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# Are You a Wise Apologist (or Just a Wise Guy)?

(March 14, 2023)

# Jorge:

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist midweek podcast. I'm your host Jorge Gil. I'm one of the speakers at CrossExamined.org and I'm here with Dr. John Ferrer, another one of our speakers. We're going to be talking about what apologetics can and cannot do. We actually focus a lot of our time and resources here at CrossExamined.org, to teach people how to defend the faith. That's what apologetics does, to give evidence for the Christian faith.

But we as apologists have also done some things that kind of put us in a negative light. Apologetics has also been put in a category where sometimes people think that this is all we need to be able to bring people to the foot of the cross. So on this episode, we want to talk about the things that we can and cannot do through apologetics. Now apologetics is a beautiful exercise.

It's an incredible tool to bring a bunch of other fields together, to give us a robust case in favor of the Christian faith. But we also want to make sure that with humility, we realize that it has its limits. Now I'm going to bring in John to give us a bit of the insights that he's been able to gather throughout his years as a an educator. And also a person who has really done his research and his work when it comes to apologetics. So without further ado, how you doing, John?

# John:

Hey, Jorge, we're doing well.

### Jorge:

So let's talk a little bit about apologetics. Let's start with what that word means, apologia.







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### John:

So apologetics is the defense of the historic Christian faith. Now you can apply apologetics to anything and it's defending anything. You could have a defense for your favorite sports team. I'm a Carolina Panthers fan. And if I'm making a case that's somehow contrary to the best evidence that Carolina is the best team in the NFL, I would be making a defense, giving an apologetic for them. Now, I wouldn't make that case. As much of a fan as I am, I'm not prepared to to go contrary to the facts of the matter. They're not really doing that great so far in the offseason. But that's another discussion for another day. But the long and short of it is, apologetics refers to that field and or that skill wherein you're trying to defend something. And often that's fed not so much through merely intellectual matters, knowledge, information data.

Often, it flows at least as much or more so from the heart, from your passion. That is, you defend the things you love. And people who have no interest in defending the historic Christian faith, or defending different elements of it or defending certain teachings of the faith, if they're not interested in apologetics at any level, that raises a genuine question. To what extent do you really love the truth of Christ? Is Christ someone you would love enough to defend?

And if you're not willing to defend, what does that say about the kind of relationship you have with Him? If He could be defaced and defamed in the public square, people can tell all sorts of lies about Him. The truth of Christianity can just be disparaged and run into the ground. And if you can stand idly by without offering even a word of defense, I think that's not so much a check on your intellect, as it is a check on, how much do you love Jesus?

### Jorge:

Yeah, that's a very interesting point because in the world of apologetics, people like you like myself, like Frank and many others out there who are doing great work in this field. A lot of us kind of have that reputation of being geeky or nerdy or being Bible nerds. But like you said, this deep desire to defend God and His word should come from the relationship that you have. How much you see the beauty of Jesus, the love that you have for Jesus, the relationship that you have with Jesus.







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### Jorge:

Let's use this analogy. When somebody talks about about your wife, you know how beautiful and lovely and kind and hardworking your wife is. You want to make an apologetic in favor of your wife's character. And we are the bride of Christ, right? We should be out there defending the truth because in that truth, there is salvation. And we should also always take into consideration the idea that this is not something that we're doing just to win arguments. This is one of the main misconceptions about apologetics, that apologetics is just there to win arguments. We as apologists, nine times out of ten, forget about winning souls, which is the ultimate goal. So what are the biggest misconceptions about apologetics?

### John:

Well, I think there are two sides to that question. What are the biggest misconceptions about apologetics from apologists? And then, what are the biggest misconceptions about apologetics from people who aren't into apologetics? They aren't trying to do it. They may not have a high view of it. What do they think apologetics is? And how are they misunderstanding it?

I think these two kind of feed into each other, in that one of the biggest misconceptions apologists have about it, is we tend to treat it (regardless of what we think about it), we tend to do it and treat it like it's just argumentation. It's just argumentative people arguing over doctrinal matters or arguing over ideas and philosophy. You know, the heady intellectual type of stuff. And that's certainly part of the broader umbrella of what apologetics is. But there's a lot of ways you can defend the faith.

When St. Peter is using the phrasing of apologia, when he talks about, always be prepared to give an answer, give a defense for the historic Christian faith. There may be an intellectual, rational, philosophical component to it. But in context, he's talking to people who are facing persecution. He's talking to people who their life is actively being threatened. Their job, their civil status is actively being threatened. How are those kinds of people supposed to give a defense?







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### John:

Well, rational argumentation is one of them, but a lot of it is just being morally distinct. Live out the counter cultural lifestyle that Christ models and commands us to. That's a big part of our defense. Do family in a way that contradicts the bad teachings about family relationships that are popular in society. Those are still aspects of giving a defense.

Now formally speaking, when folks talk about apologetics, they're usually talking about rational argumentation. But it's not just that. It goes beyond that. Because many apologists are doing apologetics in a way that makes it look like it's just a bunch of argumentative people arguing, that gives us a reputation for those outside the church, that these are just a bunch of argumentative people: nit picky, pedantic, insatiable. Nothing you say or do will satisfy them. They're always gonna find some way to take a word you just said, and get upset about it. And that's not the kind of person that you invite to your parties. Right?

### Jorge:

So what you're saying, is that we as apologists have a bad reputation because of this, because we are argumentative. We are always, even within the church, we are kind of fighting against each other. We give emphasis to these intellectual arguments and we leave the relational aspect of it to the side. I think that was very, very interesting in how we are now involved in a culture war. And our behavior and our Christian morals are a very powerful apologetic.

Let's look at someone like Mike Pence, that was made fun of because he lived by the Modesto manifesto. He didn't want to be in a room with another woman that is not his wife, just him and the other woman. As if that is so antiquated. But it is something that has a lot to do with the way he wants to take care of himself morally, right? So I think that this is one of the aspects that we don't talk about much. Now, tell me a little bit more about this bad rep that we get as apologists.







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### John:

Yeah. Well, I think the some of the good intention behind apologists is that we recognize that we are engaged in spiritual warfare as a church. This isn't just a metaphor. This is literal. There's literal spiritual warfare going on in lives and families, relationships, society. These are all potentially plunder, and right now, the wreckage and the landscape is what we spend so much of our time lamenting in our apologetics diatribes.

And so folks that recognize that there's a spiritual warfare going on, might therefore recognize we need to be the Church militant. That's a classic phrase that believers use to describe all living believers. All Christians, the Church capital C, is the Church militant. And the Church at rest, those are the believers that have passed on. Believers who've died and they're with their savior now. We are the Church militant. And that's the normal disposition, because spiritual warfare is what's going on. It's a dimension of everything that's going on.

Apologists rightly recognize that church should at least have this aspect, wherein we're training people for spiritual warfare. We're training them to be soldiers for truth. Now, of course, that creates a challenge if the normal paradigm that churches are operating under isn't church militant, it's church therapeutic. It's we are trying to minister to hurting souls. There's nothing wrong with that in principle. But there's a balancing act. And if we get out of balance, then apologists just come off as overly militant, aggressive, and argumentative. And the church ends up becoming too hostile to that too, unwilling to embrace that aspect. And so they're not really training believers for spiritual warfare. They're training them to feel happier and healthier and more whole, but not necessarily training them to be useful. [unintelligible]

I kind of gravitate to apologetics in part because there's this macho, combative, competitive aspect to Christian thought life, that is downplayed and ignored in a lot of contemporary church culture. But historically, that hasn't always been the case. Now, if I go out, and I take that and I go hog wild and I'm starting arguments everywhere I go, and I'm considering myself this deputy Holy Spirit and trying to pinpoint everybody else's sins and say, "This is wrong. This teacher needs to repent." I can just make a stink of myself because none of that truth seeking is necessarily balanced with the wider Christian responsibilities that we have of being agents of reconciliation, being peacemakers. Not just throwing truth bombs from a distance, but going into people's lives and engaging.







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### John:

Getting in the thick of it, getting down in the mud and living the hard parts of their life with them, so that they know they're not alone. And then we can bring in the truth and the different challenging aspects in balance with grace and love. And it's in that bigger picture, that balance, where we have wisdom and love and truth and grace, and orthodoxy. All of that works together in this big ball of wax. It's when we compartmentalize that we end up imbalanced, and just coming off like all salt, and no recipe.

# Jorge:

This is so good because in the era of the digital ministry, we have, YouTube ministries. We have apologetics ministries that are solely based on digital platforms: TikTok, Instagram, YouTube. And we see a lot of these bad apples out there. Now, I want to be clear. The majority of them, I will say 95% of those ministers, are doing amazing work. They are my friends. I actually advise a lot of them. Part of what I do is to focus, especially here in CrossExamined. I'm the technology and innovation director. So I am eager to use these tools that the Lord has given us to reach out to the younger generations and to be able to get the message far and wide through the digital platforms that exist today.

But one of the things that I see is how much colder things get online and how easy it is for people to hide behind an anonymous account and to start beating people down. Now some of them might have great intentions, but their execution is poor. Intent is always prior to content. The intentions that we have is always prior to the way that we execute things and the goals that we might have for a conversation. The one on one and in person execution of this apologetics enterprise sometimes can go the negative route because we forget about the relationship. This is magnified times 100 on social media. And we are guilty of that many of times.







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### Jorge:

Now, I want to ask you to give me a few of the things that apologetics can do and a few of the things that apologetics cannot do. Some of us have an idea that apologetics can do everything and bring people to the foot of the cross and that apologetics has no limits. We see a group of people who are passionate about it. They want to be the next William Lane Craig, but sometimes their execution comes at a cost. At a cost to our reputation, at a cost to even the enterprise of apologetics. So give us a few of the items that you have on the list of what apologetics can do, and what apologetics cannot do.

### John:

Yeah, the whole time you're framing that question, I'm picturing someone who has a hammer and is treating everything like a nail. Yeah, they've got their apologetics and they want to use that to repair everything. Apologetics as a field, and as a skill, and as a passion. I'm thinking of it in sort of a three fold dynamic there. Apologetics is a field of knowledge. It's a passion, a disposition of the heart, something that's fueled by love and zeal. But it's also a skill to where you have to get practice. You have to learn how to do it right.

And in that sense, apologetics can be great for refuting heresy and for helping to reinforce and fortify orthodox teaching, the historic Christian teachings of the Church. It can answer bad ideas with good ideas. It can clarify where our theology is cloudy, so that you can get a better sense of "What do you mean by these terms?" We're not always dealing in heresy when you've got cloudy language. Sometimes it's just, we don't have the words. And good apologetics can help say, "Oh, do you mean it like this? Or do you mean it like that?"

Apologetics can enrich your thought life and your study habits. It can help you cultivate better communication skills. It can help you develop the academic tradition in a denomination, or in a church, or even in a family. I found a lot of what drove me to apologetics was this concern for the thought life and the intellectual aspect of historic Christianity. Because we might get taught here's what to believe.







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### John:

But we're not necessarily taught why we believe it or what are the implications of that? Or what does that look like? Or how do we spot it and apply it in different parts of society? Because often in church, we're leaving those separated so that you don't see how that goes together intellectually. And for anyone who's a thinker who enjoys school, who enjoys learning, who enjoys studying, many times, that kind of person isn't really embraced by the Church.

We don't necessarily know as a church what to do with people that ask questions that aren't in the Sunday school guide. We don't necessarily know what to do with them. So that intellectual life of the church is one thing that drove me to apologetics so that I could kind of help reinforce and build that part up so that we can love the Lord our God, not just with our feelings, not just with our hands, not just with our will and our choice and our faith, but also with our minds. This is a holistic act of service.

So, apologetics can develop the academic intellectual traditions in a denomination, in a church, or in a family. It could lend richness to your education and your discipleship. It can help uncover implications and inferences within different Christian ideas or other ideas. It can help you protect loved ones from pernicious ideologies. This is a big reason why my wife, Hillary, started Mama Bear Apologetics. She saw all these moms who are clamoring for for some sense of what to do with what's going on with their kids in schools. How do we help these kids along so that they stay in the faith and aren't just casualties of the youth exodus?

Apologetics is an act of love towards the upcoming generation so that they are better protected. Understanding that we're imparting this rich heritage in Christ. And if you're just throwing it away, it's quite likely because you didn't understand what a great thing you had. You were just presented with the surface appearance of it, and not a deep, rich understanding of just how invaluable and critically important this is for life and eternity. That's just some of the things that it's good for. I didn't get into the what it can't do just yet.







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# Jorge:

And I think that we have to emphasize that apologetics in this day and age is done very differently than it was done, let's say 50 years ago, 75 years ago, 20 years ago, even 10 years ago due to the development of social media and the explosion of the internet and all the different ways that we're able to communicate nowadays.

#### John:

And new atheism has kind of gone over the horizon. It's come and gone in many ways. Not gone gone, but it's changed and morphed.

# Jorge:

Now we have progressive Christianity kind of taking root. We have all these other bad ideologies, kind of taking a hold of our kid's minds. But before we talk about how apologetics has changed over the years or how we have to change the way we engage in the apologetics enterprise, let's talk about the things that apologetics cannot do. Because a lot of people still have this idea that apologetics can do it all. And they go into the field of apologetics with this idea that once you know apologetics, everybody that I know will become a Christian because I will have all the answers. And I will be able to debunk all these bad ideas that they have. Let's talk about what apologetics cannot do, John.

#### John:

Apologetics, as we noted is, it's probably not just a hammer that you use to hammer nails and you treat everything like a nail, so you start hammering it. It's probably more like a tool bag, that there's a lot of options within it. But even still, apologetics understood as a field of theology or a field of philosophy, is still one aspect of the larger operation of the Church. The Church is supposed to be an instrument of evangelism, discipleship, worship, ministry, and caregiving. And apologetics can serve all of those, but it doesn't replace any of those.

What kinds of things is it really good at? We talked about those. And by implication, it's not really good necessarily at silencing heretics. It can help you spot them and call them out. But it's not necessarily going to equip you to leverage power to be able to silence false teaching. At best it can help you to pinpoint it so that people who are like minded and want to avoid false teaching and avoid the heretics, can hear these warning warnings and stay away.







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#### John:

Apologetics can't replace your devotional or meditational life. No amount of reading the books and learning the answers necessarily means that you are growing richer and deeper in your personal, relational understanding with with Jesus Christ. Your devotional life with Him, who you are with Christ, when no one else is around, when no one else is watching, in secret that devotional life. Apologetics might be able to strengthen your mind. But you still have a heart life and private disciplines that you have to be investing to be growing in the faith at a personal level.

Of course, it doesn't replace evangelism. It can be tremendously empowering to your evangelism. Lots of ministers have found that when they are trying to communicate the Christian faith to people who aren't believers, and present it in ways that answers the questions and speaks to the challenges that they face so that they see Christ for all of his winsome beauty. Apologetics can go hand in hand with evangelism. But it doesn't replace it and it never has, and probably never will. You can do all the argumentation and answering. But if you stop short of saying, are you willing to let Christ be Lord of your life? If you do all of that and stop there and don't take it the rest of the way, you're fumbling on the one yard line.

Apologetics is tremendously important and powerful. It's something like the combat aspects of taking the ball down the field. But if you never get into the end zone, then you're still not winning. At some point, there has to be some transition from just communicating information to life application. Here's what I do with this knowledge that Jesus should be Lord of my life. Now, let's make him Lord of my life. And that's the evangelism part.

Also, apologetics can't change people's minds. That's maybe psychology, the skill of persuasion. You can give people truth upon truth after truth. You can line up a whole series of evidences. You can tailor it to whatever is most persuasive to them. But people still have a choice to make. And if a person does not want to believe, no amount of evidence will persuade them. It can, however, clear away the fog so that the real reasons for non-belief are patently obvious. But people still have a choice to make. On that note, apologetics can't make anyone believe in Jesus. There is no such thing as a rational proof that compels the will. There's still an act of the will.







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# Jorge:

Let's focus on that, because I've heard it 1,000,001 times. People say that apologetics will never convert anyone. Then I have the other side. People are saying, "I came to faith through apologetics." But I think making that fine distinction that you just made is very important. This is not either or, it's both and. Apologetics will clear all the obstacles and then you will come face to face with the truth. That's the difference between belief that and belief in. Go ahead and expand on that a little bit and make it clear for our hearers.

### John:

To build on that phrase you just used, belief that versus belief in. Occasionally, I'll end up in discussions with atheists who are kind of retreating in this knowledge of belief and faith, that it's intellectually assenting to some proposition that Jesus is God. And if you grant that at some theoretical ideological level, what does that do? They could say, "I could try to believe it with the evidence you give me, but I just don't. It's not compelling. What you're saying isn't winsome to me." I would have to back up and say, for one thing, even if you granted that proposition, the Christian faith is a call not just into intellectual assent. That's definitely an aspect of what's going on when people go from non believer to believer. That's definitely an aspect.

But faith is also fidelity, as in relational faith, faithfulness. There's the beginning of a relationship that is premised on some kind of head knowledge. But it still has to go from belief that Jesus is Lord, to belief in Jesus as Lord. That idea has to sink the proverbial fifteen inches from the head to the heart. It's not just something intellectual, but it becomes something more holistic and complete that engages you in a relational level.

So I'm glad you stopped me there because it would be easy for someone to hear what I just said and think, "Oh, he just disagreed with CS Lewis and Lee Strobel," people who would say that their art in apologetics won them over to the faith. I think what they would say in this kind of conversation is, the apologetics creates that clear pathway. It clears away the fog so that you are faced with a real challenge point. What are you going to do with this evidence that Jesus is Lord? Apologetics serves for that challenge point.







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### John:

At a volitional level, we have to accept. There's a humility there. According to your theological system, some would say, "No one's going to accept unless God intervenes with some gift of faith. That's where their will is turned. God plays some explicit, interactive role there to make that will turn." Others would say, "You have that capacity within you." I'm not going to go there. Whatever happens in that mystical moment, there's still a choice to be made. Whether God makes it a live choice, or you already had a live choice, that's a different theological debate. The point being, the apologetics serves that moment, but you still have to step over the line.

# Jorge:

Let me pick it up here and ask you, what do you mean when you say, apologetics cannot make you loving? This is something that I struggled with for years. I had a livestream show that would go on several platforms every morning. A lot of my close friends would send me direct messages and say, "Hey, Jorge. I know that you're doing a segment on your show where you're breaking down the fallacies or the bad arguments that atheists or people who are not Christians are making in the comments section, and I think you can be a little bit nicer." I would not be the nicest person, even though what I was saying was right. I was breaking down their arguments. I was not making any logical fallacies. I didn't have any issues in my reasoning. But the way that I was doing it was turning people off.

People were saying, "Hey, I love your show. But when you get to that section, sometimes I just turn it off because you come across as pedantic. You come across as being a know it all. And then I started to say to myself, "God, please help me to be able to see these people the way you see them. Lend me your eyes so I can see them and love them in the way that you do. And that softened my heart and allowed me to be more loving. Why is it that apologetics sometimes turns you into a jerk until you open your heart to the Holy Spirit? And the Holy Spirit starts working in you and allows you to see that at the end of the day, it's not a race. That you're actually dealing with human beings who were created in the image and likeness of God, and they have intrinsic value. You should be treating them in a different way.







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### John:

That's a really good observation. Sometimes you've got jerks who gravitate to apologetics. Sometimes people gravitate to apologetics, and the way they interact with apologetics, they become jerks. Is it the jerkiness that led them to a field that prioritizes argumentation and all of that? Or is there some misconception that sneaks in, and they start taking the field of apologetics and they apply it in a way that their spiritual growth veers more towards being a jerk? I would imagine both happen.

I think your friends are wise. This is the value of church. Apologetics definitely doesn't replace the church. It doesn't put you in a position where you don't need the accountability, the interaction, the sword sharpening sword so that we're becoming better through our interactions with other believers. But a lot of what you're talking about it sounds like, it's part of a growth process. And unfortunately, a lot of folks, once they get exposed to apologetics and they start cultivating that passion for truth, they don't necessarily have the balance. They don't have the poise and the control to do it in a way that manifests the love and beauty of Christ along with the truth of Christ.

They're all truth and no grace. They're all conviction and challenge, and theology, and doctrine, but not necessarily any of the softer elements. You might say it's all drill sergeant, but no mothering. If you're training folks to be spiritual warriors for truth, fit for the battlefield, they're going to need both. You need the drill sergeant to help you develop that thick skin and to have the bravery and the courage to be able to endure all the attacks that you're going to be facing if you're standing up for truth. That's invaluable. But if you can't really get out of the crib because of neglect, because you haven't been mothered well; you haven't had the softer aspects in the more formative stages as a young one, then you will never get to that drill sergeant point.

So our maturity, our growth into the faith, hopefully is going to be refined in the course of our involvement in the local church. Our humility as we're interacting with others, as we're embodying the fruits of the spirit, it's very holistic.







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#### John:

And as long as we treat apologetics like the set apart thing that somehow I'm exempt from all of these lesser matters: the spiritual maturity, the fruits of the Spirit...I'm just going to hyper focus on theology. If we think that we are somehow exempt from the general call to all Christians to be like that, then we think too much of ourselves. Humility needs to come in before we get humiliated and realize, "Oh, I've been getting it wrong this whole time."

# Jorge:

And let me say something. Let's use this point and then we go to the next question. The whole idea of apologetics cannot make you a wise person. A lot of people realize, I got all this information. I have all this knowledge, so now I'm a wise guy. I'm going to go in there and I'm going to help everybody see things clearly. Why is it that apologetics cannot make you wise?

### John:

A couple of things. One, and I'm sure you're very well aware of this. Knowledge isn't wisdom. You can have all the know how and still not know how to do anything with it because we're dealing with people. You're not dealing with floating brains that are purely rational and they're persuaded whenever given sufficient evidence. You're dealing with people and people have biases. People have emotional commitments. People have relational ties.

There's power dynamics. To be able to navigate with all of those different dimensions operating at the same time, so that we're ministering to people. And then taking life giving truth along with us through that journey, it's going to take a lot of skill and learning how to get there, and how to create those encounters with people that we can impart something that's actually a blessing to them so that it's received as as truth and wisdom.

But wisdom, it's not cultivated just with a bunch of information. So you can learn all the apologetics knowledge, [unintelligible] information. If you haven't been learning how people work, and learning about yourself in the process, and humbly submitting your efforts to Christ, and growing as a minister in the process, then your approach to apologetics is going to be more like truth bombs rather than actually relating with people in ways that they want to become more like Christ because of their relationship with you.







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# Jorge:

That's so good. My wife always says that wisdom is more like a properly applied knowledge. When we have that experience, and we have that knowledge and then we are able to share it the right way, at the right moment, with the right tone. And that's because she works in the field of information, in the field of relationships and she always uses that phrase. So John now, how has your own views of apologetics changed over the years? I know you started many years ago. You actually went to Southern Evangelical Seminary. You got a degree in the field.

For all of those who are listening to us right now, you can go to scs.edu/Frank. You will see all the information there because we have a scholarship name on there after Frank. I think you're able to get a very cheap tuition if you apply at scs.edu/Frank. So you went through the whole training of apologetics. You also have degrees in other fields. How have your views changed over the years? How has apologetics itself changed over the years, John?

### John:

Great, great question. As a field, I've seen it grow a lot in different hubs. People's understanding and awareness of apologetics has grown over the years. Back when I started at SES in I think summer of 2002, I took a class, "Cults", with Ron Rhodes. At that time, my initial thought about apologetics was, this is basically preparing believers to be able to have meaningful, evangelistic conversations with people who are in the cults. That's my general assessment of what apologetics was at the time. Now, I had a great experience in that class and I was hooked. I knew I enjoyed apologetics, but I still had only a sliver of apologetics in mind when I was talking about apologetics. So I enjoyed that class.

Before then, I was already making friendships with Mormons. There were some Mormons that were advertising on the TV. It said, "Call for your free copy of The Book of Mormon." I was like, free books? I like free books. And then I can meet up with some Mormons, sure. And I thought they were just going to mail it to me. As their evangelistic ploy, they use that to come to the door and talk with you about the book. And then their challenge point at the end of that first conversation is going to be, "Will you read this book and pray to see if it's true?"







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### John:

And that was the challenge point for it. And ten meetings later, they've got a whole schedule. By the 10th meeting, you're supposed to be like, one or two years into your own Mormon membership by that time. I think number six, you're supposed to be a baptized Mormon by that time. Well I'm on number ten, and I'm still arguing over theology with them.

But you know, learning how to be friendly and learning how to care about them, and still keep a close eye on truth and be coaching, nudging, steering the conversation towards challenging truth points, but the whole while trying to earn trust and develop a relationship there. So I was already doing that before I started at SES. Now, by the time I was taking other classes, not the summer classes, but the semester classes, I was rapidly expanding in my understanding of what apologetics is, how it works, what it's good for. I started becoming aware of the meta level questions. "What do you have to believe to be able to believe that Jesus is Lord? What do you have to believe about our own ability to think and interpret before we can read God's truth in Scripture?" And so that whole meta level just expanded things for me.

I became more aware of the philosophy undergirding nuanced, sophisticated theology and just everything was expanding. Every day I'd go to class and just be mind blown about how little I really knew, how much more there is to know. So I got that experience over three and a half to four years. I finished my M.Div. there. I was working in local church ministry at the time. My apologetics role was primarily sort of a theological fact checker and sort of an idea guy as we're developing sermons within a small church planting network.

I went off to Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, and I was already heavily engaged in apologetics. I knew this is what I wanted to do for my life, but I was thinking it was going to primarily be as a teacher. I was aiming more for academia by that time. I was doing apologetics in much the same vein that I picked up at Southern Evangelical. So, we're aiming largely at new atheists and Jesus Seminar, (which was the thing), theological liberalism, and how do we argue that God exists? And that was sort of the central focus and everything else is sort of a satellite around that. Mainly, we're trying to argue that God exists, and then use that







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to lead into evidences for the Bible, and for the resurrection. And hopefully, persuade people to the truth of Christ.

#### John:

And I think that's a big part of what CrossExamined is. That's a big part of what classical apologetics is. That's a big part of what apologetics still is today. But over the past maybe three to eight years, it looks like a lot of the socio-cultural landscape for apologetics has shifted radically. Questions of whether God exists are now being supplanted, being replaced with questions about whether Christianity is a bigoted, intolerant set of ideas that should even be allowed in the public square.

The wokism conception of Christianity as a general bad for society, and how can we expunge it from society? That's become a more common disposition nowadays. Which means as apologists, our task has shifted several steps more basic. Not how can we take this common belief that truth is knowable, and help people to see Jesus as the truth?

How can we take where people are at, where they might not believe that there is such a thing as objective truth? They might not believe that Christianity is worth any value in society. They might not believe in free speech. They might not believe in freedom of religion. They might think all of those are outdated. And so, how do we conduct our apologetics task in that environment? And I think that's more where apologetics broadly is living today, for the sake of being relevant to people that still need Jesus as much as they ever did. But the starting points keep pushing further and further back.

# Jorge:

Absolutely. I have witnessed that. I think that not only here in the States, but I see that happening globally. I travel to Latin America a lot. I go to universities down there. I go to churches and I go do trainings, and it's the same pattern. More and more, we have to go further back and start at completely different starting point than we did, 20 years ago, 10 years ago.







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# Jorge:

So now the last question to wrap this up, John. It's been an amazing conversation. Hopefully, people now know what apologetics can and cannot do and have a better idea of why we engage in the field of apologetics here at CrossExamined.org. And why we have the blessing to be able to be out in the front lines, dispelling bad ideas and doing it not only on the intellectual side, but also on the relational side and seeing people for what they are and who they are, made in the image of God. What advice would you give a young person who says that they want to be an apologist? There are hundreds of people out there, young men and women, who want to engage in apologetics. What would you tell them, for them to start in apologetics and not make the mistakes that we have made? How can they do away with the bad ideas that we have presented here in relation to how not to do apologetics and know that apologetics has its limits?

### John:

That's an insightful application question. Thank you for asking. I would suggest that for young people coming up, or anyone who's just new and they got the bug. That something about apologetics triggers them to say, that's what I want. That's what I'm interested in. I would encourage them to love people through apologetics. So let your motivation, let the underlying motivation behind this be your love for people. That will shape how you go about doing it and it will also help fuel what you're doing.

So for example, if you've got an LGBT family member, and you come to me asking for answers. How do we answer them with with the Bible? I would ask them to as you're digging into this apologetics issue, think about that person that you care about, and how that conversation can go and what answers you would want to be able to have, and how you could present that to them in ways that would be a blessing, and honor them, and help point them to the truth of Christ. If you're thinking through this as a thought experiment in your own head, I imagine you can see how radically different that is versus, I'm just going to read a bunch of books, take a bunch of notes, and then spout all that information off to them. That relationally ignorant model that isn't concerned for people, but it's just information dumping on people. If you want







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to be effective in apologetics, let your love for people be the fuel and inspiration for how to go about doing this.

#### John:

When Christ was asked to summarize the law, what is the greatest of these laws? He says, "Love God with everything you got, and then love your neighbor as yourself." And I think those are in that order because loving God is first. There are definitely times where we have to pick and choose. We can't love the world, where we have to put relationships second to our relationship with God. But as a general rule, loving God is going to be our fuel, our inspiration naturally demonstrated in our love for others. And let apologetics be part of that relationship that you have with God. Let it flow out in truth and love, not just a bunch of truth bombs thrown at an unloving distance.

# Jorge:

Thank you so much, John for those insights. I completely agree with you. We have to be able to have the head knowledge to deal with the objections and to deal with all the information as we do apologetics. But we also must have the heart for the relationship in order to reach people where they are. So with that being said, thank you all for listening to the I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist midweek podcast, with Dr. John Furrier and myself. And don't forget, if you want to become an apologist, we have the CrossExamined Instructor Academy, happening in July 27-29th at Calvary Church in Albuquerque, New Mexico. All you have to do is go to CrossExamined.org, click on Events and you will see CIA and you can apply.

This Academy is a three day intensive training for you to become a better communicator of the field of apologetics. We actually assume that you already have some apologetics knowledge, but it is an experience that you will never forget. Also, download the CrossExamined app. It's two words in the app store. We have a ton of awesome resources. We have a quick answers section there for you to start dialoguing with your friends, intelligently, about apologetics topics.







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# Jorge:

As John says, make sure that you do it with love and truth. If you want to catch this podcast, both the weekend podcast and the midweek podcast on video, all you have to do is join the CrossExamined community. It is not a free community, but it is an awesome place for you to be able to share your ideas. It's just like your own social media platform with all the CrossExamined family in there. So all you have to do is go to CrossExamined.org, click on CE community and you will see a way to join. Thank you John for this time that you give us. Hopefully we'll get to co-host a podcast again in the future. And don't forget to listen to this weekend podcast where Frank will be back. God bless



