



# \* personal apologetics

the MINISTRY PAPERS

## me a lawyer?

There's lots of 'law' TV shows these days, some good, some not so good. The ones I have trouble liking are ones like "The Practice". The main characters are defence lawyers who want to win at any cost, twisting the law and justice, often defending people accused of terrible crimes.

Well, believe it or not, what Peter's saying in 1 Peter 3:15 is this: "God wants you all to be good defence lawyers for the gospel". Because when Peter says "always be ready with your answer", the word behind "answer" is the Greek word 'apologia', a word lifted straight from the legal system of the day.

'Apologia' means a speech of defence in a court of law. 'Apologia' is where our word apologetics comes from. Following on from the personal evangelism ministry paper, that's what this paper is all about. Apologetics is not about saying sorry all the time. Apologetics is about having answers to the tough questions people ask Christians. It's about defending the gospel.

However, unlike many approaches to apologetics, we're going to turn defence into attack. We're going to see the best defence for the gospel is... the gospel! In the paper we'll be looking at some of the most commonly asked tough questions. We'll look at sample answers to questions like:

*does God exist?  
what about suffering?  
what about other religions?  
is the Bible reliable?*

The idea is to have answers ready, to be defence lawyers for the gospel. But if you can't imagine being a defence lawyer like the sort you see on 'The Practice', good! We're to be very different to them, not just using clever arguments but living lives that show we mean what we're saying. Not only that, we've got a very different kind of defendant, the perfect defendant, the forgiveness-bringing, hope-giving gospel of God!

LEADERS:...before taking someone through this paper, review the two key introductory MINISTRY PAPERS: 'the ministry training church' and 'meeting one to one'.

Our church has two main 'arms': small groups & ministry teams. This 'personal apologetics' paper relates within the **small groups** arm. It's designed to help your small group leader encourage you to be prepared to give an answer for your hope in Christ.



key **verse**

"But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."

1 Peter 3:15a



investigate

1. Why would the Bible include a command like this?

2. Look up the context. How might remembering that Christ is Lord help with not being frightened of people (verse 14)?

3. Why might hope in Christ be something attractive that people will want to find out about?

4. How might obeying this verse dispel the idea some people have that faith is "believing something you know isn't true"?



think &  
**apply**

5. Sometimes when people ask a 'tough question', the question is really just a cover-up for avoiding the issue. Do you agree?

6. How could you go about finding out if a question is genuine?

7. Why might all this be important in how you answer the question?

8. Peter makes the focus our hope in Christ. How can we ensure that our answers about Christianity always point to Jesus?

# gospel first, questions later

This paper won't take the usual apologetics approach. Rather, we're going to turn defence into attack. The best defence for the gospel is always the gospel itself. The gospel contains within it the best answers to all the tough questions people ask. This will become clear when we apply this approach to some of the 'classic' tough questions on the next page. For now, however, we need to remind ourselves of the 'two ways to live' gospel outline we looked at in the 'PERSONAL EVANGELISM' MINISTRY PAPER. Then we'll be ready...



Work through the 'Two Ways to Live Bible Study' (Matthias Media). When you're finished, use the boxes below to put into your own words each of the six points covered in the gospel outline. Go over it a few times until you can do it from memory. Having this locked in will be vital when we come to look at the tough questions on the next page.

**1 God the loving ruler and creator** Revelation 4:11

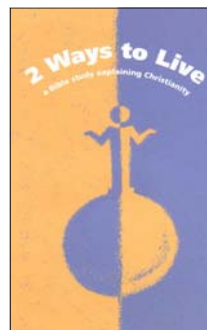
**2 Humanity in rebellion** Romans 3:10-12

**3 God won't let people keep on rebelling forever** Hebrews 9:27

**4 Jesus, the man who dies for rebels** 1 Peter 3:18

**5 Jesus, the risen ruler** Philippians 2:9-11

**6 The Two Ways to Live** John 3:36



## stop apologising!

It's time to stop apologising! It's time for a different approach to the questions and objections people put up against Christianity. The usual approach is something like this: we need to know the gospel and be ready to tell it. But chances are, it is said, people often have questions that will prevent them from hearing the gospel. So we need to answer these questions first. This means we not only have to remember our gospel outline, but also remember all the different answers to the various questions that might arise. However, apart from insufficient memory, there's a few problems with this approach:

- ✦ while there are some useful standard 'answers' to tough questions we might remember how to roll out, they are rarely totally compelling
- ✦ we can easily get bogged down in debate and get, in fact, further away from telling the gospel
- ✦ even if our answer is compelling, for example, "God does exist because surely someone put us here", which God have we proved? ...we still need to tell the gospel
- ✦ the fact is, the gospel itself tells us that people aren't 'objective' adjudicators but people committed to suppressing the truth (Rom 1:18). The unbeliever is actually committed to unbelief.
- ✦ more crucially, there's the problem: who's really the judge here? The gospel says that God rightly sits in judgment of us, rather than us daring to sit in judgment of him. See the trap? It's a bit hard to pander to someone who wants to be judge and jury of whether God exists, and then turn around and tell them what the gospel is all about: whether God should allow us to exist!
- ✦ the gospel is the "power of God for salvation" (Romans 1:16). It's best to gently ask our friends if we can first share the gospel with them.
- ✦ of course, this "gospel first, questions later" approach has the advantage that we will actually get to tell the gospel. Not only that, but the gospel itself can provide the best answer of all... it can even tell them how it is that their question can even be asked!

So let's stop apologising. Let's turn defence into attack. Let's tell the gospel... THE answer.



ideas for discussion

What is the "tough question" God asks of every person in the gospel?

How might the reality of God's question impact the way we answer people's questions?



# turning the tables

Jesus not only turned the tables in that memorable incident in the temple. He was constantly turning the tables when people came to him with tricky questions. Somehow he always sent a bigger question back the way of his questioner. That's the way "gospel first, questions later" works. We're saying to our friend, with the gentleness and respect Peter counsels, "I want to answer your question with a quick outline of the Christian message, but I'll give you the heads up now: there'll be a bigger question you'll need to answer..."

## now you're talking

As you read through the sample answers on pages 3 & 4 you'll see how there's a similar 'shape' to all the answers. It's a shape that comes from the gospel. The answers show us where our question comes from and throws a bigger question back our way. It's an approach that does turn the tables and turn defence into attack.

Of course, there's no suggestion that these answers will immediately cause your friend to become a Christian. Only God's Spirit at work through the gospel can do that. But that's the point—you're sharing the gospel. This approach don't guarantee your friends will turn to Christ for forgiveness. But it does tell them that that's what God's calling them to do!

With this 'gospel first' approach, now you're talking! Now you're talking about Jesus. Now the gospel is out on the table. Now the tables have been turned from the questions we ask of God to the questions God asks of us.

There is a place for getting familiar with some of the resources available that address people's tough questions in more detail. "So many questions" from Matthias Media and "1st century answers to 21st century questions" from SMBC press are both worth a look. There is a place for digging deeper into people's questions and equipping ourselves to do so.

But all that can come in later, and it will come in differently too. The conversation often unfolds very differently once the gospel is already out and centrestage. It's so much better to be in a position to keep relating things back to the gospel rather than hoping we'll somehow, sometime get to share it! Let's go gospel first, and questions later. And let's invite our friends to meet Jesus by reading one of the gospels: Mark is a good one to start with.

let's see how the "gospel first, questions later" approach works with four of the most frequently asked questions. You'll be struck by how *similar* all the answers are. That's the beauty of the approach. It's because the gospel is THE answer. Here's how to truly "give the reason for the hope that you have"...

- ✦ when your friend asks one of the questions below, tell them: "the best way for me to answer your question is to give you a brief outline of Christian belief from the Bible. It's the best chance of my answer making sense... and I'll be able to show you the question God's asking too..."
- ✦ go through the two ways to live gospel outline—but shape your presentation around their question... here's how that might sound:

## "how do you know God exists?"

- 1 there was once a time when the question "does God exist?" couldn't be asked. We were made to live with God.
- 2 it's only because of sin that this question can be asked. In our rebellion we wanted to live without God, and God gave us what we asked for. Because of sin, we can no longer live in God's presence. In fact, sin really is saying to God we don't *want* him to exist.
- 3 the real issue the Bible raises isn't about God's existence but ours. Our sin brings death and judgment. Our separation from God because of our sin will be forever.
- 4 God sent Jesus to earth to re-introduce himself to us. Read a gospel and you'll be struck that Jesus does show God to us. Not only that, but Jesus died on the cross so that we can be truly re-introduced to God. By trusting in his death we can be spared the judgment our sin deserves, and know and enjoy forever that God exists!
- 5 God raised Jesus from the dead and he now rules as Lord. We need to stop defying God's existence and submit to the risen Jesus as the ruler of our life.
- 6 in all of this, the Bible says our question is the problem. It says that God has a question for us that we have to answer. It's the question: will you submit to Jesus as your ruler and rely his death and resurrection, which will mean forgiveness and eternal life? Or do you want reject God as ruler, run life your own way, which will mean condemnation and judgment from God?

## "what about other religions?"

- 1 there was once a time when you could not ask this question. We knew God directly because we were made to live with him and enjoy serving him.
- 2 it's only because of sin that this question can be asked. Sin was the act of inventing religion. Rather than living under the rule of the one true God, we made up our own ways of living & running things. Religions were born.
- 3 God isn't impressed by our religious ideas. He doesn't see them as different ways of reaching towards him but different ways of rejecting him. In this sense all religions are the same: human inventions, condemned by God.
- 4 God sent Jesus to earth not to establish a religion but to bring forgiveness for our religions. He came to call us to live again under the rule of the one true God. Not only that, but Jesus died on the cross so that we can be spared the judgment our religion deserves, be forgiven, and know and enjoy God forever!
- 5 God raised Jesus from the dead and he now rules as Lord. We need to stop defying God with our made-up philosophies and submit to the risen Jesus as the ruler of our life.

## “what about suffering?”

- 1 there was once a time when you could not ask the question “what about suffering?”. God made a perfect pain-free world for us to enjoy, living under his rule. In the beginning, there was no suffering.
- 2 it’s only because of sin that this question can be asked. In our rebellion we wanted to live without God, and God gave us what we asked for. But life without God is destructive to us, our relationships and to the whole creation. It retains some of its beauty but is marred at every point by pain and suffering. We throw it at God, but the suffering of this world is of our doing.
- 3 the suffering we see and experience in the world now is, in fact, a sign of the greater consequence of our rejection of God: death and judgment. So there’s an even more serious dimension to our suffering we need a solution for.
- 4 Although suffering is our problem, God made it his. He did this by sending his Son Jesus to earth to end our suffering. Amazingly, Jesus ends our suffering by entering into it, especially in the extreme suffering of the cross. By trusting in Jesus’ death we can be forgiven. We can be spared the judgment and eternal suffering our sin deserves! We can be part of a pain-free future he is preparing.
- 5 God raised Jesus from the dead and he now rules as Lord. We need to stop throwing the question about suffering up to God and see where the problem came from: us; and where the solution comes from: Jesus. We need to submit to the risen Jesus as the ruler of our life.
- 6 repeat, as in previous answers.

## “is the Bible reliable?”

- 1 there was once a time when we didn’t need to ask questions about how God speaks to us. We lived in God’s presence and he spoke to us directly.
- 2 it’s only because of sin that this question can be asked. In fact, at the heart of sin was the question, “did God really say?”. Sin started with us doubting God’s Word, and so rejecting his right to call the shots. Sin was us wanting the last word over God. We can talk later about how the Bible came about in history. But for now we need to see that we are people who choose to not listen to him. Rejecting the Bible now continues the theme of rejecting God’s Word which goes right back at the start.
- 3 rejecting God’s Word and his rule over our lives is a serious business. Our sin brings death and judgment. We will hear God speak to us again. But the next—and last—words we can expect to hear from God are words of condemnation and judgment.
- 4 God sent Jesus to earth to speak to us again. He came as God’s Word. He came to make it possible that we might hear quite different words from God in the future, such as “welcome home, you’re forgiven”. But this forgiveness is only possible because Jesus died on the cross for us. Amazingly, we again tried to silence God, and yet God used the cross to offer us forgiveness. By trusting in Jesus’ death we can look forward to hearing God’s voice forever!
- 5 God raised Jesus from the dead and he now rules as Lord. We need to stop our futile attempts to silence him. We need to accept his word of forgiveness or we’ll face his word of judgment. We need to submit to the risen Jesus as the

## small groups and accountability

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” Hebrews 10:24-25

The table below shows a number of key goals that our small groups are aiming for as we seek to encourage each other. It’s all about relationships. The small group is a context in which we can be accountable for all the important relationships in our lives.

Apologetics goes hand in hand with evangelism. It’s all about the relationships we have with unbelievers. These relationships need to be kept on the top of the agenda in our small groups. We need to share about how we’re going defending the gospel, and turning defence into attack by proclaiming the gospel. We need accountability in this. Most of all, we need to pray for each other, that we’d stand up as defence lawyers for the gospel of Jesus. Small groups provide the opportunity to pray specifically in this way.

As you develop these gospel conversations with friends, it’s a good idea for your small group to do social activities together that are suitable for asking them along to. It’s about relationships building relationships... for the ultimate: a relationship with God.



a growing relationship with **God**, especially through personal Bible reading and prayer

growing relationships with **other believers**, especially through the small group

growing relationships with those in their **family/household**, as servants

growing relationships with unbelievers, especially through **personal evangelism**

growing relationships with the **whole church** in mission, serving in a ministry team



ideas for discussion

\* “Brace yourself like a man; I will question you and you shall answer me” Job 40:7. Read this verse in its context. How does this provide inspiration for a ‘gospel first, questions later’ approach to personal apologetics?

\* “but do this with gentleness and respect” 1 Peter 3:15b. Read this verse in its context (it’s the rest of our key verse from page 1) . As we adopt this ‘gospel first, questions later’ approach, why is it so important to speak with “gentleness and respect” as we give an answer for the hope we have in Christ?

\* where to next? once you’ve gone through one of the gospel outlines above with a friend, invite them to read one of the gospels, to come to church, or a social event with your small group. Pray for them. What else might be ‘next steps’ in sharing Christ with them?