

Scriptural Apologetics

How to be an Everyday Apologist

Student Guide

FOCUS

Vision for Life

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FOCUS

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Welcome

1. What comes to mind when you think of a Catholic apologist? An author with a bestselling book? A radio personality that knows the answer to every question? What about yourself?

The purpose of this Bible study is to help **you** become an everyday apologist—an ordinary person who is able to share the beliefs of the Catholic Church in truth and love.

How is this study going to help you do this?

1. Give you a vision for what apologetics is.
2. Show you seven principles to use when you dialogue with others about the faith.
3. Outline seven key topics on the Catholic faith and give you specific Scripture verses and reasons for what the Catholic Church believes on these topics and why.

Below is an introduction to these three subjects before we dive into the study.

2. What is Apologetics?

St. Peter encourages his listeners in 1 Peter 3:15 to know how to defend their faith: “Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you.” This defense of the faith comes from the Greek word—apologia—the root word for apologetics. Scripture calls us to know how to defend what we believe.

St. Peter goes on in 1 Peter 3:15-16 to say “yet do it with gentleness and reverence; and keep your conscience clear.” We must know the truth, but we must also share it in love. Our goal is not to win arguments; it is to win souls.

St. Francis was an amazing witness in sharing the faith in truth and love. He is often quoted as saying: “Preach the Gospel always, and if necessary, use words.” St. Francis’ personal example of holiness was vital. His poverty and humility amidst the extravagant clergy of his day was a monumental testimony that moved many to follow Jesus Christ more deeply.

At the same time, what most people may not realize is that St. Francis preached with words almost every day—to people in his town, to the rich at their elaborate parties, and to several Muslim countries despite turbulent travel. He must have found preaching to be necessary!

3. Seven Apologetic Principles

If our goal is to win souls with apologetics, we can’t just know arguments; we must know how to convey these arguments in convincing and charitable ways. This could be described as the art of apologetics.

Here are seven principles designed to help you learn this art of apologetics.

- 1. Show you are open to dialogue:** By being cool, calm, and collected in the face of any objection, the other person will be more open to dialogue.
- 2. Focus on just one issue at a time:** Rather than addressing several objections all at once, agree on one specific area to discuss.
- 3. Restate their objection and understand their logic:** Make sure you understand what they are really saying and see the argument from their perspective.
- 4. Ask thought-provoking questions:** Really good questions can be more effective than rattling off every reason you have for a particular belief.
- 5. Correct misunderstandings:** One of the best things you can do is to correct the false ideas about the Catholic faith or Catholics themselves.

6. Build on common ground: It is easy to see what separates us, but dialogue is also furthered when we realize the issues agreed upon as well.

7. Be a witness, not a converter: Instead of trying to just win the argument, view yourself as trying to give a witness to the Catholic faith. This may seem a lot to download all at once. Don’t worry! Each chapter, you will focus on just one principle and over time will add them to your apologetic repertoire.

4. How does this study work?

In each chapter, you will learn about a particular topic and why the Church believes what it does. Then, as a small group you will have the chance to respond to some common objections to that topic with your Apologetics Training Cards. We want you to not just know apologetics; we want you to put it into practice. Similar to riding a bike, the art of apologetics develops with practice and persevering through failures.

Both the reasons for believing in the teaching of the Church along with the objections against them are not exhaustive. They are there to give you a foundation for learning more about that topic. Resources are given at the end of each chapter for you to dive deeper into particular topics.

Finally, do not be afraid! You don’t need a degree in Theology or to be a world class debater to be an effective Catholic apologist. You need the desire to learn, the courage to speak up for your faith, and a heart for souls as you speak the truth in love. Thank you for taking the time to learn how to defend the Catholic faith—it is an invaluable tool in our world today.



Chapter One

Scripture and Tradition: The Word of God

What the CHURCH says...

The Catholic Church believes that the **Word of God** is handed on in two ways: **Sacred Scripture** and **Sacred Tradition**.

Sacred Scripture is the **Word of God** that was written down “by those apostles and other men associated with the apostles who, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation to *writing*” (CCC 76, emphasis added).

Sacred Tradition is the **Word of God** handed down “by the apostles who handed on, by the spoken word of their preaching, by the example they gave, by the institutions they established, what they themselves had received” (CCC 76, emphasis added). **Sacred Tradition** is sometimes referred to as oral Tradition.

This idea of Tradition can be confusing. Tradition (big T) is different than the traditions of the Church (small t). Traditions (small t) include praying the rosary or using Advent candles. These are important to our Church, but can change over time. Sacred Tradition (big T) is the **Word of God** passed on from Jesus to the apostles and to us today—this does not change over time.

Another important factor that plays a role in God’s word is the **Magisterium**. The Magisterium is the teaching authority of the Church given to the apostles and their successors by Jesus Christ. These successors would be the bishops of the Catholic Church, including the Pope, the bishop of Rome. The task of the

Magisterium is to give an authentic interpretation of the **Word of God**. And yet, the Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant (see CCC 86). Through the Holy Spirit, it hands on the Word of God.

Why the CHURCH believes this...

There are several reasons why the Church believes in both Scripture and Tradition. Since this is a Scriptural Apologetics Bible Study, we are going to look at how Scripture itself attests to the idea of Tradition. Below are two reasons that we will examine further in this chapter.

1. The Gospel writers speak of other things that Jesus did and said that were not recorded in the Gospels.
2. St. Paul goes into further detail about written and oral Tradition and how it is passed down to others.

Not Just in the Gospels

1. The New Testament writers speak of other things that Jesus did and said that were not recorded in the Gospels.

Read John 21:25

Read Acts 20:35

How could they have known this phrase already if it were not in the Gospels?

Passing It On

2. St. Paul goes into further detail about written and oral Tradition and how it is passed down to others.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:15

How does this verse support the Catholic belief about Tradition?

Read 2 Timothy 2:1-2

In-depth Insight

Here is another way to look at Scripture and Tradition. In regards to Scripture, all Christians agree on what the Bible says, but we do not agree on what the Bible means. Tradition helps us see how the apostles understood Jesus and how they lived and what they taught as a result. It provides the historical context for understanding what the Word of God means.

A practical example might help illustrate. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus clearly tells his apostles to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” But, people in the early Church and even in the Church today ask the question, should we baptize infants? There is not direct teaching in Scripture for or against infant Baptism. Tradition tells us the apostles baptized infants. Although not in Scripture, the apostles were either told or shown to do this by Jesus or told this through the Holy Spirit. In turn, the Catholic Church uses this form of the Word of God as its basis for baptizing infants today.

The Tradition of the Catholic Church is a beautiful resource to have. Much of this Tradition is contained in the works and writings of the Early Church Fathers, men who lived in the first centuries after Jesus. Because Tradition helps us understand what Scripture means, many Protestants have turned to Catholicism through the writings of these men. For an introduction to Early Church Fathers, see *The Early Church Fathers* by Mike Aquilina.

Conclusion

The idea of Scripture and Tradition brings up two important apologetic points pertaining to the Protestant belief in *Sola Scriptura* (basing all their beliefs off on the written Word of God alone).

First, when we study Tradition, we realize that Tradition had to come before Scripture. The Word of God was spoken by the apostles and their successors even before the Bible was completed. When we examine the early Church it is also apparent that no set canon or what we know as the books included in the Bible was established officially until the end of the fourth century. It would be hard for the early Christians to rely solely on Scripture.

Second, the Protestant acceptance of *sola scriptura* is really a rejection of the authority of the Catholic Church and its ability to interpret Scripture and to pass on Tradition. They believe that one can come to a correct understanding of Scripture through the Holy Spirit. This naturally leads to the question: If this is the case for all people seeking truth who read the Scriptures, why are there 30,000 denominations with competing doctrines about grace, morality, etc.? With charity, this is an important question for us to pose to Protestants to encourage them to grapple with the consequences that occur without authority.

Whereas Scripture itself claims in 1 Timothy 3:15, "...if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which acts as the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth." St. Paul points to the Church as "pillar and bulwark [or safeguard] of the truth," that is a guide for Christians. We will look more into the authority of the Church next chapter.

When we examine the Scripture, Church history, and logic, the idea of Tradition and the Church's authority is not only reasonable, but essential to our Christian faith.

More Scripture verses: 1 Corinthians 11:2; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 John 1:12; 3 John 1:13-14; 2 Peter 1:20-21
CCC: 78, 80-84, 95, 113, 120

Made for More: p. 103-108

Extra Resources:

By What Authority: An Evangelical Discovers Catholic Tradition by Mark Shea
Why Is That in Tradition? by Patrick Madrid

Reading for next time: Matthew 16:13-20; Isaiah 22:15-24; Acts 1:15-26

Practical Objections

The purpose of the "Practical Objections" section is to introduce a few of the most common objections to that apologetics topic.

While you are answering these objections, your group will be working on one of the seven apologetics principles of dialogue. For chapter one, the principle is: Show that you are open to dialogue. As a group, brainstorm ways to enact this principle in an apologetics conversation.

When you are going through the actual objections, you can use these objections in a few ways. Someone can volunteer to answer the objection in a straight forward manner. Or, you can have a mock dialogue in front of the whole study. Or, you can split up into partners and all practice a mock dialogue. Also, if you run out of time, begin the next study by using the objections of the previous study. This provides a good review of the topic from last time.

Apologetics Principle #1: Show you are open to dialogue: By being cool, calm, and collected in the face of any objection, the other person will be more open to dialogue.

Objection 1

The Catholic Church's reliance on and belief in tradition is opposed to Jesus' words in **Matthew 15:6**: "For the sake of your traditions, you have made void the word of God."

Answers to every objection can be found in the Appendix of this Bible study.

Objection 2

Why would we need Tradition? Scripture alone is sufficient as **2 Timothy 3:16** says, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

Objection 3: Think on your feet

Catholics have added practices and beliefs to the Christian faith that are not found in Scripture. At the end of the Bible, John warns against adding anything to Scripture in **Revelation 22:18**: "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if any one adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book..."