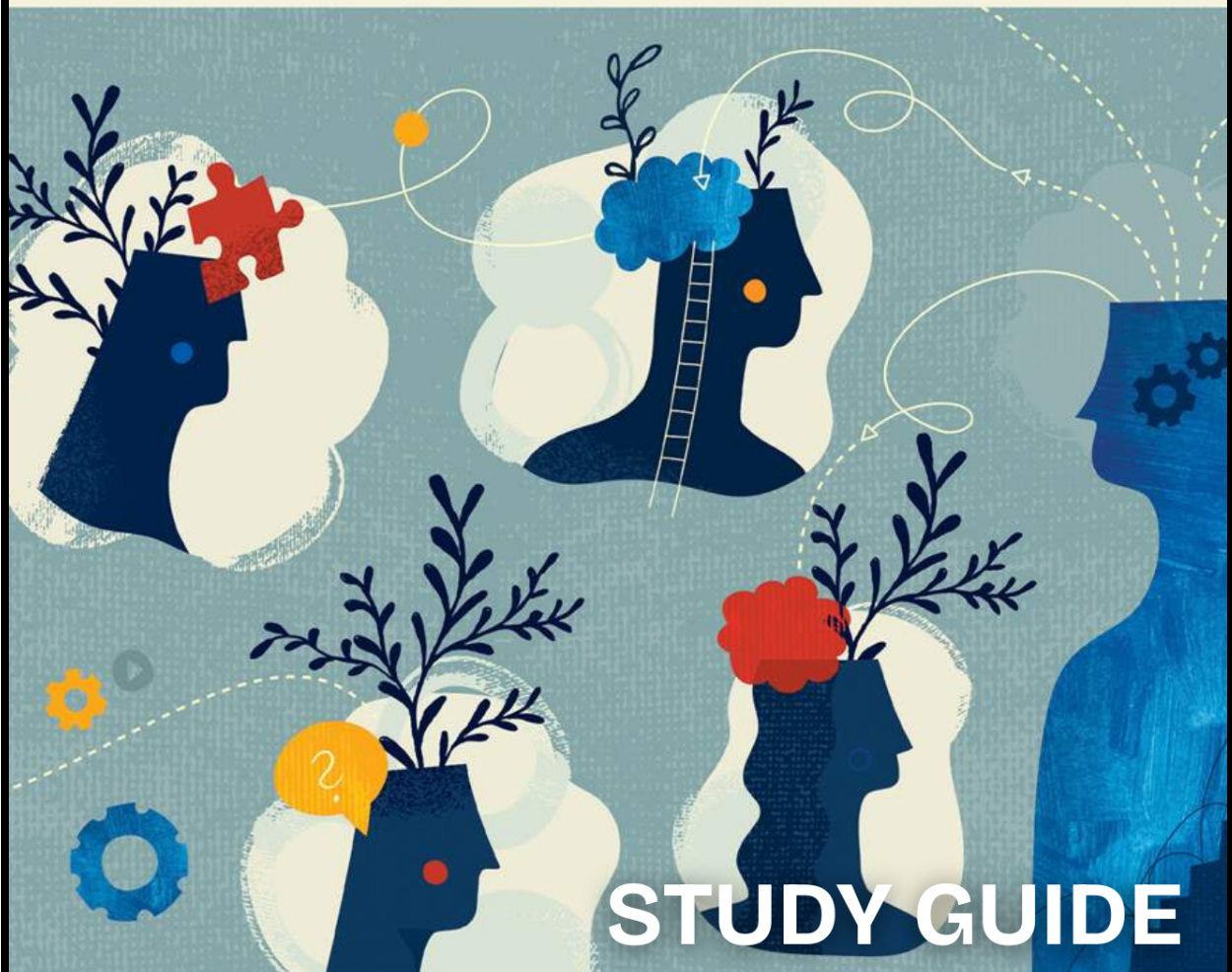


HENDRICKSON

Understanding Christian Apologetics

5 METHODS *for* DEFENDING *the* FAITH



STUDY GUIDE

Edited by Timothy Paul Jones

STUDY GUIDE

	Title	Key Texts
Introduction	We Are All Apologists Now	1 Peter 3:13–20
Chapter 1	Classical Apologetics	Romans 1:16–25
Chapter 2	Evidential Apologetics	1 Corinthians 15:1–19
Chapter 3	Presuppositional Apologetics	1 Corinthians 1:18–2:16
Chapter 4	Cultural Apologetics	Acts 17:16–34
Chapter 5	Ecclesial Apologetics	1 Peter 1:13–2:12

Introduction: We Are All Apologists Now

Timothy Paul Jones

Prepare to Study the Introduction

1. Before reading the introduction of *Understanding Christian Apologetics* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2025), prayerfully meditate on 1 Peter 3:13–20. How should these words from God, given through Simon Peter, shape your attitude toward defending the truth of the gospel?

2. Timothy Paul Jones defines Christian apologetics as “the church’s reverent, reasonable, and humble defense of the hope we have in the risen Christ, as this hope has been revealed in God’s word and God’s world” (4). How might this definition change the way you think about apologetics?

Study the Introduction

Answer the questions below as you read the introduction of *Understanding Christian Apologetics*.

What are the four primary perspectives on apologetics? Briefly describe each one.

1.

2.

3.

4.

What are the four subsidiary practices that can support the primary perspectives on apologetics? Briefly describe each one.

1.

2.

3.

4.

Apply the Introduction

Each contributor to *Understanding Christian Apologetics* has written a response to the case study below. You will find their responses later in this study guide. Their responses to the case study show how each perspective on apologetics is able to defend historic Christian practices in response to real-life challenges.

Carefully read the case study below and consider how you would speak God's truth with love in this particular situation.

Case Study

"Well, I actually *do* believe that Jesus was probably raised from the dead," the young woman measures each syllable carefully as she squints into the lights above the stage. "I just don't believe the Bible, and I don't want to be a Christian if I have to believe everything in the Bible."

A few minutes earlier, the student minister wrapped up a five-week series on the Bible and sexuality with an exposition of Paul's words to the church in Thessalonica: "For God has not called us to impurity but to live in holiness. Consequently, anyone who rejects this does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit" (1 Thess 4:7–8 CSB). The service ended with a plea for anyone who hadn't yet trusted Christ to believe the gospel, and that's part of what brought this ninth-grader to the edge of the platform after the service was over. Now, a half-dozen clusters of students and volunteers linger amid the folding chairs in the student ministry room. Some conversations are lighthearted and loud. Others, like this one, are heavier.

"So what is it that keeps you from wanting to follow Jesus?" you ask her, trying to make certain that you've understood what she's trying to say. A year ago, she had never set foot inside a church. Now, she's been regularly participating in student ministry for almost six months, and she's even attended Sunday morning worship services a couple of times.

"It's not that I don't want to follow Jesus," she replies quickly. "I'm great with following Jesus. I just don't want to follow the Bible."

"And what is it about the Bible that don't you want to follow?" You've already had a couple of interactions with this student during the past several months, and you're fairly sure you know where the conversation is headed.

"Well," she draws a deep breath, "like I've told you before, I'm bisexual, and I think I might actually be a guy even though I was born a girl. Christians aren't supposed to transition or be transgender, and the teacher tonight said the Bible wasn't in favor of living your life as gay or lesbian either. But I think there are good reasons to think maybe Jesus really was raised from the dead. I just don't know that I can believe in what the Bible says."

“So what do you think it means to follow Jesus?”

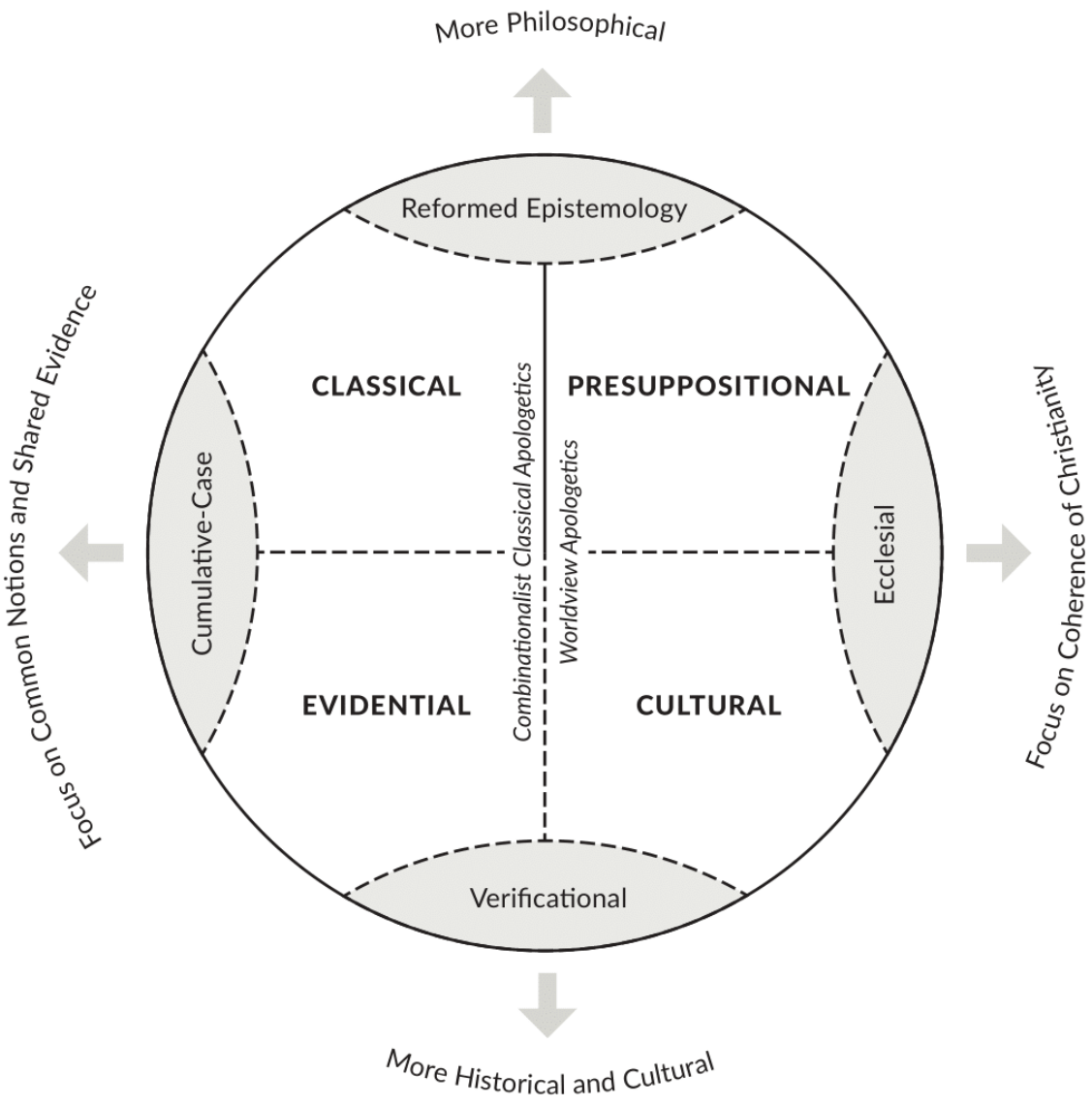
“It means loving and trusting Jesus in everything you do,” she launches exuberantly into her explanation. “And that means you love and care for other people. When you follow Jesus, you love God with everything you've got, and you love your neighbor as yourself. When you do that, you've got God's Spirit inside you, just like Jesus did.”

You breathe an inward prayer, asking God to go to work in this young woman's heart. What you want most in this moment is to testify to the truth of God with clarity and compassion. You have grown to care about her over the past few months, and your heart aches as you consider the struggles that she's facing. And yet, it's clear that her confusion runs deep, all the way down to her understanding of the very nature of God.

What do you say next?

**How can you defend God's truth with “gentleness and reverence” in this situation?
(1 Peter 3:16 CSB)**

Map of Apologetics Methods



Chapter 1: Classical Apologetics

Melissa Cain Travis

Prepare to Understand Classical Apologetics

1. Before reading Chapter 1: Classical Apologetics and the responses from other contributors in *Understanding Christian Apologetics* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2025), prayerfully meditate on Romans 1:16–25. How should these words from God, given through the apostle Paul, shape your attitude toward defending the truth of the gospel?

2. Classical apologetics is a two-step apologetics method that (1) appeals to reason and nature to establish the plausibility of God’s existence and then (2) defends Christian doctrines based on historical and cultural evidences. Melissa Cain Travis describes holistic classical apologetics as a specific approach that engages the intellect, imagination, aesthetic sensibilities, and innate existential longings, and then uses philosophical, historical, and cultural elements to reveal the truth of the gospel and the inherent goodness of Christianity. Based on these definitions, what aspects of classical apologetics might be most useful in your context?

Study Classical Apologetics

Answer the questions below as you read Chapter 1: Classical Apologetics and the responses from other contributors in *Understanding Christian Apologetics*.

1. What is “classical apologetics”?
2. According to the apostle Paul, God’s “invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made. As a result, people are without excuse” (Romans 1:20). How might this text support classical apologetics?
3. What knowledge is available by the light of natural reason, according to Thomas Aquinas?
4. Why did Philip Melanchthon champion the study of arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy in Lutheran seminaries?
5. What is “cosmic fine-tuning”? Why does cosmic fine-tuning suggest the existence of God?
6. In the responses from other contributors, what was the most cogent critique of classical apologetics?
7. In the responses from other contributors, what was the least cogent critique of classical apologetics?

Apply Classical Apologetics

Classical Apologetics Response to the Case Study Melissa Cain Travis

I digest the young woman's words for a moment and then ask, "Could you explain what you mean by loving and trusting Jesus in all things?"

"Well, I guess what I mean is that I trust him to guide me, to help me treat others the right way and make good decisions for my life," she responds.

"You mentioned that you don't believe the Bible, so in what way do you think Jesus guides us? In other words, how does he tell us what's 'right' and 'good'?"

"Oh, well, he does that by giving us signs and strong feelings about things. When something feels good and right, it must be part of God's plan, I think."

I challenge her: "Let's consider that. Very often, people act according to strong emotions, and that's sometimes disastrous, isn't it? And what happens when someone passionately disagrees with us on the moral course of action in a serious situation? Whose strong feelings win?"

"Yeah... maybe it's not *just* about feelings. We have to see how it lines up with the moral code. If the person is reasonable, I'm sure we can figure it out," she says confidently.

"This moral code, where do we find that?" I ask.

"Pretty much the whole 'do unto others' thing, and the legal system, I guess."

"I see where you're coming from with that first part, since you've said you want to follow Jesus, and you mentioned his teaching about loving your neighbor as yourself. Does this mean that you believe at least *some* parts of the Bible are true?" I ask.

"Well, yeah, I guess so. Mainly, the parts about Jesus's words and the resurrection story."

"Okay, let's put that part on hold for a minute and talk about what you said about moral choices and the legal system. You're suggesting that the law tells us what's right and wrong in terms of how we live in our society. Do I have that right?"

"Yeah, that's basically it."

"Great, just making sure. The lawmakers, where do they get their ideas about right and wrong?"

“Well, they probably think about what’s best for everyone, what rules will make sure we have fairness and justice.”

“How do they know what justice and fairness are?”

“That’s not hard; everyone understands what’s fair and what’s not. Justice is making sure everyone does what’s fair,” she insists.

“If that were true, I think we’d see all the same laws in all societies throughout history, but we don’t. Wouldn’t you agree? For example, less than two hundred years ago, the laws in our country didn’t prohibit slave ownership. The slave trade went on for centuries before it was outlawed.”

“Yeah, but a lot of people knew that was wrong, and that’s why it was finally stopped. Society improved.”

“I don’t disagree. My point is that major immoralities have been part of various legal systems, and still today we have huge disagreements in our society over some laws, so how do we decide who’s right? What if a law makes a lot of people happy because it allows them the freedom to make life choices that they prefer and that gives them a feeling of equality, but that same law makes a lot of other people upset because they believe it’s significantly harmful and wrong? They can’t both be right. Where do we turn for the ultimate truth in a situation like that?”

“I’m not sure. I guess we can’t always figure it out. Humans aren’t perfect.”

“No, we are not. Far from it, in fact. Wouldn’t you say this is why Jesus had to die for us in the first place—because we are fallen, we are sinners, and we aren’t capable of perfection? We had to be rescued by our Creator. Since he loved us enough to die for us, don’t you think he’d love us enough to make sure we have a dependable and authoritative source of moral truth that tells us how we can know him, grow in his likeness, and flourish as his children?”

“That makes sense, that he wouldn’t leave us to figure things out by ourselves, since our ideas can be wrong sometimes,” she concedes. “But I just can’t believe some of that stuff in the Bible, like the parts that are against homosexuality. It’s hateful, and Jesus wasn’t hateful.”

“Why do you think it’s hateful?”

“Because we should be able to be with the person we deeply love. To say that some people’s love for each other is sinful is hateful,” she insists.

“You know, we agreed earlier that feelings are not always reliable guides to truth and we’ve just agreed that our judgments are sometimes incorrect. I think we’ve all observed, at one time or another, that we sometimes have deep desires for things that seem good to us but that, in reality, turn out to be harmful. It’s one of our many imperfections. Our desires, which include romantic feelings, can sometimes be disordered and damaging.”

She sits up straight, with a look of annoyance. “What do you mean, *damaging*?”

“Do you believe that we are more than our physical bodies?”

“You mean do we have a soul?”

“Yes, exactly.”

“Yeah, how else could we be with Jesus after we die?”

“Right. So if there are things that are destructive to the body, wouldn’t it make sense that there are things that are destructive to the soul, too? So even when we think a life choice doesn’t hurt anyone else, and doesn’t do us any physical harm, we still have our souls to consider.”

“What do you mean?”

“Following Jesus, seeking godliness, means pursuing a healthy soul, and since our Creator knows every minute detail about how we are designed, body and soul, he’s the supreme authority on what is good for us and what is not. Scripture shows that one way he communicates his truth is through creation itself,” I explain.

“How does that work?” she asks.

“Well, he gives us observable evidence and reasoning skills. We see that human beings are created as male and female, and our bodies are beautifully designed so that a male and female union is physically complementary and reproductive. This serves as a natural revelation of God’s will for his creation, for the marriage union and the family unit. We see that this revelation in nature is in perfect harmony with Scripture, God’s special written revelation. They’re in sync,” I explain. She sits in silence, mulling over what I’ve said, but reluctant to respond. After a few moments of silence, I continue.

“In his perfect wisdom and love, God tells us in Scripture everything we need to know to choose the good. It’s not always easy. It’s not even *usually* easy. Often, the cross that Jesus calls us to bear in his name is incredibly difficult. And yet, ultimately, we will flourish when we live in obedience to him. That’s his promise to us—to have life and to have it abundantly.”

Chapter 2: Evidential Apologetics

Sean McDowell

Prepare to Understand Evidential Apologetics

1. Before reading Chapter 2: Evidential Apologetics and the responses from other contributors in *Understanding Christian Apologetics* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2025), prayerfully meditate on 1 Corinthians 15:1–19. How should these words from God, given through the apostle Paul, shape your attitude toward defending the truth of the gospel?

2. Evidential apologetics is a one-step method of apologetics that argues for the truth of Christianity and the existence of God through direct appeals to historical evidences that support miracles and fulfilled prophecies, with a particular emphasis on historical evidences for the resurrection of Jesus. Based on this definition, what aspects of evidential apologetics might be most useful in your context?

Study Evidential Apologetics

Answer the questions below as you read Chapter 2: Evidential Apologetics and the responses from other contributors in *Understanding Christian Apologetics*.

1. What is “evidential apologetics”?
2. What is the difference between evidential apologetics and an evidentialist epistemology?
3. Describe the mediating position between theological rationalism and the self-authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit.
4. How do the Old Testament Scriptures support evidential apologetics, according to Sean McDowell?
5. How do the New Testament Scriptures support evidential apologetics, according to Sean McDowell?
6. In the responses from other contributors, what was the most cogent critique of evidential apologetics?
7. In the responses from other contributors, what was the least cogent critique of evidential apologetics?

Apply Evidential Apologetics

Evidential Apologetics Response to the Case Study

Sean McDowell

“Thanks so much for sharing about where you are in your faith journey”—that’s how I would continue the conversation with this ninth-grade young woman. “I love that you want to be a follower of Jesus and I appreciate that you’re willing to be honest about your concerns with the Bible. It would be great to explore these issues further with you. But first, would you be willing to help me better understand you? I would love to hear your story, experiences, and reasons for coming to church and wanting to follow Jesus. Maybe you could come by this week, and we could have a more in-depth conversation. No judgment. I just want to understand you and how you see the world. Is that okay with you?”^[1]

“Sure, that sounds fine,” she responds. “Thanks for caring. I’ll swing by this week so we can talk.”

So why would I start with an invitation for further discussion?

While it is tempting to launch into an apologetic for the Bible, or a defense of biblical sexuality, my goal would be to create the right conditions for an on-going relationship and conversation that God might use to draw her heart towards Him.^[2] The Bible has a lot to say about listening before speaking (Prov 18:2; Jas 1:19), and the power of understanding (Prov 24:3-4). My first goal would simply be to understand her and her worldview. If possible, I want to get to the *heart* of the issue and then address it accordingly. Proverbs 20:5 says, “The purpose in a man’s heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out.” This girl probably doesn’t even understand the depths of her own heart. But through prayerful listening, and asking clarifying questions, I would aim to draw out her deeper beliefs, fears, and motivations.

A few years ago, after a session I taught on biblical marriage, a teenage young man asked me if I thought that homosexual behavior was the worst sin. Rather than launching into an apologetic for biblical sexuality, I probed a little further as to why he asked *this* question. It turns out he had same-sex attraction and had never told anyone before opening up to me. Behind his specific theological question were deeper fears about his relationship with his Christian parents (whom he had heard make homophobic remarks), his relationship with his friends, as well as his future. His deeper questions were about belonging, purpose, and identity. My hope would be to discover what deeper issues are pertinent with this ninth-grade young woman too.

Once we find a suitable place to talk, I might start like this: “Thanks again for being willing to meet with me and share about where you are on your faith journey. Do you mind if I ask you some questions to better understand you?”

“Sure, what would you like to know?”

The goal of this first conversation is not to interrogate but to understand *her*. This is best done by asking thoughtful questions and being a good listener. Here are some of the kinds of questions I might ask:

When was the first time you thought you might be bisexual and possibly transgender?

Who did you first tell, and why *that* person? How did he or she respond?

Have you talked with your parents, and if so, how have they responded?

How has this realization shaped the way you think about yourself? How does it shape the way you think about God?

Who are some of the key influencers, whether in person or on social media, who have shaped your thinking about this?

Why have you been coming to church? Are you planning on continuing to come? Why or why not? How important is a relationship with God to you?

What is your family like? Do you feel they love you unconditionally?

Do you feel like I genuinely understand you and your journey? If not, please tell me what else I need to know.

Again, the goal is to understand the experiences and relationships that inform how she thinks about God and sexuality. I also want this young girl to know that I am not threatened by her beliefs and that I will continue to care about her whether she embraces the Bible or not.

Here is how I might end the conversation: “Thanks again for giving me a glimpse into your life and faith. Would you be willing to meet again and talk further about Jesus, the Bible, and your relationship with God?”

After establishing that I care about her, and that I am a safe person, my next step would be to engage her in a conversation about the deeper reasons behind her beliefs. The first goal of this final question is to gauge whether she is genuinely open to further conversation about Jesus and the Bible, or whether her mind is made up. If she resists, I might ask what would cause her reconsider, but also make sure she knows that she is welcome at youth group anytime, and that I would love to have further conversation when she is ready. Second, if she agrees to meet

again, then she has invited the conversation and would likely be open to gentle probing about her views on Jesus and the Bible.

“Sure, let’s meet again,” she says, and so you set up another time to meet.

While this would likely take many conversations, I would aim to steer the conversation towards worldview issues. I might start the conversation this way: “When we first talked about this after youth group, you mentioned that you don’t believe in the Bible but also that you don’t want to believe in the Bible. Is the heart of your concern that you don’t want to believe in the Bible, or that you think don’t think the Bible is true?”

If her concern is that she doesn’t believe it is true, then I would shift the conversation to the evidence. If she does not want to believe in the Bible (which seems more likely in this case), then I would aim to understand the heart of her resistance and try to help her see that God’s commandments are actually for her good.

I might continue the conversation with questions such as: “If the Bible really were God’s Word, would you believe it? If the Bible were God’s Word, is it okay to pick and choose what passages we follow? It seems to me that we first have to determine if the Bible is God’s Word, and then we can determine if we should follow it. Do you agree? Since you believe in Jesus, does it matter to you how Jesus thought about Scripture?”^[3] My hope would be to get her thinking about the nature of the Bible, what it means that it is God’s Word, and why it is authoritative for faith and practice.

Nonetheless, the issue for her likely goes much deeper. As we move into the issues of sexuality and gender, I would first want to make sure she understands *what* the Bible says about sexuality and gender. Then, I would ask questions to see if she understands *why* God has given these parameters. My deep suspicion is that she, and the vast majority of young people today, do not understand the “why” behind the “what.”^[4] The goal of this conversation (or conversations) would be to help her see that God is good and that His commands are for our flourishing.^[5]

As a part of this conversation, I would also introduce her to some Christians who have wrestled with LGBTQ+ issues and yet stayed faithful to Jesus—and thus, the Bible—through either remaining single or marrying someone of the opposite sex.^[6] My hope is that they could be both a model and inspiration for her.

Here’s the bottom line of how I would engage this young woman. My first goal would be to make sure she feels heard, valued, and cared for. Second, I would aim to identify the heart of the issue—whether emotional, relational, moral, or spiritual—that is driving her to follow Jesus but to reject the Bible. Third, address the heart of the issue. If the issue is evidential, then I would share some of the reasons we can trust the Bible, or give a positive case for the truth, goodness, and beauty of biblical sexuality. Since she already claims to believe in the

resurrection of Jesus, then it seems more likely she either fails to understand what the resurrection means for discipleship, or her objection lies elsewhere. Finally, if she expresses interest in wanting to be a Christian, then I would provide her with tools to live out her faith as a follower of Jesus in our confusing world.

[1] I have taught high school Bible full-time or part-time for more than two decades. I aim to be sensitive and wise when female students come to me for advice. I always keep the door open to my classroom or move to a public place for conversation. If I sense that the conversation is shifting a personal direction, or one that involves issues of sexuality, I will ask the student if she is comfortable with me inviting a woman to join us.

[2] Jonathan McKee has a helpful blog on how to respond with both grace and truth when a teen comes out as LGBTQ+. See Jonathan McKee, “Oh, and I’m Bisexual,” *The Source for Youth Ministry*: <https://thesource4ym.com/oh-and-im-bisexual/>.

[3] For a helpful resource on the inspiration of the Bible and how Jesus viewed Scripture, see Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *From God to Us* (Moody, 2012).

[4] In our book *So the Next Generation Will Know*, J. Warner Wallace and I encourage youth workers to give two “whys” for every “what.” To help motivate young people to become passionate about God’s word, we encourage youth workers to give these two “whys”: (1) Explain *why* the claim is true; give the evidence. (2) Explain *why* this should matter to them; personalize it. See Sean McDowell and J. Warner Wallace, *So the Next Generation Will Know* (Cook, 2019), 103-105.

[5] One of the most significant insights my father taught me is that God’s commands are not to steal our joy, or oppress us, but they are designed for our flourishing. Deuteronomy 10:13 says that God’s commands are for our good. David rejoiced in the commands and statutes of the Lord (Psalm 119:14-17). If you are looking for a resource to help students understand God’s design for sex and marriage, see my book *Chasing Love* (B&H, 2020). I make the biblical and extra-biblical case that following God’s word brings genuine freedom in relationships.

[6] I would encourage her to consider the books, lectures, and online profiles of Christians such as Rebecca McLaughlin, Rachel Gilson, Christopher Yuan, and Sam Allberry.

Chapter 3: Presuppositional Apologetics

James N. Anderson

Prepare to Understand Presuppositional Apologetics

1. Before reading Chapter 3: Presuppositional Apologetics and the responses from other contributors in *Understanding Christian Apologetics* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2025), prayerfully meditate on 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:16. How should these words from God, given through the apostle Paul, shape your attitude toward defending the truth of the gospel?

2. Presuppositional apologetics is an apologetics method which holds that the fundamental disagreement between Christians and non-Christians lies at the level of competing presuppositions about ultimate reality and ultimate authority. Based on this definition, what aspects of presuppositional apologetics might be most useful in your context?

Study Presuppositional Apologetics

Answer the questions below as you read Chapter 3: Presuppositional Apologetics and the responses from other contributors in *Understanding Christian Apologetics*.

1. What is “presuppositional apologetics”?
2. Summarize one conviction that presuppositional apologists typically hold.
3. According to James N. Anderson, “disputes over apologetic methods ultimately boil down to disagreements (whether recognized or not) over *epistemology*.” What is the proper relationship between theology, epistemology, and apologetics?
4. What does it mean to say that special revelation is “necessary, authoritative, and self-attesting”?
5. Presuppositional apologetics affirms “common ground” but rejects the notion of “neutral ground.” What is the difference between “common ground” and “neutral ground” in apologetics?
6. In the responses from other contributors, what was the most cogent critique of presuppositional apologetics?
7. In the responses from other contributors, what was the least cogent critique of presuppositional apologetics?

Apply Presuppositional Apologetics

Presuppositional Apologetics Response to the Case Study

James N. Anderson

As I consider how to respond to this young woman, several thoughts arise. On the one hand, I want to affirm and build on the positive signs of interest in Jesus. I thank God that this high-schooler is attracted to the character of Jesus and wants to talk more about what it means to follow him. Even so, it's apparent that she harbors some major confusions about the gospel and the Christian faith. She hasn't truly reckoned with the absolute lordship of Christ, the indispensability of the Bible, the holistic unity of the Christian worldview, and the true significance of the resurrection. Despite her professed openness to following Christ, it seems she still wants to assert her own autonomy in her life. She wants Jesus *on her own terms*, rather than on his. Instead of submitting to God's Word in Scripture, she's effectively treating her own feelings and experiences as the highest authority and placing herself in judgment over the Bible.

As a presuppositionalist, I want to graciously but firmly challenge her assumed autonomy, emphasize the radical claims of the Lord Jesus on her life, and I want to help her understand the importance of the Bible for truly knowing God and for truly knowing herself. In short, this young lady doesn't yet see herself as a sinner in desperate need of a Savior.

"Well, it's great that you've been giving such serious thought to all this," I say. "You know, Jesus once asked his disciples, 'Who do you say I am?' That must rank as one of the most important questions in the history of the world! How you answer it shapes your view of absolutely everything in life, simply because of the extraordinary claims that Jesus made about himself. I mean, he claimed to be none other than *the Son of God* who had been sent into our world to save sinners and give *eternal life* to everyone who believes in him. No other religious figure in history ever made such astonishing claims. So, it makes sense that you would want to follow Jesus. I just wonder, though, if you've really grasped what that involves."

"What do you mean?" she asks, one eyebrow raised.

"Jesus claimed to have divine authority, which means absolute authority over the entire universe and over every single human being, whether they acknowledge it or not. He insisted that anyone who follows him must surrender *everything* to him.^[1] As someone once quipped, 'If Jesus isn't Lord of all, he isn't really Lord at all.' We can't pick and choose among Jesus's teachings. He simply won't allow it!"

"So how am I picking and choosing? I said I want to follow what Jesus taught about loving God and loving my neighbor. Didn't he say those were the two greatest commandments?"

“Absolutely, but that’s not *all* that Jesus taught. For example, you say you want to follow Jesus, but not the Bible. The trouble is, Jesus himself didn’t leave that option open to us! He believed and taught that the Bible is divinely inspired. He repeatedly referred to the Hebrew Scriptures, what we now call the Old Testament, as nothing less than the words of God.^[2] What’s more, he taught his followers that the Old Testament was ultimately all about *him*.^[3] His birth, the events of his life, his sacrificial death, and his resurrection were all divinely orchestrated fulfillments of the Hebrew Scriptures—all part of a grand plan that God put in place from the beginning. Jesus also promised that his disciples would be guided by the Holy Spirit to write a new collection of Scriptures—what we call the New Testament—so that people through the ages could know who Jesus really was, what he did for us, and how he fulfilled the earlier Scriptures. Like it or not, Jesus and the Bible are a package deal. You can’t have one without the other! You can’t be a consistent follower of Jesus without also following his teachings about the Bible.”

“I don’t buy it. Jesus was accepting of everyone, but the Bible is obviously bigoted toward LGBTQ+ people. Where does that leave someone like me?”

“You’re right: Jesus accepts everyone in the sense that he offers salvation and eternal life to everyone without discrimination. *Anyone* can become a follower of Jesus. But that’s not the whole story. Jesus also upheld God’s laws, including God’s original design for human sexual relationships.^[4] God has to be the final authority on what leads to healthy and fulfilling human relationships because God *invented* human relationships. When Jesus taught about sexuality, he pointed us straight back to God’s instruction manual, so to speak.”

“But if God made me bisexual, and maybe transgender too, how could that be wrong?”

“The problem is that our personal feelings and inclinations just aren’t a reliable guide to what’s true and good and normal. I don’t mean to be offensive, but what would you make of the personal feelings and inclinations of someone who was sexually attracted to children or to animals? I’m sure you get the point. We can’t base moral judgments on our personal feelings. That’s a recipe for complete anarchy! If there are moral standards that are binding on everyone, everywhere, they must come from a *transcendent* source that stands over us. They must come from our Creator. Who else could have the authority to tell us who we really are and how we should live?”

“Here’s the bottom line,” I continue. “We all know deep down that we’re messed up inside. Jesus had some pretty shocking things to say about the corruptness and deceitfulness of our hearts!^[5] We *don’t* love God or love our neighbors as we really should. Not even close. But that’s exactly why we *need* Jesus. We need more than a moral teacher. We need a Savior who can heal our corrupt and rebellious hearts, take away the stench of our sins, reconcile us with our Maker, and turn our lives in the right direction. I know you have doubts about the Bible, but it’s impossible to make sense of Jesus’s life and teachings without it. It’s like a floodlight that

illuminates *everything*—who God really is, who Jesus really is, who we really are, why we’re here, why we’re so messed up, what Jesus has done to fix us, and how it all fits together. Or to mix metaphors a bit: the Bible is like a pair of spectacles from God that brings everything into clearer focus. So rather than dismissing it, why not dive in even deeper? The Bible is *Jesus’s* book. It has the power to transform your entire outlook on the world. What have you got to lose?”

[1] Luke 9:23–27, 57–62; 18:22.

[2] Matthew 4:4; 15:6; 19:4–5; 22:29–32; Mark 12:36.

[3] Luke 24:25–27; John 5:39.

[4] Matthew 5:17–20, 27–32; 19:3–9.

[5] Mark 7:20–23; Luke 11:13, 39; John 3:19–20; 8:34.

Chapter 4: Cultural Apologetics

D.A. Horton

Prepare to Understand Cultural Apologetics

1. Before reading Chapter 4: Cultural Apologetics and the responses from other contributors in *Understanding Christian Apologetics* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2025), prayerfully meditate on Acts 17:16–34. How should this sermon, proclaimed by the apostle Paul, shape your attitude toward defending the truth of the gospel?

2. Cultural apologetics is a dialogical apologetics method that responds to critiques and inquiries about the historical global Christian faith by using cultural expressions and artifacts to redirect human affections from idols to Jesus in collaboration with the Holy Spirit. Based on this definition, what aspects of cultural apologetics might be most useful in your context?

Study Cultural Apologetics

Answer the questions below as you read Chapter 4: Cultural Apologetics and the responses from other contributors in *Understanding Christian Apologetics*.

1. What is “cultural apologetics”?
2. Summarize the three-step approach to cultural apologetics that D.A. Horton described in this chapter.
3. How did the apostle Paul practice cultural apologetics in Acts 17?
4. How did the author of the *Epistle to Diognetus* practice cultural apologetics?
5. How did Justin Martyr practice cultural apologetics in his *First Apology*?
6. In the responses from other contributors, what was the most cogent critique of cultural apologetics?
7. In the responses from other contributors, what was the least cogent critique of cultural apologetics?

Apply Cultural Apologetics

Cultural Apologetics Response to the Case Study

D.A. Horton

So how might a cultural apologist respond to this case study?

Cultural apologetics uses cultural artifacts to shift human affection from idols to Jesus in response to critiques and inquiries about the historical global Christian faith. This approach includes three steps: identifying the good, pinpointing how sin leads to idolatry, and redirecting the focus to Christ.

1. Identify the Good

First, I would affirm the student's belief in Jesus's resurrection as non-material cultural artifact aligning with a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith. This belief and the statement, "I want to follow Jesus," will be used in the subsequent steps. Next, I would acknowledge that the student's awareness and confession of sexual desire can be understood as a gift from God with boundaries he has set. The focus during this step is on recognizing sexual desire in general, not focusing on specific orientations; the focus on specific orientations will take place in the next step. Lastly, I would praise the student's understanding of the importance of following Jesus. Statements like, "You love and care for other people" and "When you follow Jesus, you love God with everything you've got, and you love your neighbor as yourself" would be excellent examples of areas where she has rightly understood God's truth. Quoting the student directly would not only demonstrate active listening but also provide an opportunity for her to confirm her sense of her position.

2. Pinpoint Sinful Misdirection

During this step, the affirmations identified in the first step must be engaged to ensure the student understands the truth of her structurally sound statements. The sequence of the affirmations does not necessarily need to match the original order of the conversation. The order to be followed in this section is following Jesus, believing in Jesus's resurrection, and understanding sexual orientation.

Building on the student's own statements about loving God and loving neighbors, a question arises: Do God and humans love with equal perfection, or is perfect love exclusive to God or to humans? This presents an opportunity to introduce Scripture to discuss perfect love positively. Referencing 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a could help to define the love that God embodies, showing how humans fall short in comparison. Human vices like impatience, jealousy, irritability, and injustice contradict God's perfect love. Our inability to love perfectly results in our failure to love God, our neighbors, and ourselves. This failure to love perfectly is considered sinfulness, a

universal trait in humanity (Gen 3; Pss 51:5; 58:3; John 8:34; Rom 5:12), which distorts our own understanding of love and sets our love in contrast to God's perfect love (John 3:16; Rom 5:6-8).

Being able to admit one's inability to love perfectly provides another chance to engage with Scripture, this time by directly using Jesus's words. The Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37 is an excellent passage to explore. Connecting the lawyer's response (10:27) with Jesus's affirmation (10:28) and the student's earlier response is essential. However, focusing on 10:29–37 is crucial. The lawyer wanted to exclude certain people from being considered neighbors. Jesus, aware of this, tells the parable and asks a direct question, "Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" (10:36 ESV). The lawyer's response is significant when he answers, "The one who showed mercy."

The lawyer's failure to possess eternal life is evident in two ways. First, his refusal to mention the Samaritan's ethnicity ("the one" instead of "the Samaritan") reveals deep-rooted prejudice, indicating a lack of perfect love for God, his neighbor, and his own self. Second, by omitting the priest and Levite from his response, the lawyer aligns himself with characters who lack mercy and who fail to love their neighbor.

The goal of this discussion is to lead the student to an awareness that, although she may be aligning herself with the Christ-affirmed summary of God's law that implies perfect obedience, she is in desperate need of a Savior, because she has not kept this law perfectly. This awareness engages with the student's professed belief in Jesus's resurrection and helps her to see humanity's failure to live up to God's perfect standard. Jesus met this standard, and his resurrection validates this claim.

At this point, an illustration of a financial transaction involving cultural artifacts with which the student would be familiar would be helpful. For example, buying a cup of coffee involves entering an establishment, placing an order, providing a name if requested, and being informed of the total cost. Payment with valid currency is necessary; money from a board game would not be accepted. The individual uses a debit card, taps it on the contactless payment symbol, and follows prompts such as "please wait" or "enter PIN." Once the payment is processed, the word "approved" will appear, indicating that the correct amount in acceptable currency has been deducted from the person's bank account. A receipt can be printed, emailed, or disregarded. Still, it serves as proof of payment and ownership of the purchased item, allowing the customer to leave the store without legal issues.

With the student following the illustration up to this point, it might be an appropriate time to explain how all humans became infected by sin through Adam's fall (Rom 3:23; 5:12). Sin incurs a penalty and price: death (Gen 3:8–24; Rom 6:23) and the shedding of the blood of a flawless sacrifice (Lev 1–7; Heb 9:22). This realization would prompt the student to understand that, since all humans are tainted by sin and do not meet God's perfect standard, any attempt to atone for

our sins is futile because we are imperfect. This discussion then circles back to the student's belief in Jesus's resurrection.

Perhaps a brief explanation of Abraham's justification by God (Rom 4:1–22) would set up an opportunity to share the following Scripture: "But the words 'it was counted to him' were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom 4:23–25 ESV). The delivering up of Jesus for our trespasses would be explained as him taking upon himself, as a substitute for sinful humans, the death penalty for our sin. A reading of Romans 5:6–8 might complementing this truth to highlight further that—while sinners are separated from God, indebted because of their sin and unable to pay off this debt—Jesus demonstrated perfect love by dying. Next would come the issue of the price for sin. Jesus shed his blood, and this was his offering of payment on behalf of sinners.

Paul states that Jesus's resurrection was for our justification. Jesus, sinless and perfect, served as the unblemished sacrifice required by God (Heb 7:26), shedding his pure blood to pay the sin debt of sinners. Jesus's resurrection signifies God's approval of his payment, allowing sinners of all backgrounds to be declared "not guilty" when they accept Jesus as their savior, as outlined in Romans 10:9–10. This would provide an opportunity for a response regarding the student's statements about sexual orientation.

After Jesus's resurrection, he revealed that the entire Old Testament points to his life and work (Luke 24:44), showing his acceptance of the entire Old Testament, which includes teachings on human sexuality. Some of Jesus's teachings on sexuality can be found in Matthew 15:10–20 (where, among other sins, he mentions adultery and sexual immorality) and in Matthew 19:3–9 (where he discusses divorce and God's original design for human sexuality and marriage, referencing Genesis 1:27 and 2:24). Jesus's teachings were challenging, prompting even his disciples to question his words (Matt 19:10–12). Jesus did not endorse self-mutilation (Matt 18:8–9; 19:11–12) but advocated for a radical pursuit of purity through consensual monogamy for married couples, abstinence for the unmarried until marriage, and the possibility of lifelong abstinence for those who choose not to marry.

Jesus upheld God's sexual ethics, which involve consensual intimacy between one man and one woman within marriage. Non-consensual sexual experiences within marriage, as well as all other forms of sexual expression outside the marriage of a man and a woman, are considered sexual immorality.^[1] If one participant is married and the act involves someone outside the marriage covenant, it is considered adultery. Due to human sinfulness, our sexual desires are corrupted, and any temptation to engage in sexual activities outside God's plan is deemed sinful. This may lead us to worship idols by indulging in consensual sexual activities that seem like they can fulfill our sinful desires.

The Bible offers various examples—Abram, Samson, David, Solomon, and others—demonstrating how the consequences of sinful actions endure despite God’s forgiveness. It might be wise here to speak to Paul’s rebuke of the sexual practices mentioned in 1 Corinthians and how the sexual reputation of Christians over time became less and less like non-Christians, who were just as openly defiant about their lack of sexual restraint as in our day.^[2] This underscores God’s power to save through the gospel message (Rom 1:16-17), indicating that all sinners can be reconciled to God solely through Jesus’s work of redemption regardless of their transgressions. This could help to guide the student toward the final step of redirecting her focus to Jesus.

3. Redirect towards Jesus

At this point, it is necessary to communicate that sexual sin, like all other sins, falls short of God’s standard of perfection. Jesus’s resurrection provides historical, literal, and physical proof of his sinlessness. Through his shed blood, sinners of all backgrounds can be forgiven and declared not guilty by God for eternity (Rom 5:1–5). God’s plan for forgiving sinners involves crediting Jesus’ righteousness—like online cash apps, with which this student would certainly be familiar—to those who repent and accept him as their Savior and Lord (Rom 3:24; 5:19-21). After this, Jesus will faithfully begin the excellent work of holistically transforming this new Christ-follower’s life.

Since the student struggles with issues of identity, sexual orientation, and the truthfulness of Scripture, I would encourage her to accept Jesus’s invitation to exchange her burdens for freedom in him (Matt 11:28-30). The student would be challenged to come to Christ, who declared himself to be the way, the truth, the life, and the only path to righteousness with God (John 14:6). Discipleship would be explained as the process of spiritual growth where a mature follower of Jesus mentors an immature follower, linking their lives to grow together in Christ.

The student would be taught that genuine followers of Jesus receive God’s perfect love continuously, as described in 1 Corinthians 13. Terms would be clarified to show that God’s unwavering love is constantly provided, not based on obedience or disobedience, but on Christ’s perfection. This would provide an opportunity for her to confess her sins and receive forgiveness through Christ’s finished work (1 John 1:9-10).

If the student decides to accept Christ, to God be the glory! If the student declines the invitation or expresses uncertainty about embracing Jesus, her response should be respected. The ministry of intercessory prayer can begin after the conversation concludes. Three benefits of the cultural apologetics approach in this chapter include its reliance on the Holy Spirit for regeneration (John 3:3-8; Rom 8), its emphasis on continuous dialogue, and its method of identifying what is good, pinpointing sinful misdirection, and redirecting individuals toward Jesus.

[1] I do not condone abuse, assault, or coercion as acceptable forms of sexuality, even within the context of marriage as described in Genesis 1–2. The author views these actions as sinful, criminal human rights violations that should be prosecuted.

[2] One text that explores the differences in sexual norms between Greco-Roman and Christian cultures is Nadya Williams, *Cultural Christians in the Early Church* (Zondervan, 2023). Another text that categorizes primary Greco-Roman sources in a way that reveals their misalignment with scriptural views on human sexuality is Marguerite Johnson, *Sexuality in Greek and Roman Society and Literature*, 2nd ed (Routledge, 2022).

Chapter 5: Ecclesial Apologetics

Timothy Paul Jones

Prepare to Understand Ecclesial Apologetics

1. Before reading Chapter 5: Ecclesial Apologetics and the responses from other contributors in *Understanding Christian Apologetics* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2025), prayerfully meditate on 1 Peter 1:13–2:12. How should these words from God, given through Simon Peter, shape your attitude toward defending the truth of the gospel?

2. Ecclesial apologetics is an ancient apologetics method that points to the presence and power of God as the best explanation for the existence and the ethics of the church. Based on this definition, what aspects of ecclesial apologetics might be most useful in your context?

Study Ecclesial Apologetics

Answer the questions below as you read Chapter 5: Ecclesial Apologetics and the responses from other contributors in *Understanding Christian Apologetics*.

1. What is “ecclesial apologetics”?
2. According to 1 Peter, how should Christians respond to detractors?
3. What is an “abductive” argument?
4. How was the initial growth of Christianity different from other religions such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Islam?
5. How does the life of the church falsify the materialist claim that the physical cosmos “is all there is or ever was or will be”?
6. In the responses from other contributors, what was the most cogent critique of ecclesial apologetics?
7. In the responses from other contributors, what was the least cogent critique of ecclesial apologetics?

Apply Ecclesial Apologetics

Ecclesial Apologetics Response to the Case Study **Timothy Paul Jones**

“So you think Jesus was raised from the dead and you’re open to following him?” I ask the young woman beside the platform in the multipurpose room where the student ministry meets.

“Yeah, mostly. I’m just not sure I can ever believe the Bible.”

“Let me ask you this: Do you think Jesus knows what’s good and true?”

“Oh, definitely,” she replies without hesitation. “Jesus was in touch with everything that’s true.”

“You’re right; Jesus is the truth, and everything he said was true. Now, think about this: Jesus trusted the Old Testament—that’s the part of the Bible that tells about God working with the Israelite people before Jesus was born—and he quoted it all the time. And he commissioned the people who wrote the New Testament. So, if we really think Jesus knows what’s true, don’t you think it might make sense to believe the Bible is true too?”

“Well, actually, I do believe a lot of the Bible. I believe the parts that are about Jesus loving everyone and the miracles he did and coming back from the dead. But I think some parts, like the parts against gay people and stuff like that, got added later. I’ve watched a lot of videos about how people changed the Bible to make it so it was against being gay and lesbian.”

“A lot of people do claim that. But here’s one of the problems with that: the same books in the Bible that tell us about God’s love also describe how God’s people should live and how they shouldn’t live. Those parts couldn’t have been added later because they’re all together in the same texts.”

The young woman shrugs and remains silent for a few moments before tossing up her hands in frustration, “Why can’t this church just accept everybody and let them stay the way they are? Other churches do that. What’s the big deal with just letting people follow whatever they feel about themselves?”

“We do love people the way they are,” I reply gently. “You’ve seen that.” She acknowledges my response with a reluctant nod.

“Our hope for you and everyone else,” I continue, “is that you’ll find real, lasting life. The only way you’ll find real life is to trust Jesus as he really was and really is, the way he’s described in the Bible. When we entrust our lives to Jesus, we become part of his people, and we start aligning our lives with God’s design for his creation. That means saying ‘no’ to some of the things we feel so we can say ‘yes’ to God’s good design. Christians don’t do this to earn God’s love; God already loves us perfectly in Jesus. We do this together as the church because we believe God’s way really is the best way. That’s the life we’re inviting you to.”

“I get that, sort of, but churches have done some really messed-up stuff too,” the young woman counters. “I read about the Crusades and Inquisition at school, and there was a video I saw about how Christians supported slavery. And almost every week, there are preachers on the news who’ve abused people in their churches.”

“There’s some truth in what you’re saying,” I concede. “Christians have done some horrible things in the name of Jesus, and churches do fall short a lot of times. But, whenever that’s happened, it’s because Christians aren’t living up to the whole truth of the whole Bible.^[1] If they would’ve followed the whole message that the church confesses, they wouldn’t have done what they did that was wrong. The Bible isn’t the problem; in fact, it’s the Bible that shows how wrong some of these things are.”

“What do you mean?”

“Here’s one example: most of what we understand as sexual abuse today was considered to be perfectly acceptable in the Roman Empire; it was the church proclaiming what the Bible says about the dignity of every human being over the centuries that caused people to see how wrong some of these actions are.^[2] Even though some Christians did twist the Bible to support the enslavement of Africans, it was faithful Christians who worked to abolish slavery, and they did it because they believed every human being is created in God’s image and has equal moral value. This idea was a radical innovation that changed human history.”

“Maybe so,” she stares for a moment at her sandal-clad feet. “But I still don’t see why the Bible has to be against people who are trying to find out who they really are inside, whether that’s a guy or a girl or a little bit of both. I’m just not sure about any of it right now.”

“That’s okay,” it seems like it’s time to give her some space to think about the conversation. “God is at work in your life right now. If he wasn’t, you wouldn’t be asking these questions. So ask him to help you see the truth and beauty of Jesus. Keep coming to church, and read the Bible we gave you, even if it doesn’t always make sense. It’s a package deal—Jesus, church, the Bible. You can’t pick one of them, or choose certain parts of each one. But this life with Jesus

and with one another is the life that's ultimately good and that leads to flourishing, and it's a life that lasts forever.”

[1] One inevitable question in ecclesial apologetics has to do with Christian hypocrisy. Trypho raised this question with Justin, regarding Christians who ate meat offered to idols. Justin acknowledged these individuals' unrepentant sin as an indication they were not Christians and then noted that such sin “causes those of us who are disciples of the true and pure teaching of Jesus Christ to be more faithful and steadfast.” See *Dialogus cum Tryphone* 30, in *Iustini Martyris Apologiae pro Christianis. Iustini Martyris Dialogus cum Tryphone* (Walter de Gruyter, 2005).

[2] Kyle Harper, *From Shame to Sin* (Harvard University Press, 2013), 8, 98. Pederasty, for example, was widely accepted prior to the empire-wide spread of Christianity; Christian writers seem to have coined the word παιδοφθορία (“child corruption”) to describe pederasty as evil.

This study guide is designed to be used with the book *Understanding Christian Apologetics: Five Methods for Defending the Faith*, edited by Timothy Paul Jones (Hendrickson Publishers, 2025).