

Raising one's self-consciousness [awareness] about worldviews is an essential part of intellectual maturity.... The right eyeglasses can put the world into clearer focus, and the correct worldview can function in much the same way. When someone looks at the world from the perspective of the wrong worldview, the world won't make much sense to him. Or what he thinks makes sense will, in fact, be wrong in important respects. Putting on the right conceptual scheme, that is, viewing the world through the correct worldview, can have important repercussions for the rest of the person's understanding of events and ideas.... Instead of thinking of Christianity as a collection of theological bits and pieces to be believed or debated, we should approach our faith as a conceptual system, as a total world-and-life view.¹

Let's look at it another way. There is a difference between strategy and tactics. Strategy involves the big picture, the large-scale operation, one's positioning prior to engagement.²

Negative/Positive Apologetics

Positive Apologetics: supplying reasons for believing the Christian faith (offensive).

Negative Apologetics: answers to objections to the Christian faith (defensive).

Distinguishing between negative and positive apologetics can be helpful. **In negative apologetics**, the major objective is producing answers to challenges to the Christian faith. The proper task of negative apologetics is removing obstacles to faith. Many people refuse to believe because they think that difficulties like the problem of evil or the alleged impossibility of miracles makes the acceptance of some important Christian beliefs untenable. When enough tenets of the Christian faith become unacceptable (for some, this need involve only one claim, such as the Incarnation or the Resurrection), they find unbelief easier than faith.

In negative apologetics, the apologist is playing defense. **In positive apologetics**, the apologist begins to play offense. It is one thing to show (or attempt to show) that assorted arguments against religious faith are weak or unsound; it is a rather different task to offer people reasons why they should believe. The latter is the task of positive apologetics. The person engaged in doing positive apologetics might attempt to provide proofs or arguments for the existence of God. Or the apologist might direct the attention of the unbeliever to something he already knows and help him see how such a belief supports in some way the existence of God.

¹ Ronald H. Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 9, 17-18, 19.

² Gregory Koukl, *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 25.

What Does this Distinction Have to Do with Apologetics? (CARM)

“Apologetics is the branch of Christianity that deals with the defense and establishment of the Christian faith.” As such, it is concerned with providing answers to common objections to the Christian faith, which are, in essence, objections to the revealed character and will of God. To object to the revealed character of God is to object to God Himself; and to object to the revealed will of God is to object to His standard of moral judgment; it is, therefore, to sin. On the other hand, apologetics aims to provide not only a critique of non-Christian worldviews, but also seeks to establish the Christian faith. These two ways of doing apologetics have been called **negative apologetics** and **positive apologetics**. In my own estimation, negative apologetics, which seeks to dismantle supposed opposition to the Christian faith, corresponds roughly to the **Law**, the primary purpose of which is to remove the unbeliever’s supposed grounds for continuing in sin; whereas positive apologetics, which presents proofs in favor of the Christian faith, corresponds roughly to the **Gospel**. The former exposes the heart of Christ’s opponents in revealing their underlying presuppositions and removing the possibility of making excuses for themselves; the latter is declarative, presenting the Christian faith to the unbeliever in purely positive terms. Here are some texts that will, I hope, show you what I mean.

| [a.] “Negative” Apologetics (Law) | [b.] “Positive” Apologetics (Gospel) |
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| We <u>destroy arguments</u> and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ... (2 Cor 10:5) | But in our hearts we honor the Lord as holy, always being prepared to <u>make a defense</u> to anyone who asks us for a reason for the hope that is in us... (1 Peter 3:15) |
| We must be able to <u>refute</u> those who are in error (Titus 1:9b) | But we must hold firm to the trustworthy Word [of the Gospel] as taught, and <i>give instruction</i> therein... (Titus 1:9a) |
| God has <u>destroyed the wisdom of the wise</u> (1 Cor 1:18-21) | But Christ has <i>become for us wisdom from God</i> (1 Cor 1:30) |

In column **[a.]**, the task is one of deconstruction, *destroying* opposing worldviews; in column **[b.]**, the task is one of building up, *making* a defense. Again, in column **[a.]** the task corresponds to the preaching of the Law in that it removes any supposed excuse an unbeliever may present for his unbelief; in column **[b.]**, the task corresponds to the Gospel in that it presents a positive case for the Christian faith. The former leaves the proud unbeliever without excuse, removing

all pretence, and exposing the nature of his unbelief (it is moral *first* and intellectual *second*); the latter gives the unbeliever what he cannot on his own find and possess: the truth.

Arguing People into Heaven

No one is converted through apologetics. The charge is made that no one ever comes to Christ through apologetics. If this implies that the Holy Spirit never uses apologetic evidence to bring people to Christ, this is clearly false. C. S. Lewis noted that *"nearly everyone I know who has embraced Christianity in adult life has been influenced by what seemed to him to be at least a probable argument for Theism."* Lewis is an example of an atheist who came to Christ under the influence of apologetics. The skeptic Frank Morrison was converted while attempting to write a book refuting the evidence for the resurrection of Christ (see Morrison). Augustine tells in his confessions how he was led toward Christianity by hearing a Christian debate an unbeliever. Harvard Law School professor Simon Greenleaf was led to accept the authenticity of the Gospels by applying the rules of legal evidence to the New Testament. God has used evidence and reason in some way to reach virtually all adults who come to Christ.³

³ Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 41.