

CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

A Reasoned Faith. A Historical Faith.
A Spirit-Empowered Witness.

Reworked from Mark A. Copeland's 2006 Christian Apologetics outline
with updated historical cautions and Assemblies of God alignment notes.

PURPOSE

This edition preserves the original apologetic flow while updating dated claims, softening arguments that overstate the evidence, and adding a distinctly Pentecostal emphasis on the Holy Spirit's witness, illumination, and empowerment. It is designed as a preaching/teaching outline rather than an academic monograph.

How This Edition Was Updated

- Modern typography, stronger visual hierarchy, shorter paragraphs, and teaching callouts.
- Original sequence retained: rational faith, historical Jesus, New Testament reliability, early evidence, archaeology, manuscripts, and the resurrection claim.
- Historically disputed claims are reframed rather than presented as settled facts.
- Assemblies of God alignment is made explicit: Scripture is verbally inspired, infallible and authoritative; Jesus is the eternal Son of God; His bodily resurrection is essential; salvation is by repentance and faith; and the Holy Spirit continues to illuminate, empower, and bear witness.

IMPORTANT DISTINCTION

Apologetics can give reasons for faith, answer objections, and show that Christian belief is intellectually responsible. It does not replace the work of the Holy Spirit, the authority of Scripture, repentance, or personal faith in Jesus Christ.

Series Map

- 1. Introduction to Christian Apologetics
- 2. The Historical Jesus
- 3. Our Dependence on the New Testament
- 4. Evidence for the Early New Testament
- 5. Archaeology and the New Testament
- 6. Manuscript Attestation
- 7. The Resurrection: Truth, Explanation, and Response

Introduction to Christian Apologetics

Why Christians can think deeply, answer graciously, and trust boldly.

WATCH + DISCUSS

Why Smart Christians Lose Arguments About God

Wes Huff

Recommended segment: 01:32–10:14 (about 9 minutes)

WHY THIS FITS: A strong opening because Huff starts with 1 Peter 3:15, explains the biblical purpose of apologetics, warns against treating apologetics as winning arguments, and models a gracious approach to questions.

DISCUSS: 1. What is the difference between giving a defense of the faith and trying to win an argument? 2. Why do humility and good questions matter when we talk with someone who doubts Christianity?

VIDEO: [Open video](#)

1 Peter 3:15 Be ready to give a defense for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.

1. Apologetics is a defense, not an argument for argument's sake

- The Greek word apologia refers to a reasoned defense or answer.
- Peter places apologetics in ordinary Christian witness: someone asks why you have hope, and you are ready to answer.
- The goal is twofold: strengthen believers and equip them to explain why they believe.

2. Christian faith engages both mind and heart

- Jesus commands love for God with the whole person, including the mind (Matthew 22:37).
- Biblical faith is not intellectual suicide. It is trust grounded in God's self-revelation and centered on Jesus Christ.
- Evidence does not create saving faith by itself, but honest reasoning can remove unnecessary obstacles to faith.

3. Christian faith is rooted in history

- Christianity makes claims about real people, places, rulers, events, a crucifixion, an empty tomb, and witnesses.
- Luke deliberately anchors his narrative in historical settings (Luke 2:1-5; 3:1-2).
- The Christian claim is not merely 'this idea inspires me.' It is also 'God acted in history.'

4. Christian faith has an object

- The object of saving faith is not faith itself. It is Jesus Christ: who He is and what He has done.
- Romans 10:9 connects confession of Jesus as Lord with belief that God raised Him from the dead.

5. Truth welcomes honest examination

- Peter appeals to publicly known events in Acts 2:22. Paul reasons publicly in Acts 26.
- We should not fear sincere questions. We should answer with humility, accuracy, and confidence.

AG LENS

The Assemblies of God affirms Scripture as the infallible, authoritative rule of faith and conduct. Pentecostal confidence in the Holy Spirit is not opposed to careful reasoning; the Spirit who inspired Scripture also illuminates the believer through Scripture.

The Historical Jesus

What can history reasonably establish before we ask the larger question: Who is He?

WATCH + DISCUSS

“Up To 500 Witnesses!” Is There PROOF of Jesus Christ’s Resurrection?

Wesley Huff with Piers Morgan

Recommended segment: 03:00–05:00, then 26:52–33:50 (about 9 minutes total)

WHY THIS FITS: The opening segment addresses the historical existence of Jesus in a public, skeptical setting. The later segment lets the class hear how Gospel dating and historical sources enter the conversation without pretending that history alone proves every Christian claim.

DISCUSS: 1. What can a historian reasonably say about Jesus before making a theological claim about who He is? 2. Why is it important not to overstate what non-Christian sources can prove?

VIDEO: [Open video](#)

1. Jesus' existence is part of mainstream historical study

- Among specialists in ancient history and early Christianity, Jesus' existence is broadly accepted, including by many scholars who do not affirm Christian theology.
- That consensus does not prove His deity, but it moves the discussion beyond the claim that Jesus was simply invented.

2. Non-Christian sources matter, but they must be used carefully

- Tacitus reports that Christus was executed under Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius.
- Pliny the Younger describes Christians gathering and singing to Christ 'as to a god.'
- Josephus refers to James as the brother of Jesus who was called Christ; another Josephus passage about Jesus contains wording that scholars debate.
- Suetonius mentions unrest connected with 'Chrestus,' but whether that directly refers to Christ is debated.
- References connected with Thallus, Mara bar Serapion, and later rabbinic material may be useful, but their dating and interpretation should not be overstated.

3. What historical evidence can and cannot do

- It can strongly support that Jesus lived, gathered followers, was crucified, and became the center of a rapidly expanding movement.
- It does not, by itself, prove that Jesus is the eternal Son of God.
- That larger claim requires engagement with the New Testament witness, especially the resurrection.

Matthew 16:15 But who do you say that I am?

TEACHING MOVE

Do not oversell the evidence. Strong apologetics distinguishes what a source establishes from what Christians conclude when the historical evidence is read together with Scripture and the resurrection testimony.

Our Dependence on the New Testament

Why the historical reliability of the New Testament matters to Christian proclamation.

WATCH + DISCUSS

Is the New Testament Reliable?

Sean McDowell

Recommended segment: Full short film

WHY THIS FITS: A concise bridge from “Jesus existed” to “can the documents telling us about Him be trusted?” McDowell introduces the historical reliability question in an accessible format.

DISCUSS: 1. What kinds of evidence should we examine when deciding whether an ancient document is historically reliable? 2. Why does New Testament reliability matter if Christianity makes claims about events that happened in history?

VIDEO: [Open video](#)

1. The central Christian claims come to us through apostolic testimony

- Jesus' miracles, teaching, death, resurrection appearances, and fulfillment of Scripture are known principally through the New Testament witnesses.
- The New Testament is therefore not a disposable accessory to Christian faith. It is foundational to the Church's proclamation of Christ.

2. Reliability matters

- If the New Testament were composed so late that it had no meaningful connection to eyewitness memory, its historical value would be diminished.
- If its authors were consistently inaccurate about checkable people, places, and events, confidence in their testimony would be weakened.
- If the text had been radically corrupted in transmission, we would have difficulty knowing what the earliest Christian witnesses actually wrote.

3. Pentecostal faith is not blind faith

- The Holy Spirit bears witness to Christ and illuminates Scripture, but the Spirit does not ask believers to despise evidence or historical inquiry.
- Acts repeatedly portrays Spirit-empowered witnesses reasoning, testifying, appealing to Scripture, and speaking about events they claimed had occurred publicly.

AG LENS

The Assemblies of God teaches that the Old and New Testaments are verbally inspired by God and are the final authoritative rule for faith and conduct. Historical study serves that conviction; it does not sit above Scripture as a higher authority.

Evidence for the Early New Testament

How close are the documents to the events they describe?

WATCH + DISCUSS

Can the Gospels Survive Historical Scrutiny?

Wes Huff

Recommended segment: 05:03–11:26 (about 6½ minutes)

WHY THIS FITS: This section focuses on whether the Gospels were written close enough to the events to preserve living memory, then discusses Mark and the dating of John. It pairs well with the lesson's caution that dating arguments are important but should not be overstated.

DISCUSS: 1. Why does proximity to the events matter when evaluating the Gospels? 2. What is the difference between evidence for an early date and proof of an exact date?

VIDEO: [Open video](#)

1. Why early dating matters

- The closer a source is to the events it reports, the greater the opportunity for living memory, eyewitness testimony, correction, and corroboration.
- Early dating alone does not prove truthfulness, but it is an important part of historical evaluation.

2. Internal evidence

- Acts ends with Paul alive in Roman custody. Some interpreters see this as evidence for an early date; others believe Luke's literary purpose explains the ending. It is suggestive, not decisive.
- The New Testament's limited explicit reference to Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70 has been used to argue for early dates. This argument is debated and should not be presented as proving that every New Testament book was written before AD 70.

3. Manuscripts and early Christian writers

- Early papyri demonstrate that New Testament writings were circulating well before the great fourth-century codices.
- Papyrus P52, a small fragment of John, is commonly dated to the second century; exact dating remains debated.
- Clement of Rome, Ignatius, and Polycarp show that New Testament language and writings were already deeply embedded in Christian communities by the late first and early second centuries.

4. The conclusion

- The New Testament documents belong to the world of early Christianity, not to a legendary period many centuries removed from Jesus.
- Individual books require individual dating arguments; sweeping claims should be avoided.

UPDATE FROM THE 2006 OUTLINE

The original outline treated several early-date arguments as more conclusive than current scholarship warrants. This edition keeps the apologetic value while distinguishing evidence from inference.

Archaeology and the New Testament

Archaeology can illuminate the world of the Bible, but it must not be asked to prove what it cannot prove.

WATCH + DISCUSS

22 Historical References in Two Chapters – Luke

Josh McDowell Ministry

Recommended segment: Full clip, 2:49

WHY THIS FITS: A very short visual reinforcement of Luke's use of rulers, places, offices, and historical details. Use it as an example of corroboration, while keeping the lesson's important distinction: archaeology can support historical setting without automatically proving every theological claim.

DISCUSS: 1. What does accurate knowledge of names, rulers, places, and offices tell us about an ancient writer? 2. What can archaeology confirm, and what theological claims are beyond archaeology's ability to prove?

VIDEO: [Open video](#)

1. What archaeology can do

- Confirm or clarify locations, titles, customs, political structures, inscriptions, buildings, roads, coins, and cultural settings.
- Strengthen confidence when a biblical writer demonstrates accurate knowledge of local details.
- Correct modern assumptions about the ancient world.

2. What archaeology cannot do

- Archaeology cannot excavate the deity of Christ, inspiration, forgiveness, or the resurrection as a theological event.
- A historical detail being confirmed does not automatically prove every theological claim in the same document.

3. Useful examples

- The title 'politarchs' in Acts 17:6 is attested in inscriptions, including material associated with Thessalonica.
- Luke's geographical language around regions such as Phrygia and Lycaonia fits the complexity of ancient regional usage better than older critics sometimes assumed.
- Archaeological work has illuminated first-century Jerusalem and settings associated with John's Gospel, but exact identifications such as the location of Gabbatha should be presented with appropriate caution.

4. The Quirinius question requires caution

- The census language in Luke 2 has generated substantial scholarly debate because the well-attested governorship of Quirinius is usually dated after Herod the Great's death.
- Archaeology and inscriptions provide important background for Roman censuses, but they have not produced a universally accepted solution to the chronological question.

DO NOT SAY

"Archaeology has proven every disputed New Testament detail." A stronger and more defensible statement is: archaeology has repeatedly illuminated and, in many cases, corroborated the New Testament's historical setting, while some questions remain debated.

Manuscript Attestation

Can we know what the New Testament authors wrote?

WATCH + DISCUSS

Can I Trust the Bible? Episode 2: The Right Text

Wes Huff / Apologetics Canada

Recommended segment: 09:01–18:38 (about 9½ minutes)

WHY THIS FITS: The best fit for manuscript attestation. Huff directly addresses manuscript differences, textual variants, and how the surviving textual evidence is evaluated. It helps students see why variants do not mean the text is unknowable.

DISCUSS: 1. Why do many surviving manuscripts create both more variants and more opportunities to identify the earliest wording? 2. How should Christians talk about textual variants without either hiding them or exaggerating their significance?

VIDEO: [Open video](#)

1. The basic textual question

- We do not possess the original handwritten copies, or autographs, of the New Testament books.
- Textual criticism compares surviving manuscripts, ancient translations, and quotations in early Christian writers to identify the earliest recoverable text.

2. The New Testament has an unusually rich manuscript tradition

- Thousands of Greek New Testament manuscripts survive, along with many more manuscripts in ancient translations.
- The manuscripts come from different centuries and geographic regions, giving scholars a large body of evidence for comparison.
- Early papyri and major codices allow the text to be checked across long periods of transmission.

3. Variants are real, but they are studied openly

- Copyists introduced variants: spelling differences, word order, omitted or repeated words, harmonizations, and occasional larger textual differences.
- Modern critical editions document these variants rather than hiding them.
- No central Assemblies of God doctrine depends on a uniquely disputed textual reading.

4. Inspiration and transmission are related but distinct questions

- The AG doctrine of inspiration concerns Scripture as God's inspired revelation and authoritative Word.
- Textual criticism addresses how the wording of that text has been transmitted through manuscript copying.

AG LENS

The Assemblies of God affirms an inspired, inerrant, and authoritative biblical revelation. Responsible manuscript study is compatible with that confession and helps us assess the history of the text we read today.

The Resurrection: Truth, Explanation, and Response

The heart of Christian apologetics is not merely that a text survived, but that Jesus Christ is risen.

WATCH + DISCUSS

Powerful Evidence for Jesus' Resurrection & Debunking False Narratives

Sean McDowell

Recommended segment: 05:26–27:46, or select 10:46–21:56 for a tighter 11-minute segment

WHY THIS FITS: McDowell moves from Jesus' historical existence to the empty tomb, post-death appearances, and alternative explanations. The tighter segment is especially useful because it centers the historical evidence rather than relying on a simple "truth or lie" dilemma.

DISCUSS: 1. Which historical fact or line of evidence for the resurrection do you think requires the strongest explanation? 2. Why is it better apologetically to compare competing explanations than to say the only options are "truth" or "deliberate lie"?

VIDEO: [Open video](#)

1 Corinthians 15:14 If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.

1. The resurrection is central, not optional

- The apostles did not preach a vague spirituality. They proclaimed that Jesus died, was buried, was raised, and appeared to witnesses.
- The Assemblies of God explicitly affirms the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

2. Avoid a false dilemma

- The original outline often framed the options as either 'the New Testament is true' or 'the writers knowingly orchestrated a lie.'
- That is too narrow. Historical discussion also considers possibilities such as legendary development, mistaken interpretation, memory, literary shaping, visionary-experience theories, and combinations of these.
- A stronger apologetic case asks which explanation best accounts for the total evidence rather than dismissing alternatives before examining them.

3. Key historical data to examine

- Jesus was crucified and died.
- His followers very early proclaimed that God raised Him from the dead.
- Paul preserves an early resurrection tradition in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 and reports appearances to individuals and groups.
- The disciples' resurrection conviction transformed the direction of the early Christian movement.
- Paul, once an opponent of the Church, became a leading witness after what he described as an encounter with the risen Christ.

4. Martyrdom claims should be precise

- There is strong early evidence for the deaths of James the son of Zebedee, James the brother of Jesus, Peter, and Paul in connection with the early Christian movement.
- Later traditions describe the deaths of other apostles, but the historical evidence varies greatly. Do not present every traditional martyrdom story as equally established.

5. The apologetic invitation

- Historical evidence can bring a person to the threshold of the resurrection claim.
- Scripture calls for more than intellectual agreement: repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The Holy Spirit bears witness to Christ, convicts of sin, illuminates Scripture, and empowers believers to testify.

PENTECOSTAL CONCLUSION

We do not have to choose between evidence and encounter. The New Testament gives us both: eyewitness proclamation rooted in history and the present work of the Holy Spirit making Christ known and empowering His Church to witness.

VIDEO USE NOTE

Preview each clip before class. Public YouTube availability can change. For paid curriculum such as Evidence That Demands a Verdict, use the publisher's licensed video rather than an unauthorized upload. The recommended segments are teaching aids, not substitutes for the biblical text or the lesson manuscript.

Assemblies of God Alignment Review

Summary of the theological review of the original 2006 outline.

Area	Assessment	Recommended handling
Scripture	Aligned	The original strongly defends New Testament reliability. Add the AG's explicit language of verbal inspiration, infallibility, and final authority.
Jesus Christ	Aligned	The outline centers on Jesus as Son of God, His death, and resurrection. This is fully consistent with AG doctrine.
Resurrection	Aligned, with argument update	AG affirms bodily resurrection. Replace the original truth-or-deliberate-lie binary with a fuller evaluation of competing historical explanations.
Salvation	Generally aligned	The original calls for commitment and obedience. Clarify AG language: salvation is received through repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ, by grace through faith.
Holy Spirit	Underdeveloped, not contradictory	The original is largely evidential and does not emphasize the Spirit. Add illumination, conviction, witness, and empowerment without treating subjective experience as a substitute for Scripture.
Baptism in the Holy Spirit	Omitted	Not a contradiction because the outline's topic is apologetics, but a Pentecostal edition should connect Acts 1:8 to Spirit-empowered witness and distinguish Spirit baptism from conversion.
Initial evidence of tongues	Omitted	No conflict is stated. If this becomes a full AG discipleship course, add a separate lesson rather than forcing it into historical apologetics.
Divine healing / Second Coming	Omitted	No doctrinal conflict; simply outside the scope of the original outline.

Historical claims

Several need revision

Quirinius, universal pre-AD 70 dating, P52 as definitively the oldest fragment, exact manuscript percentages, and universal apostolic martyrdom were stated too confidently.

BOTTOM LINE

I found no major doctrinal statement in the original outline that directly contradicts the Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Truths. The bigger issues are emphasis and precision: the source is generic evidential apologetics rather than distinctly Pentecostal apologetics, and several historical arguments from 2006 are presented more confidently than they should be today.

Suggested AG Additions for Teaching

- 2 Timothy 3:15-17 and 2 Peter 1:20-21: inspiration and authority of Scripture.
- John 16:8-14: the Spirit convicts and glorifies Christ.
- Acts 1:8: apologetics and witness are empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- 1 Corinthians 2:10-14: spiritual illumination does not bypass Scripture; it enables Spirit-led reception of God's truth.
- Romans 8:16: the inward witness of the Spirit.
- Acts 17:2-3, 17:17, 18:4: Spirit-filled apostolic ministry included reasoning and persuasion.

Sources & Editorial Notes

- Base outline: Mark A. Copeland, Christian Apologetics, Executable Outlines (2006), supplied by the user.
- Doctrinal alignment: Assemblies of God (USA), Statement of Fundamental Truths; official position paper on Inspiration, Inerrancy, and Authority of Scripture; official position paper on Baptism in the Holy Spirit.
- Historical revisions are editorial updates intended to avoid overstating debated claims. For an academic edition, individual historical claims should be footnoted to current primary-source editions and contemporary scholarship.