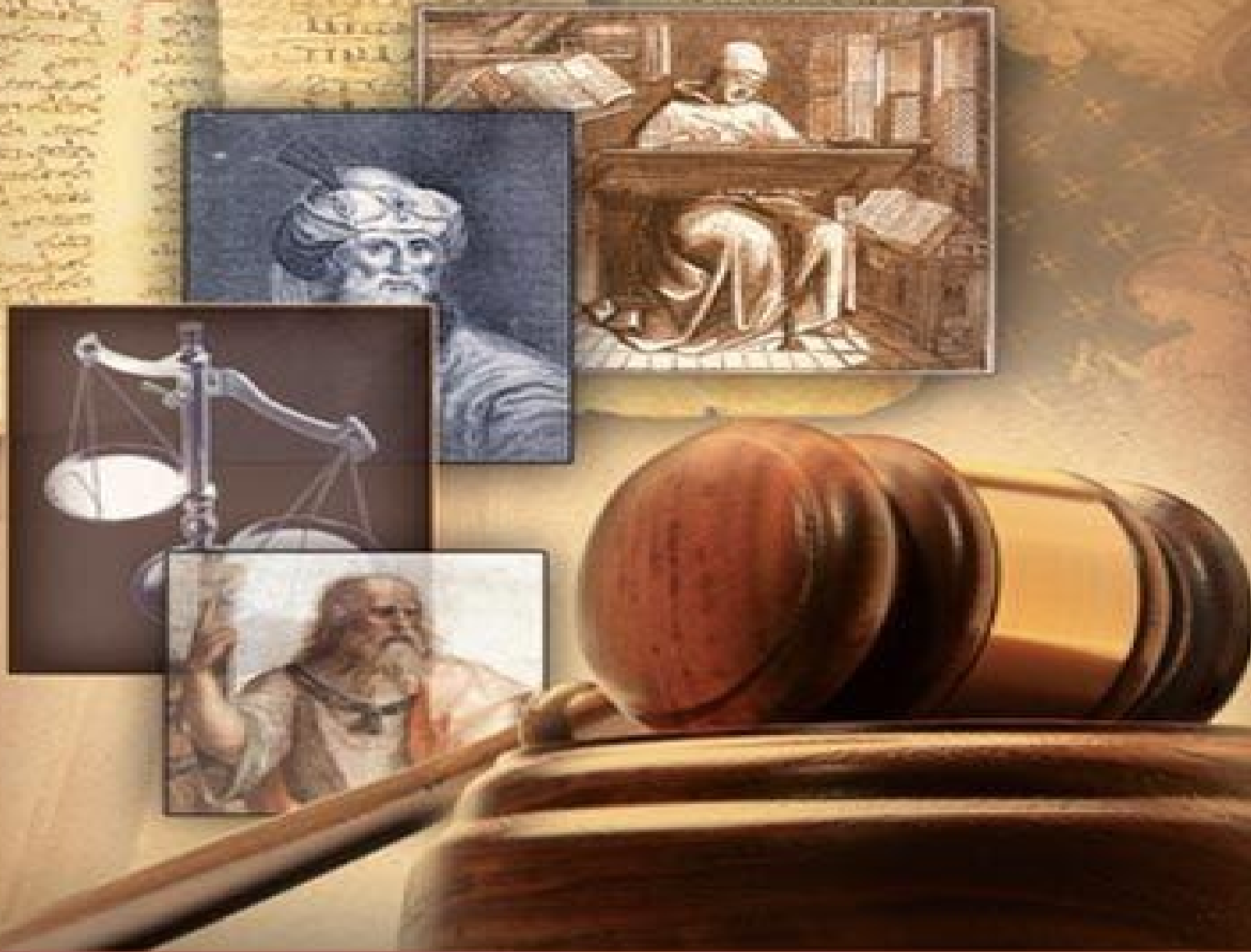


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GUIDE TO

CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

DOUG POWELL



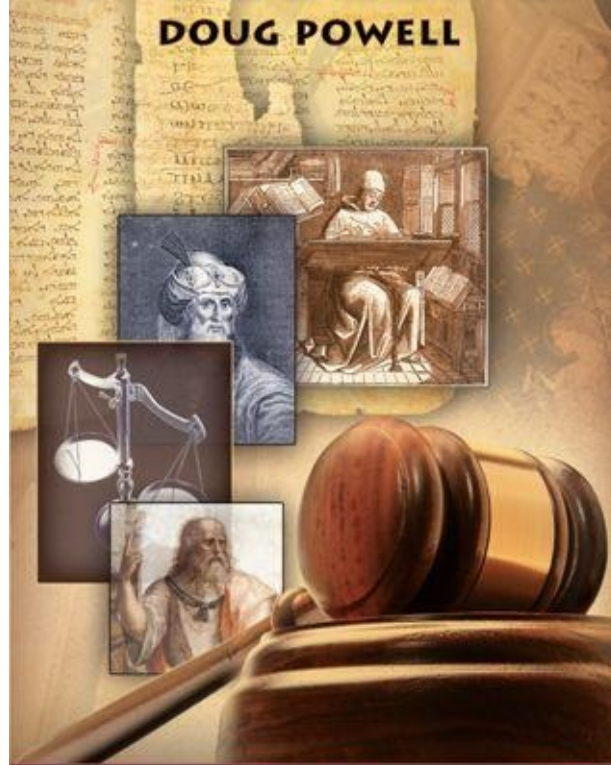
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Nashville, Tennessee

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—1 Corinthians 15:18

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—Ravi Zacharias

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—John M. Fram



What Is Apologetics?

Supermarket or Antidote?

Picture yourself in a vast supermarket that is fully stocked. Yet instead of selling food, the supermarket sells religions. The departments are all the same but have taken on symbolic meaning. For example, the meat department sells Judaism, representing the animal sacrifice needed for blood atonement. The cereal aisle is where Hinduism is found since cereal boxes often feature characters. “different God in each box! Collect all 330,000,000!” In the baking goods aisle Islam is for sale since all the other foods started with this stuff but became corrupted when it was baked. New Age religion is found in the candy section since the power behind both is in how appealing they are. Dead religious beliefs no one holds anymore like Greek mythology, Molech worship, and golden calves, are found in the frozen food section. Christianity, with all its scenes in gardens and agricultural parables, is in the produce department. Mind sciences are available in the magazine aisle. There is a person sitting in an empty shopping cart pushing himself around the store—a Buddhist, of course.



In charge of the checkout counter is death itself. After your selection is made, you pay with

your life. Whether there is anything outside the exit door and what happens there is the big question.



There is another person who can't find anything in the store at all—an atheist. Some shoppers are strictly vegetarian, some eat only meat, but all the diets are of equal value. They all basically do the same thing—feed you. In charge of the checkout counter is death itself. After your selection is made, you pay with your life. Whether there is anything outside the exit door and what happens there is the big question.

Is religion really like this, an act of preference where different elements can be mixed and matched at will? Or is religion something entirely different, like an antidote?

Instead of a supermarket, picture yourself in an emergency room with a serious illness. The doctor explains that the illness is 100 percent fatal unless one particular antidote is administered. He then goes on to say that recovery from the illness after taking the antidote has a 100 percent success rate. By this, the doctor is proclaiming that your preferences do not matter at all; they are not a part of the conversation. Whether or not you like to get shots or take pills is irrelevant. This particular ailment has a particular remedy that needs to be administered in a particular way. Do it or die.



Given this illness and the necessary treatment, a misdiagnosis is very dangerous. No one having a heart attack wants to go to a doctor who thinks the proper response is to put a leg in a cast. Proper treatment is necessary no matter how distasteful, inconvenient, painful, or even offensive. There is no going shopping for the treatment you like best. The remedy is the remedy—period. The patient must conform his thinking to accept the remedy or face the alternative.

The remedy is the remedy-period. The patient must conform his thinking to accept the remedy or face the alternative.



Christianity properly understood is an antidote, not a lifestyle choice or part of a well-balanced religious view. Like the antidote, it can be painful and inconvenient. It can be socially unacceptable. But most of all, it can be offensive. Most of us would much rather take the supermarket approach where we always ended up with a religion tailored to our lifestyles and preferences and could change as we changed.

But we cannot seriously believe like this. As human beings capable of rational thought, we are obliged to conform our beliefs to reality, not the other way around. Not to approach the world in this way is to create very dangerous situations. Before attempting to cross a street we must conform our beliefs about current traffic conditions to what we see around us. If we begin crossing the street because we prefer the street to be free of traffic and because it is more convenient to us, we risk being flattened by a bus. The bus doesn't care what we prefer or what is convenient. It is our responsibility to respond to the facts of the matter, to conform ourselves to them.

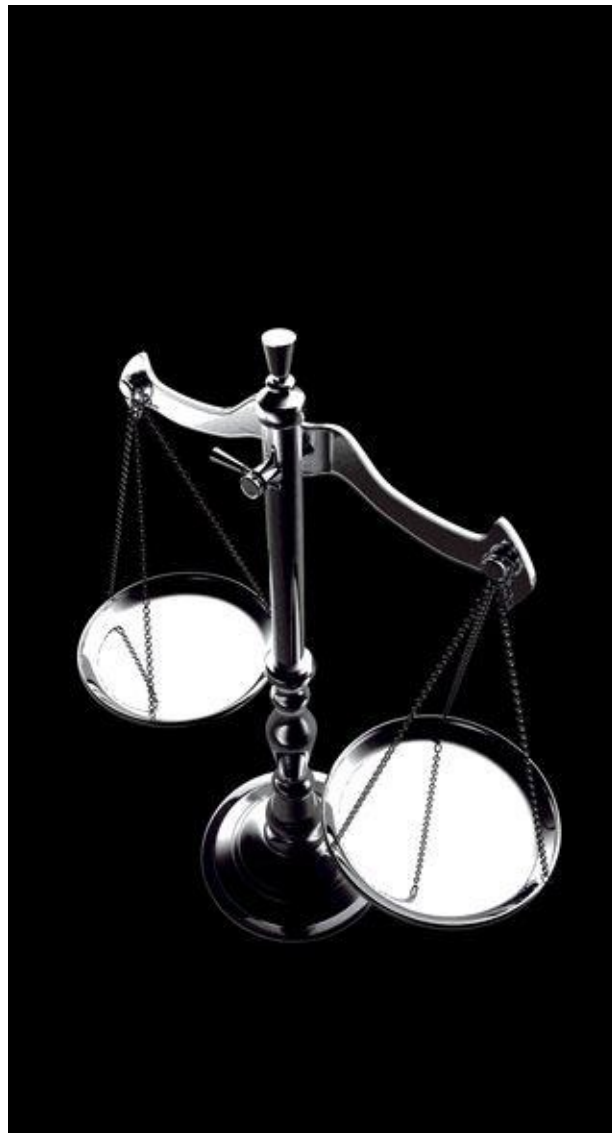
To do this, to form beliefs, we must investigate the world and its issues to discover facts and truths about them. This process, which we all employ, is useful for one simple reason: truth is true whether you believe it or not. Truth does not require belief in order to be true, but it does deserve to be

believed.

Spiritually speaking, we must gain an understanding of our situation to be able to understand why an antidote is necessary. It is the goal of the law of God to give us that understanding, that diagnosis, and the goal of the gospel of Jesus Christ to provide the antidote. Jesus is not just a cherry flavored cough syrup that works just as well as the lemon flavored Buddha. Belief in Jesus is an extremely invasive heart procedure that brings people to life. And it is the only procedure that will work.

Truth is true whether you believe it or not. Truth does not require belief in order to be true, but it does deserve to be believed.

But as human beings who would rather be in the supermarket we must be persuaded to go to the emergency room. We have many objections, barriers, biases, acculturations, conditions, misconceptions, presuppositions, distortion of facts, and any number of excuses. It is the goal of Christian apologetics to remove these hindrances that stand between a person and the cross of Christ.





Whatever its relation to the gospel, apologetics is an extremely important enterprise that can profoundly impact unbelievers and be used as the tool that clears the way to faith in Jesus Christ.

As a result, some Christians see apologetics as preevangelism; it is not the gospel, but it prepares the soil for the gospel.¹ Others make no such distinction, seeing apologetics, theology, philosophy, and evangelism as deeply entwined facets of the gospel.² Whatever its relation to the gospel, apologetics is an extremely important enterprise that can profoundly impact unbelievers and be used as the tool that clears the way to faith in Jesus Christ.

Apologetics Is for Believers as Well

For some, though, apologetics is not discovered until after making a profession of faith. Many Christians did not come to believe as a result of investigating the authority of the Bible, the evidence for the resurrection, or as a response to the philosophical arguments for God's existence. They simply responded to the proclamation of the gospel. Although these people have reasons for their belief, they are deeply personal reasons that often do not make sense to unbelievers. They know the truth but are not necessarily equipped to share or articulate the truth in a way that is understandable to those who have questions about their faith. It is quite possible to believe something is true without having a proper understanding of it or the ability to articulate it.

Christians who believe but don't know why are often insecure and comfortable only around other Christians. Defensiveness can quickly surface when challenges arise on issues of faith, morality, and truth because of a lack of information regarding the rational grounds for Christianity. At its worst, this can lead to either a fortress mentality or a belligerent faith, precisely the opposite of the Great Commission Jesus gave in Matthew 28:19–20. The charge of the Christian is not to withdraw from the

world and lead an insular life. Rather, we are to be engaged in the culture, to be salt and light.

The solution to this problem is for believers to become informed in doctrine, the history of their faith, philosophy, logic, and other disciplines as they relate to Christianity.

The solution to this problem is for believers to become informed in doctrine, the history of the faith, philosophy, logic, and other disciplines as they relate to Christianity. They need to know the facts, arguments and theology and understand how to employ them in a way that will effectively engage the culture. In short, the answer is Christian apologetics.

One of the first tasks of Christian apologetics is to provide information. A number of widely held assumptions about Christianity can be easily challenged with a little information. This is even true for persons who are generally well-educated. C. S. Lewis had always believed the Gospels were collections of myths like those of Balder, Adonis, and Bacchus. Lewis held this view until he first read the Gospels at age 31. Having read as many myths and legends as he had, Lewis recognized that what was in the Gospels did not fit this literary genre. The Gospels were simple eyewitness accounts of historical events, lacking the artistry of ancient myths.



Other assumptions widely held in our culture that can be challenged by both information and argument are:

- ***Jesus never lived.***
- ***You can't prove God exists.***
- ***There are no such things as miracles.***

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