as his or her beliefs, the Christian faith is the only one that can make sense of these questions. Since every person we meet holds different beliefs and has different objections, there is no script that we can learn that can be used in every conversation. Every engagement with unbelievers is different, so learning to listen and give answers specifically aimed at their questions is the best way to reach them.

## STEP #5

# We Call Unbelievers to Repent & Believe In Christ Alone for Salvation

“For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”

– Romans 10:13

If the unbeliever is willing to engage in conversation with you, seek to answer enough questions and objections so you can clearly present the **gospel** of Jesus Christ. This is the goal of every gospel encounter.

Explain that he or she is guilty because of sin and fully deserving of God's wrath. But God, in His love, gave His only Son to die in our place—the innocent for the guilty—to provide a way for salvation. By acknowledging guilt before

God and trusting in Jesus alone, we can be assured of God's pardon (Romans 10:13).

To determine if the unbeliever is ready to be saved, you can ask, “Is there anything keeping you from putting your trust in Christ right now for the forgiveness of your sins?” If they express conviction of sin and a desire to call out to Jesus for salvation, you can encourage them to do so right then and there. If they're not ready or don't quite understand, you can ask if they have other

questions that you can answer. It may take more conversations about the gospel before he or she is ready to put their faith in Christ.



# Conclusion

I hope this short guide helps you think more biblically and strategically about proclaiming and defending the gospel. Since God has called every Christian to proclaim the gospel and since God has promised to go with us (Matthew 28:18-20), we can do so with confidence, even if we also experience fear.

To learn more or to access more resources about effectively engaging unbelievers with the good news of Jesus Christ, go to [apologeticsforthechurch.org](https://apologeticsforthechurch.org) and check out our Podcast and YouTube channels.

## Website



[ApologeticsForTheChurch.org](https://ApologeticsForTheChurch.org)



## Podcast



[Every Believer Confident](#)



## YouTube



[@ApologeticsForTheChurch-nu2lj](#)







“

And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”

– Matthew 28:18-20





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