M10A2 Preparation

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Christians have options when faced by attacks on our faith. The easiest is to remain quiet, perhaps thinking doing so shows humility. We can simply shoot from the hip in our apologetic response without being prepared. We risk being shamed when we stride forth unprepared. Or we can choose to prepare so as to be ready when attacked or challenged.

Those who prepare upfront know the danger the general Christian community faces when ambushed by a skilled critic of Christianity. Nominal or new Christians lose hope when critics succeed in winning the argument. We lose the opportunity to grow in the faith when long-standing believers fail to counter strong arguments for the Bible. Our faith increases when we see God speak through prepared persons of faith.

We need to not only learn to silence critics, we need to be able to guide sincere questioners and reassure doubters with clear, encouraging explanations. We don’t need to shrink because we’re not expert in all areas of apology. We can refer to others who have strengths we don’t have. For instance, I’m not knowledgeable in areas of evolution or science. But most churches may have someone who is.

 We can’t be defenders of the faith by mere knowledge of the Bible or even knowing the Bible and also the tools of apologetics. We must actively commit to Jesus in life purpose. We must commit time, money I dare say, and heart to the cause of Christ. We must study his word to actually become acquainted with God, his character, and his will for us personally. Bible trivia won’t build our character to be able to choose Jesus over a job or or the unbelieving girlfriend of our otherwise dreams. “It is written, 'man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:4)

Paul speaks of “circumcision of the heart”. Circumcision requires commitment. I’ve read that Jewish mothers struggle to permit this because they don’t want their baby to hurt. In America, circumcision of boys has, until recently at least, been the norm. My dad wouldn’t let doctors circumcise me as an infant. But at age ten, he decided it should be done. Moses had to be pushed by his wife to circumcise his son. Adult circumcision (10 years old) is an ordeal!

Circumcision of the heart is an adult decision. It requires grit and determination. We must determine to study and share Bible truths and principles, to live according to Godly principles learned only through study and absorption of the Word of God.

“But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (1Corinthians 12:7) Cindy Tusch, a leader in our church who works for the White Estate said in a sermon, “We must not wait until we’re sinless before we become willing to witness for Christ.” God has a witnessing opportunity for us in whatever stage in Christian growth. As we use our gifts he gives to each of us, he builds our capability.

To know not only the Bible but also remain committed to the God of the Bible we allow our lives to be led by the Holy Spirit. We pray not only daily but also “Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18) We can’t operate heavy machinery with eyes closed. Ancient Israelites were told to wear fringes and a ribbon of blue on their garments to “remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them ; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes.” (Numbers 15:37-39) Everything we do should aim to please him. This explains the “without ceasing.” Our “delight is in the law of the LORD.” (Psalms 1:2-3)

If we truly delight in the “law of the Lord” we will be dissatisfied with a people pleasing theology. We seek the Spirit led theology grounded in the fundamentals: Sola Scriptura, Sola Fide, Sola Gratia, and Sola Christus

“The Christian apologist should always remember that this is a battle at the mental level.” -lecturer We must determine to be solidly grounded. “Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.” (Deuteronomy 11:18)

We can’t be satisfied being middle-of-the-road Christians, neutral and bland. We must cease “walking as the Gentiles also walk” [NASB], “blindfold in a world of illusion” [Phillips], “with their sterile ways of thinking” CJB. (Ephesians 4:17-19)

We must discipline our minds to faithfully study scripture with prayer seeking to be led by God. We should study the books of faithful Christian leaders, current and past. We must not lose faith when we face personal doubts. We must continually “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

Practical preparation

Read widely. Study your Bible regularly and systematically. Subscribe to magazines and listen to podcasts in your study. I find twitter highlights good resource articles. Maybe my choice on who to follow helps here. I’m amazed at the Sabbath tweets I read that I’ve never before heard as a Seventh-day Adventist. We have much we can learn from students of the Bible who come from faiths outside our own. Two of my favorite *outside writers* are Baptist - Philip Yancey and Max Lucado.

Apologists should study to communicate well, both written and spoken. In this digital age, that might include choosing to become social media skilled. He or she might also learn graphic design. Digital media thrives on effective graphics.

Writing sharpens our communication skills. If our spoken word were transcribed we might find ourselves embarrassed by the casual, almost careless way we naturally speak. When writing we get to review our message and improve it to more effectively communicate. We can at least edit our written word to add in the key words we thought we said but glossed over. Writing gives us the opportunity to complete our thoughts. So often we leave a conversation and then later slap our forehead saying to ourselves, “I should have remembered to say …”

Writing gives us the chance to recognize our weak points. It gives us time to sharpen the grammar and sentence structure, to remember the most effective words, to organize our lists. Of course, writing complicates the process we need to be aware of spelling and punctuation. But we need spelling and punctuation in our social media interactions.

I find writing benefiting the casual apologist in that it gives time to research and improve my reasoning without yet being the expert. Familiarity brings sketches to mind but I need details and verses. Google and bible gateway are substantial crutches. I remember enough to be able to search although I must set the Bible gateway option to KJV since that’s the wording I best recall. I often prefer other versions for clarity that speaks to my mind; and additionally provides the lightbulb of understanding to my audience. But when I find effective expressions they come from too many versions to keep them in my memory. The KJV is NOT a crutch. It is a tool.

If it’s a scheduled class I teach, I write my ideas ahead. This provides organization and effective wording. And it allows for up front research. The written notes also allow me to know what to leave out as time expires. Preparation is key.

Eventually you will want to write to become published. Your editor and later reader responses will help you refine your ideas and expressions. Over time you stand a chance to become recognized as an expert, giving you additional venues to participate and be heard.

Even when we read or hear the news we need to develop an awareness of where our society is going in relation to Bible prophecy, Christian eschatology, and morality. 1st Peter 3:15 says "Be ye ready always to give an answer to every man who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you". When I worked, co-workers would sometimes ask me about my Christian take on events. I could share a confident Christ centered alternative to the tragic happenings around us. For instance, in ecology discussions I could agree that we need to be responsible caretakers of our crumbling world. But we need not despair. Jesus will come before the world disintegrates, even soon although I didn’t know the definition of soon. He is a fair God, caring about his creation, and “No, he did not cause the Katrina tragedy in New Orleans.”

In the USA we don’t read about or commonly hear that Jesus came down from the cross to preach another hundred years in India. But we see movies that focus on the people who cruelly tortured Jesus and focus on the intense pain inflicted on him. This focus on physical pain totally overlooks the agony Jesus experienced during the hours he perceived himself abandoned by the Father while he bore my sins and yours on the cross.

Jesus knew the penalty of sin. We so easily miss the enormity of sin. In the end of days, so many will die the final death, never again to live. Jesus with his father created us to live, to live with him as his companions forever. And at the cross his agony was the ‘felt’ loss of his father. He experienced no guilt. But he and his father had been a team and now he feared the results of the contamination of our sins, yours, mine, John’s and Peter’s heaped and heavy on his shoulders. As he breathed his last he called out, “It is finished.” (John 19:30) I believe this was a cry of accomplishment and hope.

The night before Jesus had sweat blood with his tears, I believe he did so in anticipation and dread the hours ahead separated from the Father. His father this Thursday night sent comforters. But as he died on the cross he experienced the penalty pronounced in Eden. Thankfully he had passed his years without sin. He was God. He arose. Instead of physical pain imposed on Jesus by others, our focus should be on our part inflicting anguish on Jesus. He felt the torment we heaped on him, not so much the injuries inflicted by the Roman soldiers, Pharisees, and the Jewish crowd.

I might add that indirectly, God through the Holy Spirit encouraged Jesus on the cross in the conversion of the thief hanging beside him. Jesus gladly added this thief’s sins to his own shoulders. It is said Jesus would have chosen to die to save just one person. Peter had denied Jesus, John had slept instead of praying with Jesus. This thief, also dying, might be this one person saved.

I shared this story at the time of Mel Gibson’s movie.

Readers often gravitate to books highlighting conflict against the Bible. Conflict is an essential ingredient in a story. We don’t as readily select wholesome books. I might say, Sabbath hours create a need for finding wholesome books. That aside, the apologist can read book reviews. He can then research everything he can to expose the fallacy in the objectionable books. He may on occasion read the book to analyze and prepare a proper, full rebuttal.

Many websites source material for the Christian apologist. One can participate in discussion forums on the internet, some dedicated exclusively to apologetics. Be careful to only read. Participate only if it is a moderated forum. You may otherwise be targeted with stressful abuse.

Formal training in apologetics has only been available in the last quarter century. I did take an apologetics class at Newbold College in Bracknell, England in 1965. I’m not sure a comparable class was available at Andrews University in Michigan in 1968, which is where I graduated..

An internet search can find introductory apologetics, creationism, and Biblical Archeological courses. Baola University, C.S. Lewis Institute, and Liberty University among others come up. Liberty University also shows for creationism classes. Wheaton College along with Liberty University among others shows for Biblical Archeology classes.

The aspiring apologist must be a committed Christian led by the Holy Spirit. He must commit to studying the Bible, studying apologetics, honing these skills, and developing good communication skills.

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1. How this module helped your studies

2. What new lessons you learned.

Teenagers in Pathfinder clubs in our church study to win Bible trivia contests. I’m not sure this benefits our faith or our witness.

I stand with Cindy Tusch, a leader in our church who works for the White Estate who said in a sermon, “We must not wait until we’re sinless before we become willing to witness for Christ.” While being prepared is essential for an apologist, a failure to attempt to witness always results in loss. We must face our unpreparedness, learn from it, and witness again. Our pastor shared how in the early years of his ministry he lost people’s interest in Bible studies because he failed listen and simply overwhelmed them. There is a learning process. Even Olympic gymnastic champions have fallen many times.

3. Your critical evaluation on the topic. WE mean what is the shortcoming you see in the text, your suggestions for improvement.

I appreciated the warning that when we study the material on Internet forums on apologetics that if we feel compelled to participate we discipline ourselves to share only on moderated forums.

4. How does this lesson help you?

We have a responsibility to speak when confronted by those opposed to our faith. We also have a responsibility to be prepared when we speak. If no one speaks up for Christ and the Bible, then the critic wins by default. When we speak up and stumble because we aren’t prepared, the critic scores a bigger win. Even believers with doubts have those doubts increasingly confirmed when the apologist loses the argument. The critic may have struck low, but a loss is a loss.

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