

Have you ever seen a Christian and a non-Christian get in a debate where they are getting exactly zero miles from nowhere, and they both are throwing out bad arguments left and right while the spectators who may be viewing the whole fracas just shake their heads in disapproval? Such debates often devolve into petty, or at the very least impotent, wastes of time, and people end up leaving confused, frustrated, or thinking that the other is rather crazy - glancing at them with a raised eyebrow. Kind of like the "self-defense" techniques shown in the following video:

(No one is paying me to post this video, I promise. I just think it is funny).

[**Source:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j16Hjy2LB5Q>]

So what can we learn from that video? Let's analogize it and perhaps have some fun along the way. Well if we take the "frozen yogurt" to mean one's closely held belief and someone assails you while indulging in said belief (even in a sneaky way from behind when you weren't expecting it) then we can see the common origin of such silly debates. A lot of these debates can just be avoided by taking a right approach to begin with, by not using sneaky or underhanded ways to pounce on one's opponent. But let's move on to the reactions. The natural (perhaps visceral) reaction to the untrained and unprepared person is to lash out in defense of your belief when it is assailed, often striking out forcefully with a blunt instrument - as if it were - and to "defend" blindly from a position of ignorance. The other participant, if also untrained, will react back in the same manner and thus the "slap fight" ensues.

I've seen atheists do that. I've seen Christians do that. I've seen Muslims do that. I've seen Mormons do that. I've seen Republicans do that. I've seen Democrats do that. It doesn't take much imagination to say that representatives from all world views and inclinations do that at one time or another. That is because it's easy to do that. We may potentially take the message on the sign outside of the building, "*Self-defense classes: For Le\$\$!*" to stand for sloppy defense training which results from engaging in "less" effort. The reason that anyone can get into a slap fight is because it is effortless. It doesn't require thinking, and often it rather evidently

demonstrates of its own accord that thinking is not much involved.

Eventually one of the two slap mates will tire of the ridiculous sparring and leave the conversation (or perhaps run away), as does the assailant of the man who was (supposedly) eating frozen yogurt in the video. Either way, in this scenario, one of the two - if not both - will probably raise their hands in victory and claim that they won the argument fair and square, despite there not having really been any good points made. Now let's up the stakes a bit, and let's further suppose that this slap fight, the limp and ineffectual verbal sparring of two individuals, was on a public stage with many spectators, say in a formal debate setting. The would-be victor claims to have a "powerful technique" after engaging in a slap fest, and the uncritical spectators then split up into their own debate circles sometime later and spar with the same ineffectual techniques (as in the video). Thus bad techniques are not only occurring occasionally, but are even proliferating systemically. This happens often when people repeat bad arguments and (re)use poor techniques in presenting their positions.

Some people see debates like this and choose to simply not engage at all and just write off the debate as hopeless, as if it were the subject matter that was irrelevant and not rather the techniques of the people who were discussing it poorly. But that is not a right way to address and react to discussions about important issues. The way to stop the silliness, the ineffectualness, and the madness is to step into the midst of the fray and to **start talking some sense** in a respectful manner. However, I have seen some self-styled "non-argumentative" Christians who say they just don't want to cause a fight, by which they mean that they don't want to have to really take a stand on a biblical belief in the face of real opposition, and therefore they retreat and end up yielding important ground to unbelievers. Yet we cannot be timid as Christians! We must put on our armor in preparation for the evil or challenging day, "and having done all, to stand" **(Ephesians 6:13)**

. This does not mean that you are to come off as crass or haughty, but rather you should possess a sincere and calm confidence and conviction in the face of opposition, keeping in mind that you are endeavoring to defend the actual truth (and not just a subjective proposition) of God to someone.

As Christians, what we rather need to do is engage our mind and our heart together in seeking God's truth, to partner thinking with faith and reasoning with conviction, so that we may first be built up in our own understanding in order that we may then go on to share it with others.

Engaging in what we call "apologetics" is in fact a biblical command. We take the word from **1 Peter 3:15**

which says, "

But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone

who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence " (NASB). The word "defense" (sometimes also translated "answer" or "reason") is from the Greek word *apologia*, from which we get the word *apologetics*. It has absolutely nothing to do with apologizing in the sense of saying that you are sorry. That is actually a stock joke among those who know what the term really means, but the joke can get old after a while (though we retain our good humor about it).

The New Defenders Study Bible takes note on this verse (in part):

3:15 *answer. "Answer" is the Greek apologia, from which we get our word "apologetics," meaning the careful, logical defense of the Christian faith against the attacks of its adversaries and showing its validity as the true saving gospel of God, our Creator and Savior. In effect, Peter is admonishing believers to be always prepared to give an apologetic for the faith, especially when confronted by those who deny it and would destroy it if they could. This surely means that there is an effective apologetic that can be given, and it is each Christian's responsibility to study (II Timothy 2:15) and be ready to give it when needed.*

Notice also how the command in Scripture ends with "*yet with gentleness and reverence*". As I said before our defense does not need to be crass, haughty, or disrespectful. We should genuinely care about a person, even an enemy, so much that we would put forth careful and sincere effort to correctly represent the truth to them. Understanding that the other person who you are speaking with is made in the image of God like you are, and also shares in the same common need of humanity for a savior along with you, is a good starting point. In that way, even when another disagrees with us it is not due to us coming at them with wildly flung arguments, as with slapping hands, but with inviting and ready hands eager to engage another sincerely and intelligently; knowing what we believe, speaking with conviction, and most importantly speaking from the authority of Scripture. That is why we must study to show ourselves approved, so that in all things we may glorify God. Jesus said in

Matthew 5:16

, "
Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven
" (NASB).

So how can you develop better techniques to be able, and indeed **ready**, to give an answer/reason/defense for the hope that is in you? Firstly, read God's Word, which is His revelation to us, and communicate back to God in prayer. Be firmly rooted in God and His Word. Then also take advantage of as many tools and opportunities as you can to build up your faith. Find someone who can sharpen your mind as iron sharpens iron. Listen to talks or debates with strong Christian representatives in them who are engaged in apologetics in the public sphere, such as people like William Lane Craig, Ravi Zacharias, Frank Turek, John Lennox, Alvin Plantinga, Alister McGrath, Michael Brown, and James White to name just a few. Read books on apologetics. Discuss apologetics in online forums or social media. Discuss apologetics with your friends and family. Check out organizations like

[Stand to Reason](#)

,
[Ratio Christi](#)

,
[Tactical Faith](#)

, and the

[Christian Apologetics Alliance](#)

(many of which have a social media presence) and get plugged in where you can. Attend apologetics conferences if there are any in your region.

In my region (the southeastern United States) there is the annual [SALT Apologetics Conference](#) in partnership

with Tactical Faith. There's even an organization in Dallas called the

[Bible & Beer Consortium](#)

(no, seriously) that actively engages the community on issues of apologetics and invites people to come and ask questions while sipping on pale ale and listening to apologetics talks. Engage the culture, but first engage yourself. Jump in and learn. Seek the Scriptures diligently and think of effective ways to communicate your faith and the realities - seen and unseen - of this universe that God has created.

Don't take defense classes (apologetics lessons) from the slap masters. Go to the warriors who know how to wield the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Ephesians 6:17), who rightly divide the word of truth, and honor God with all of their mind - as intelligently and responsibly yielded to God - along with all their heart, soul, and strength (**Luke 10:27**), and do likewise

(1 Corinthians 11:1; Philipians 4:8-9)

Soli Deo Gloria.