

CHAPTER 2

APOLOGETICS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT PERIOD

Periods of apologetics

Throughout the history of the church since the time of Christ there have been major periods of time in which the circumstances of the church regarding the outside world have remained basically constant. In each period, apologists have spoken to the world, seeking to convince people that Christianity is true, and that the attacks against it are false. We can detect certain common strains or issues among apologists in each period.

[For a fairly detailed discussion from a critical perspective, see Avery Dulles, *A History of Apologetics* (New York: Corpus Instrumentorum, 1971)]

OT Period

Throughout this period the biblical writers simply assumed the existence of God as self-evident. For example, the Ten Commandments (Exod 20; Deut 5) base God's authority to command all aspects of human life on his existence as the Almighty God and as the Redeemer of Israel.

Several OT passages infer God's existence and attributes from the world he created and which he governs:

- “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is hidden from its heat.” (Ps 19:1-6)
- “Does he who implanted the ear not hear? Does he who formed the eye not see?” (Ps 94:9)

- “Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance? Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor? Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding? Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust. Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings. Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing. To whom, then, will you compare God? What image will you compare him to? As for an idol, a craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it. A man too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot. He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple. Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff. ‘To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?’ says the Holy One. Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.” (Isa 40:12-26)

NT period

This period includes the time of the events recorded in the NT, especially from the ministry of Christ to the end of the book of Acts, ca. A.D. 25-60. It also includes the time during which the NT was written, ca. A.D. 45-95. Basically, therefore, it covers the first century A.D., and is commonly called the Apostolic age.

During the first century the church faced challenges on several sides. *First*, there had to be a defense against the attacks of Judaism, both as to the truthfulness of the gospel claims, and as to the freedom the church had from Jewish regulations. *Second*, incipient Gnosticism was denying the importance of the human, physical nature of Jesus. *Third*, unbelieving Jews and Gentiles had to be convinced that Jesus was the only Son of God, the Messiah, and the Savior of the world. *Fourth*, young Christians had to be confirmed in the truthfulness of their faith, especially when facing persecutions. *Fifth*, while the Roman government helped protect Christianity in its early years, it soon became hostile to the church; and it was important that government officials and others of influence should realize that it was proper to grant freedom

and toleration to this “new” religion. Much of what the characters of the NT said, and of what its authors wrote, is directed to meeting these challenges.

Here follow in the notes a sample of the Scripture passages that reveal the method of apologetics employed by the people they speak about, and by the authors of the NT books. Many more passages could be adduced, but these provide the basic patterns.

Testimony of John the Baptist

John 1:6-9, 15, 19-34, There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’”

Now this was John’s testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, “I am not the Christ.”

They asked him, “Then who are you? Are you Elijah?”

He said, “I am not.”

“Are you the Prophet?”

He answered, “No.”

Finally they said, “Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”

John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, “I am the voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’”

Now some Pharisees who had been sent questioned him, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”

“I baptize with water,” John replied, “but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.”

This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.”

Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.”

- Appeal to his prophetic office (v. 23; cf. Isa 40:3)
- Appeal to special divine revelation in conjunction with observation (vv. 32-34)

Testimony of Jesus

John 5:31-47, “If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid. There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is valid.

“You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved. John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light.

“I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

“I do not accept praise from men, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?

“But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If (2nd class condition, contrary to fact) you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?”

- Appeal to testimony of John (vv. 31-35)
- Appeal to work he is doing (v. 36)
 - Miracles (here called “works” in Greek; cf. John 10:25, 32, 37-38)
 - Preaching of truth (cf. John 8:45-47; 17:7-8)
- Appeal to testimony of the Father (vv. 37-38)
 - At his baptism (see under John the Baptist)
 - (Later) at transfiguration (Synoptics)
 - (Later) before his passion (John 12:27-30)
- Appeal to the OT Scripture (vv. 39-40, 45-47)
 - (Cf. Luke 24:27, 44; and cf. Abraham’s remarks in Luke 16:29-31)

John 8:46, “Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don’t you believe me?”

- Appeal to his own godly life (implies he tells the truth)
 - Cf. his teaching in Matt 5:15-16 (light before men)
 - “I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.” (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*)

Testimony of Peter

Acts 2:14-39 (Pentecost sermon), Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

“In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.
Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.
I will show wonders in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.
The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.
And everyone who calls

on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ (Joel 2:28-32)

“Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. David said about him:

“‘I saw the Lord always before me.

Because he is at my right hand,

I will not be shaken.

Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;

my body also will live in hope,

because you will not abandon me to the grave,

nor will you let your Holy One see decay.

You have made known to me the paths of life;

you will fill me with joy in your presence.’ (Ps 16:8-11)

“Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,

“‘The Lord said to my Lord:

“‘Sit at my right hand

until I make your enemies

a footstool for your feet.’” (Ps 110:1)

“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

- Appeal to current special manifestations, gifts of Holy Spirit (vv. 15-21)
- Appeal to Jesus’ miracles (v. 22)
- Appeal to Jesus’ resurrection and eyewitnesses (v. 32)
- Appeal to fulfilled Scripture (vv. 16-21, and vv. 25-31, and vv. 34-36)

Acts 3:12-26 (sermon to Jews in temple after healing lame man), When Peter saw this, he said to them: “Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see.

“Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. For Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people’ (Deut 18:15-16).

“Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, ‘Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.’ When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.”

- Same arguments used by Peter as in Acts 2, with different OT passages and a different miracle

Apostolic miracles

Many passages in Acts show Peter (and later Paul) performing miracles through the name of Jesus. Some miracles brought judgment, but many more were of healing or raising someone from the dead. These miracles obviously had great apologetic value, and the apostles spoke of them as evidences of the truth of the gospel (cf. the disciples’ prayer in Acts 4:29-30). Reaction to these miracles, however, is recorded as mixed, either inspiring belief or confirming unbelief. They were designed to accredit the apostles and their message (cf. Rom 15:18-19; 2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:3-4); however, miracles by themselves are insufficient to prove God’s truth (cf. Matt 24:24; 2 Thess 2:9; Rev 13:13-15).

Acts 10:34-43 (sermon to Cornelius), Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what

is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

“We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

- Appeal to Jesus’ miracles (v. 38)
 - Especially exorcisms of demons (v. 38b)
 - Note eyewitnesses to miracles (v. 39)
- Appeal to Jesus’ resurrection (v. 40)
 - Again, eyewitnesses (v. 41-42)
- Appeal to OT prophecy about Jesus (v. 43)

Acts 11:4-17 (report to Jerusalem believers), Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened: “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds of the air. Then I heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’

“I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’

“The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.

“Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man’s house. He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.’

“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?”

- Appeal to direct revelation in opening church to Gentiles and fellowshiping with them
 - Vision of animals in sheet
 - Message of Spirit to accompany men to house of Cornelius
 - Cornelius' household baptized by Holy Spirit

1 Peter 1:10-12, Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

- Inspiration of Scriptures led to predictions of Christ, fulfilled in NT times and confirmed by evidences of Spirit in preaching of the apostles

1 Peter 2:12, 15, Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. . . . For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.

- Christians' godly conduct is an apologetic against ignorant attacks against Christianity

1 Peter 3:1-2, Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.

- Wives' godly conduct results in winning over unbelieving husbands

2 Peter 1:16-21, We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

- Appeal to Peter's eyewitness account of transfiguration (vv. 16-18)
- Appeal to "more certain" word of OT prophets (vv. 19-21)
 - Not from human origin (prophet's interpretation of events in his day)
 - Men spoke from God
 - Men "carried along by the Holy Spirit"

2 Peter 3:3-9, First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

- Appeal to God's providences in the past (vv. 3-7)
 - Argument against exclusive uniformitarianism
 - Earth destroyed before, by flood
 - Earth to be destroyed, by fire
 - (Argument by analogy)
- Appeal to nature of God and time (vv. 8-9)
 - Christian "world-view": time a creation of God; God above time (cf. Ps 90:4)

- God's mercy a reason for delay of judgment

Peter's influence in the gospel of Mark

According to the testimony of the early Christian writers, Peter was the main source Mark used to compose his gospel. As a matter of fact, it is asserted that Mark's gospel is a summary of the preaching of Peter concerning the life of Jesus. This agrees with the content of the gospel itself; the outline of Mark agrees closely with the testimony of Peter in Acts 10.

Mark appears to be directed to the Gentile world. It emphasizes the miracles and good deeds of Jesus. Likewise, it emphasizes his passion under the Romans, as instigated by the Jews.

Another emphasis of the gospel is the abrogation of the Jewish ceremonial laws, especially the dietary laws. Mark alone of the gospels contains the editorial statement that "in saying this, Jesus declared all foods 'clean'" (Mark 7:19; see the Greek and modern translations). This agrees with Peter's own concerns as shown in his dealings with Cornelius (Acts 10-11), his statements at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:10), and with his conduct and controversy at the Antioch church (Gal 2:11-21; note his agreement with Paul, evidenced not only by Paul in Galatians, but by himself in 2 Pet 3:15-16). This emphasis in Mark is directed to protecting the church against inroads by Judaizers or legalists.

Testimony of Paul

Acts 13:16-41 (sermon in synagogue in Antioch-Pisidia), Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: "Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! The God of the people of Israel chose our fathers; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt, with mighty power he led them out of that country, he endured their conduct for about forty years in the desert, he overthrew seven nations in Canaan and gave their land to his people as their inheritance. All this took about 450 years.

"After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. Then the people asked for a king, and he gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years. After removing Saul, he made David their king. He testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.'

"From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised. Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel. As John was completing his work, he said: 'Who do you think I am? I am not that one. No, but he is coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.'

“Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.

“We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm:

“You are my Son;
today I have become your Father’ (Ps 2:7).

The fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words:

“I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised
to David’ (Isa 55:3). So it is stated elsewhere:

“You will not let your Holy One see decay’ (Ps 16:10).

“For when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed. But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.

“Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you:

“Look, you scoffers,
wonder and perish,
for I am going to do something in your days
that you would never believe,
even if someone told you” (Hab 1:5).

- Appeal to fulfilled Scriptures in Jesus (vv. 22-23, 27, 29, 32-35)
- Appeal to John’s testimony (v. 25)
- Appeal to Jesus’ innocence (v. 28)
- Appeal to resurrection and witnesses (vv. 30-31)
- Appeal to requirement of prophecy in the light of observation (vv. 35-37)

Acts 14:14-17 (testimony to Gentiles in Lystra), But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: “Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn

from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.”

- First a simple declaration of the truth (vv. 14-15)
 - Note that all creation made by God
- Appeal to God’s graciousness to all people (vv. 16-17)
 - Gracious in longsuffering
 - Gracious in good providences

Acts 17:2-3 (in the synagogue in Thessalonica), As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ,” he said.

- Requirements of OT prophecy concerning the Messiah
 - These fulfilled in Jesus

Acts 17:22-31 (speech before the Areopagus), Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’

“Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone — an image made by man’s design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day

when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”

- Since this speech was made before a pagan audience (note the Epicureans and the Stoics in v. 18), it should be compared with his short speech in Acts 14.
- Finds a place to start, an “unknown god” (vv. 22-23)
 - (Paul does not start by identifying the true God with one of the gods they have named; he had no tolerance for the false gods of the Greeks; cf. v. 16; Christian apologetics must be radical)
- Appeal to the creation as evidence of the power and immensity of God (vv. 24-25)
- Appeal from providence in history (vv. 26-28)
 - Note quotation from Greek Stoic poet Aratus, by Paul’s time a widely used text: “For we are his [Zeus’] offspring”; Paul adapts the quotation to the Christian God; it appears that the earlier statement, “In him we live and move and have our being” is a Christian statement, not a quotation from Epimenides (cf. Robert M. Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century* [1988], p. 27)
- Appeal to nature of man as creature (v. 29); cf. Ps 115:4-8
- Appeal to resurrection of Jesus (vv. 30-31)

Acts 20:33-35 (message to Ephesian elders), I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

- Appeal to Paul’s own life-style as an evidence of his sincerity and the truth of his message
 - (This theme is repeated frequently in Paul’s epistles)

Acts 22:1-21 (speech from the steps of Antonia fortress),

“Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense.”

When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.

Then Paul said: “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, as also the high priest and all the Council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

“About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?’

“‘Who are you, Lord?’ I asked.

“‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.

“‘What shall I do, Lord?’ I asked.

“‘Get up,’ the Lord said, ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.’ My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

“A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. He stood beside me and said, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very moment I was able to see him.

“Then he said: ‘The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.’

“When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance and saw the Lord speaking. ‘Quick!’ he said to me. ‘Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me.’

“‘Lord,’ I replied, ‘these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.’

“Then the Lord said to me, ‘Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

- Appeal to his own former life and the circumstances of his conversion (vv. 1-11)
- Appeal to the testimony of Ananias, received by divine revelation (vv. 12-16)
- Appeal to divine revelation in Jerusalem (vv. 17-21)

Acts 24:10-21 (trial before Felix), When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied: “I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I gladly make my defense. You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. And they cannot prove to you the charges they are

now making against me. However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

“After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance. But there are some Jews from the province of Asia, who ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me. Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin—unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence: ‘It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.’”

- Appeal to his sincerity and belief in and obedience to the OT law, the law of Rome, and “the Way” of Christ
- (Note: basically the same appeal made in his trial before Festus, Acts 25:8)

Acts 26:1-29 (speech before Herod Agrippa II), Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You have permission to speak for yourself.”

So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense: “King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews, and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.

“The Jews all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee. And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial today. This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. O king, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me. Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?

“I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.

“On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’

“Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” the Lord replied. “Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”

“So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. But I have had God’s help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen—that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles.”

At this point Festus interrupted Paul’s defense. “You are out of your mind, Paul!” he shouted. “Your great learning is driving you insane.”

“I am not insane, most excellent Festus,” Paul replied. “What I am saying is true and reasonable. The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.”

Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”

Paul replied, “Short time or long—I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.”

- Appeal to his earlier life (vv. 1-7)
- Appeal to possibility that God can raise the dead (v. 8)
 - (A good verse for those who deny the possibility of miracles)
- Appeal to the circumstances of his own conversion (vv. 9-18)
- Appeal to his present ministry and to its agreement with prophetic scriptures (vv. 19-23, 27)
- Appeal to truth and reasonableness of what he says (vv. 25-26)

Acts 28:17-20 (speech to Jews in Rome), Three days later he called together the leaders of the Jews. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: “My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to

Caesar — not that I had any charge to bring against my own people. For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.”

- Appeal to his own innocence
 - Statements against him attributed to opposition of the Jews

1 Thessalonians 1:4-5, 9; 2:13, For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. . . for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

- Christianity evidenced by effectiveness of their conversion

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

- Christianity evidenced by godly lives
- (These evidences for Christianity, noted in 1 Thessalonians, are frequently repeated in Paul’s epistles)

1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5, For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”

Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.

- Appeal to the unexpectedness of God’s plan
 - Not appeal to human wisdom
 - Not appeal to human strength
 - Appeal to crucifixion of Christ (1:23; 2:2)
 - Appeal to weakness of Christ’s followers (1:26-29; 2:1, 3-4)
- Appeal to the perfection of Jesus Christ (vv. 30-31)

1 Corinthians 2:6-16, We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written:

“No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those who love
him”—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing

spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment:

“For who has known the mind of the Lord
that he may instruct him?”

But we have the mind of Christ.

- Rulers ignorant, thus crucified Jesus (v. 8)
- Appeal to divine regeneration of the elect
 - Impossible to be a believer without new birth

1 Corinthians 14:22-25, Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers. So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, “God is really among you!”

- Appeal to spiritual gifts, especially prophecy
 - Cf. the excellent treatment by Phil Roberts, *The Gift of Tongues: An Evaluation* (1991)

1 Corinthians 15:3-8, For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

- Appeal to the death, burial, resurrection of Christ, as attested by many witnesses

2 Corinthians 2:14-17, But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?

Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.

- Appeal to his own preaching and ministry
 - Accomplishes God's purpose whether believed or not

Galatians 1:8-9, But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

- Appeal to authority of apostolic preaching
 - No empirical, testimonial, or other evidence to contradict what has been revealed

Romans 1:18-23, The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

- Classic “natural theology” passage
- The creation demonstrates the eternal power and divine nature of God (cf. Ps 19 and Rom 10:18)
- This revelation is clearly understood by all who observe nature
- Because of our sinful nature, natural man suppresses this knowledge
- The suppression of this knowledge results in the judicial darkening of the mind by God
- As a result, man forms his own gods and worships the creation instead of the Creator
- Other sins result from this error (rest of Rom 1)

- [for a recent summary of interpretations of this important passage, see Richard Alan Young, “The Knowledge of God in Romans 1:18-23: Exegetical and Theological Reflections,” *JETS* 43:4 (Dec 2000) 695-707]

Romans 2:12-16, All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) This will take place on the day when God will judge men’s secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

- Deals with Gentiles and the evidence of conscience

Many (as evidenced in the NIV translation) consider this passage as discussing unbelieving Gentiles, who nonetheless have God’s law implanted in their consciences as an evidence that shall be used against them. Thus the existence of the conscience, and the presence of some kind of moral law among people untaught in Christianity, is an evidence pointing to the existence and moral character of God.

However, it appears better to understand this passage as speaking of believing Gentiles. The first sentence could be translated as follows:

“Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law by nature, do the things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, . . . “

In this case, Paul is speaking of the new covenant, which promises to write the law of God on the hearts of believers. The phrase “by nature” would refer not to their doing the law, but to their not having the law (by birth and culture). With this understanding, we do not need to supply the parentheses necessary in the prior translation. Paul teaches elsewhere that the unbeliever does not have God’s law in his heart (e.g., Rom 8:7-8). (For further defense of this view, see Cranfield, *ICC*, ad loc.)

If this understanding of the passage is correct, the evidence for God’s existence and moral law would be found not in the conduct of unbelieving Gentiles, but rather in that of believing Gentiles.

Romans 13:1-7, Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established

by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

. . . and Titus 3:1-2, Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.

- While not explicitly apologetic, these passages set the tone for the Christian's relation to a potentially hostile state. Paul teaches proper submission and respect for the civil authority, while at the same time the responsibility of the civil magistrate as a minister of God. Future apologists encouraged this submission and this consideration by the government.

Testimony of Matthew

In addition to the statements of Jesus recorded in Matthew's gospel, Matthew himself provides evidences for the truth of the Christian message. Perhaps the most forceful is his continual referring to Jesus' actions as fulfilling OT prophecies (cf. the similar argument from OT prophecies, this time fulfilled in secular history, in John Urquhart, *The Wonders of Prophecy* [1925]). He sees Jesus' life itself as a fulfillment of the experience of the Hebrews in the wilderness, starting from Egypt, being "baptized" in the Red Sea, being sustained forty years in the wilderness, receiving the law from God, and entering the promised land. Many individual events in Jesus' life are specific fulfillments of OT prophecies, recognized so in Matthew's gospel.

Another purpose of Matthew is to show why the Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah. He shows that this rejection was expected by Jesus and the OT, and led to the bringing in of the Gentiles.

Finally, Matthew deals with the argument of the Jews that Jesus' disciples took his body from the tomb, claiming he was raised from the dead. This same attack was made seventeen centuries later by Reimarus. Matthew relates the account of the beginning of this false rumor (28:11-15), probably upon the information of a converted guard or priest (cf. Acts 6:7).

Testimony of Luke

Luke's two volume work Luke-Acts was written for an explicitly apologetic purpose (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-2), "that you might know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed."

Luke makes it a point that his account is based not only on the written accounts of others, but on first-hand testimony and the testimony of other eye-witnesses. He had many occasions to interview such people.

The purpose or purposes of Luke-Acts have been the object of much scholarly discussion. These apologetic purposes seem to be apparent:

- 1) To show that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Son of God, as proved by his life, teachings, miracles, resurrection, and ascension
- 2) To show that the gospel which Paul preached in Rome was the same gospel that began with Jesus Christ in Galilee and Judea and that was preached by the other apostles
- 3) To show that the Holy Spirit guided the apostles in the days after Jesus' ascension
- 4) To show that Peter, as the leader of the Jewish believers, and Paul, as the leader of the Gentile believers, were united in the apostolic tradition
- 5) To show the unity of the church, whether Jewish or Gentile
- 6) To show that Paul was the God-appointed apostle to the Gentiles, and that his gospel was from God
- 7) To show that the early opposition to the church came from the Jewish establishment, and that the Roman government, embodied in its officials, approved of the spread of Christianity

Testimony of John

John's gospel is organized around the increasing evidence for the deity and messiahship of Jesus, the increasing faith and loyalty of his disciples, and the increasing bitterness and animosity of his enemies. It presents the miracles of Jesus as a series of seven "signs," which are explicitly designed to produce faith in the reader.

John 20:30-31, Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

- It is only by the most incredible blindness that Jesus' enemies refuse to believe in him (cf. John 11:47-48). These signs of Jesus thus reveal two things: they reveal truths about Jesus (related to the seven "I am" sayings), and they reveal the state of heart of the people who observe the signs (whether they are elect, or whether they are not; cf. Luke 2:34-35). In this regard, John distinctly teaches that acceptance of the gospel depends on God's effectual calling (as in John 6:37).