

***“Here I Stand”
Lutherans Finding
Their Voice in
Christian Apologetics***



Salem Men's Retreat

September 18-20, 2026

Mark A Paustian

- Session 1 On Christian Apologetics
- Session 2 Apologetics As Communication
- Session 3 Positive Apologetics
- Session 4 Handling Objections
- Session 5 Witnessing with Story

Notes from our Opening Devotion

Her first day of college

When the WELS Bubble Bursts

What happens to “naïve faith”

Christian Worldview & the Secular Social Imaginary

How she survived

The secular university exposes young Christians...

...who have only a superficial grasp of Christian truth

...who were already disconnecting from the Church long before heading off to college

...who have no mature Christian mentor to run to when the questions get real

I Corinthians 1

¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”¹⁹

²⁰ 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? ²¹ 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. ²² Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

Session One – The Big Picture

Opening Remarks & Preview

Definitions of Christian Apologetics

1) The Academic Discipline

How the Christian worldview functions among others in the scholarly arena. What can a Christian thinker who is a historian contribute, or a philosopher, or a scientists...?

An Apologetic of the Hiddenness of God

There is in this realm a powerful Lutheran distinctive.

We note, in Luther's expression, that God hides behind "masks" where only faith can find him. This creates a useful distinction between what can be investigated empirically on the basis of evidence and what we have no business trying to prove or verify with human reason.

We can bring people into contact with the "mask," for example, exploring the wonder of the created universe in its grandeur and design. We do not prove with reason or evidence that behind that mask is the God who has reconciled the world to himself in Christ. Our apologetic turns to testimony. And for this we have only the Spirit of God revealed this truth to us our hearts by faith through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

Likewise we can investigate his phenomenal Word, the historical record, the Christian's experience, etc., while keeping reason in its proper place.

2) Negative Apologetics

In our circles we have often limited our Christian apologetic to the use of human reason to dismantle other worldviews and the particular objections that spring from them.

“How much sense does it really make to say...”

3) New Testament *apologia*

The apostle Paul “reasoned from Scripture” in the Jewish synagogue. The apostle Peter was “prepared to answer” in the face of hostile question; his answer was a testimony to his hope in Christ on the basis of what he had personally witnessed.

Acts 26

25 “I am not insane, most excellent Festus,” Paul replied. “What I am saying is true and reasonable. 26 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. 27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.”

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

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

Things Lutherans are NOT interested in.

Raising up apologetic “geniuses”

A “second Judas’ kiss”

Theodicy (“defending the ways of God to men”) & Fideism (“you just gotta believe”)

Supplanting the Word of God

Reading God’s hidden mind

Avoiding being fools in this world

Softening the scandal of the cross

Things Lutherans ARE interested in.

Christian Apologetics as “another form of bringing good news”

Speaking like the apostles

An “Apologetics of the Word”

“Faith seeking understanding”

Loving God With All Our Minds

How the vulnerable among us survive

Falling back “into the thing itself”

Session Two – Talking to People

O...

Three core issues within Christian apologetics

The historical fact of Christ's resurrection

The phenomenal reliability of the New testament

The necessity of God

These are not ultimately meaningful unless...

2 Corinthians 10

1 By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you....

3 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. 4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

What is a “Defeater?”

A defeater is a thought in someone’s head that, if true, Christ, as Scripture reveals him, cannot be. It often has a taken-for-granted quality. It feels self-evidently true. And it may, for the person, go mostly unexamined.

If it were true that a loving God could not send someone to hell, or that a God of infinite power and love would never allow suffering (etc. etc.) than Christian truth itself is cancelled.

Note how these vary for different places and times.

The apologetic conversation

The beauty of Christ transparently communicated

Expose and gently deconstruct their particular defeater

Open the Word of God to articulate Christian truth.

An apologetic of the Word

There’s also a “Soft Apologetic”

And art, invitation, hospitality, and caring about what happens to people in this world – “as unanswerable as a sunrise.”

Session Two – Communication Approaches

First something you didn't pay for

Three Messages that characterize satisfaction in long-term relationships

They reminisce – “Hey, remember that time...?”

They appreciate - “I know I don't say it enough...”

They still share hopes and dreams – “I want that for you, too.”

Then There's also

They apologize – “You didn't deserve that...”

They forgive – “I release you...”

They speak to hidden fears – “Let me encourage you...”

Beating the 50% - A conversation for every week

What brought you joy this week?

What was difficult for you this week?

What's one specific thing I can do for you this week?

How can I pray for you this week?

Is there anything unspoken between us or left unsaid? (Appreciation / Apology)

What's a dream or memory has been on your mind this week?

That's every week. Once a month: How's our stewardship? How's our sex life?

Back to the Main Event – Communication Approaches to Apologetics

Why make this issue so prominent?

People's objections not define them. There is always way more to the story – *"Seek first to understand..."*

Research indicates that 80% of people who object to Christianity do so for personal reasons – *"my life is hard."* Another 10% cling to their autonomy (how they want to live and who they want to associate with). That leaves 10% who claim to have an intellectual problem with Christianity. Think about how these things play out.

It's no surprise that polarization is becoming entrenched and patterns of resistance are well established – *"just getting up to bat is a win."*

We will be transparently Christian, signal who we are, ask and prompt questions, and stand on the Word – *"You will be my witnesses."*

A big idea – maybe the Biggest

"Seek first to understand, then, and only then, to be understood."

What does this mean?

How is the pressure off?

We seek the wisdom and courage to ask powerful “back porch” questions.

“So how are you?...okay...so how are you?”

“What are you hoping for in life?...okay...so what if that never happens?”

What makes life worth living?...okay...so what about when that’s gone?”

“Tell me the story within which this (anxiety, sadness, anger) makes sense?”

We wait and hope for questions to come back to us.

Active listening means...

Brief content paraphrases: “So you’re saying...”

Reflection of feeling: “You seem...”

Open questions: “Help me understand this...”

“What do you mean by...”

“How have you come to think...”

“Have you considered...”

A book recommendation – Greg Koukl’s *Tactics*

How the ambassador for Christ can remain non-adversarial.

How any Christian can begin to do apologetics *today*.

How to drain most of the anxiety out of the situation.

The “Columbo” Approach

You might remember the rumpled detective from the old television show. He asked a ton of questions, typically, “There’s something I still don’t understand. Can you help me?”

Here’s the big idea.

We can stay in these first two modes as long as we like, resolving simply to understand (not to mention buying time). We don’t let a hostile skeptic turn the tables.

1) “What do you mean when you say _____? I really want to understand this.”

2) “How have you come to this conclusion? Why do you think that’s true?”

When we’re ready we can ask a third kind of question that draws on our growing body of knowledge and the experiences we’re gaining. (This is called “putting a stone in the shoe.”)

3) “Well, may I ask if you’ve thought about _____? Were you aware that _____?”

Evaluate

It may not be as easy as he makes it sound? Or it may be that we are just “trying on a suit coat three sized too big.”

Would it make a difference among us if we gave ourselves every chance to grow into these methods?

How can we find ourselves in spiritual conversations?

Grice's Maxims are a rule-based approach to conversation. Like the game of chess, if you don't know the rules you can't play.

Let's consider the "relevancy maxim."

Let's have a quick silent brainstorm on introducing a spiritual topic at a "...soooo..." moment.

All these are real. "So...

"...last time we talked you said something I can't stop thinking about..."

"...I'm reading an incredible book..."

"...I noticed you were having a tough time of it the other day, and I wanted to encourage you somehow but I wasn't sure..."

"...I found myself praying for you the other night..."

"...my pastor told this great story on Sunday..."

"...I've got this song stuck in my head..."

"...I stumbled across this amazing thing in my Bible this morning..."

"...here's something I can't believe we've never talked about..."

"...Do you mind if I ask you something? Do you believe in God?"

The Apologetic Conversation

1) The beauty and reality of Christ transparently communicated.

You speak in such a way that although the skeptic may not believe a word of it, they will understand why a person could long for it to be true.

2) Expose and gently deconstruct their particular defeater.

The point is not to win arguments or prove Christian truth, only to once shake their confidence in their patterns of resistance.

3) Open the Word of God for a fuller articulation of Christian truth.

That the Word of God and the story of Christ should gain entrance in a person's mind so that the Spirit might do what only he can.

We have an "Apologetic of the Word."

There is also a "Soft Apologetic"

An apologetic of invitation, hospitality, and caring about what happens to people in this world – "as unanswerable as a sunrise."

Think: Beauty, Symbol, Mystery, & Community.

Round Table Time? What would like to explore or hear more about?

Ethical Dialogue

Identification

Crossing The Narrow Ridge

“Yes...but No”

Logos, Ethos, Pathos and how the apostles talk

Rogerian Argument

The Power of Story

Changing the Moment

“Matthew parties”

Hospitality

About the Scriptures: why do it this way?

Loving God With All Your Mind, by Gene Veiths

Other book recommendations?

Session Three – Positive Apologetic Arguments

Three Core Issues in Christian Apologetics

The Historical Fact of Christ's Resurrection

The phenomenal reliability of the New testament

The necessity of God

“Speaking like the Apostles”

3 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene— 2 during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, *the word of God came...* (Luke 3)

This is from the world-class historian named Luke whom modern historians charge with “habitual reliability.”

From Chuck Colson:

“I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Every one was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world-and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible.”

From CS. Lewis:

“I’ve been studying myths and legends all my life. This is not what they sound like.”

On the Phenomenal Reliability of the New Testament

“Why would the apostles lie?...If they lied, what was their motive, what did they get out of it? What they got out of it was misunderstanding, rejection, persecution, torture, and martyrdom. Hardly a list of perks!” – Peter Kreeft.

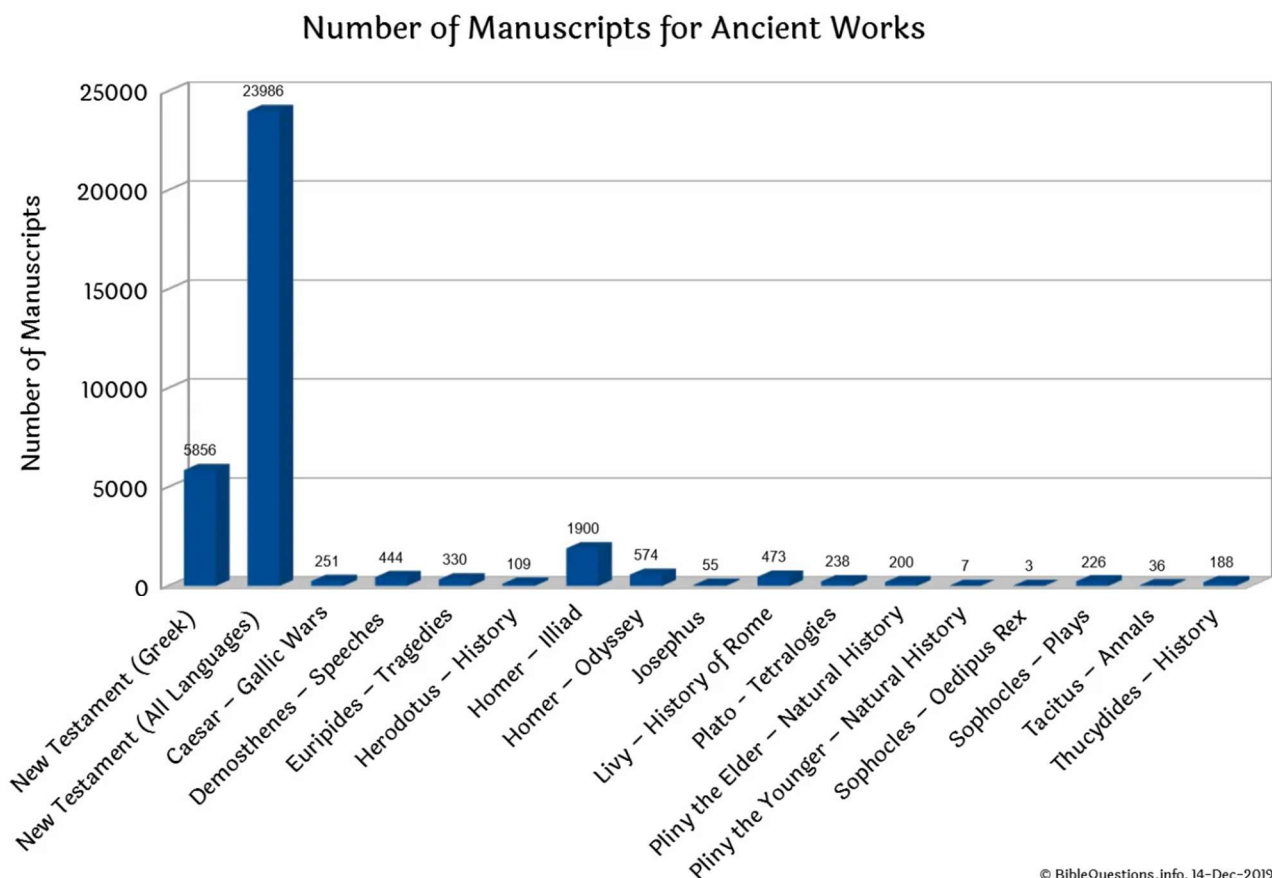
1. Scholars of the New Testament enjoy an “embarrassment of riches” with approximately 5800 documentary witnesses to the original text in Greek, plus over 24,000 translations of New Testament texts into other languages.
2. When you hear about hundreds of thousands of textual variants, that number includes every time a variant appears in any of the nearly 30,000 texts. These numbers are astonishingly low and no doctrine of the New Testament is implicated.
3. The New Testament writers included countless embarrassing and inconvenient details about themselves.
4. The New Testament writers included many difficult sayings of Jesus; neither they nor those who produced copies of the apostolic writings ever allowed themselves permission to smooth over the difficulties. There is zero evidence of New Testament documents in any state of flux.
5. The New Testament writers carefully distinguished Jesus’ words from their own rather than put anything they may have wanted into his mouth.
6. The New Testament writers included accounts that they would not have invented. That Jesus’ first resurrection appearances were to women is only one of many examples (an incredibly significant one). Others include the last words of John the Baptist, “Are you the one or should we look for another?”
7. The New Testament writers include more than thirty historically confirmed people in their writings; these combine with countless locations and events that can be investigated historically; wherever their veracity can be empirically tested they pass (with minor exceptions in the form of issues not yet resolved).
8. The New Testament writers include divergent details just as is typical of real events, not fabricated stories; this is true of all events witnessed by multiple people. The NT copyists never paper over these difficulties either (which can all be solved just as they are).
9. The New Testament writers challenge their readers to check out verifiable facts.
10. New Testament writers describe miracles just as they do other historical events, with simple, unembellished accounts; this is in dramatic contrast to the false gospels that began with “The Gospel of Thomas” dated to the end of the 2nd century with their blatant mythical flair.
11. If the New Testament were a fabrication, it means that some common ancient men invented a literary genre – “realistic historical fiction” – that would not be seen again for over 1800 years. (There is much more to this than students usually think.)
12. Unlike modern day martyrs who come to believe things for which they willingly die, the apostles were in a position to know whether their claims were false. No one knowingly dies for a lie.
13. The New Testament writers abandoned their long-held sacred beliefs and cultural practices, adopted new ones, and did not deny their testimony under persecution or pain of death.

It matters when the NT was written. Portions were written in the 50s and 60s AD (this is not in dispute). We can solidly date the church’s confession about Jesus to five or six years after he was raised (see 1 Corinthians 15 & Galatians 1, documents that enjoy full scholarly consensus as to their authenticity). Most of the NT was written before 70 AD – this is supported by its failure to mention the fall of Jerusalem. 25 of the 27 NT books –

besides Jude and 3 John – were widely quoted all around the ancient world by the church fathers by 100 AD (this is not in dispute). *Any conspiracy a person could dream up strains the imagination.* Legendary material cannot gain traction or supplant eye-witness testimony while thousands were still alive. And remember that we are not talking about what someone had for breakfast on a Tuesday, but about life-altering, “where-were-you-when?” events. And remember that we have only scratched the surface of the spine-tingling phenomenon of OT prophecy (e.g., crucifixion details that precede its invention, and a resurrection of a man who died but avoided decay). Again, the most important person who ever lived, who divides history into a *Before* and *After*, happens to have unique prophetic credentials which a mere man could not arrange for himself.

Whatever else we have to say about this, we should always say, “Let’s read Luke, the world-class historian...then John, the one who leaned on Jesus’ chest...”

This is what we mean by “an embarrassment of riches.”



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The Minimal Facts Approach to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ

For the sake of argument, we can limit ourselves to conclusions that have almost total consensus among historians regardless of their presuppositions.

Likewise, we can limit ourselves for the time being to New Testament texts whose veracity is not in doubt (e.g., about half of the epistles of Paul).

“Doggone it! It seems like he did it.”

The Minimal Facts

A man known as Jesus Christ was executed by the Romans through crucifixion

Later, the disciples believed he appeared to them physically

The Conversion of the Persecutor Saul

The Conversion of the Skeptic James

The Empty Tomb (with not quite the same consensus)

Also: the authenticity of 1 Corinthians and Galatians is unquestioned.

1 Corinthians 15

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

If a foot represents a year...

The earliest manuscript evidence for Alexander the Great is a football field removed from his life.

We have the unquestioned testimony of Paul, a man known to history, from five or six feet (years) from Ground Zero.

Skeptical New Testament scholars, including none other than Bart Ehrman himself, publicly acknowledge that the testimony of Christians in Jerusalem can be dated to two or three years after the resurrection of Jesus. Paul appears to be quoting a confessional statement already in circulation by the time he was converted two or perhaps three years after Jesus rose.

Broad Historical Consensus about the Resurrection.

“Scholars must provide more than alternative theories to the Resurrection; they must provide first-century evidence for those theories.” – Gary Habermas

The following represent a historical consensus among scholars no matter their presuppositions about Christianity. A person ought to have an opinion about the resurrection of Jesus.

1. Jesus was a real historical figure who died in Jerusalem by Roman crucifixion, experts at the task.
2. He was buried in a private tomb. No one there expected him to rise. All would need convincing.
3. Afterwards the disciples were terrified, bereaved, and hopelessly despondent. This was the state of Jesus followers when something caused the church to suddenly explode into existence.
4. The conspicuous lie from hostile witnesses that “his disciples stole the body while we were sleeping” is their testimony that the tomb was empty.
5. Women provided the first crucial testimony (without value at the time) that the tomb was indeed found empty two days after his internment. Mary believed she met the risen Jesus.
6. The disciples had experiences that they believed were actual appearances of the risen Jesus.
7. The disciples could have made the convenient claim that they were met by the spirit of Jesus; instead they were explicit in making the falsifiable claim of his physical resurrection from the dead, citing the “many convincing proofs” he showed them.
8. Powerful forces in Jerusalem were highly motivated to squash the resurrection rumors; they needed only to produce the body of Jesus. No group that we know of in Jerusalem had serious motivation to steal Jesus’ body.
9. Due to their experiences, the disciples’ lives were thoroughly transformed. They were without exception willing to die for their claim. They had nothing to gain and everything to lose by lying.
10. The proclamation of the resurrection was sounded very early, in fact, from the beginning of Christian church history, not a legend that arose after centuries (see the note on 1 Corinthians 15 later in this document).
11. The disciples’ public testimony and preaching of the Resurrection took place in the city of Jerusalem among thousands who would have refuted their factual claims were that possible.
12. The gospel message centered on the preaching of the death and resurrection of Jesus.
13. The resurrection of Jesus was immediately affirmed in the primitive Church as proof of his full divinity, and this among the last people in the world disposed to create a legend that a crucified man was God himself given that Judaism gave the world the highest conceivable conception of God. (See the “legend, liar, lunatic, Lord” argument.)
14. Sunday immediately became the primary day for the gathering and worshiping of thousands of Jews in Jerusalem.
15. James, the brother of Jesus and a skeptic before this time, was converted when he believed he also saw the risen Jesus; he became the pillar of the church in Jerusalem.
16. Saul of Tarsus became a Christian believer due to an experience that he also believed was an appearance of the risen Jesus. He voluntarily surrendered all his privilege, brilliantly expounded the implications of what he saw and the about-face in his own life; he died for this conviction.

Skeptical counter-theories, in addition to flying in the face of all the evidence there is, can be dispensed with given minimal preparation: hallucination theory, the wrong tomb theory, the swoon or apparent death theory, the stolen body theory, the substitute Jesus theory, the wanting to believe theory, the copied pagan myth theory. If a given theory may fit with one or two of the “minimal facts” that all historians accept, it will run headlong into others. The Resurrection is not legend, lie, or embellishment. Crucifixion was designed to erase a human being who as not fit to live or be remembered. There’s only one reason you know the name of Jesus. He rose.

Whatever else we have to say about this, we should always *fall back into the thing itself*. “Let’s read the Psalms together (22 and 16)...then Luke...then Peter...then Paul...”

The top four items below enjoy virtually *total* consensus among historians for this period. There is just a bit less agreement about the fifth item. Half of the letters of Paul are unquestioned, including (very significantly) the two mentioned below.

“The Minimal Facts” Approach

A man known as Jesus Christ was executed by the Romans through crucifixion

Later, the disciples believed he appeared to them physically

The Conversion of the Persecutor Saul

The Conversion of the Skeptic James

The Empty Tomb (with not quite the same consensus)

The authenticity of 1 Corinthians and Galatians is unquestioned.

If God Became a Man, You Could Expect...

A fascinating backdoor approach; a profile that fits.

1. If God became a man, he would have told us in advance so that we could recognize him; this is about the phenomenon of prophecy.
2. He would have an unprecedented entrance into the human story (the incarnation as Christianity's "One Grand Miracle"; this will complement our emphasis on Jesus' resurrection.
3. He would have words and deeds that would resonate in the human soul like none other; this is the simple apologetic of helping skeptics become familiar with the one they would reject.
4. He would do something about the most serious problems that plague humanity; this is a comparison of Christianity's answer to evil, pain and death, versus those of all other religions or philosophies.

Christianity's Historic Advantage

Accepting Christianity does not mean taking a single historical figure's word for it (as is the case, e.g., with Mormonism, Islam, and the rest).

5. Christianity's falsifiability, as well its intersection with hundreds of known people, places and events (as repeatedly confirmed by archaeology and historians of all persuasions).
6. The fact of the early Christian church and its explosion into existence, shocking and against all odds.
7. The persistence of the Church throughout history / the survival of the essential gospel until now.

The Phenomenal Word of God

Many have tried to slam the door on Christianity, but something keeps it ajar, something that isn't going away...

8. The Bible's phenomenal unity – the essential agreement on dozens of writers, spread across centuries – on countless complex and controversial subjects.
9. The Bible's phenomenal authenticity – this is *not* the way a fictionalized history or cast of characters could ever have been written. (Extend this point beyond the same approach that was narrowly focused on the four Gospels).
10. The Bible's phenomenal preservation and survival; this is about our confidence in the Bible we now hold in our hands in the face of relentless disinformation and opposition.

There is No One Like Jesus

It would take more than a Christ to invent a Christ.

11. Jesus cannot be dismissed as a “great moral teacher” and nothing more. He claimed to be God himself. This leaves us three choices: he is a liar, a lunatic – how much sense do those really make – or the Lord himself. *(Some people include “legend” in this construct, but any time spent with our two Core Issues in apologetics will help us to dismiss that nonsense out of hand.)*

12. There is no life that has so changed the world – left a larger wake in history or transcended human cultures. (And there is no one who has been so dangerous to the skeptic who *dares to examine him closely.*)

13. There is no life that ever inspired such unadulterated devotion. No person has so invaded human imagination or haunted people’s dreams. Think especially of literature, music, and art. Think of Christian self-sacrifice and willing martyrdom down to this very day.

Evaluation of Classic Apologetic Arguments

14. The cosmological argument (and/or the contingency argument that is closely related)

15. The teleological argument (and/or the “fine-tuned universe” argument that is closely related)

16. The moral argument.

Why I Believe

Coming home to a recognizably Lutheran apologetic voice.

17. The definition of faith, its causes, and its preservation, biblically speaking, as Lutherans uniquely affirm them. (This will be a review of the first written lectures.)

18. “We walk by faith not by sight” – our serene confidence no matter what we ever see, think or experience, even when every answer to the hard questions eludes us. (Nothing is more sure the voice of God making promises in his own name.)

19. A religion with the crucifixion of God at its center is utterly unique and un-inventible – humanity cannot account for it except that it is the Truth. (This piece should reaffirm that Christ crucified and raised is the centerpiece of Lutheran apologetics).

20. Apologetics is “another form of bringing Good News” and as such, it is an extension of the apologist’s whole life of faith, worship and love for people and for the gospel itself.

Session Four – Handling Objections

Open Remarks and brief Review

“Tell me about the God you don’t believe in. Maybe I don’t believe in him either.”

Negative Apologetics

2 Corinthians 10

Defeaters

The Apologetic Conversation

Major Defeaters in American Culture

There is too much suffering in the world to believe in God.

A loving God could not send someone to hell.

There is no such thing as truth.

Science has discredited Christianity.

The church is grossly bigoted and intolerant.

Our Approach

We do not assume people know what Christian theology says in relation to the defeater or, for that matter, what the gospel is.

We do not fail to present a Scriptural argument, even if we aren't quoting chapter and verse. ("What story can I tell?")

We do not labor to make that answer palatable or to remove the scandal.

We will honor the question, listen well, and speak transparently, (not with pat answers).

We will testify to Christ crucified and raised, as our one true subject.

Table Talks

Part One. What is this all about?

Where does this idea originate? Who are its prominent spokespeople today?

What do they really mean by it? What are the hidden assumptions?

Is it true in a way? At the same time, is there a bigger picture this defeater leaves out?

Where might it be coming from in the person who is presenting this defeater to us? Is it an intellectual question or could there be more to the story?

What is the false belief or presupposition that sits within this defeater?

Does it really make sense? Let's deconstruct it a bit.

Part Two. What is this all about?

What theology is at play here that we cannot assume people know anything about? Or what Scriptures are begging to be consulted and given room to breathe?

How can we formulate an answer that will make sense to people, to not talk past each other?

Why, in your heart of hearts, does this defeater not get in the way of Christ for you?

What is a uniquely Lutheran response: biblical, Christ-obsessed, grace-saturated, winsome not argumentative, “sticky,” and with reason or evidence appealed to only in ways that are Scripturally safe?

A Second-Tier of “Defeaters” – Which interest you?

“I don’t need to believe in God to live a meaningful life.”

“Miracles are impossible.”

“Religion is the greatest cause of trouble in the world.”

“The church of history has done horrible things.”

“The God of the Old Testament is petty, cruel and all too much like the people who invented him.”

“Religion is a psychological crutch for the weak and one that does untold damage.”

“People are basically good.”

“Sin is an outdated idea.”

“All roads lead to heaven; Christianity is too exclusive.”

All religions look different in the externals, but they are the same at the core.

“I can believe what I want as long as I’m sincere.”

“There are no moral absolutes.”

“Christianity is anti-reason and has no place among educated people.”

“Christian denominations are a mess; no one can agree on what the Bible even means.”

“The Church of today is an oppressive ideology especially toward women.”

“If you were born in India, you’d be Hindu.”

“Christianity is culturally conditioned.”

“It would not be fair if God judges those who never hear the gospel.”

“Christianity is sexually repressive and hopelessly outdated in its views of sex.”

“I just don’t want to be anything like you Christians or have any association with them.”

“The church is full of hypocrites.”

“It’s wrong to claim that you have the truth and everyone else is wrong.”

Closing Remarks

Martin Luther: "See a man captivated by the cross."

Siegbert Becker: "I only have the gospel."

CS Lewis: "God in the Dock."

Marin Luther: "The Three Lights."

Tullian Tchividjian: "The Last Idol to Fall."

Yours truly: "If it seems like a weak thing not to ground the truth in our own wonderful powers of reason, it is that the power of the Christ my rest on the nothingness of the man and the *apparent* nothingness of the gospel."

Prompts for the Group Liaison Activity

Starting Groups – Go wherever the story is for you...

What could happen in your local setting in regard to “defeaters” and the core issues of resurrection apologetics and the phenomenal reliability of the NT?

What is one actionable idea that may gain easy consensus among anyone from your ministry context?

The specifics can come later on in the conversation we are hoping has only begun:

Who?

What?

When?

Where?

How?

Come to some sort of consensus about a single exciting answer to the question, “Where do we go from here?”

Something of special interest from the Group Liaison exercise after the liaisons joined other groups and returned home?

Closing Remarks

CS Lewis: “I believe in Jesus like I believe in the sun. I not only see it. I see everything else by it.”

GK Chesterton: “Allow one sun in your sky, one mystery too bright to look into, and all else is lit up in that light.”

Session Five – Narrative Witnessing

What story can I tell? The evolution of an idea

The Power of Story

Walter Fisher's "Narrative Paradigm"

The rational world paradigm versus narrative rationality

The best stories "ring true" (narrative fidelity) and "hang together" (narrative coherence) so as to smuggle in "good reason"

In the face of an objection ask "What story can I tell?"

Social Penetration Theory

Personal stories are an "exchange of friendship" on the way to deepened relationship

As we inhabit the biblical world, we can learn to keep its stories in the same "box in our heads" from which we draw our richest conversational material.

The same naturalness is possible.

Dr. Kristen. A Case study.

Bible Study – a method

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself; 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 18)

Talk about the story.

Who needs to hear this story?

How does it confront us?

What is the Good News in this story?

How would you tell it?

Who wants to try?

Closing Remarks

CS Lewis: “For the apologist to be saved...he must continually fall back into the thing itself.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “Speak to Christ about the man even more than you speak to the man about Christ.”

Soren Kierkegaard: “What good would it do me to construct a world in which I did not live, but only held up to the view of others?”

J.P. Koehler: “The desired end is brought about by our becoming again ever more deeply absorbed in the gospel – not letting go until it blesses.”

A Final Word

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 person? Where is the teacher of the law? 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 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 human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

(1 Corinthians 1:18-25)