

NG Study Guide: 1 Pet. 3:15 “Love God with All Your Mind” Apologetics Series Pt. 1 [7.15.18]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. *Leader note: Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

The Study

Thesis: Everyone has a belief about God: whether God does or does not exist, the nature of God, and can God be known? Do you know what you believe and why you believe it? Does the evidence support your worldview? Jesus declared that the greatest commandment was to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and *with all your mind* [Mt. 22:37, Dt. 6:5]. Biblical Christianity, unlike any other belief system, is reasoned and reasonable in that it can withstand critical analysis. In this study, we focus on loving God with our minds so that we can be prepared to defend our faith.

Today we begin a seven-week series on reasons to believe. Doctrine is what the Bible teaches, and apologetics refers to the defense of the faith. The Greek term *apologia* refers to a defense as in a court of law. We want to examine if there is a case for the truth of the faith, or a rational basis to believe the gospel is true.

Theme verse: Set-apart the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give an answer (apologia) to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with gentleness and respect” [1Pet.3:15]. All Christians should know what they believe and why, and be able to explain it with gentleness and respect. You don’t want to be abrasive when trying to be persuasive. And apologetics is not about winning a debate, but being involved in God’s work of winning souls.

A. Why apologetics are important

To shift the culture and reinforce reason to our faith:

According to research from Pew Institute, Gallup, and Barna the church today is more guided by feelings than by convictions. We value enthusiasm more than informed commitment. C.S. Lewis observed, “Christ wants us to have a child’s heart, but a grown-up’s head.”

There has been a loss of the Christian worldview in our country. Let’s consider four trends influencing the shift away from a Christian worldview.

One reason for this has been an **emphasis on personal conversion rather than a deep understanding of Christian doctrine**. Second, there has been an **assault on the faith** beginning in the 1800s with German philosophers like Kant asserting that God cannot exist since God is not perceived with the senses. Then the reliability of the Bible was attacked, and Darwin proposed his thoughts on our origins and evolution. Neo-atheists presently aggressively attack the Christian worldview.

A third cultural shift was **the emergence of a secular culture**. Universities, media, and government lack meaningful religious discussion. It is still the norm in the U.S. to believe in a generic God, but not necessarily the God of the Bible. G.K. Chesterton noted, “Once people stop believing in God, the problem is not that they will believe nothing; rather, the problem is that they will believe anything.”

The fourth shift was **moral relativism replaced moral absolutes**. Our society is characterized by minimalistic ethics: anything is morally permissible provided only that you don’t harm others.

To strengthen believers:

Knowing what you believe and why leads to confidence in your faith and a desire to share. When people learn what they believe and why they become bold in their witness and attractive in the way they engage others in dialogue about their faith.

To reach unbelievers:

Ultimately salvation is a work of the Holy Spirit, but many people reject the gospel, because they don’t understand the rational arguments and overwhelming evidence beyond a reasonable doubt that support the Christian faith.

B. Four powerful arguments for God and Christianity:

1. **The beginning of the universe** clearly points to a Creator. Whatever begins to exist has a cause. The universe began therefore, the universe has a cause.
2. **Intelligent design:** the incredible fine tuning defies coincidence and reveals the handiwork of an intelligent designer.
3. **Morality:** objective moral values are evidence of God, and only God could establish a universal standard of right and wrong. The existence of “evil” shows there is a standard of good and God. You don’t need to believe in God to display some goodness.
4. **Evidence of the resurrection:** the empty tomb and missing body of Jesus, the eyewitness accounts, the martyred apostles and transformed lives of the disciples all provide evidence beyond a reasonable doubt. When Thomas doubted Jesus’ resurrection, the Lord provided the evidence Thomas needed [Jn. 20]. The evidence for the Christian faith is overwhelming.

C. Developing your mind for God:

Paul begged believers to understand and respond to the gospel by yielding their lives to God which was only reasonable in light of all that God has done through Jesus,

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” [Rom 12:1].

Paul understood that in order to yield their lives to God they needed to be transformed, *“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God”* [Rom. 12:2].

Don’t be conformed to this world is the idea of resisting the thinking and behavior of the culture around you that is opposed to God. Instead, we are to be *transformed*. The Greek term translated “transformed” is *metamorphoo* which is the basis of the English metamorphosis, and is associated with a caterpillar’s transformation to a butterfly. God wants to transform us to be something else that beautifully displays His glory. The way to be transformed is the work of the Holy Spirit in a believer, and the *renewing of the mind*. You can change your thinking about God and sin by developing your mind for God. By learning the Bible and spending time with Jesus and yielding to Him you *prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God*. In essence, a transformed life displays the goodness of God, the superiority of His will, and a spiritually mature follower of Christ.

As Jesus’ followers, we need to recognize that we are called to love God with all our mind, and thus need to develop our minds for God. Yes, we want to love God with our hearts which relates to feelings and emotions. And we want to love God with our body or strength which focuses on behavior or doing. But without loving God with your mind you cannot display what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. The display of the good and acceptable and perfect will of God is one of the greatest apologetics imaginable.

You develop you mind by spending time with Christ, learning of and from him, and by becoming a student of the Bible. Study Bibles, commentaries, active participation in a Bible teaching church, small group, and mentor relationships are all great ways to develop your mind for God.

Series overview:

Bible: Has God Really Said ...?

Bible: How Did We Get It?

Creation: How Did We Get Here and Why Are We Here?

God: How Can We Explain God?

God: How Can We Explain Hardship or Evil?

Truth: Is There Absolute Truth?

Christ: Who Do You Say Jesus Is?

Study Guide Qs

Q1. How comfortable are you with the idea of defending your faith? How might a study on apologetics help prepare you?

Q2. Review the section, “Why apologetics are important – to shift the culture and reinforce reason to our faith.” How have you observed those trends?

Q3. Some of us enjoy studying more than others. Share some of your challenges, and experiences to encourage one another about developing your mind.

Q4. How would you like to apply this lesson to your life?

“Digging Deeper” (optional or alternative study)

Recommended apologetics books:

1. ***The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*** by Josh McDowell; Nelson Pub.
2. ***God Wrote A Book*** by James MacDonald; Crossway Pub.
3. ***Can You Trust The Bible?*** by Ralph O. Muncaster; Harvest House Pub.
4. ***The Case For Faith*** by Lee Strobel; Zondervan Pub.
5. ***The Moody Handbook of Theology*** by Paul Enns; Moody Pub.
6. ***Love God With All Your Mind*** by J.P. Moreland; Navpress Pub.
7. ***The Reason For God*** by Timothy Keller.
8. ***On Guard*** by Wm. Lane Craig.

Love your neighbor *outside* the group better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors where they live, work, study, or play this past week?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor outside the group?
3. Here is a neighboring idea(s) for us to consider for the week(s) ahead:

As you gather with friends for recreation offer to pray for them before and after your activities. Consider asking them if there are any matters that you can pray for. I (PB) have found this to be a great way to keep God on our minds as we cycle, and to express love to my neighbors that I ride with.

Love your neighbor *inside* the group better:

1. Are there some needs in our group that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor within the group?
2. What might we do about that need to help?

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

1. **Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.

2. Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.

3. The "Digging Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities. As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Digging Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.

4. Every time you meet consider asking:

a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing? If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.