

Apologetics 101 - Apologetic Tool Box (part 1)

What equipment do apologists have in their “toolbox”? What can we use to defend our faith? In this section we will survey two examples of argumentation from the New Testament: 1 Corinthians 15:1-19 and Acts 17:16-34 (next week).

1 Corinthians 15:1-19

In this passage Paul argued with those in the church who denied the resurrection. In making his case Paul utilized several devices: evidences, reasoning, critical analysis, and scripture. First and foremost, he made his case on the basis of the Bible. On the one hand, Paul declared that the resurrection is true because he, the apostle of God, preached it to them as the word of God (vs. 1-3a). Indeed, that message had its intended effect: “We preach and so you believed” (v. 11). On the other hand, he also received this teaching as the word of God from other divinely authorized spokesmen of Christ (v. 3). And, though Paul does not argue so here, he testified that the resurrected Christ personally revealed Himself to Paul (Acts 22:6-11; 26:12-15; Gal 1:15-16).

Second, Paul provided evidence for the resurrection through reliable and numerous eyewitnesses: Cephas (Peter, v. 5a), the “twelve” (apostles, v. 5b), “five hundred brothers” (v. 6), James (v. 7a), all the remaining “apostles” (v. 7b), and finally to Paul, himself (v. 8). Third, Paul provided a twofold rationale for the resurrection. On the one hand, he reasoned “according to the scriptures”: he deduced the necessity of the resurrection based upon the internal logic of God’s word, itself. On the other hand, he used their own contention, “there is no resurrection,” to show the futility and absurdity of their position. For, as he said:

But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

To summarize Paul argued that, if they reject the evidence of scripture, reliable testimony, and do not recognize their flawed reasoning, then they are in “still in their sins” (v. 17) and “most to be pitied” (v. 19). Rejecting the resurrection, in other words, made no sense based on the presupposition of scripture (its own internal logic) and neither from their own point of view (assuming their independent perspective and own internal logic).