

Knowing Our God

Advanced Exegetical Theology

The Knowledge of God Series

Book 5

Biblical Apologetics

*How Does God Really Want Us to Prove
Christianity?*

Kurt Jurgensmeier

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my daughter Jessica who exemplifies *virtue apologetics* as well as anyone I know.

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- ◆ **Best:** The most helpful, interesting and or important chapters.
- ♦ **Essential:** Important chapters to understand the topic of the book.
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Preface

Helping the next generation of Bible Teachers

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. (2 Tim 2:15)

These words were written to a young Teacher of God's word. They are a reminder of the awesome privilege, responsibility, and accountability that comes with such a divine calling. Being a Teacher is God's gift to a man, but what kind of Teacher he becomes is his gift to God. And God tells all Teachers something of what He is expecting in the verse above.

First, the Teacher is to "**present**" himself "**to God**" when he teaches. When we teach it is not only humans that are listening, but Heaven as well, and God is our most important audience. We can be concerned with what people will think of our teaching, but we need to be much, much more concerned with what God will think.

And God's expectations can significantly differ from those of humans. People often expect eloquence and entertainment, God expects accuracy, "**correctly**" interpreting, teaching, and applying God's word for God's people. There is nothing in all the world more important than this because to do otherwise is to misunderstand, misrepresent, and eventually disobey the Author.

As in all human endeavors, not even God expects perfection, but He certainly demands that we do our "**best**." We need to remember that we do all of this under the watchful eye of the Author Himself, and will one Day be either "**approved**" or "**ashamed**" regarding how careful and diligent we were in working to understand, teach, and apply His word "**correctly**."

This book is offered as a help in obeying the Apostle's command for those who have, or desire to have, the great responsibility of teaching God's word to His people. It is part of a series of books written under the title of ***Knowing Our God: Advanced Exegetical Theology***.

These books are *advanced* in that they are an in-depth, scholarly study of very specific and often difficult theological topics.

They are uniquely *exegetical* in that there is a special emphasis on interpreting the Scriptures applicable to the topic. While many

systematic theologies would not require much of a Scripture index, a large percentage of the current 5000 pages of *Knowing Our God* is commentary on Scripture.

Finally, these books are *theology*, because it is in such an endeavor that we bring the pieces of God's word into a harmonious whole in order to produce the full truth of Scripture. We believe *Advanced Exegetical Theology* is a great need in equipping Pastors today to defend the faith for this and future generations.

Ezra the priest, of course, is our example, of whom it is written: **"the gracious hand of his God was on him. For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel"** (Ezra 7:9-10). Obeying God's word was obviously important to Ezra, but so was being **"devoted . . . to the study"** of God's word, all so that he could be **"teaching"** it to God's people. It is our hope that this book will help you do just that.

Finally, a few practical points. First, while we are not aware of anything in it that would be contrary to the historical, Evangelical Christian faith, if you encounter something that differs from the beliefs of your Pastor(s), please discuss it with them if it causes serious questions for you. We desire to respect the pastoral authority God has in your life as much as possible.

Secondly, studying God's word is best pursued in community with spiritual peers, and we encourage you to read this with others and discuss the ***Gauging Your Grasp*** questions usually at the end of a chapter.

Thirdly, we make an effort to make an organized study of God's word not just theological but practical as well. So prayerfully consider the sections entitled ***Pastoral Practices*** along the way.

Fourth, as you read you will notice several references to other writings. This reflects the fact that this book is an excerpt from a larger production entitled *Knowing Our God*. The entire collection of books on systematic theology that are currently available can be found at www.trainingtimothys.org.

Finally, we would appreciate the reader visiting the site and emailing us any feedback on this book, including concerns, comments, and any proposed corrections. We too wish to study God's word in community, and that community includes you.

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Apologetics

Chapter 5.1

Born Again Living

Virtue Apologetics: *The Ultimate Proof of Christianity*

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Primary Points

- Apologetics is the field of study which provides proof for the claims of Christianity to be the only faith through which people can be accepted by God.
- The superior virtue of Christians proves the salvific exclusivity of the Christian Gospel because real moral transformation only occurs with its reception.
- Ordinarily, God does not intend today to authenticate the Gospel with "charismatic" miracles, but rather, with "character" miracles.
- What better way to prove Jesus than to have people meet Jesus?
- The greatest value of *intellectual apologetics* is not in sparking the faith of unbelievers, but rather in building the faith of believers who can actually appreciate such evidence.
- The moral virtue of God, and all the moral virtue He expects of us, can be summed up in the biblical ideas of love and holiness.
- While sexual, parental, and friendship love are by far the most common ideas of love in both the ancient and modern world, it is unconditional *agapē* that the early Christians virtually invented in order to describe God's love.
- While all other loves are founded on and limited to liking someone, *agapē* love *does not even begin until we do not naturally like someone*.
- Because of its divine nature, the noun *agapē* was *never* used in any classical Greek literature that we know of before the NT.
- Christianity is the only religion that requires forgiveness because we are the only ones that can forgive.
- Because God is holy, holiness is the other ultimate proof that someone has a relationship with Him.
- The example of Ananias and Sapphira demonstrates that holiness, not just love, can attract seeking unbelievers to Christ.
- All of which makes it all the more disturbing that *virtue apologetics* is the most neglected approach to Christian apologetics in our day.

A)

The Ultimate Apologetic: *Supernatural Virtue*

A.1) God's Approach to Apologetics: *Character Miracles*

It is one thing to claim that born again Christians possess an exclusive and superior knowledge of God, as we have elsewhere in *Knowing Our God*. It is another thing to prove it, both to ourselves,

and to the world. This is the purpose of *apologetics* and the defense of the exclusivity of the Christian faith. *Apologetics* is not telling someone why you are sorry you are a Christian. Neither is it making someone else sorry they asked why you are a Christian. Rather, the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (EDT) states under "Apologetics":

The English word comes from a Greek root meaning "to defend, to make reply, to give an answer, to legally defend oneself." In NT times an *apologia* was a formal courtroom defense of something (cf. 2 Tim 4:16). As a subdivision of Christian theology apologetics is a systematic, argumentative discourse in defense of the divine origin and the authority of the Christian faith.¹

Christian apologetics then is the field of study which provides proof for the claims of Christianity to be the only faith through which people can be accepted by God. The King said, "**I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me**" (John 14:6). The Apostle Peter said, "**Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other Name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved**" (Acts 4:12). The Apostle Paul wrote: "**There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus**" (1 Tim 2:5). Either these men are liars, or all followers of any other religion are damned. Right away, then, we see that such a critical claim demands considerable proof.

While we will certainly argue in this book that God desires us to engage in apologetics, we do not believe it can save anyone, and that its value in even leading people to Christ is limited. Nonetheless, God certainly desires that His people give the world evidence for the salvific exclusivity of the Christian Gospel.

Several different angles have been taken in Christian apologetics, but the most popular ones could be categorized as *intellectual apologetics*, which involve philosophical, historical, or scientific evidence and arguments, with the goal of demonstrating that Christianity simply makes better sense of the world than other religions. We would suggest, however, this was not the primary approach of God in either the OT or NT. Instead, God's approach to authenticating His truth has always been *miracles*.

For example, it is the miracle of Creation that provides proof that leaves humanity "**without excuse**" (Rom 1:20) for not believing its message of the existence and authority of a Creator.

¹ A. J. Hoover, "Apologetics" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (EDT), Walter Elwell ed., (Baker, 1984), 68.

Accordingly, when the Creator came to Earth, He did not simply claim a superior spiritual knowledge, but proved it with supernatural deeds (cf. John 4:11; 20:20-21; Acts 2:22). Likewise, Christ's Apostles authenticated themselves as sources and messengers of superior spiritual truth with the miracles they performed (cf. Acts 14:3; 2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:3-4). Even in the OT, it was the miracle of plagues in Egypt (cf. Exod 7-12), the miracle of conquests in Canaan (cf. Josh 5-13, esp. 2:8-11), the miracle of fire before the prophets of Baal (cf. 2 Kgs 18:15-40), and the supernatural humbling of the king of Babylon (Dan 4), that God intended as evidence that He was the only true God.

How then are Christians today supposed to prove to themselves and others that they possess superior spiritual knowledge? How do we justify our claim that we are right and saved, and the rest of the world is wrong and damned? Is it with intellectual arguments? No, it is again with *miracles*. Do we mean casting out demons and healing headaches? No, we mean real miracles, the kind that only God can do. We mean the "**greater works**" of power that the King said would accompany His people after His departure and the coming of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 14:12).

Here, however, we part company with many Christians today and claim that by "**greater works**" Christ did not mean the physical healing of the body, but rather, the spiritual healing of the soul.² Ordinarily, God does not intend today to authenticate the Gospel with "charismatic" miracles, but rather, with "character" miracles.³ The greatest miracles occurring today are the transformation of sinners into saints, lusters into lovers, and the greedy into givers. This miracle of supernatural regeneration is *the* ultimate apologetic for the superiority of the Christian faith, far surpassing all other apologetic approaches combined. This is because it results in a supernatural love and holiness that can be witnessed by all. And as NT scholar Leon Morris put it in a rare study on the topic, "Love is a sheer miracle."⁴

What better way to prove Jesus than to have people meet Jesus? And they do when Christians act like Jesus by the unique power they have because the Holy Spirit lives in them.

² For further discussion of the vital understanding of what Christ meant when He said His followers would perform greater miracles than He upon His departure see section 10.5.B.2.

³ For further discussion and a critique of what has come to be known as "Power evangelism" see chapter 11.5.6.

⁴ Leon Morris, *Testaments of Love: A Study of Love in the Bible* (Eerdmans, 1981), 277.

How do we know that the Gospel of the King is the only Gospel that saves? We know because real and supernatural human transformation is in the name and power of Christ alone. No other Gospel can claim or boast of the same holy, miraculous, moral fruit of this Gospel. We know the spiritual transformation that we have experienced has occurred in the *name* and *power* of the King, because it only occurs with the communication and reception of the *Gospel* of the King.

To the question of, "How do we know this spiritual experience of regeneration cannot happen by some other religion?" we answer simply that it cannot and never has. The kind of superior life change we have experienced only happens in the name of the King and this is because the Holy Spirit (the only One who can create such change) only acts in the name of the King and no other.

Contrary to the growing number of *pluralists* ⁵ in our day, salvation is only found in knowing and accepting the King for who He is. And the best way of knowing whether or not one has the King, is to judge how well they are obeying and acting like the King, and born again Christians far surpass any other humans in these categories. The superior virtue of Christians proves the salvific exclusivity of the Christian Gospel because supernatural moral transformation only occurs with its reception.

Which makes it all the more disturbing that *virtue apologetics* is also the most neglected approach to Christian apologetics in our day. ⁶ This is in spite of the fact that it can be proven both biblically and historically that God has always intended virtue to be His ultimate and universal apologetic for salvation through Him. G. K. Chesterton remarked: "Original sin . . . is the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved." ⁷ On the contrary, if the sinful nature of unregenerated humanity can be proven by their sinfulness, then the New Nature of the regenerated can be proven by their virtue.

Whether or not the Holy Spirit is healing bodies upon the command of "faith healers" is debatable, ⁸ but it is beyond doubt that He is healing hearts upon the preaching of the Gospel. In addition to spiritual regeneration which uniquely allows the Christian

⁵ *Pluralism* is essentially the belief that all moral religions provide salvation. For further discussion see section 6.10.B.

⁶ For further discussion on the neglect of *virtue apologetics* see section 5.10.C

⁷ G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, ch. II; online at www.ccel.org.

⁸ For further discussion of "faith healing" see Book 11: *Human Miracle Working*

to accept the Gospel, the Spirit continues to work to provide undeniable, supernatural, and *objective* proof of their salvation, and their spiritual and epistemological superiority. This miracle of spiritual rebirth through the Holy Spirit of Christ demonstrates itself in the supernatural and superior *virtue* that flows from the lives of regenerated Christians, explaining our labeling of this approach as *virtue apologetics*.

More specifically, nobody *loves* the Creator and His human creations as sincerely, consistently, and deeply as Holy Spirit indwelled believers, and nobody can. Likewise, nobody is as *holy* as those uniquely indwelled with the *Holy* Spirit, which is only born again Christians. We believe the Bible clearly teaches these very things and that the superiority and certainty of our *born again believing* is proven by the superiority and certainty of our *born again living*.

A.2) A Popular Approach to Apologetics: *Intellectual Arguments*

Many contend that a presentation of Christian truth must begin with a rational defense of the superiority of its authority and sources. We would label this as *intellectual apologetics* in which there is an emphasis on philosophical, historical, and scientific arguments for the Christian faith.⁹ For example, the rightly respected apologist Norm Geisler writes:

The heart of this [*intellectual*] apologetic approach is that the Christian is interested in defending the truths that Christ is the Son of God and the Bible is the word of God. However, prior to establishing these two pillars on which the uniqueness of Christianity is built, one must establish the existence of God. For it makes no sense to speak about an act of God (i.e., a miracle) confirming that Christ is the Son of God and that the Bible is the Word of God unless of course there is a God who can have a son and who can speak a Word.

Theism, then, is a logical prerequisite to Christianity. What is more, an adequate test for truth is a methodological prerequisite to establishing theism. For unless the Christian apologist has a test by which he can show other systems to be false and theism to be true, then there is no way to adjudicate the conflicting claims of various religions and world views.¹⁰

⁹ For further discussion of *intellectual apologetics* see section 5.10.

¹⁰ Norm Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Baker Book House, 1976), 8-9.

Likewise, the popular Reformed theologian R. C. Sproul says: Apologetics is indispensable for the establishing of [the intellectual assent to Christian truth that occurs before someone gets saved]. Though apologetics may not be evangelism, it is [apparently always] a vital part of pre-evangelism.¹¹

We would respectfully disagree. In order to be saved, people need to believe in the Savior, and they can do so without believing in a Creator. People need to believe in Jesus, and that can occur without belief in the Bible. While we do not wish to deny that the evidences produced by *intellectual apologists* have had some value for the conversion of some unbelievers, they do not have the preeminent evangelistic value that Drs. Geisler and Sproul suggest.¹²

In fact, the greatest value of *intellectual apologetics* is not in sparking the faith of unbelievers, but rather in building the faith of believers who can actually appreciate such evidence.¹³ This, in fact, may explain the misplaced emphasis on philosophical, historical, and scientific evidences for the Christian faith as a defense of it to unbelievers. It is because such evidences are so valuable to *us*, that we want to assume they will be valuable to the unregenerate as well, which is often not the case.

Several Scriptures are often used to give biblical support to defending the Christian faith with *intellectual apologetics*, but as will be demonstrated especially in chapter 5.4, there is virtually no clear support in Scripture for this popular approach and overwhelming evidence for *virtue apologetics*. Which makes one seriously wonder why, as demonstrated in chapter 5.8, there is virtually no modern discussion or references to *virtue apologetics* in modern Christian literature but literally thousands of books, articles, seminars, and websites dedicated to *intellectual apologetics*.

B) The Meaning of Virtue: Love & Holiness

¹¹ R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsey in *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Academie Books, 1984), 22.

¹² For further discussion of the value of apologetics for evangelism, and the balance between the need for regeneration, see section 2.12.C

¹³ For further discussion on the value of apologetics for believers see sections 5.11.D and 6.12.C.1.

If we are going to claim that *virtue* is the prescribed approach to apologetics in Scripture, perhaps we need to at least briefly define what we mean by it. For us, it is substantially summed up in the biblical ideas of love and holiness. Accordingly, in his very good book, *The Mark of a Christian*, Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984) wrote of the importance of maintaining both of these virtues:

The Christian really has a double task. He has to practice both God's holiness and God's love. The Christian is to exhibit that God exists as the infinite and personal God; and then he is to exhibit simultaneously God's character of holiness and love. Not his holiness without his love: that is only harshness. Not his love without his holiness: that is only compromise. Anything that an individual Christian or Christian group does that fails to show the simultaneous balance of the holiness of God and the love of God presents to a watching world not a demonstration of the God who exists but a caricature of the God who exists.¹⁴

Therefore, all the moral virtue of God, and all the moral virtue He expects of us, can be summed up in the biblical ideas of love and holiness. And it is important that Scripture is the source of our understanding of these virtues because the world hardly comprehends them, let alone practices them. Which simply illustrates why *virtue apologetics* works.

B.1) *Agapē* Love

In the Greek language there are four primary nouns for love, including *erōs*, *philia*, *storgē*, and *agapē*. *Erōs* is romantic, sexual love between a man and woman based on physical attraction. *Philia* is a warm, brotherly love between friends, based on mutual interests. *Storgē* is a natural love, especially between parents and children. *Agapē* is fundamentally different from all of these merely human loves, particularly because it is an unconditional love. *Agapē* is based on a decision made by the lover, and having nothing to do with the attributes of the one loved, even to the point of loving those who are otherwise repulsive.

Before discussing *agapē* (unconditional love), it is interesting to note that neither the Greek nouns *erōs* (sexual love), nor *storgē*

¹⁴ Francis Schaeffer, *The Mark of a Christian*, (Intervarsity, 1970), 21.

(parental love) are ever used in the NT,¹⁵ and *philia* only once to refer to a sinful “**friendship with the world**” (James 4:4).

The complete absence of both the noun *erōs*, and even the verb *eraō* may be because: 1) God only intended sex to be for marriage, which is best defined in biblical terms as *agapē* (cf. Eph 5:25), 2) *agapē* love in a marriage will automatically include *erōs* (cf. 1 Cor 7:2-5), and 3) *erōs* is inherently selfish and therefore sinful if exercised all by itself. As C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) said of *erōs*, it is “ready for every sacrifice except [self] renunciation.”¹⁶ Along the same lines, Dr. Morris writes:

Perhaps as good a way as any of grasping the new idea of love the Christians had is to contrast it with the idea conveyed by *erōs*. As we have seen, *erōs* has two principal characteristics: it is a love of the worthy and it is a love that desires to possess. *Agapē* is in contrast at both points: it is not a love of the worthy, and it is not a love that desires to possess. On the contrary, it is a love given quite irrespective of merit, and it is a love that seeks to give.¹⁷

The absence of *storgē* (family love) in the NT seems significant as well,¹⁸ Dr Morris pointing out that:

¹⁵ Although, *storgē* love would seem to be illustrated at Matthew 7:9-11. However, note here that Jesus still reminds us that such people are “**evil**.”

¹⁶ C. S Lewis, *The Four Loves* (Collins, 1960), 124.

¹⁷ Morris, 128. However, Dr. Morris adds:

Erōs can be beautiful. It is a valuable part of life, one that none of us can do without. In their enthusiasm for *agapē* some have written as though *erōs* is inherently evil. This simply is not so. Certainly *erōs* is not the way of salvation or the essential Christian idea of love. But that does not mean that *erōs* does not have its rightful place in the Christian life. Romantic love at its best is a wonderful, pure love, lofty and ennobling. No Christian ought to be critical of this love, considering the Bible's teaching on the subject.

The Song of Songs extols it in a way that the church has often delighted to see as an allegory of Christ's love. This is surely the wrong way to interpret the book, but the fact that it has been so understood by devout believers shows quite plainly that there is nothing essentially evil about this form of love. Moreover, throughout the Bible it is always taken for granted-and sometimes put into explicit words-that love between the sexes is a good and beautiful part of normal living for God's people. (122)

¹⁸ Although the compound *philostorgos* appears at Romans 12:10 to refer to “**brotherly love**.”

It is probably significant that when they [early Christians] spoke of the Father's love for the Son they did not use *storgē* nor any word from this root. Rather, the Son is "Beloved," *agapetos*, of the Father (Matt. 3:17; 17:5; Mark 9:7; etc.).¹⁹

Perhaps the absence of *storgē* can similarly be explained by the fact that God really wants parents to exercise *agapē* with their children, because the natural, and ultimately conditional nature of *storgē* is insufficient to weather all the difficulties that can occur in family relationships, evidenced by the number of parents and children who end up estranged from one another because the initial *storgē* of very early childhood has worn thin.²⁰

As noted above, the noun *philia* ("friendship") is used only once in the NT, but cognates of the verb *phileō* are used about 30 times, a few times rather synonymously with the verb *agapaō*, but often with a negative connotation such as the "love" that the Pharisees had for the attention of people (cf. Matt 6:4; Matt 23:6-7; Luke 20:46).

Nevertheless, it becomes clear that neither sexual, parental, nor friendship love is the kind of love that is the essence of Christianity. While these are by far the most common ideas of love in both the ancient and modern world, it is unconditional *agapē* that the early Christians virtually invented in order to describe a love that is different than all other loves that humans are familiar with. Indeed, while cognates of friendship love (*philia* and *phileō*) are used about 30 times in the NT, cognates of *agapē* are used over 250 times by NT writers.²¹ Accordingly, Dr. Morris writes of *agapē*: "[I]t is the

¹⁹ Morris, 117.

²⁰ Additionally, Dr. Morris notes regarding *storgē*:

It is all the more interesting that the term is never used in the New Testament [cf. note above]. Coming closest to it is the negative form of the corresponding adjective, which indicates disapproval. Twice people "without natural affection" are condemned (Rom. 1:31; 11 Tim. 3:3). There can be no doubt from the general thrust of New Testament teaching, and specifically from what it has to say about the family, that the early Christians saw *storgē* as natural and right. But their failure to use the word in the New Testament documents shows that it was not *storgē* that they had in mind when they spoke of love. . . . We must realize at the beginning that Christian love is not simply a family tie, an emotion that might be expected to occur in any natural grouping. Christians may thus assume that *storgē* is important and indeed necessary, but not the distinctive Christian idea of love. (Ibid., 116-17)

²¹ See NT linguistic statistics of these words in Morris, 125, fn. 35.

characteristic New Testament word—almost the only New Testament word—for love.”²²

The reason for this is obvious and significant. *Agapē* love is different from all the others in that it characteristically carries the idea of unconditional, and therefore, unfailing love (cf. 1 Cor 13:7). *Erōs*, *philia*, and *storgē* all require a natural attraction based on the attributes of the person being loved, and because of such dependence, they are fickle and unreliable. Accordingly, Greek scholar William Mounce succinctly describes the essence of *agapē* when he writes:

Agapē is a beautiful word picture of sacrificial love. It is expressed in the fact that “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). As such, *agapē* can be defined as unmerited and unwavering love.²³

“Sacrificial,” “unmerited,” and “unwavering,” rather completely describe *agapē*.

Perhaps an illustration of *agapē*, no matter how inadequate, will help. It is natural for the positive and negative poles of a magnet to bond together. But what if the negative poles of two magnets are directed toward one another? They naturally and even rather violently repel. And the only thing that will bring them together is a force more powerful than the natural resistance occurring. Likewise, when a person finds in another person what they want, whether it be the body of a lover, the companionship of a friend, the security of a parent, or the sense of significance that comes from having a child, certain kinds of human love occur. But it requires something super-human to overcome all the negative human forces pulling people apart.

Agapē is such a force. Whereas all other loves are founded on and limited to liking and being attracted to someone, *agapē* love *does not even begin until we do not naturally like someone* and are actually repelled by them. It is the only kind of love that you can have for your enemies. It is the first kind of love that God had to have for us to even initiate a relationship with us. Relatively weak, ignorant, selfish, sinful, and yet proud humans, are not naturally attractive to an almighty, all-knowing, perfect God. It is only because of the force of His *agapē* that we can be brought together at all.

²² Ibid., 125.

²³ William D. Mounce, *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* (Zondervan, 2006), 429.

Imagine the most *disgusting* and *dangerous* thing imaginable, and then imagine what it would take for you to hug it, kiss it, or eat it, and you are just beginning to imagine what *agapē* is. Disgusting and dangerous is precisely and naturally what sinners are to God. His natural disgust for them is demonstrated by His current wrath upon them (cf. Ps 5:4-5; 11:5; Eph 2:3), and His future eternal punishment of them in Hell. And sinners were dangerous to God the Son, some of whom personally killed Him, and all of whom ultimately put Him on the cross. *Agapē* overcomes disgust and danger, setting aside likes and even one's life. Accordingly, Dr. Morris writes of *agapē*:

"Herein is love," wrote John, "not that we loved God" [we will never understand what love means if we start with human response], "but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (I John 4: 10). It is the cross that brought a new dimension to religion, that gives us a new understanding of love. The New Testament writers saw everything in its light, finding their ideas about love revolutionized by what the cross meant. . . .

When we see man for what he is, the wrath of God for what it is, and the cross for what it is, then and only then do we see love for what it is. [cf. Rom 5:5-18].²⁴

Because of the supernatural and divine nature of *agapē*, it should not surprise us that the noun *agapē* was *never* used in *any* classical Greek literature that we know of before the NT.²⁵ While it

²⁴ Morris, 129, 131.

²⁵ *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)*:

The vb. *agapaō* appears frequently from Homer onwards in Gk. literature, but the noun *agapē* is only a late Gk. construction. Only one reference has been found outside the Bible, where the goddess Isis is given the title *agapē* (*P. Oxy.* 1380, 109; 2nd cent. A.D.) [an instance of idolatry if there ever was one]. (W. Günther and H. G. Link, "Love" in *NIDNTT*, Colin Brown, ed., 4 vols., [Zondervan, 1986], 2:539)

Likewise, E. Stauffer in the standard scholar's reference the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament [TDNT]*, "finds no certain example among the Greeks" (Morris, *Love*, 124).

The noun *agapē* then is only clearly found once in all of ancient Greek literature, and only after its use in the NT was rather widely known. And its verb form primarily was used synonymously with romantic and friendship love, although perhaps one obscure reference can be found concerning the divine favor of a pagan god. Nonetheless, it is clear that the idea of unconditional, unwavering love was not invented by any human culture, including the Greeks, but was a revelation of God, found

in the Septuagint (Greek translation of OT Scripture, 300-100 B. C.), and especially in the NT.

This again, in our opinion, suggests that Dr. Carson is too eager to downplay the significance of the use of *agapē* in the NT, when he criticizes other Greek scholars who "say that the writers of the Septuagint and the New Testament *chose agapaō* and cognates as the only adequate term with which to talk about God's love" (*Fallacies*, 51). Actually, the data suggests that the *noun agapē* (not the verb) was used uniquely in Christian literature to describe the unconditional love of God, which in turn gave a particular Christian meaning of the verb *agapaō* in the NT. Dr. Carson simply seems unwilling to recognize any uniqueness in the early Christians' use of *agapē* despite the linguistic evidence.

Even in reference to the pre-NT use of the verb *agapaō* Dr. Morris writes:

Perhaps I should make it clear that the newness [of the concept of love] is in the noun [*agapē*], not the verb [*agapaō*]. The Christians did not produce a new verb but employed one already in common use—namely, *agapaō*. Even here they used a distinctive approach, because they used this word much more than they did *phileō*, and they did not use verbs such as *erāō* at all. The verb *agapaō* was used quite frequently in pre-Christian times, but when the Christians used it they gave it a deeper meaning.

Stauffer [in the *TDNT*] thinks that in secular Greek in general, *agapaō* was normally used in a more colorless sense than either *erōs* or *phileō*. He sees it as characteristically having a meaning something like "prefer" and therefore a verb suitable to convey the idea that God prefers one man to another. Stauffer also asserts that *agapaō* makes distinctions. It denotes "a free and decisive act determined by its subject," whereas *erōs*, among other things, "seeks in others the fulfillment of its own life's hunger." He also sees *agapaō* as having "little of the warmth of *philein*. Its etymology is uncertain, and its meaning weak and variable." But this is not true of the way it is used in the New Testament. There it certainly has a rich, positive meaning. (126-7)

While the distinctions between *agapē*, *erōs*, *storgē*, and *philia* are fairly consistently demonstrated in both Greek and biblical literature, like most words, there is some overlap in their meanings as well, especially with *agapaō* and *phileō* sometimes being used rather interchangeably (cf. Matt 5:46; John 3:35; 5:20; 21:15-17). Particularly on the latter passage see D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Baker, 1996), 51-53.

Dr. Carson additionally points out that *agapaō* is used in 2 Sam 13:15 (incorrectly in our opinion) by the LXX translators to refer to Ammon's lust for Tamar. More significantly, it is used of Demas' sinful love for this world (cf. 2 Tim 4:10).

However, in our opinion, Dr. Carson's view is based on the verb *agapaō* and is not considerate enough of uniquenesses of the noun *agapē* in Christian literature when he writes:

[T]he content of God's love is not connected on a one-to-one basis with the semantic range of any single word or word group. What the

was used some twenty times in the Greek translation of the OT (LXX, 300-100 B.C.), and a few other Jewish writings, Dr. Morris writes:

[I]t is a striking fact that *agapē* is very rare indeed before the New Testament, and very frequently used in it. . . . Why should the Christians use what was for all intents and purposes a new word for love? Because they had a new idea about the essential meaning of love. . . . The older words were not suitable vehicles for conveying the new meaning because they aroused associations the Christians did not intend; thus they used the new noun.²⁶

Along these lines, the Oxford theologian Amos Wilder commented that, "*agapē* is in effect a Christian creation."²⁷ The idea of unconditional and unwavering love was never invented by humans, but has only become known through divine revelation. *Agapē* is rather exclusively a Christian word because it is an exclusive attribute of the Christian God and those He indwells. This would seem true of another uniquely NT virtue: serving. NT scholar I. Howard Marshall writes:

It is worth observing that the concept of serving is virtually new in Christianity or at least strongly characteristic of it. Neither in the Old Testament nor in the Hellenistic world of

Bible has to say about the love of God is conveyed by sentences, paragraphs, discourses, and so forth; that is, by larger semantic units than the word. (53)

On the contrary, there is enough uniqueness in the way the NT uses *agapē* to agree with other Greek scholars such as Amos Wilder that, "*agapē* is in effect a Christian creation" (quoted in Arthur Lindsey, *Love the Ultimate Apologetic: The Heart of Christian Witness* [Intervarsity, 2008], 86) to describe the love of God, as we demonstrate in this section.

²⁶ Morris, 125. However, Dr. Morris adds:

In saying this I am not claiming that the linguistics prove this point. The essential Christian idea of love is found in books where *agape* is not used, the meaning arising because of the way the Christians used the concept, not the word. I do not see a new idea of love in the New Testament because *agapē* is so characteristic; it is exactly the other way around. The early Christians had a new idea of love in whatever words they expressed it, but their novel use of *agapē* is significant. (125-26)

²⁷ Amos Wilder, quoted in Arthur Lindsey, *Love the Ultimate Apologetic: The Heart of Christian Witness* [Intervarsity, 2008], 86.

the time was the concept of work as service to be found. It stems from Jesus, who lived out what he taught.²⁸

All of this is because humans are born with a selfish nature, not a selfless one, and are not naturally capable of *agapē*. Therefore, its ultimate source is “**God**” Who “**is love** [*agapē*]” (1 John 4:8, cf. 16). To illustrate this, allow us to insert “those without God” into the text of the Bible’s most detailed description of God-love:

[Those without God are always] **patient and kind**. [Those without God are never] **jealous**, [those without God never] **brag**, and [are never] **proud**. [Those without God are never] **rude**, [are never] **selfish**, and [never] **get upset with others**. [Those without God never] **count up wrongs that have been done**. [Those without God are never] **happy with evil but** [are always] **happy with the truth**. [Those without God] **patiently accept all things** [done to them]. [The love of those without God] **always trusts, always hopes, and always remains strong**. [The] **Love** [of those without God] **never ends**. (1 Cor 13:4-8 NCV)

God-love and those without God simply have nothing in common. Accordingly, Christian apologist Arthur Lindsey writes:

Other than Christianity, no other religion or philosophy requires reconciliation and mandates forgiveness. No one but Jesus said that if you do not forgive, you are not forgiven (Matthew 6:15). No other religious teacher requires that we reconcile with anyone who might have something against us, even if we think it is unjustified, before we come to worship God (Matthew 5:23-24).²⁹

Likewise, the Greek scholar W. E. Vine wrote that *agapē* is:

The characteristic word of Christianity, and since the Spirit of revelation has used it to express ideas previously unknown [in humanity], inquiry into its use, whether in Greek literature or in the Septuagint [Greek translation of OT 300-100 B. C.], throws but little light upon its distinctive meaning in the NT.³⁰

Pastoral Practices

²⁸ I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter* (Intervarsity, 1991), 147.

²⁹ Lindsey, 123, 171.

³⁰ W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Nelson, 1996), 381.

Is there a Christian in your church that you simply do not like? Have you realized that loving begins where liking ends? Pray for that person and make a special effort to love them with the kind of God-love that enables us to embrace people who are otherwise not attractive. You will be acting like God when you do. And you will be setting an important **"example"** for your flock **"in love"** (1 Tim 4:12).

B.2) *Qādash* Holiness

Unlike the concept of *agapē* love, the idea of holiness was clearly and thoroughly defined and illustrated in the OT, through the word group *qdsh*. Also unlike *agapē*, the concept could be readily derived from the ancient biblical world. While humans are born with an innate selfishness that prohibits them from producing *agapē*, they all have a conscience that universally enables them to recognize and pursue moral laws.³¹ Ancient peoples knew what holiness was. Thomas E. McComiskey, Professor of OT and Semitic Languages at Trinity remarks regarding the *qdsh* word group, "The word occurs in several dialects of Akkadian [c. 2500 B. C.] with the basic meanings "to be clean, pure, consecrated [devoted].""³²

Obviously in the OT, these ideas decidedly took on a moral sense, such that God was clearly revealed as being morally perfect. Accordingly, the Prophet Isaiah declares that Yahweh is **"the Holy One of Israel"** (1:4), the **"holy God"** (5:16), **"Holy, holy, holy"** (6:3), **"the Holy One"** (Isa 40:25), and that even His **"name is Holy"** (Isa 57:15).

The idea of "pure devotion" was especially illustrative of the holiness God expected from His people, and was also a root idea in the Hebrew word group *qdsh*.³³ Which is why *qādēsh* could mean

³¹ The question of the universality of moral law is discussed in section 2.4.B.1.

³² Thomas E. McComiskey, "*qādash*" in the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (TWOT), [Moody, 1980], 787.

³³ Accordingly, Dr. McComiskey remarks regarding the word group *qdsh*:
A definitive use of the term occurs in Num 16:38. The censers of the Korahites were regarded as holy because they had been devoted to the Lord. They were thus regarded as having entered the sphere of the sacred by virtue of cultic ritual (v. 17) and were accorded a special place in the sanctuary. The devotion of the censers seems to have created a condition of inviolable holiness that could not allow for their being treated in a common way. (787)

"temple prostitute" (cf. Gen 38:21; Deut 23:17; etc.), or one whose life was completely devoted to the worship of pagan sex gods.³⁴ Nonetheless, in biblical religion, one devoted or consecrated to God obviously had to be morally clean and pure (cf. Lev 16:30; Ps 24:3-4), or more specifically, righteous, which *Webster's* defines as, "acting in accord with divine or moral law; free from guilt or sin."³⁵

Because God is holy, holiness is the other ultimate proof that someone has a relationship with Him. As the writer of Hebrews exhorts his readers: **"Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord"** (Heb 12:14). That is an important fact considering that it is *only* through a whole-hearted faith in the Gospel of the King that one is possessed by the *Holy* Spirit, giving them moral desires and abilities that no other humans have.

Of course, real love and holiness are bound together in defining what real supernatural virtue is. Accordingly, J. I. Packer writes:

As Jesus was law incarnate, so he was love incarnate, and following his way of self-giving is holiness in its purest and most perfect expression. Hard, harsh, cold-hearted holiness is a contradiction in terms. Love to God as prescribed in Matthew 22:37, citing Deuteronomy 6:5, and as voiced in Psalm 18, and love to neighbor as defined in I Corinthians 13:4-7 and illustrated in Jesus' story of the Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) is, by contrast, the very heartbeat of holiness. . . .

[W]ithout love anything purporting to be holiness is in God's sight nothing: In other words, it is a hollow sham. We do well to examine ourselves often at this point.³⁶

Pastoral Practices

The "pure devotion" of physical articles to God was certainly transferred to His people as well. However, concerning the popular idea that the essential meaning of *qdsh* is "separation," Dr. McComiskey remarks:

The meaning "to separate" is favored by many scholars, but the fact that *qdsh* rarely, if ever, occurs in a secular sense makes any positive conclusion in this regard difficult because of the limited evidence on which to base philological comparison. (Ibid. Contra, J. R. Williams in the *EDT*, 515)

³⁴ Ibid., 788.

³⁵ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/righteous>.

³⁶ J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step With the Spirit* (Revell, 1984), 114-15.

- Is there anything or anyone in your life that you need to separate yourself from in order to be holier and closer to God? Watch out especially for the things you do when you are tired or bored. Holy recreation is vital. God is expecting you to **"set an example for the believers in . . . purity"** (1 Tim 4:12).
- Does your congregation have a reputation for love and holiness? Many congregations are strong in one and weak in the other. In America, the greater danger is lacking a perception of holiness rather than love. For example, a church may be known for serving the needy, but not for excommunicating the hypocrites. Perhaps because we think love is more attractive than holiness and we want to be liked.

But we should ponder the practical application of the early Church's incident involving Ananias and Sapphira. God killed them for their sin (cf. Acts 5:1-10). Afterwards we read things that would not make sense to the "church growth" experts of today:

Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events. . . . No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number (vs. 13-15).

It was the mere religious observers, who may want to join a church like a club to make them feel better, who would not dare join the early Church. It was because they knew the Church had a standard of holiness. As a result, it would seem God used their example to convict **"more and more"** people of their need for a Savior, and such were **"added to their number."**

We cannot be content with being just a "nice" church that is liked in the community, and simply attracts "nice" people. We must also be a holy church that convicts the community, and attracts converts.

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Father in Heaven, we thank You for giving us the power to perform the greatest of all miracle working: love. We commit to exercising this miracle at every opportunity we have in order to glorify you and prove to others that we alone truly know You.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) What is *apologetics*?
- 2) How would you define *virtue apologetics*?
- 3) What do we claim is the greatest miracle occurring today? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 4) We claim that supernatural moral transformation only occurs with the reception of the Gospel. Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 5) How do we define *intellectual apologetics*? Would you agree that it is the most popular approach to proving the Christian faith to unbelievers? What biblical support would you give for that?
- 6) What two virtues sum up even the moral virtue of God?
- 7) What are at least four Greek words for love, and their meanings?
- 8) What are several things unique about the noun *agapē* and its meaning?
- 9) Why is holiness a *virtue apologetic*? What are biblical examples of it?

Recommended Reading

- The rest of the chapters of Book 5 which describe and defend *virtue apologetics* as the most effective and biblical approach to proving Christianity.
- *Types of Apologetic Systems* by Bernard Ramm, (Van Kampen Press, 1953). Gives the reader a good overview of traditional

approaches to apologetics. Unfortunately, we can offer no good reference to *virtue apologetics*.

Publications & Particulars

Chapter 5.2

Virtue Apologetics in the OT

Primary Points

- One reason God uniquely gave the Israelites His laws was so that their superior virtue might authenticate their superior standing with God to all other nations and religions.
- Wisdom as well is recognized as a virtue, and God intended His people to be superior in it such that the world would notice.
- Unfortunately, because the OT saints were generally not spiritually regenerated, they could not fulfill God's expectation of supernatural *virtue apologetics*.

In a world in which agnostic skeptics and postmodern philosophers have convinced Christians that they must introduce any claim to truth with a lengthy apologetic discourse, it is both refreshing and corrective to be reminded that God's own written presentation of truth begins very *unapologetically* and remains so. It is unapologetic about both the source and content of truth and about the basic presuppositions concerning the communication and recognition of truth.³⁷

For example, the first sentence of the most effective and influential communication of ultimate truth ever written says, "**In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth**" (Gen 1:1). Whether you agree with the first sentence of Christian Scripture or not, all have to agree that the Bible begins boldly. As the Christian theologian Bernard Ramm remarked, "The Scriptures are nowhere concerned with the theistic proof or proofs for the existence of God, such as are found throughout the history of philosophy and theology."³⁸

The Scriptures leave little doubt that God has always expected supernatural virtue to be the ultimate apologetic for the spiritual superiority of His people. As the renowned Bible scholar John Stott puts it:

For insofar as the church is conformed to the world, and the two communities appear to the onlooker to be merely two versions of the same thing, the church is contradicting its true identity. No comment could be more hurtful to the Christian than the words, 'But you are no different from anybody else.'

For the essential theme of the whole Bible from beginning to end is that God's historical purpose is to call out a people for himself; that this people is a 'holy' people, set apart from the world to belong to him and to obey him; and that its vocation is to be true to its identity, that is, to be 'holy' or 'different' in all its outlook and behavior.³⁹

³⁷ *Intellectual apologist* Norman Geisler suggests that the order in which Creation is reflected in Genesis 1 was "apologetic" because it diminished the place of the sun, which other ancient religions worshipped as God. (*Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics (BECA)* [Baker, 1999], 37) However, this revelation is not intended to *defend* and prove the truth of Genesis 1, but to *proclaim* it unapologetically as truth.

³⁸ "Biblical Apologetics" in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [ISBE]*, Geoffrey Bromiley ed. 4 vols. [Eerdmans, 1988], I:190.

³⁹ John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, revised edition of *Christian Counter Culture* (John Stott, 1978), 17.

This would seem to be one reason that He uniquely gave the Israelites His laws, so that their superior virtue might authenticate their superior standing with God. Moses said:

See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." . . . [W]hat other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? (Deut 4:5-8)

God did not give the Jews His laws so that they might have a *knowledge* that would provide them with intellectual arguments for the superiority of their faith. Rather, God gave them *moral* laws, so that if they would **"observe them carefully"** the pagan nations would recognize their moral and spiritual superiority (cf. Lev 18:1-4; 2 Sam 12:13-14; Neh 5:8-9; Isa 42:6; Ezek 11:12; 36:20-23; Rom 2:23-24). This is why David exalted in the fact that, **"He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake"** (Ps 23:3). David's son Solomon understood and expressed the power of virtue when he wrote, **"Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city"** (Prov 16:32).

Wisdom as well is recognized as a virtue, and God intended His people to be superior in it such that the world would notice. Accordingly, Proverbs is almost completely moral in nature, because wisdom in Scripture is pervasively moral in nature.⁴⁰ This apologetic effect of wisdom was demonstrated in the lives of Solomon, Daniel, and Christ (cf. 1 Kgs 4:34; 10:3-9; Dan 1:20; 4:9; 5:11-16; Matt 7:28-29; Luke 2:46-47).

Nonetheless, because the Jewish nation as a whole was never regenerated by the Spirit, giving them **"a new heart and . . . a new spirit"** (Ezek 36:26) to dethrone the sinful nature humans are born with, they were not able to be morally superior to the pagan nations. However, with the coming of **"the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit"** (Tit 3:5) after Pentecost, God's

⁴⁰ For further discussion of the biblical fact that wisdom in Scripture is predominantly moral in nature, rather than amoral (e.g. what morally acceptable house, job, or spouse to choose), see chapters 14.17-14.18.

people can now effectively engage in *virtue apologetics* as God intended.⁴¹

Publications & Particulars

⁴¹ Sadly, the fact that Christians were indwelt by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost for the purpose of *virtue apologetics* is obscured by the popular but inaccurate teaching that Pentecost was to bring continuing, physical, miracle working abilities to God's people. As pointed out in chapter 5.1, God does not intend today to authenticate the Gospel with "charismatic" miracles, but rather, with "character" miracles. For further discussion on the place of miracle working today see Book 11.

Chapter 5.3

Virtue Apologetics According to Christ

The Moral Superiority of the Spiritually Reborn Over the Fanatically Religious

Primary Points

- Christ's moral perfection, as even confirmed by His enemies, was authenticating proof that He was **"the way and the truth and the life"**
- Christ's virtue is obviously superior to Muhammad.
- Love is God's authenticating signature on His people, because real love only comes from the real God.
- God's desire for supernatural virtue to be the ultimate apologetic for Christianity is the reason that the most important and repeated command in the NT (over one hundred times) is that God's people would love.
- Christ said the ultimate apologetic for Christianity is not our love for unbelievers, but for **"one another."**
- We cannot come close to God in mental or physical power, but in the highest of virtues—love—we can equal Him.
- In John 13:34-35 Christ is declaring that *virtue apologetics* is not only the *ultimate* apologetic, but a *universal* apologetic,
- Christ prayed that we would accomplish *virtue apologetics*.
- The theme of Christ's first sermon was *virtue apologetics*.
- The most likely meaning to Christ's allusion to **"salt"** is that we uniquely possess and preserve the morality of the world.
- While even the most religious may *worship* God, the reborn are commanded and expected *to be like* God.
- Stott: "It is not enough for Christians to resemble non-Christians; our calling is to outstrip them in virtue."
- Real love separates the Christian from the self-righteous, self-deceived, and self-serving monks and maniacs of any other religion. Some of the most committed Buddhists are known for meditating on a mountaintop which can be selfish, not spiritual. Muslims are known for martyrdom, but not mercy, exposing them as spiritual frauds.
- The reason that forgiveness is a uniquely Christian concept is because we are uniquely able to do it.

A) Christ's Example of *Virtue Apologetics*

Christ certainly authenticated the truth of His messages with miracle working (cf. John 4:11; 20:20-21; Acts 2:22), but He also did it with supernatural virtue. In a context in which He is trying to convince some skeptics that He speaks for God (cf. John 8:28-30), He remarks:

Because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me! Can any of you prove Me guilty of sin? [The answer was "no"] **If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe Me?** (John 8:45-46; cf. Matt 26:59-61; Luke 23:47).

No doubt, His moral perfection, as even confirmed by His enemies, was authenticating proof that He was "**the way and the truth and the life**" (John 14:6).

Christ's innocence makes the virtue He demonstrated on the cross even more remarkable, even to those who do not revere Him as Lord and Savior. When the sinless One was tortured by sinful ones, He did not curse them, but prayed for them, saying, "**Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing**" (Luke 23:34; cf. 1 Peter 2:21-23).

Such virtue is in sharp contrast to someone like Muhammad, the founder of Islam. Norm Geisler notes:

Muhammad spent the last ten years of his life at war. As a polygamist he exceeded even the number of wives (four) he had prescribed for his religion. He also violated his own law by plundering caravans coming to Mecca, some of whom were on [Islamic religious] pilgrimage. He engaged in retaliation and revenge, contrary to his own teaching.⁴²

In sharp contrast, not only was Christ supernaturally moral, but His ministry had this effect on others. Matthew the money grubber became Matthew the Gospel promoter (Matt 9:9-13). Zaccheus the "**chief tax collector**" became Zaccheus a chief provider to the poor (cf. Luke 19:1-9).

Pastoral Practices

As Christ set an example of virtue for us, so we are to set one as well for the people we lead. The Apostle Paul told Timothy: "**Set**

⁴² Norm Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (BECA) (Baker, 1999), 138. Geisler documents the immorality of Muhammad more specifically on pages 506-9.

an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity" (1 Tim 4:12). The Apostle Peter told all Pastors: **"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care . . . being examples to the flock"** (1 Pet 5:2-3). This is why the primary qualifications for Pastors are character (cf. 1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:6-9).

Evaluate your life in the five categories of virtue in 1 Tim 4:12 or the lists of pastoral qualifications and see if there are any improvements that can be made.

B) Christ's Commands for *Virtue Apologetics*:

John 13:34-5

God's desire for supernatural virtue to be the ultimate apologetic for Christianity is the reason that the most important and repeated command in the NT (over one hundred times) is that God's people would love; love God (cf. Matt 22:37-38), love other Christians (cf. John 13:34-5), love all others (cf. Matt 22:39), and love even their persecutors and enemies (cf. Matt 5:44-47). Love is God's authenticating signature on His people, because real love only comes from the real God. This is why Christ says:

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another. (John 13:34-5).

The influential Christian apologist Francis Schaeffer based his very good booklet, *The Mark of a Christian*, on this very passage and wrote:

Through the centuries men have displayed many different symbols to show that they are Christians. They have worn marks in the lapels of their coats, hung chains about their necks, even had special haircuts. Of course, there is nothing wrong with any of this, if one feels it is his calling. But there is a much better sign-a mark that has not been thought up just as a matter of expediency for use on some special occasion or in some specific era. It is a universal mark that is to last through all the ages of the church till Jesus comes back. What is this mark? ⁴³

Dr. Schaeffer then quotes John 13:34-35 and writes:

In the midst of the world, in the midst of our present dying culture, Jesus is giving a right to the world. Upon his authority he gives the world the right to judge whether you and I are

⁴³ Francis Schaeffer, *The Mark of a Christian*, (Intervarsity, 1970), 7.

born-again Christians on the basis of our observable love toward all Christians. . . . This is the whole point [of John 13:24-5]: The world is going to judge whether Jesus has been sent by the Father on the basis of something that is open to observation.⁴⁴

Indeed, it should first be noticed that Christ *does* desire that **"all men know"** who His **"disciples"** are. He wants them to be different because He wants people to know who truly represents Him.

Why does Christ want the world to know who are His followers? Because only those who are truly following Christ are saved from the present and eternal wrath of God. **"God"** is only **"reconciling the world to Himself in Christ"** (2 Cor 5:19). Therefore, God wants the world to know who **"Christ's ambassadors"** are because **"God . . . [is] making His appeal [only] through us"** (v. 20).

How then will the world know that Christians alone have the truth that will save? By our **"love [for] one another"** Christ says. Some may suppose that Christ intends for love to prove to the world that we are merely followers of one particular religious leader among many. However, this would fall short of God's goal to authenticate Christ's claim that, **"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me"** (John 14:6). It would seem that God knows that humans inherently know that love is the ultimate and universal authentication of any Gospel. A Gospel that truly saves from sin, will be one that saves people from it now, and love is the proof that they have been set free from its power.

It is clear here that Christ wants His **"ambassadors"** to be noticed, to be different, and we will be by our love. This is because Christian love will be unique and superior to any virtue that disciples of somebody else might muster. Christ is implying that it will be a unique love, a superior love, one that distinguishes His followers from everybody else. A love that is the same as anybody else's love would not accomplish Christ's goal. Christ is not only commanding His people to be superior in the virtue of love, but is expecting it, and if we are not, the whole purpose of His command is thwarted.

Secondly, notice that Christ says the ultimate apologetic for Christianity is not our love for unbelievers, but for **"one another."** This needs to be heard loud and clear in American Christianity today which often commends itself for all their outreach and service to the lost, but cannot seem to get along with **"one another."** There is great hypocrisy when we exercise compassion, grace, and patience

⁴⁴ Ibid., 13, 21.

toward people we hardly know, and then withhold these very things in our families and local church. The great push in American Christianity for loving unbelievers to the King will never make up for any lack of love for those who already belong to the King. In fact, it is easier to really love strangers rather than friends, and all kinds of religions are nice to people in order to attract them to their cause.

We need to ponder why the King said, **"the greatest love is shown when people lay down their lives for their friends"** (John 15:13 NLT). Wouldn't we have expected Him to refer to enemies? ⁴⁵ Could it be that daily loving those we are living with, or consistently loving those we are worshipping with, requires more self-sacrifice than a kind deed to a stranger? Especially if others see us doing the latter more than the former?

The NT clearly places a much greater priority on loving Christians more than non-Christians. Just add up the commands for each if you doubt this. Whatever the reason for Christ's intentional priority of loving **"one another"** in the Church family, we will make a grave mistake if we neglect that priority, or consider ourselves to have Christian love when we are merely being kind to unbelievers, but not gladly bearing the weaknesses of those we know the best. ⁴⁶

Thirdly, do not miss what kind of love Christ is expecting. **"As I have loved you, so you must love one another."** A merely human love will be sin. We are to love like God. Think about that for a moment. How great, awesome, and supernatural is God's love? And the King is commanding us to exercise the very same thing? From a physical perspective it is as if the King commanded

⁴⁵ Neither D. A. Carson (*The Gospel According to John*, [Eerdmans, 1991]), nor Leon Morris (*The Gospel According to John*, [Eerdmans, 1992]), nor Herman Ridderbos (*The Gospel According to John* [Eerdmans, 1997]), nor John MacArthur (*The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, John 12-21* [2008]), nor any other commentators we consulted see any significance in Christ's specific reference to **"friends"** at John 15:3.

⁴⁶ Unfortunately, in our opinion, Dr. Morris spends a great deal of ink trying to downplay the emphasis in the NT on loving other Christians as opposed to unbelievers (cf. *Testaments of Love: A Study of Love in the Bible* [Eerdmans, 1981], esp. pp 211-224). He seems concerned about the accusations of some that the NT *never* refers to loving non-Christians, especially the writings of John. This is, of course, nonsense, as Dr. Morris aptly points out. As he puts it, "It may not be easy to prove that throughout the New Testament there is a uniform emphasis on loving 'outsiders,' but it is harder to prove that there is any other attitude." (209) We would agree, but instead of defending and downplaying the NT emphasis and priority on loving other Christians, we would be better off explaining it and recognizing why this is a NT fact.

us to create a whole other Universe, planets, stars, galaxies and all with just our spoken word—like God. But it is not in physical power that we are commanded to be just like God, but in moral power. We cannot even come close to God in mental or physical power, but in the highest of virtues—love—we can apparently equal Him. We can love just like God loves or Christ would not have commanded us to love as He has loved us.

Fourthly, in John 13:34-35 Christ is clearly declaring that *virtue apologetics* is not only the *ultimate* apologetic, but a *universal* apologetic, that is effective for “**all men.**” Love is the language that speaks of spiritual superiority in any language. The reason that morality is so universally and cross-culturally recognized is that all of humanity has “**the requirements of the law . . . written on their hearts**” (Rom 2:15).

Just as God gave humans eyes and a brain in order to recognize His supernatural work in Creation (cf. Rom 1:18-20), God purposely equipped all of humanity with moral reason so that they would see His supernatural work in His New Creations (cf. 2 Cor 5:17). The magnificence and intricacy of the physical Creation was intended by God to be the universal and ultimate apologetic evidence for the existence of God. Likewise, the superiority and endurance of the virtue of God’s new spiritual creations was intended to be the same for the Gospel of God. Just like the phenomenon of Creation demands a supernatural explanation, so does the phenomenon of the New Creations. And both sources of God-ordained evidence leave humanity “**without excuse**” (Rom 1:20) for not believing in God and the Gospel.

Fifth, we notice in Christ’s prescription for Christian apologetics that it is conditional on our obedience. He says, “**By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another**” (John 13:35). Therefore, disobedience, and a failure to live in the fruits of the Spirit, not only disqualify us to be good ambassadors for Christ, but the world around us is cheated and deprived of the most powerful evidence available for the salvific exclusivity of Christianity.

Likewise, it was *virtue apologetics* that Christ commended when He said, “**This is to My Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples**” (John 15:8). The “**fruit**” here is the supernatural love that He commands them to live by in this very passage, and may include the “**joy**” that Christ promises as well (cf. v. 11).⁴⁷ Along the same lines, Christ

⁴⁷ It is difficult to find a commentary that will state clearly that the “**fruit**” referred to by Christ in John 15 is virtue. However, Albert Barnes comments on John 15:2 and says, “To bear fruit is to show by our lives

responded to His critics that Christian **"wisdom is proved right by her actions"** (Matt 11:19). As Dr. Morris comments: "The wisdom Jesus taught was not meant as a topic for debate in religious or philosophical schools - it was something to be lived out and it is proved right in the [moral] works his followers do."⁴⁸

Pastoral Practices

- It is commonly thought that the most important thing for influencing unbelievers is for us to love *them*. Perhaps not. According to Christ, one of the most powerful evangelistic tools in your church is to expose unbelievers to your love for one another. Many churches disparage a "holy huddle" mentality in how they are perceived, when in reality, a "holy huddle" is precisely what God commands the church to be.

Encourage people to reach out to unbelievers in groups, rather than alone. Plan outreach activities that somehow

that we are under the influence of the religion of Christ, and that that religion produces in us its appropriate effects, Gal. 5:22-23." (*Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM [Findex.Com, 1999]).

Likewise, Leon Morris writes, "The 'fruit' is not defined here, but we need not doubt that qualities of Christian character are in mind as elsewhere in the New Testament (Matt 3:8; 7:20; Rom 6:22; Gal 5:22; Eph 5:9; Phil 1:11; etc. [see also Psa 72:3; Matt 12:33-37; James 3:17; Heb 12:11])" (*John*, 595). We would disagree that the term "is not defined here" as the King speaks a great deal about love for God and people in this very context, suggesting that this is His definition of the fruit He has in mind.

While most commentators do not make the meaning of "fruit" here plain, others suggest it means Christian converts. Their main reason is derived from John 15:16 where Christ says, **"I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last."** Accordingly, D. A. Carson comments, "The fruit, in short, is new converts" (*John*, 523). However, this appears unlikely when in the same speech the King says, **"He [the Father] cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit"** (John 15:2) which would mean (apparently according even to Dr. Carson, cf. *John*, 515) that if you do not win Christian converts you are a fake Christian. While there are Scriptures that probably use the idea of "fruit" to refer to Christian converts (cf. Prov 11:30; Matt 21:43; Phil 1:22; Col 1:6, 10), this is not one of them if it is interpreted in context. The reference to **"fruit that will last"** is simply referring to the unique endurance of authentic Christian virtue throughout their lifetime, proving them to be born again Christians.

⁴⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Eerdmans, 1992), 286.

display your love for one another, rather than just a love for unbelievers.

C) Christ's Prayer for *Virtue Apologetics*: John 17:21-23

Christ prayed for the success of *virtue apologetics*. John records Him praying:

I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message,²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in Me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.²² I have given them the glory that You gave Me, that they may be one as We are one:²³ I in them and You in Me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me.” (John 17:20-23)

Albert Barnes understood Christ's prayer to mean:

That the world, so full of animosities and fightings, may see the power of Christian principle in overcoming the sources of contention and producing love, and may thus see that a religion that could produce this must be from heaven. This was done. Such was the attachment of the early Christians to each other, that a pagan was constrained to say, “See how these Christians love one another!”⁴⁹

Leon Morris says that Jesus is praying for:

[A] unity of believers [that] . . . will transcend all human unity. . . while it is a spiritual unity rather than one of organization . . . yet [it] has an outward expression, for it is a unity that the world can observe, and that will influence the world.⁵⁰

D. A. Carson writes:

⁴⁹ Barnes, *in loc.*

⁵⁰ Morris, *John*, 651.

The thought is breathtakingly extravagant. The unity of the disciples, as it approaches the perfection that is its goal, serves not only to convince many in the world that Christ is indeed the supreme locus of divine revelation as Christians claim, but that Christians themselves have been caught up into the love of the Father for the Son, secure and content and fulfilled because loved by the Almighty himself, with the very same love he reserves to his Son. It is hard to imagine a more compelling evangelistic appeal.⁵¹

And all of this was clearly Christ's intention. Perhaps as Dr. Barnes suggested, the first Christians demonstrated this. However, it is the apparent *disunity* among Christians that surely challenges the value of *virtue apologetics* perhaps more than anything else in our day.

Elsewhere we offer some answers to this challenge.⁵² Here we will only note two things. First, the standard that Jesus set for Christian unity was no less than the unity between God the Father and God the Son Themselves! That is a perfect unity, and we should not be surprised that we have fallen far short of it.

Secondly, regardless of how disunified Christians may be perceived to be, it is clear that Christ intended the virtue of unity to prove to the world that Jesus Christ was from God, and that God loves Christians in a far superior way to any others, because He loves them as much as His own Son (v. 23). Jesus wanted *virtue apologetics* to prove everything and more than what mere *intellectual apologists* hope to prove.

D) Christ's Sermon on *Virtue Apologetics*⁵³

D.1) Salt & Light of the Earth

⁵¹ Carson, *John*, 569.

⁵² For further discussion of the problem of immorality and disunity among Christians for the cause of *virtue apologetics* see section 5.16.A.

⁵³ We do not agree with strict *Dispensational* theologians who deny that the Sermon on the Mount is binding upon Christians. If it was relevant to the Jews, how much more so for the Christian! Especially since, as we demonstrate here, only Spirit-filled Christians could actually obey it. And why would we deny that Christ came to teach the Church He came to start and build (cf. Matt 16:18)?

The central theme of Christ's first, and most famous sermon, was *virtue apologetics*.⁵⁴ For example, in His Sermon on the

⁵⁴ We are not aware of anyone who demonstrates the *virtue apologetics* in the Sermon on the Mount better than the renowned NT scholar John Stott. His commentary, in fact, constitutes one of the very rare discussions of *virtue apologetics* in modern Christian literature, although his comments were written in 1978. Nonetheless, he is easily worth the following lengthy quote:

Jesus emphasized that his true followers, the citizens of God's kingdom, were to be entirely different from others. They were not to take their cue from the people around them, but from him, and so prove to be genuine children of their heavenly Father. To me the key text of the Sermon on the Mount is 6:8: 'Do not be like them.' It is immediately reminiscent of God's word to Israel in olden days: 'You shall not do as they do. [Lev 8:1-4] It is the same call to be different. And right through the Sermon on the Mount this theme is elaborated. Their character was to be completely distinct from that admired by the world (the beatitudes). They were to shine like lights in the prevailing darkness. Their righteousness was to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, both in ethical behaviour and in religious devotion, while their love was to be greater and their ambition nobler than those of their pagan neighbours.

There is no single paragraph of the Sermon on the Mount in which this contrast between Christian and non-Christian standards is not drawn. It is the underlying and uniting theme of the Sermon; everything else is a variation of it. Sometimes it is the Gentiles or pagan nations with whom Jesus contrasts his followers. . . . At other times Jesus contrasts his disciples . . . with religious people. . . .

Thus the followers of Jesus are to be different--different from both the nominal church and the secular world, different from both the religious and the irreligious. The Sermon on the Mount is the most complete delineation anywhere in the New Testament of the Christian counter-culture. Here is a Christian value-system, ethical standard, religious devotion, attitude to money, ambition, life-style and network of relationships--of which are totally at variance with those of the non-Christian world. And this Christian counter-culture is the life of the kingdom of God. . . .

[T]here have been many other attempts to accommodate the Sermon on the Mount to the low levels of our moral attainment. In the fourth and fifth chapters of his book *Understanding the Sermon on the Mount*, Harvey McArthur first surveys and then evaluates no fewer than twelve different ways of interpreting the Sermon. He says he might well have subtitled this section 'Versions and Evasions of the Sermon on the Mount,' for all but one of the twelve interpretations offer prudential qualifications of its apparently absolute demands.

At the opposite extreme are those superficial souls who glibly assert that the Sermon on the Mount expresses ethical standards which are self-evidently true, common to all religions and easy to follow. 'I live by the Sermon on the Mount,' they say. The most

Mount, Christ says:

You are the salt of the Earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? ⁵⁵ **It is no**

charitable reaction to such people is to assume that they have never read the Sermon which they so confidently dismiss as commonplace.

For the standards of the Sermon are neither readily attainable by every man, nor totally unattainable by any man. To put them beyond anybody's reach is to ignore the purpose of Christ's Sermon; to put them within everybody's is to ignore the reality of man's sin. They are attainable all right, but only by those who have experienced the new birth which Jesus told Nicodemus was the indispensable condition of seeing and entering God's kingdom. For the righteousness he described in the Sermon is an inner righteousness. Although it manifests itself outwardly and visibly in words, deeds and relationships, yet it remains essentially a righteousness of the heart. It is what a man thinks in his heart and where he fixes his heart which really matter. It is here too that the problem lies. For men are in their nature evil. [Matt 7:11] It is out of their heart that evil things come [cf. Matt 7:21-23] and out of their heart that their mouth speaks, just as it is the tree which determines its fruit. So there is but one solution: 'Make the tree good, and its fruit good'. [Matt 7:16-20; 12:33-37] A new birth is essential.

Only a belief in the necessity and the possibility of a new birth can keep us from reading the Sermon on the Mount with either foolish optimism or hopeless despair. Jesus spoke the Sermon to those who were already his disciples and thereby also the citizens of God's kingdom and the children of God's family. [e.g. 5:16, 48; 6:9, 32-33; 7:11] The high standards he set are appropriate only to such. We do not, indeed could not, achieve this privileged status by attaining Christ's standards. Rather by attaining his standards, or at least approximating to them, we give evidence of what by God's free grace and gift we already are. (*The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, revised edition of *Christian Counter Culture* [John Stott, 1978], 18-19; 27, 29).

⁵⁵ Contrary to some, in the analogy of the salt, we see that while Christians may lose their effectiveness and abandon their purpose due to impurities, they do not, and cannot lose their true identity. Accordingly, Dr. Carson comments:

Strictly speaking salt cannot lose its saltiness; sodium chloride is a stable compound. But most salt in the ancient world derived from salt marshes or the like, rather than by evaporation of salt water, and therefore contained many impurities. The actual salt, being more soluble than the impurities, could be leached out, leaving a residue so dilute it was of little worth. In modern Israel savorless salt is still said to be scattered on the soil of flat roofs. This helps harden the soil and prevent leaks; and since the roofs serve as play grounds and places for public gathering, the salt is still being trodden under foot.

longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds ⁵⁶ and praise your Father in Heaven. (Matt 5:13-16)

The King says we "**are the salt of the Earth**" and we "**are the light of the world,**" not that we merely have the *potential* to be. In other words, these lofty descriptions are uniquely for the Christian, and they are not something that we *attain to*, but *are* by virtue of the fact that we alone have God Himself living inside of us. As Dr. Morris comments on Christ's statement here:

You is emphatic and restrictive: Jesus is not talking about people in general but specifically about his followers. He says, you are; he is making a statement, not giving a promise. ⁵⁷

This explanation negates the attempt by some (e.g., Lenski, Schniewind, Grosheide) to suppose that, precisely because pure salt cannot lose its savor, Jesus is saying that true disciples cannot lose their effectiveness. The question "How can it be made salty again?" is not meant to have an answer . . . The point is that, if Jesus' disciples are to act as a preservative in the world by conforming to kingdom norms, if they are "called to be a moral disinfectant in a world where moral standards are low, constantly changing, or non-existent . . . they can discharge this function only if they themselves retain their virtue" (Tasker). (*Matthew*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. CD-ROM [Zondervan, n.d.]

⁵⁶ Some may see a rebuttal of Matt 5:13-16 (and *virtue apologetics* itself) in Matt 6:1 where Christ says: "**Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in Heaven.**" The apparent contradiction is solved by noticing that there is an obvious difference in motive being described here. In Matthew 5 the motive for the public good deeds Christ is commanding is to glorify God, while in chapter 6 the motive Christ is warning about is to glorify the person.

The fact that Christ is speaking of two different kinds of righteousness is evident in their differing results as well. The one produces praise to God, the other the displeasure of God. Finally, we would suggest that those who would do good deeds merely to be seen by men to glorify themselves are not born again Christians anyway, and would not have the supernatural ability to perform *virtue apologetics* in the long run.

⁵⁷ Morris, *Matthew*, 104.

The most likely meaning to Christ's allusion to "**salt**" is that we uniquely possess and preserve the morality of the world. Dr. Carson notes: "Above all, salt was used as a preservative. Rubbed into meat, a little salt would slow decay."⁵⁸ As a preservative, Dr. Morris accordingly comments:

Jesus is apparently thinking of the function of salt as a preservative, as the enemy of decay. . . . What is good in society his followers keep wholesome. What is corrupt they oppose; they penetrate society for good and act as a kind of moral antiseptic.⁵⁹

By saying we "**are the salt of the Earth**" He is clearly implying that true morality is only found among His followers. If we were to lose our "**saltiness**" there would be no "**salt**" or authentic morality anywhere else to replace it. This is the great tragedy of Christians not being who they are. Because a worldly Christian looks and acts no different than an unbeliever—and maybe worse—they earn the disdain of good men and are disqualified to fulfill their God-given duty.

"**Light**" obviously alludes to truth throughout the Scriptures, and to morality as well in this passage (cf. "**good deeds**" v. 16), suggesting again that we possess both truth and morality in an exclusive and superior way. And because we "**are the light of the world**," God has made us like "**a city on a hill** [that] **cannot be hidden**." Christ did not uniquely indwell us with His Spirit, thereby uniquely giving us the fruits of the Spirit, just to have us "**put . . . under a bowl**" and not seen. In fact, our God-given purpose for being in this world depends on our moral and spiritual superiority over all other followers of any other religion. While the light of some individual Christians may "**be hidden**," as we will see below, God Himself has ensured, and will continue to ensure, that the light of His people sufficiently shines to give the world no excuse for not seeking the Source of their light.

⁵⁸ Carson, *Matthew*, 5:13.

⁵⁹ Ibid. Dr. Barnes had commented on Matt 5:13:

Salt renders food pleasant and palatable, and preserves from putrefaction. So Christians, by their lives and instructions, are to keep the world from entire moral corruption.

We believe Christ was likewise referring to morality when He said, "**Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other**" (Mark 9:50). Likewise, we have argued elsewhere that Paul's reference to "**conversation** [that is] **always full of grace, seasoned with salt**" (Col 4:6).

Finally, the God-ordained effect of our **"light shin[ing] before men"** should not be missed. Christ said it would result in people recognizing that the source of our unique and superior virtue is the one true God. And in the process, the pagans would worship *our* (not their) **"Father in Heaven."** Even unbelievers who do not accept God as their Lord, will nonetheless **"praise"** Him on account of our virtue. Such a response is significantly beyond the mere *existence* of God that *intellectual apologetics* strives to prove. Such is the power that Christ attributed to *virtue apologetics*.

Only born again Christians are equipped to be the moral and spiritual light and salt of the Earth. Others cannot fulfill such a purpose. Regarding the supernatural expectations communicated by Christ, and the necessary power to accomplish them, the popular Bible teacher John MacArthur comments:

[The] Sermon on the Mount . . . shows the absolute necessity of the new birth. Its standards are much too high and demanding to be met by human power. Only those who partake of God's own nature through Jesus Christ can fulfill such demands. . . . [T]he sermon is perhaps the greatest scriptural resource for witnessing, for reaching others for Christ. A Christian who personifies these principles of Jesus will be a spiritual magnet, attracting others to the Lord who empowers him to live as he does. The life obedient to the principles of the Sermon on the Mount is the church's greatest tool for evangelism.⁶⁰

D.2) Reborn Superior to Even the Most Religious

Christ's expectation of moral superiority in His followers is clearly stated as well when He remarks in His Sermon: **"For I tell you that unless your righteousness [far ⁶¹] surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly**

⁶⁰ John MacArthur, *MacArthur's New Testament Commentary (MNTC)*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Parsons Technology, 1997), Matt 5:1-2.

⁶¹ The Greek here for **"surpasses"** is *perisseuoē*, which means "to superabound (in quantity or quality), be in excess, be superfluous." (*Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, James Strong, ed. Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Parsons Technology, 1998).

not enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt 5:20).⁶² This is a remarkable statement considering that the Jewish religious leaders were quite famous for "righteousness." No matter. The practical, observable "**righteousness**" of God's people is to exceedingly surpass that of even the most committed unregenerated religious people anywhere, so that born again Christians beat the Pharisees, Jews, monks, and mystics of the world even at their own game.

It is in such a statement that Christ also raises the standard of virtue from that expected under the Old Covenant (cf. Deut 19:21; Matt 5:38-42). This is because He knew the Spirit was coming to

⁶² Two wrong views related to Christ's statement in Matt 5:20 and following can be suggested here. First, Christ is not speaking of a *positional* righteousness granted by God to believers in Christ, but rather a *practical* righteousness that will be demonstrated by believers. Christ's emphasis throughout the Sermon on the Mount especially is the latter, not the former.

Secondly, Christ is not speaking only of a "deeper" more sincere righteousness that only God might see, but rather an outwardly observable righteousness that other people can see as well. Therefore, the following interpretation by Dr. Stott seems inadequate:

Christian righteousness far surpasses pharisaic righteousness in kind rather than in degree. It is not so much, shall we say, that Christians succeed in keeping some 240 commandments when the best Pharisees may only have scored 230. No. Christian righteousness is greater than pharisaic righteousness because it is deeper, being a righteousness of the heart. . . . Pharisees were content with an external and formal obedience, a rigid conformity to the letter of the law; the King teaches us that God's demands are far more radical than this. The righteousness which is pleasing to him is an inward righteousness of mind and motive. For 'The Lord looks on the heart' (Stott, *Sermon*, 75).

But, "**Man looks at the outward appearance**" (1 Sam 16:7) and Christ clearly states just a few verses earlier that the Christian is to, "**let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds**" (Matt 5:16), making it clear that He intends our superior righteousness to be abundantly evident to people as well, not just God. Dr. Stott is right to point out that the greater righteousness that Christ's followers are to have is a qualitatively deeper one, but he would seem to unnecessarily limit Christ's statement to deny that it also includes a greater, visible, quantitative righteousness as well. Would we not expect greater visible virtue from followers of Jesus that were to be indwelt with the Holy Spirit as opposed to the spiritually dead Pharisees?

Contrary to Dr. Stott, Dr. Carson sums up our position well when he comments on Matt 5:20: "The verb 'surpasses' suggests that the new righteousness outstrips the old both qualitatively and quantitatively (Bonnard) (see on 25:31-46)" (*Matthew*, underlining added).

indwell members of the New Covenant, enabling them for greater virtue than any unregenerated OT saint could produce.

Christ then provides some examples of how real Christian morality will be superior to any other merely religious morality. While a committed religious person may not “**murder**,” the Christian will not even live in anger, because to do so is to be under God’s judgment and “**in danger of the fire of Hell**,” a warning that does not apply to the born again Christian (cf. Matt 5:21-22). The unregenerate religious person may fulfill their spiritual duty by presenting a “**gift at the altar**,” but God’s people will temporarily abandon even the most sacred sacrament in order to humbly initiate and diligently pursue reconciliation with someone who, for some reason, does not like them (cf. vs. 5:23-24).

Religious people may not commit adultery, but the reborn are not to even imagine it (cf. vs. 27-28). While religious people may make “**oaths . . . to the Lord**,” reborn people will not fall into such pride, but will humbly admit that apart from Christ they can do nothing and that all the credit for any righteousness belongs to Him (cf. vs. 33-37). Religious people may uphold *justice*, but the reborn will gladly suffer *injustices* for the name of Christ (cf. vs. 38-42). Along these lines, Christ says that while the religious will love those who love them, the reborn will love their enemies too (cf. vs. 43-47). In fact, while the religious may *worship* God, the reborn are commanded and expected *to be like* God (cf. v. 48).

In terms of the superior moral virtue that God is expecting of His people, these last statements are worth a closer look. Christ said:

You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in Heaven. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matt 5:43-47).

Christ recognized that there is a “**love**” of “**those who love you**” that even the unregenerate can muster. However, it is in our response to those who hate and hurt us that the true nature of someone’s virtue is demonstrated. In time, and under pressure, the virtue of the authentic Christian will be proven superior. While the unregenerate may appear to love briefly, their fake, fleshly love will not endure like real, miraculous love does (cf. 1 Cor 13:1, 8).

It is real love that separates the Christian from the self-righteous, self-deceived, and self-serving monks and maniacs

of any other religion. Some of the most committed Buddhists meditate, and some of the most committed Muslims murder. Where is the love in all of that? Sitting alone while meditating on a mountaintop can be selfish, not spiritual, nor supernatural, and neither is killing your enemies or killing yourself in the name of your God. Muslims are known for martyrdom, but not mercy, exposing them as spiritual frauds.

God's word says, "**If I . . . surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing**" (1 Cor 13:3), demonstrating that fanaticism is not the ultimate proof of true religion. Mere *commitment* to a cause is not a virtue, for it can spring from powerful selfishness or deception. Remember Saul from Tarsus who with "**zeal**" was "**persecuting the church**" (Phil 3:6), perhaps with more determination than all others? Therefore, it matters not that someone might be as committed to their cause as the Christian is to theirs. Anyone can be very dedicated to something, even to sin.

On the other hand, to be neck deep among the failings and offenses of fellow humans and still sincerely love them, like God loves them, is a miracle that only Holy Spirit indwelt Christians can perform. Anyone, including unbelievers, can *like* people, but only Christians can really *love* them.

The moral superiority to be expected from God's people is evident in Christ's question, "**what are you doing more than others?**" (v. 47). Accordingly, John Stott remarks:

This simple word "more" is the quintessence of what he is saying. It is not enough for Christians to resemble non-Christians; our calling is to outstrip them in virtue. Our righteousness is to exceed (*perisseusē* ... *pleion*) that of the Pharisees and our love is to surpass, to be more than (*perisson*) that of the Gentiles. Bonhoeffer puts it well: 'What makes the Christian different from other men is the "peculiar", the *perisson*, the "extraordinary", the "unusual", that which is not a matter of course" . . . It is "the more". . . . For him [Jesus] the hallmark of the Christian is the "extraordinary".⁶³

But Christ does not stop there. He does not say that we must merely be *more* virtuous than unregenerated humans, but He actually goes on to say, "**Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect**" (Matt 5:28).⁶⁴ This is an

⁶³ Stott, *Sermon*, 121.

⁶⁴ Many cannot accept that Jesus commanded us to be morally perfect. Calvin claimed that in Matthew 5:48, "This *perfection* does not mean *equality*, but relates solely to resemblance. . . . There is no comparison here made between God and us" (*Commentaries*, online at

www.ccel.org). Dr. Barnes finds a way to dilute *teleios* in Matthew 5:48 into meaning mere consistency. Likewise, Dr. Morris says, "Jesus is calling on his followers to be mature people" (*Matthew*, 134).

Indeed, the Greek has a variety of meanings, but "perfect" as in flawless is one of them, and the fact that the perfection is being compared to God proves this is Christ's meaning. Accordingly, Dr. MacArthur writes:

Teleios (**perfect**) basically means to reach an intended end or a completion and is often translated "mature" (1 Cor. 2:6; 14:20; Eph. 4:13; etc.). But the meaning here is obviously that of perfection, because the **heavenly Father** is the standard. The "sons of [the] Father" (v. 45) are to be **perfect, as [their] heavenly Father is perfect**. That perfection is absolute perfection. (*Commentary, in loc.*)

Along the same lines, Reformed scholar James M. Boice wrote:

This verse does not teach perfectionism, since none of us are or can be perfect in this world. But what does it teach?

William Barclay explains it by use of the meaning of the Greek word *teleios* ("perfect"), which describes something perfectly suited to the end for which it was created, like a full-grown adult as opposed to a person who is still a child, or a tool perfectly suited to a task. "The Greek idea of perfection is functional," Barclay says.

R. V. G. Tasker sees it differently. He thinks Torrey is right "in supposing that the underlying Aramaic word was active in sense, and that the meaning here is 'all-including (in your good will) even as your Father includes all.'" Harry Ironside also sees the verse as a call for impartiality, arguing, "This is perfection in the sense of the complete absence of partiality, thus imitating him who is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34), but who lavishes his favors upon just and unjust alike?"

Those interpretations could be on the right track, but I think D. A. Carson is wiser when he refuses to drop the idea of perfection so easily. It is true that we will never be perfect in this life, but the perfections outlined in this sermon are still those for which we should aim and that we should increasingly attain by God's grace and power in our lives.

Carson notes that the form of this verse is exactly the same as Leviticus 19:2, with "holy" merely being displaced by "perfect" ("Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy"), and that Leviticus 19:2 is likewise urged on God's people in the Bible." . . .

Barclay is not entirely wrong when he says that we should be perfectly fitted to that for which we were created. But this is not some low standard, as if it meant only to be a well-rounded person. We were created to be like God, to aim at Christ-like character. The only way we will be able to aim at that character and achieve it is if God gives us a transformed heart. (*Matthew* [Baker, 2001], 93-94).

W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison concur that Christ is commanding moral perfection:

The immediate context of 5:48 is the most important key to its understanding. The tradition demanded love of neighbor, but Jesus

extraordinary command from God to be like God. Certainly not in knowledge or power, but in love. As J. Oswald Sanders has commented here, "The Master expects from His disciples such conduct as can be explained only in terms of the supernatural."⁶⁵

And God expects God-like love from us because we can love like this. Accordingly, the popular NT scholar William Barclay commented on this passage:

We must note that this commandment is possible only for a Christian. Only the grace of Jesus Christ can enable a man to have this unconquerable benevolence and this invincible goodwill in his personal relationships with other people. It is only when Christ lives in our hearts that bitterness will die and this love spring to life. It is often said that this world would be perfect if only people would live according to the principles of the Sermon on the Mount; but the plain fact is that no one can even begin to live according to these principles without the help of Jesus Christ. We need Christ to enable us to obey Christ's command.⁶⁶

More recently, Dr. MacArthur has commented on Christ's statement:

That perfection is also utterly impossible in man's own power. To those who wonder how Jesus can demand the impossible, He later says, "With men this is impossible, but with God all

demands love of enemy, which means, in effect, love of all. To obey Jesus' words, is law, is, therefore, to love utterly: no more can be asked. And in this lies perfection; love of unrestrained compass lacks for nothing. It is catholic, all-inclusive. It is perfect. (*Matthew*, (ICC) [T & T Clark, 1988], Vol. 1:562-3)

Likewise, Dr. Stott writes:

The concept that God's people must imitate God rather than men is not new. The book of Leviticus repeated some five times as a refrain the command, 'I am the Lord your God; . . . you shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.' . . . [O]ur obedience will come from our hearts as the manifestation of our new nature. . . . Our Christian calling is to imitate not the world, but the Father. And it is by this imitation of him that the Christian counter-culture becomes visible. (Stott, 122-124).

Matthew Green (*The Message of Matthew* [Intervarsity, 2000]) and John Nollan (*The Gospel of Matthew* (NIGTC) [Eerdmans, 2005]) have little to say on this matter.

⁶⁵ Quoted in MacArthur, Matt 5:43-48.

⁶⁶ William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible* CD-ROM (Liguori, 1996), Matt 5:43-48

things are possible" (Matt. 19:26). That which God demands, He provides the power to accomplish.⁶⁷

D.3) The Uniqueness of Forgiveness

Notice as well that Christ does not say that loving enemies and persecutors is something real "**sons**" of God *might* do, but rather, something they *must* and, therefore, *will* do.⁶⁸ And while it is clear

⁶⁷ MacArthur, in loc.

⁶⁸ The NEB translation catches the idea here when it reads: "**Love your enemies and pray for your persecutors; only so can you be children of your heavenly Father**" (Matt 5:45). Accordingly, John Calvin commented:

When he expressly declares, that no man will be a child of God, unless he *loves those who hate him*, who shall dare to say, that we are not bound to observe this doctrine? The statement amounts to this, "Whoever shall wish to be accounted a Christian, let him *love his enemies*." It is truly horrible and monstrous, that the world should have been covered with such thick darkness, for three or four centuries, as not to see that it is an express command, and that every one who neglects it is struck out of the number of the children of God (*Commentaries*)

Calvin's concern about the "Dark Ages" is applicable to our own day when there are continuing efforts within the Church to water down God's expectations of born again Christians. Calvin goes on to comment that the reason God has such expectations is that, "he looks at the design of our calling, which is, that, in consequence of the likeness of God having been formed anew in us, we may live a devout and holy life." Along the same lines, John Stott remarks on this command:

Having indicated that our love for our enemies will express itself in deeds, words and prayers, Jesus goes on to declare that only then shall we prove conclusively whose sons we are, for only then shall we be exhibiting a love like the love of our heavenly Father's (Stott, *Sermon*, 120, underlining added).

that Christ is not teaching perfectionism here, ⁶⁹ we should not hastily invent excuses or interpretations that would automatically diminish the supernatural standard that Christ is expecting of the Holy Spirit indwelt sons and daughters of God (cf. Lev 11:44-5; 19:2; 20:26; Deut 18:13; 2 Cor 13:11; Col 1:28; 1 Pet 1:15-16).

This same uncompromising, supernatural standard of love is also communicated in the Sermon on the Mount when Christ says:

If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matt 6:14-15).

Notice again that forgiveness is not simply an option for those who are saved, but something that Christ anticipates Christians will be doing. This is, in fact, one of the most telltale signs that someone is not a born again Christian. Those who cannot, or will not, forgive the offenses of others are in a precarious position to

⁶⁹ Dr. Stott insightfully comments on Christ’s call to perfection:

Some holiness teachers have built upon this verse great dreams of the possibility of reaching in this life a state of sinless perfection. But the words of Jesus cannot be pressed into meaning this without causing discord in the Sermon. For he has already indicated in the beatitudes that a hunger and thirst after righteousness is a perpetual characteristic of his disciples, and in the next chapter he will teach us to pray constantly, 'Forgive us our debts.'

Both the hunger for righteousness and the prayer for forgiveness, being continuous, are clear indications that Jesus did not expect his followers to become morally perfect in this life. The context shows that the 'perfection' he means relates to love, that perfect love of God which is shown even to those who do not return it. . . . We are called to be perfect in love, that is, to love even our enemies with the merciful, the inclusive love of God. (*Sermon*, 121-22)

claim that they are in a regenerated forgiven state themselves.⁷⁰ As Dr. Stott puts it, "Nothing proves more clearly that we have been forgiven than our own readiness to forgive."⁷¹

Because of the unique supernatural ability of born again Christians to forgive, the Bible uniquely speaks of forgiveness. Again, as Arthur Lindsey has noted:

Other than Christianity, no other religion or philosophy requires reconciliation and mandates forgiveness. No one but Jesus said that if you do not forgive, you are not forgiven (Matthew 6:15). No other religious teacher requires that we reconcile with anyone who might have something against us, even if we think it is unjustified, before we come to worship God (Matthew 5:23-24).⁷²

⁷⁰ Dr. Morris seems to have the meaning of Christ's warning correct when he comments: "Jesus is saying that to fail to forgive others is to demonstrate that one has not felt the saving touch of God" (*Matthew*, 149).

On the other hand, Dr. MacArthur seems to water down the warning when he writes:

An unforgiving spirit not only is inconsistent for one who has been totally forgiven by God, but also brings the chastening [actually condemnation] of God rather than His mercy. Our Lord illustrates the unmerciful response in the parable of Matthew 18:21-35. There a man is forgiven the unpayable debt representing sin and is given the mercy of salvation. He then refuses to forgive another and is immediately and severely chastened [rather, doomed to eternal torture] by God. (Matt 6:9-15).

It would seem Dr. MacArthur is assuming that Christ's audience is only believers, but He is probably talking to a mixed crowd. Also, Christ's words both in Matthew 6 and 18 suggest more than divine chastening, but rather condemnation. In fact, it would seem in the latter passage that Christ is clearly warning of eternal Hell when He says: **"In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how My heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart"** (Matt 18:34-35).

It is important to notice that if the King's offender could not pay his debt while out of jail, it would seem a hopeless impossibility for him to pay it while confined to jail, and the torture then is implied to be never ending. Accordingly, Dr. Carson comments "The servant is to be tortured till he pays back all he owes, which he can never do" (*Matthew*, in loc.). Therefore, in Matthew 6, we would suggest Christ is speaking of the judgment of the unregenerate who cannot forgive.

⁷¹ Stott, *Sermon*, 48.

⁷² Arthur Lindsey, *Love the Ultimate Apologetic: The Heart of Christian Witness* (Intervarsity, 2008), 123, 171.

D.4) Distinguishing the Divine from the Demonic

An important and final reference to *virtue apologetics* in the Sermon on the Mount occurs when Christ says:

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father Who is in Heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!'" (Matt 7:15-23; cf. 12:33-34)

The ultimate power of *virtue apologetics* is perhaps best expressed by Christ when He prescribes it for distinguishing between the divine and the demonic. We need to imagine all of the religious things a person would need to do and say to be accepted as a Prophet of God (i.e. the **"sheep's clothing"**). Christ even points out that they may do authentic and amazing miraculous things in His name.⁷³ As we point out elsewhere, the Scriptures teach that the sheer power of demonic miracles can equal those of God Himself, including foretelling the future (cf. Deut 12:32-13:1-4), and resurrecting the dead (cf. Rev 13:3).⁷⁴

How then can we possibly know that people who have the power to perform miracles and gladly do so in the name of the King, are actually **"evildoers"**? The King said by their moral fruit. It is not by the content of their message alone that a false prophet will be exposed, but rather, it will be primarily by the content of their character. The first can be faked, the other cannot because it

⁷³ Most commentators agree that the miracles Christ is alluding to are real. For further discussion see chapter 10.6.

⁷⁴ For further discussion of the devil's delegated power to work miracles see chapter 10.6.

requires a supernatural enablement greater than physical miracle working, that God will only grant to those who are His.⁷⁵

Christ knows that the unregenerate cannot match the virtue ("**good fruit**") of the regenerate, no matter how religious they may be. In addition, in spite of all the supernatural power God may grant satan, the devil cannot and will not duplicate the greatest miracle which is supernatural virtue. Accordingly, because virtue is the ultimate apologetic, in the end, it alone is sufficient to distinguish divine from demonic power and people. As discussed further elsewhere, the test of supernatural morality exposes a great number of false prophets, philosophers, and "faith healers" in our day as counterfeits.⁷⁶

Not only does virtue expose false prophets in the Church, but false philosophers in the world as well. The immorality of the foremost secular philosophers is well known. For example, we read that Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), one of the most influential pagan philosophers in all of history:

Had five children out of wedlock, and he abandoned them all. Then he maintained, supposedly out of his reasoning, intellect and common sense, that children do not need parents to give them discipline or guidance, and that the state should be responsible for raising them—an idea that is still shaping some educational and child-rearing theories to this day. His conclusions were not based on true reason but on his desire to justify the moral choices he had already made.⁷⁷

It is supernatural virtue that clearly marks a man as a source of the truth, making the King the ultimate source of truth. Christ's moral expectations on His followers are supernaturally high because He expects supernatural virtue to be the ultimate and universal apologetic for His teachings. In fact, while we can find an abundance of Christ's teaching that relates to *virtue apologetics*, we can find none that would place any importance on *intellectual apologetics*.

⁷⁵ Virtue is obviously not the only biblical authentication of God sent Prophets. The ability to predict the future perfectly was one that God prescribed from the very beginning (cf. Deut 18:20-22), which NT Prophets like Agabus possessed as well (cf. Acts 11:28; 21:10-11), and which any real Prophet should be able to exhibit today. For further discussion regarding the authentication of Prophets see chapters 9.10-11.

⁷⁶ For further discussion on how *virtue apologetics* exposes many "Christian" celebrities as frauds see sections 10.14.C; 11.7.B.9; 11.8.E-F.

⁷⁷ James Emery White, *A Mind for God* (Intervarsity, 2006), 94-5.

Pastoral Practices

- It is important to ensure that our church is visibly and consistently meeting a need in the community at large in order that they may “see our good deeds.” Do an annual, advertised service project for the local school. Get your church’s name on one of those roadside signs telling people you are keeping that part of the community clean. Find one significant need and become known for the best place to have it met.

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Jesus, thank You for Your supernatural example of virtue while You lived on Earth. And thank You for giving us the power of Your Holy Spirit so that we can imitate You. Help us to live in that power!

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) How was Christ's moral perfection proven and what is its significance in proving Him to be true?
- 2) What is at least one important reason that the most important and repeated command in the NT (over one hundred times) is that God's people would love?
- 3) Why does the Scriptures repeatedly state that the ultimate apologetic for Christianity is not our love for unbelievers, but for other Christians?
- 4) What are several references to *virtue apologetics* in the Sermon on the Mount?
- 5) How do reborn Christians excel even fanatically religious people in virtue?
- 6) Why is forgiveness a uniquely Christian concept among world religions?
- 7) Why do we claim it is not the power of miracles, but the virtue of the miracle-worker, that ultimately distinguishes the divine from the demonic?

Recommended Reading

- John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, revised edition of *Christian Counter Culture* (John Stott, 1978)

Publications & Particulars

Chapter 5.4

Apologetics According to the Apostles

Virtue, Not Arguments

Primary Points

- The list of the greatest miracles in Scripture is found in 1 Corinthians 13.
- Paul believed Christians possessing the Spirit were to be something more than "**mere men**" (1 Cor 3:3), but rather super-human in their morality.
- While levitation would be recognized as an amazing miracle because of the pervasiveness of gravity in Nature, so love should likewise be recognized because of the great power and pervasiveness of selfishness in humanity.
- No one, apart from the enablement of the only God, can unconditionally love sinful people like He does, and Christians do.
- The Apostle Paul appealed to his supernatural virtue as an authentication of being a messenger from God.
- *Virtue apologetics* is biblically and succinctly described when Paul refers to "**weapons of righteousness**" to defend his ministry.
- Miraculous power alone cannot prove a divine commission. Purity of life must go with the miracles to assure us that a teacher has come from God.
- *Virtue apologetics* is the Apostle Peter's emphasis throughout his epistle.
- When the Apostle writes: "**Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have**" (1 Pet 3:15), he is not referring to being asked for *intellectual* reasons for the *Christian faith* as many claim, but rather, the reason for the Christians' amazing *virtuous* faith in difficult circumstances, which would be the Gospel itself, not a defense of the Gospel.
- Real "power evangelism" is not performing

A) Apologetics According to Paul: "*Weapons of Righteousness*"

A.1) *Virtue Apologetics* in the Church

Virtue apologetics is repeatedly mentioned by the Apostle Paul in his writings. This is precisely the approach he was emphasizing when he said that slaves were to respect their masters so that "**our teaching may not be slandered**" (1 Tim 6:1), and "**that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive**" (Tit 2:10). Christian widows were to live in such a way as "**to give the enemy no opportunity for slander**" (1 Tim 5:14). Christian women in general were to be virtuous, "**so that no one will malign the word of God**" (Tit 2:5). The Apostle aptly describes anyone with mere religion as those who "**claim to know God, but by their actions they deny Him**" (Tit 1:16). Christians in a legal dispute were not to take their case "**in front of unbelievers**" (1 Cor 6:6) and expose themselves to ridicule for a lack of morality. *Virtue apologetics* is certainly being described by Paul when he writes the Thessalonians:

Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody. (1 Thess 4:11-12)

It is also *virtue apologetics* that the Apostle is encouraging when he exhorts the Philippians:

Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life [the Gospel]. (Phil 2:14-16)

Here, the Apostle reminds us that the simple virtues of thanksgiving and peace making are to accompany our presentation of the Gospel.

An expectation of supernatural virtue was reflected in the Apostle's interaction with the Corinthians. In the third chapter of his first letter he writes:

You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?" For when one says, "I

follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men? (1 Cor 3:3-4)

Notice that Paul believed Christians possessing the Spirit were to be something more than "**mere men**," but rather super-human in their moral virtue. While "**jealousy and quarreling**" is a very common vice among "**mere men**," it is not to be expected among Christians. Accordingly, various translations have the Apostle accusing these people of acting "**like natural men**,"⁷⁸ as opposed to supernatural men; "**behaving like any merely human person**"⁷⁹ instead of something more than human; "**behaving like ordinary men**" (RSV), "**being merely human**" (ESV), "**acting like people of the world**" (NCV), and "**acting like those who are not Christians**" (NLT).

In fact, because their immorality continued by the time the Apostle wrote his second letter, at the conclusion of it he writes: "**Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?**" (2 Cor 13:5). And the "**test**" was that they would "**not do anything wrong . . . but . . . do what is right**" (v. 6). Super-human virtue is to be a part of the normal Christian life to such an extent that if a person is not consistently exhibiting it, they bring even their claim to be a Christian into serious jeopardy.⁸⁰

Finally, the Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians:

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the Gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. (Phil 1:27-28)

⁷⁸ Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, (TNTC) (Eerdmans, 1985, reprint 1999), 62.

⁷⁹ Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC) (Eerdmans, 2000), 286.

⁸⁰ For further discussion of the fact that supernatural virtue must accompany a believable profession of Christian faith see the arguments against some subjective feeling of a "testimony of the Spirit" see the next chapter, 5.5 and the biblical attributes of *saving faith* in chapter 6.3.

The Apostle expected extraordinary **“conduct . . . worthy of the Gospel of Christ”** from these Christians including a **“one spirit”** kind of unity and boldness in the face of persecution. Their remarkable virtue was to be precisely what set them apart and demonstrated as a supernatural **“sign”** to unbelievers that they were doomed, but the Christians saved.⁸¹

A.2) The Greatest Miracle is Love: 1 Cor 13:4-8

In fact, do you want to see a list of the greatest, most supernatural miracles in the Bible? Maybe you think we should go to Exodus and the miracles of Moses, or 1 and 2 Kings to read about Elijah and Elisha, or surely the Gospels and Acts to study the amazing miracles of Christ and His Apostles. No, even from God’s perspective, these are not the places where we read of the greatest miracles. Rather, that list of the greatest miracles is found in the most definitive passage of Scripture on love:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸Love never fails. (1 Cor 13:4-8)

⁸¹ It is surprising that many commentators either downplay the effect of the **“sign,”** mentioned by the Apostle in Philippians 1:28, or suggest it is a sign only to Christians. For example, Peter O’Brien writes in his well regarded *New International Greek Testament Commentary*:

As an Attic [Greek] law term it [*endeixis*: “sign”] denoted ‘proof’ obtained by an appeal to facts and may be rendered a ‘sure sign’ (NEB, JB, Gpd) or ‘clear omen’ (Mft, RSV). The point is not that the adversaries themselves see this (the dative . . . is one of reference), though perhaps they may have a dim awareness of it. (*The Epistle to the Philippians NIGTC* [Eerdmans, 1991], 155; see also Homer Kent, *Expositors Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelin ed. CD-ROM [Zondervan, n.d.].)

On the contrary, Paul clearly says that the Philippians’ virtue, **“is a sign to them [unbelievers],”** and the fact that *endeixis* is in the dative form as an indirect object does not alter this. And “dim awareness” does not reflect the meaning of the word Paul uses for **“sign.”** Nonetheless, it is difficult to find a commentary that will take Paul at face value here.

Being **"patient"** and **"kind"** to people who hurt or hate you is miraculous. Not envying what others have, nor boasting about what you have is a moral miracle. Never being **"self-seeking"** but always others-seeking in all you do is an amazing miracle. Keeping **"no record of wrongs"** done to you and forgiving everyone is simply supernatural. Having an unconditional love that **"never fails"** no matter what happens is the greatest of all miracles occurring today.

This stuff just doesn't happen apart from the working of Almighty God. While levitation would be recognized as an amazing miracle because of the great power and pervasiveness of gravity in Nature, so love should likewise be recognized because of the great power and pervasiveness of selfishness in humanity. Patience, kindness, humility, selflessness, forgiveness, and faithfulness are the greatest miracles ever performed by anyone, even God Himself. They are, in fact, the most supernatural thing about God the Father and the Son when He was on this Earth.

Remember that the Apostle Paul is writing this in the context of arguing what truly is supernatural. Like the miracle-hungry Corinthians, he no doubt thinks that the abilities he has listed are miraculous including, **"gifts of healing . . . miraculous powers . . . speaking in different kinds of tongues** [human languages]," **"the interpretation of tongues,"** a **"gift of prophecy** [that] **can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and . . . a faith that can move mountains"** (1 Cor 12:9-10; 13:2).

However, the Apostle says that if those possessing such gifts **"have not love"** they are **"nothing"** (1 Cor 13:2) Why? The presence of such love is an infallible test of the Spirit's presence. The various miraculous gifts, as important as they were and as highly as Paul valued them, can all be duplicated by pagans. Doctors are **"healing"** people, scientists have solved a great number of **"mysteries,"** linguists can teach you foreign **"tongues,"** and excavators can **"move mountains."** And as we demonstrate elsewhere, all of these miraculous gifts have been accomplished by demonically empowered people.⁸²

But no one, apart from the enablement of the only God, can unconditionally love sinful people like He does, and Christians do. In a world where every human is born with an irresistible and overpowering selfish nature, love is a much greater miracle than all of these miraculous gifts combined.

Like Christ, the Apostle commanded Christians to love their enemies when he wrote the Romans **"Bless those who persecute**

⁸² For more on demonic miracle working see chapters 11.11-13.

you; bless and do not curse. . . . Do not repay anyone evil for evil" (12:14, 17). These are *very unnatural* things for humans to do, and highlight the supernatural essence of Christian love.

However, let us notice as well, that like Christ (cf. John 13:34-35; 15:12-13), and unlike too much of American Christianity, the Apostles focus on our love for other Christians, not unbelievers. The Apostle Paul shares the balance when he writes: **"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers"** (Gal 6:10). It is not that we should not love those outside of the **"family of believers,"** but that it is in the local church where real *agapē*, patient, forgiving, humble love is called on, and demonstrated the most.

A.3) *Virtue Apologetics* in Paul's Life

Like Christ, His Apostles authenticated themselves as sources and messengers of superior spiritual truth with the miracles they performed (cf. Acts 14:3; 2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:3-4). But the Apostle Paul also appealed to his supernatural virtue as an authentication of being a messenger from God. For example, when Paul spoke to an angry crowd in Jerusalem, he introduced his speech with, **"Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense [apologia]"** (Acts 22:1). What then was the Apostle's apologetic approach? He sought to prove that Christ had personally commissioned him to, **"be a witness to all men"** (v. 15) of salvation in Christ by reminding them that he had previously, **"persecuted the followers of this Way to their death"** (v. 4; cf. vs. 5, 19-20; 2 Tim 1:12-13). He testified to his supernaturally changed life in order to provide proof for his supernatural claims.

Likewise, before Governor Festus and King Agrippa, Paul made **"his defense [apelogeito]"** of his Christian faith (Acts 26:1) to **"persuade"** them (vs. 28-29). And he simply relates that a personal encounter with Christ (cf. vs. 12-18) supernaturally transformed him from a man who was violently persecuting Christianity (cf. vs. 10-11), into a man who was sacrificially preaching Christianity (cf. vs. 19-23).

Along the same lines, in answer to the accusations of false Apostles in Corinth, the Apostle said, **"This is my defense [apologia] to those who sit in judgment on me"** (1 Cor 9:3), and then proceeded to describe in detail how he had ministered there without expecting money, which set him apart from his adversaries (cf. 1 Cor 9:1-18). Accordingly, he wrote, **"we [supernaturally] put up with anything rather than hinder the Gospel of Christ"** (1

Cor 9:12). Even though the Apostle often worked authenticating miracles (cf. Acts 14:3; 2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:3-4), an important approach to proving the superiority of his spiritual authority was his supernatural virtue.

Accordingly, in a letter essentially dedicated to defending the divine authority of his ministry (2 Corinthians) he begins by saying:

Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God (2 Cor 1:12).

No doubt Paul's Gospel was from God (cf. Gal 1:11-12), and his miracle working abilities (cf. 2 Cor 12:12), but equally supernatural was his "**holiness and sincerity that are from God**" (2 Cor 1:12) which likewise authenticated his message.

Throughout the epistle the Apostle Paul attempts to prove that he has God's truth, as opposed to the "**false apostles**" (2 Cor 11:13), based on his superior virtue. We read again:

Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God" (2 Cor 2:17).

He also mentions the great suffering he had endured for the sake of his Gospel, which was no doubt greater than what his opponents were willing to suffer for their false gospel (cf. 2 Cor 11:21-28).

Likewise, another apologetic passage is chock full of references to supernatural virtue when the Apostle writes:

We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry [and the Gospel] will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend [authenticate] ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left (2 Cor 6:3-7; cf. 2 Tim 3:10-14).

Here, the "**power of God**" is manifested in "**sincere love**" and "**truthful speech**" and the powerful proof that the Apostle is relying on to silence his critics is "**weapons of righteousness.**" One could hardly suggest a phrase that would reflect *virtue apologetics* better than that.

The Apostle followed the same apologetic approach in his writings to the Thessalonians, reminding them that he and His companions lived a supernatural life of love among them in order to not hinder their reception of the Gospel, or their belief in Paul as a messenger of it:

You know how we lived among you for your sake. . . . As Apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, ⁷ but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. ⁸ We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the Gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. ⁹ Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. (1 Thess 1:5; 2:1-11).

The NLT translates 1:5: “[Y]ou know that the way we lived among you was further proof of the truth of our message.” Several commentators agree with this meaning. Albert Barnes commented:

He means here that he and his fellow-laborers had set them an example, or had shown what Christianity was by their manner of living, and that the Thessalonians had become convinced that the religion which they taught was real. The holy life of a preacher goes far to confirm the truth of the religion which he preaches, and is among the most efficacious means of inducing them to embrace the gospel. ⁸³

Likewise, John MacArthur writes:

He told the Thessalonian believers that the spiritual power manifest in his life and the lives of his fellow ministers affirmed the accuracy of their preaching. The apostle (and no doubt Silas and Timothy, as well) was truthful, humble, selfless, gentle, caring, passionate, and compassionate toward the Thessalonians. He worked among them with his own hands so that he would not have to accept any money from them (2 Thess. 3:7-8). The Thessalonians had not only heard the gospel preached, they had seen it lived out in Paul, whose

⁸³ Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Findex.Com, 1999), 1 Thess 1:5.

life was a rich example of the power of the gospel he preached (see 2 Cor. 1:12).⁸⁴

The Apostle's writings abound with references to *virtue apologetics* for the messenger of spiritual truth (cf. Acts 20:18-19, 33-34; 1 Cor 4:9-13; 10:31-11:1; 2 Cor 4:1-2; 11:4-12; 2 Thess 3:7-10; 1 Tim 4:12-16). Accordingly, the great Baptist theologian Augustus H. Strong (1836-1921) wrote many years ago:

Miracles, therefore, do not stand alone as evidences. Power alone cannot prove a divine commission. Purity of life and doctrine must go with the miracles to assure us that a religious teacher has come from God. . . . No amount of miracles could convince a good man of the divine commission of a known bad man.⁸⁵

Therefore, we are given an expanded understanding of what the King meant when He told His disciples that before they could fulfill their mission as His witnesses, they must be "**clothed with power from on high**" (Luke 24:49) and "**baptized with the Holy Spirit**" (Acts 1:5). Accordingly, He told them, "**you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth**" (Acts 1:8). Obviously, this supernatural "**power**" included the ability to work physical miracles. However, it no doubt also empowered them to have the supernatural virtue necessary to be authenticated Apostles (representatives) of Christ as well.

Pastoral Practices

Do you highlight the miracle of love in your church? Surely if someone were physically healed in your church it would be noted.

⁸⁴ John MacArthur, *MacArthur's New Testament Commentary*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Parsons Technology, 1997), 1 Thess 1:5.

⁸⁵ Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 3 Vols. (Judson, 1907, 1953), 128.

How about the more important miracle of sacrificial humble service? Be more diligent to celebrate this miracle before your people as well.

B) Apologetics According to the Apostle Peter

B.1) Live Such Good Lives Among the Pagans: 1 Pet 2:12

When the Apostles Peter and John were brought before the Jewish authorities for healing a lame man, it does not seem the officials were impressed at all with the physical miracle, not knowing by what power it had been performed (cf. Acts 4:5-7). However, we do read: **"When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus"** (Acts 4:13). To be astonished is biblical language for a miracle, and it was supernatural courage in the face of opposition that spoke to these hardened religionists the most.

Virtue apologetics is the Apostle Peter's emphasis throughout his epistle. The Christians are encouraged to be holy, in contrast to those who live in spiritual **"ignorance"** (cf. 1:14-16). The result of being **"born again"** through **"obeying"** the Gospel of Christ is to be morally **"purified"** and exercising a **"sincere"** and deep **"love for your brothers"** (cf. 1:22-23). *Virtue apologetics* is the reason the Apostle writes:

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, [and you need to defend your faith] they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us. (1 Pet 2:11-12).

Accordingly, Wayne Grudem notes in his commentary on 1 Peter that *virtue apologetics* is the central theme of the remainder of the letter:

Thus [1 Peter 2:11-12] form a brief prologue to the second half of the letter and in fact state in summary form what Peter will explain in detail in 2:13-5:11: Christians living in an unbelieving society must avoid sinful desires and continually maintain exemplary patterns of life, so that unbelievers will be

saved and God glorified. There is no reason to doubt that such a strategy for evangelism would still work today.⁸⁶

Accordingly, the Apostle describes the God-given mandate for *virtue apologetics* when he writes concerning their conduct toward authorities, “[I]t is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men” (2:15). The Apostle prescribes *virtue apologetics* for the home as well as the world when he says:

Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. (1 Pet 3:1)

Submission, especially to an unkind spouse, is a great, God-glorifying miracle, so much so that the Apostle suggests it is the most powerful apologetic to an unbelieving husband. Such willing humility in a person is non-existent among the followers of any other religion, and even the most hardened husbands can recognize this and “**be won over without words by the behavior of their wives**” when they supernaturally exhibit the miracle of such servanthood.

The Apostle continues his plea for *virtue apologetics* in chapter three when he commands: “**Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing . . . Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened**” (vs. 9, 14).

B.2) Give the Reason for Your Amazing Virtue: 1 Pet 3:15

Then in verses 15-16 the Apostle writes:

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

This is, of course, the classic text used to support *intellectual apologetics* and a biblical mandate for Christians to be well versed in historical, scientific, and philosophical reasons for the superiority

⁸⁶ Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, (TNTC) (Eerdmans, 1988, repr. 1999), 117.

of the Christian faith. On the contrary, we would suggest that the Apostle Peter is not referring to *intellectual apologetics* at all, but is in fact, clearly speaking of the power of *virtue apologetics*.

Let us notice that the context of this chapter is the rather severe persecution the Christians are being subjected to.⁸⁷ People were being “**evil**” to them and insulting them (3:9). They were being spoken “**maliciously against**” and subjected to “**slander**” (3:16). The Apostle tells these Christians that the unbelievers “**heap abuse on you**” (4:4). There was the threat of “**harm**” and that they would “**suffer for what is right**” (3:13, cf. 17; 4:1), such that normally they should “**be frightened**” (3:13-14), instead of having “**hope**” (v. 15).

In response to their persecution, these Christians were to “**be compassionate and humble**” (v. 8). They were not to “**repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this [virtue apologetics] you were called**” (v. 9). They were to be “**eager to do good**” and “**suffer for what is right**” and as a result they would be “**blessed [makarioi]**” (v. 14), the Greek

⁸⁷ Accordingly, Dr. Grudem comments at verse 13:

Here Peter begins a new section dealing specifically with the problem of persecution by unbelievers. Although this theme has been hinted at in 1:6; 2:12, 15, 19; 3:1 and 9, this is the first time Peter confronts persecution as his primary subject and deals with it at length. (151).

Likewise, Dr. Achtemeier writes:

Because the theme of this passage-Christian life in the midst of hostility-is familiar throughout the letter, one is dealing here with the core of the author's message to his readers who are facing social oppression and persecution. (229).

literally meaning “to be happy.”⁸⁸ Accordingly, the KJV reads, “[I]f **ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye.**” Likewise the TEV translation reads, “**But even if you should suffer for doing what is right, how happy you are!**”

Because these Christians have “**set apart Christ as Lord**” (v. 15) they are exhibiting “**good behavior in Christ**” (v. 16) and living in the power of the Holy Spirit with His fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, even in the face of opposition and difficulty (cf. Phil 1:28). Therefore, the Apostle anticipates that the supernatural virtue, or “**the hope**” and “**good behavior**” that they have in the midst of such difficulties will amaze the pagans enough to ask about the source of such virtue. And “**the reason for the hope**” would be their relationship with Christ.

Therefore, what Christians need to have “**prepared**” is not intellectual arguments and answers to support the Gospel, but a clear description of the Gospel! Notice that the unbelievers are not asking the persecuted Christians for the philosophical or historical reasons for the *Christian faith*, but the reasons for their personal amazing faith in difficult circumstances. The Christians are being

⁸⁸ Unfortunately, the common translation of *makarioi* here as “**blessed**” gives many the connotation that Peter is referring to some future reward. On the contrary, Peter expects these believers to be experiencing *makarioi* in the midst of their present suffering. Thus the NIV, “**you are makarioi.**” Likewise, Dr. Grudem writes: “the Gk. text does not contain a verb but a plural adjective which applies to the readers, ‘if you suffer ... (you) blessed ones’, and it most naturally indicates blessing which comes at the same time as the suffering, not after it.” (151)

Secondly, “**blessed**” is not a good translation of *makarioi* in our culture which often views it as being rewarded. Originally in ancient Greek it meant to be “free from daily cares and worries,” later coming to mean simply to “be happy.” (U. Becker, “Blessing” in *NIDNTT*, 1:215). Such happiness was understood as being related to being favored by God. Accordingly, Dr. Carson comments on the use of *makarioi* in the Beatitudes: “Usually *makarios* describes the man who is singularly favored by God and therefore in some sense “happy”; but the word can apply to God (1 Tim 1:11; 6:15). (*Matthew*, 5:3)

Thus, we would suggest the following translations are the best:

“**[I]f ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye**” (KJV; cf. NEB).

“**But even if you should suffer for doing what is right, how happy you are!**” (TEV)

Perhaps the worst translation is the NLT which reads “**But even if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it.**” (cf. CEV, LB)

asked for “**the reason for**” their ability to have supernatural “**hope**” in the midst of suffering.

At this point, there is no need for further apologetics, the *intellectual* kind or otherwise. The Apostle anticipates that the supernatural ability to have hope practiced by these persecuted Christians (i.e. *virtue apologetics*), has already won them a hearing of the Gospel itself, not a hearing for mere philosophical and historical reasons for the Christian faith (i.e. *intellectual apologetics*). These astonished unbelievers are not asking for a *defense* of the Gospel, but are already open to a simple *explanation* of it! And it would have, in fact, been a great mistake for these Christians to launch into *intellectual apologetics* instead of a simple explanation as to why they possessed supernatural virtue.

Accordingly, Dr. Grudem writes:

[S]ince the questioning is concerning the hope that is in you, Peter must be assuming that the inward hope of Christians results in lives so noticeably different that unbelievers are prompted to ask why they are so distinctive [in virtue, not intellect] (cf. 4:4).⁸⁹

The answer would be, of course, “We are Christians,” not “this is all the intellectual reasons you should believe in Christ.” As Peter Achtemeier puts it in his respected *Hermeneia* commentary, the Apostle Peter is referring to a “readiness to explain what it is that causes them to act as they do”⁹⁰ the answer again being, the indwelling of God, not philosophical arguments about God.

Along these lines, John Calvin commented on this passage:

But it ought to be noticed, that Peter here does not command us to be prepared to solve any question that may be mooted; for it is not the duty of all to speak on every subject. . . . Peter had in view no other thing, than that Christians should make it evident to unbelievers that they truly worshipped God, and had a holy and good religion. . . . *Hope* here is by a metonymy to be taken for faith. Peter, however, as it has been

⁸⁹ Ibid., 153.

⁹⁰ Dr. Achtemeier writes concerning 1 Peter 14b-15:

These verses, along with v. 16, explain how the Christians are to react to suffering imposed on them because of their faith. The first element in that reaction (v. 14b) is to be lack of fear . . . The second element (v. 15a) is to be faithfulness to Christ as Lord, again expressed in the form of a command, followed by an explanation (v.15b) of how that faithfulness is to be carried out, namely, by a readiness to explain what it is that causes them to act as they do. (1 Peter, (*Hermeneia*), [Augsburg, 1996], 231-2)

said, does not require them to know how to discuss distinctly and refinedly every article of the faith, but only to shew that their faith in Christ was consistent with genuine piety [i.e. *virtue*].⁹¹

We have many examples throughout Church history of the kind of apologetics the Apostle Peter was speaking of,⁹² but the following testimony of a Chinese Christian concerning her harsh and hardened jailer will have to suffice at this time:

When jailer Kane next came on duty, she did not seem as stern as before. Again she stood in front of my cell. "It's really strange," she said. For the first time I had the impression she was speaking to me. I opened my eyes hesitantly. "What is strange, Mrs. Kane?" I asked her.

"The faces of people these days. It isn't only in the prisons. It's on the outside, as well. Everybody is nervous and tense and angry. Even the children look wicked. I must confess that the faces of people irritate me. That's why I find this cell so different." I was surprised and asked her what she meant.

She had difficulty expressing herself. "What shall I say?" she began. I--I guess it's because I find the faces of those in this cell peaceful."

"Peaceful?" I echoed. "In here?"

"That's right. Your face and that of the prisoner in cell three and the one in cell five are all peaceful." . . .

The ones she mentioned were believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. . . .

"Would you tell me in what way our faces are strange, Mrs. Kane?"

"Well," she began hesitantly, "it almost seems as though you have the faces of angels. And I can't understand it. Nowhere else have I found peaceful faces in this world."

That night a change occurred in our relationship, and I asked if I could talk to her. "You said that our faces look peaceful," I began, "and you said it was strange. Would you like to know why we can look peaceful in such a place as this?"

"Yes," she said, "I want to know about it."⁹³

⁹¹ John Calvin, *Calvin's Bible Commentaries*; online at www.ccel.org.

⁹² For many other examples and testimonies to *virtue apologetics* see chapter 5.18.

⁹³ Excerpted from Esther Ahn Kim, *If I Perish* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1977), 247-48.

This is a perfect example of the Apostle Peter's admonition to, **"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the [ability to have] hope"** (1 Pet 3:15) in the midst of difficult circumstances as discussed elsewhere.

⁹⁴ Consequently, real "power evangelism" is not performing physical miracles to remove suffering, but rather, the power to live a virtuous life in the midst of suffering. Likewise, real apologetics is not studying in order to comfortably answer difficult questions, but rather humbly suffering in order to display a supernatural peace and joy. And one primary reason that *intellectual apologetics* is so highly promoted, and *virtue apologetics* is so neglected in America, is probably because the one only requires study, and the other suffering.

The unfortunate bias in American Christianity toward *intellectual apologetics*, and the subsequent disregard of *virtue apologetics*, is demonstrated by the popularity of a distorted and misleading interpretation of 1 Peter 3:15. *The Life Application Bible Commentary* is typical when it explains:

All Christians must be ready and able to give a reasonable defense of their faith [belief in Christianity, not an explanation of their ability to have hope]. They need not be apologists or theologians, but every Christian ought to be able to clearly explain his or her own reasons for being a Christian.

Christianity is founded on evidence; and though it cannot be supposed that every Christian will be able to understand all that is involved in what are called the evidences of Christianity, or to meet all the objections of the enemies of the gospel; yet every man who becomes a Christian should have such intelligent views of religion, and of the evidences of the truth of the Bible, that he can show to others that the religion which he has embraced has claims to their attention. ⁹⁵

Likewise, in the Introduction to *The Apologetics Study Bible*, Kenneth Boa under the article "What is Apologetics?" writes: "The idea of offering a reasoned defense of the faith is evident in . . . especially 1 Pt 3:15." ⁹⁶

Again, and on the contrary, the unbelievers are not asking for intellectual reasons for the Christian faith, but rather the **"reason"**

⁹⁴ For discussion of 1 Peter 3:15 see section 5.4.B.2.

⁹⁵ *Life Application Bible Commentary*, Grant Osborne, ed., Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Findex.com), 1 Pet 3:15.

⁹⁶ Kenneth Boa "What is Apologetics?" *The Apologetics Study Bible*, (Holman, 2007).

for the Christians' supernatural ability to have "**hope**" in the midst of persecution. And the answer would be the Gospel of the King itself, not "the evidences of Christianity" as claimed above.

Likewise, one of the foremost *intellectual apologists*, the rightly respected Norm Geisler, clearly promotes this unfortunate error when he writes:

The most important reason to do [*intellectual*] apologetics is that God told us to do so. The classic statement is I Peter 3:15, which says, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."

This verse tells us to be ready. We may never run across someone who asks tough [*intellectual*] questions about our faith, but we should still be ready to respond if someone does. Being ready is not just a matter of having the right information available, it is also an attitude of readiness and eagerness to share the [*intellectual*] truth of what we believe. We are to give a[n] [*intellectual*] reason to those who ask the questions. It is not expected that everyone needs pre-evangelism, but when they do need it, we must be able and willing to give them an [*intellectual*] answer.⁹⁷

Similarly, I. Howard Marshall comments in the *IVP New Testament Commentary*:

The text probably implies no more than that Christians should always seize such opportunities when they arise, but it is fair to add that they will be unable to capitalize on the opportunities if they are not already prepared with a coherent [*intellectual*] understanding of faith and some practice in rehearsing it.⁹⁸

Along the same lines, the well known Creationist Henry Morris quotes 1 Peter 3:15 and writes, "The Lord expects Christian believers, as his chosen and called witnesses, to be able to give an answer and this implies life-long study of both his word and his world."⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Norm Geisler, "Apologetics" *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics (BECA)* (Baker, 1999).

⁹⁸ I. Howard Marshall, 1 Peter, *IVP New Testament Commentary* (Electronic Edition STEP Files (Parsons, 1997).

⁹⁹ Henry Morris, *For Time and Forever*, 86.

Such an approach is nothing new, as Dr. Barnes had commented on 1 Peter 3:15:

[W]e are to state the reasons why we regard the system of religion which we have embraced as true—implies, that we should be acquainted with the evidences of the truth of Christianity, and be able to state them to others. It should also be an object with every Christian to increase his acquaintance with the evidences of the truth of religion, not only for his own stability and comfort in the faith, but that he may be able to defend religion if attacked, or to guide others if they are desirous of knowing what is truth. ¹⁰⁰

Likewise, Dr. MacArthur has written:

Effective Christian witness includes being able to answer questions about the faith. Peter commanded believers to “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” (1 Pet. 3:15). ¹⁰¹

Along the same lines, perhaps the most famous Christian apologist, Josh McDowell, in his excellent reference, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, also misinterprets the question being asked by these enquirers in 1 Peter 3:15 when he writes:

The manner in which the word “defense” is used in 1 Peter 3:15 denotes the kind of defense one would make to a legal inquiry, asking, “Why are you a Christian?” A believer is responsible to give an adequate answer to the question. ¹⁰²

Accordingly, it should not surprise us that Josh McDowell’s son Sean McDowell has quoted 1 Peter 3:15 to support the claim:

The biblical evidence is clear: All Christians are to be trained in apologetics . . . This involves learning how to respond to common objections raised against the Christian faith. . . ¹⁰³

On the contrary, the question being asked in 1 Peter 3:15 is *not* “Why are you a Christian?,” but rather, “Why do you have the ability

¹⁰⁰ Barnes, *loc. cit.*

¹⁰¹ MacArthur, *Commentary*, Acts 17:26-34.

¹⁰² Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (1999), xxx.

¹⁰³ Sean McDowell, “Introduction,” in *Apologetics for a New Generation*, Sean McDowell, ed. (Harvest House, 2009), 18-19.

to have hope even though you are being persecuted?" And the answer was to be, because we *are Christians*, not intellectual reasons why they were Christians.

Unfortunately, a recent collection of essays from leading *intellectual apologists* is entitled *To Everyone An Answer*,¹⁰⁴ clearly referring to 1 Peter 3:15. Yet, the contents of the book has nothing to do with 1 Peter 3:15.

Likewise, the well respected Christian apologist William L. Craig misinterprets the Apostle Peter as well when he says:

Thus, against those who think that it is inappropriate to present arguments and evidence to show that the Christian faith is true stands the New Testament involvement in just such a project, both in the example of Jesus and the Apostles and in entire books dedicated to this purpose. Indeed, we are actually commanded by Scripture to have ready an apologia to present to any unbeliever who asks us the reason for our faith (1 Peter 3:15).¹⁰⁵

First, notice the distortion of the Scripture here by suggesting that the Christians are being asked for a defense of the "Christian faith" in general, rather than the "**reason**" for their ability to have faith ("**hope**") in the midst of their suffering. We agree with Dr. Craig that "we are actually commanded" by the Apostle here to do something, but we had better properly understand what it is. It is not to "**be prepared**" "to present arguments and evidence to show that the Christian faith is true" as Dr. Craig suggests. Rather, in the context of unbelievers noticing a Christian's supernatural ability to exercise virtue in difficult circumstances, we are to be prepared to present the simple Gospel.

Which, by the way, may give many Christians a great deal of relief. Far too many of them have been intimidated by *intellectual apologists* into thinking all of us need to be like them, and they have misused 1 Peter 3:15 to do so. On the contrary, the Apostle is commanding something all Christians can do the very first day they become Christians: act with supernatural virtue and tell people the reason why they can.

Not only is *intellectual apologetics* not being commanded here as so many suggest, but we are not at all sure what examples of *intellectual apologetics* in the life of "Jesus and the Apostles" that Dr. Craig would be referring to. As we have demonstrated

¹⁰⁴ *To Everyone An Answer*, (Intervarsity, 2004)

¹⁰⁵ William L. Craig, *Five Views on Apologetics*, (Zondervan, 2000), 43.

elsewhere, their practice was to preach the simple Gospel, not *intellectual apologetics*.¹⁰⁶

Finally, the rightly respected James Emery White, former President of Gordon-Conwell seminary has written of his past:

I was surrounded by very bright people who were not Christ-followers and were eager to explain why. To hold on to my faith, much less contend for it, would demand fulfilling the Bible's clear and commanding exhortation to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15). I knew I had to out-think those who were challenging my faith; and to out-think them, I had to out-read them.¹⁰⁷

Here is some of that unwarranted pressure that *intellectual apologists* place on Christians to "out-think" and "out-read" unbelievers in order to defend our faith and influence them. On the contrary, and with all due respect Dr. White, it is far more important, possible, biblical, and powerful to out-love them.

These are all good, godly men we're sure, but their bias toward *intellectual apologetics* and against *virtue apologetics* would seem to unfortunately lead them to misinterpret 1 Peter 3:15. And none of our critiques are intended to unnecessarily devalue the great value that evidences for the faith have for Christians

However, what Christians need to have "**prepared**" is not intellectual arguments and answers to support the Gospel, but a clear description of the Gospel! And the supernatural virtue is to also be a part of sharing the reason for our ability to have hope, as the Apostle Peter instructs them to do it with "**gentleness and respect**" even toward "**those who speak maliciously against,**" and "**slander**" them (3:16).

Perhaps the neglect of *virtue apologetics* reflects the modern attraction to easy shortcuts. It is easier to learn and expound intellectual arguments for Christianity rather than exuding hope in the midst of painful trials like 1 Peter 3:15 is really talking about.

Pastoral Practices

¹⁰⁶ For discussion of the approach that Jesus and the Apostles had to evangelism, which had virtually nothing to do with *intellectual apologetics*, see chapter 5.13.

¹⁰⁷ James E. White, *A Mind for God* (Intervarsity, 2006), 36.

- Are all the people in your church “**prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks [them] to give the reason for the hope that [they] have**” as the Apostle instructed? Again, we are not talking about *intellectual apologetics* but the simple, powerful Gospel itself.

Unfortunately, all kinds of ministries have developed models for training people in evangelism that present the Gospel in various ways, many claiming to be the best. Choose one that is simple and can be shared with a small booklet. We recommend the one published by Evangelism Explosion and available at <https://www.evangelismexplosion.org/shop/Inventory.jsp?category=TRACTS+FOR+WITNESSING>.

Don’t be concerned with equipping everyone to answer all the tough questions people may come up with. It will be a great accomplishment if everyone can simply share their testimony and a clear, accurate explanation of the Gospel.

- One reason that people in our church may not have many opportunities to share the Gospel is that they are not being supernaturally virtuous enough in their workplaces and neighborhoods. Encourage them to perform the miracle of love more, not only because God has enabled them uniquely to do so, but to draw more people to Christ! As one man put it: Our people should be asking themselves, “Does my life demand an explanation?”

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Our Father in Heaven, thank You again for the power to be a living miracle of love and holiness in such a selfish, wicked world. Help me to make the most of every opportunity to shine my light for You to bring glory to You on this Earth where You get so little, and to draw my lost brothers and sisters to You.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) What are some examples of *virtue apologetics* in Paul’s writings?

- 2) Where do we claim is the list of the greatest miracles in Scripture? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 3) Besides performing miracles, what else was supernatural about the Apostle Paul that authenticated his ministry?
- 4) What do we claim is a major theme of 1 Peter and why?
- 5) What is the common interpretation of 1 Peter 3:15? What is our interpretation of this passage? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 6) Why do we claim *intellectual apologetics* puts an unnecessary pressure on Christians?

Publications & Particulars

Chapter 5.5

Virtue Apologetics & Assurance of Salvation

The Fruits of the Spirit, Not a "Testimony"

Overall Objective

To demonstrate that supernatural virtue is also the only sufficient proof that we are saved.

Table of Topics

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C) The Superiority of *Virtue Apologetics* for the Assurance of Our Salvation

Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- Contrary to the belief that our personal assurance of salvation rests in some subjective “testimony of the Spirit,” the Bible teaches that such assurance is based on the objective fruits of the Spirit.
- The Apostle John’s intention in 1 John is to teach new believers how to tell if they have been born again, and he repeatedly points to the evidence of love and holiness.
- The Bible emphasizes our love for other Christians more than for others.
- Nonetheless, we would contend that the clearest, most immediate proof of our spiritual regeneration is our *desires*, not our practice.
- For some, the Apostle John’s instruction on the proof of salvation is too dogmatic and unqualified. However, we should be careful of watering down his statements.
- While a person living a lifestyle of sin may be a Christian, we have a biblical mandate to lovingly warn them that neither we nor they have reason to believe they are a Christian.
- Christ said that even fakes performing miracles, exorcisms, and prophesying in His name could be exposed by their lack of virtue.
- Several of the Church’s best teachers have supported the view that virtue is our personal proof that we are saved.
- A subjective foundation for our assurance is no foundation because even spirits must be tested objectively.
- An emphasis on some sort of subjective assurance of our salvation has given some an excuse to ignore a lack of objective evidence, leading to a false assurance.

A) Biblical Support for Assurance through Objective Virtue

We are arguing in this book that the ultimate proof that only authentic Christianity saves people from the punishment of God, is their supernatural virtue. How then do we know that we are saved? By the same evidence: supernatural virtue.

Contrary to some who teach that it is *gifts* of the Spirit, such as speaking in tongues, that proves our salvation, we contend that it is the *fruits* of the Spirit (cf. Gal 5:22-26; Col 3:12-15). Against the common teaching of our Roman Catholic and Lutheran brothers that our *water* baptism gives us assurance of our salvation, we would claim that it is the life transformation that comes with *spiritual* baptism (cf. Eph 1:13-14). And against John Calvin (1509–1564) who suggested some inner, subjective feeling of assurance that the Spirit communicates to our spirit, we insist that the real “testimony of the Spirit” to our salvation is the objective, observable virtue that flows out of the born again Christian’s life.¹⁰⁸

A.1) The Apostle John’s Support of Objective Assurance

It is this very thing that the Apostle John is so eager to explain in his epistle. While the Apostle’s purpose for writing his Gospel was **“that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name”** (21:31), his purpose in 1 John is, **“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life”** (1 John 5:13).

His goal in his Gospel is the salvation of unbelievers, while his goal for the epistle is assurance for believers.¹⁰⁹ While the Apostle

¹⁰⁸ For further discussion regarding the “testimony of the Spirit” and our assurance of salvation see chapter 3.6.

¹⁰⁹ Dr. Stott remarks regarding the central subject of John’s epistles: The predominant theme of these letters is Christian certainty. Their characteristic verbs are *ginōskein*, ‘to perceive’ (twenty-five times) and *eidenai*, ‘to know’ (fifteen times), while a characteristic noun is *parrisia*, ‘confidence of attitude’ or ‘boldness of speech’. The certainty of Christian people is twofold - objective (that the Christian religion is true) and subjective (that they themselves have been born of God and possess eternal life). Both are expounded by John, who takes it for granted that this double assurance is right and healthy. His teaching about these certainties, their nature and the grounds on which they are built, urgently needs to be heard and heeded today. .

John claims in his Gospel that it was Christ's physical miracles that authenticated Him as the only way of salvation (cf. John 14:6; 20:30), he claims in his epistle that it is our miraculous, objective virtue that proves we have such salvation.

For example, he writes in simple and straightforward terms:

We know that we have come to know Him if we obey His commands. The man who says, "I know Him," but does not do what He commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys His word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in Him: Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. (1 John 2:3-6)

In other words, the certainty of our salvation rests not in feelings or subjective revelations from the Spirit, but rather in the objective evidence of our Christ-like virtue. John Stott, in his superb commentary on 1 John, comments on this passage as follows:

The Gnostics in particular laid claim to the knowledge of God. They had been enlightened with the true *gnōsis*. John does not deny the possibility of knowing God, since both the Old Testament and the Gospel promise it (e.g. Jer. 31:34; Jn. 17:3). But he insists that no religious experience is valid if it does not have [objective] moral consequences (cf. Tit, 1:16). It is not the person who claims to be a Christian and to know God who is presumptuous, but the person whose claim is contradicted by his conduct. He is a liar (v. 4).¹¹⁰

The Apostle repeats this truth several times in this short letter. He writes again in chapter 2:

Anyone who claims to be in the light [correctly believing what is necessary for salvation] **but hates his brother is still in the darkness** [i.e. unsaved]. **Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.** (1 John 2:9-11)

. . . A fresh certainty about Christ and about eternal life, based upon the grounds which John gives, can still lead Christian people into that boldness of approach to God and of testimony to the world which is as sorely needed as it is sadly missing in the church today. (*Letters of John*, (TNTC) [Eerdmans, 1988], 56, 60)

¹¹⁰ Stott, *Letters*, 95.

Granted that the supernatural and superior virtue of Christians proves the truth of Christ, how do we know if we possess the truth of Christ? The Apostle writes:

If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of Him.
(1 John 2:29)

No one who lives in Him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen Him or known Him. Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who does what is sinful is of the devil . . .

No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother. (1 John 3:6-10)

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. (1 John 3:14)

Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in His presence whenever our hearts condemn us. (1 John 3:18-20)

Dr. Stott comments regarding these latter verses:

It is implied that we shall be able to do this [be assured of our salvation] only if we know that we belong to the truth. It is the mind's knowledge by which the heart's doubts may be silenced. But how can we know this? What is the meaning of the *this is how* with which the verse begins? . . .

Here (as in 4:6) it seems to refer back to the preceding paragraph about love. It is 'everyone who loves' who 'has been born of God and knows God' (4:7). Love is the final objective test of our Christian profession, for true love, in the sense of self-sacrifice, is not natural to human beings in their fallen state. Its existence in anyone is evidence of new birth and of the indwelling Spirit (3:24; 4:12-13), and it shows itself 'with actions'.

'There are actual things we can point to - not things we have professed or felt or imagined or intended, but things that we have done' (Law). If we thus love 'in truth' (v. 18), we may indeed have full assurance in our hearts. 'The fruit of love is confidence' (Westcott).¹¹¹

The Apostle John also explains why love is the ultimate proof of our standing with God:

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." (1 John 4:7-8)

The kind of love that God is requiring can only come from Him, and He only gives it to those who know Him.¹¹²

Notice the Apostle's focus on loving Christians rather than non-Christians. He says, "**We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers**" (3:14; cf. 2:9-11; 3:12, 15-17; 4:20-21). Make no mistake, the Apostle is referring to Christian brothers, not just a stranger. This is because it is those Christians whom we live and labor with that will sin against us the most, not a stranger. Being kind to strangers is relatively easier than bearing with the weaknesses of Christians in your local church. Cults do the former, only Christians can and will do the latter. Supernatural love is really demonstrated in how we treat other Christians. Nonetheless, R. Alan Cole notes, "This is not a popular view today, for to us it smacks of 'favoritism,' but there is no question that it is biblical."¹¹³ However, Dr. MacArthur correctly points out, "How we treat each other is our greatest attraction to a world seeking love, kindness, and compassion."¹¹⁴

Obviously, in none of these statements is the Apostle implying that a born again Christian cannot sin. First of all, he has already said that to claim sinless perfection is to be deceived (cf. 1:8, 10), and secondly, he has promised that, "**if anybody does sin, we**

¹¹¹ Stott, *Letters*, 149.

¹¹² For a discussion of 1 John 3:18-4:2; 4:13; and 5:6-11, which some claim would support a subjective, mystical "testimony of the Spirit" see chapter 3.4.

¹¹³ R. Alan Cole, *The Letter of Paul to the Galatians (TNTC)* (Eerdmans, 1989), 231.

¹¹⁴ John MacArthur, *MacArthur's New Testament Commentary*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Parsons Technology, 1997), Gal 6:10.

have One Who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One” (1 John 2:1).

Also, we would contend that the clearest, most immediate proof of our spiritual regeneration is our *desires*, not our practice. It is our *desires* to be holy that change rather powerfully and immediately when real conversion occurs, because we immediately receive **“a new heart and . . . a new spirit”** (Ezek 36:26), which is Christ’s own heart and Spirit because He has come to live inside of us. However, while our *desires* change rather powerfully and immediately, it will require our whole Christian life for our consistent *practice* to catch up. God changes our desires radically and instantly at conversion, but we still need to, **“be transformed by the renewing of [the beliefs of our] mind”** (Rom 12:2) so that we more consistently practice what we desire.

Therefore, it is not our fluctuating performance which we should base our assurance of salvation on, but our ardent, abiding, enormous hatred of sin in our lives. This is precisely what is illustrated in the life of the Apostle Paul in Romans 7:14-25. His struggle with sin in him, *even after over 20 years of being an Apostle of Jesus Christ*,¹¹⁵ was very real.¹¹⁶ But even more real was his great hatred for that sin. He wrote:

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. . . . As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. . . . So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.

For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom 7:15-25)

¹¹⁵ NT scholar and Pauline expert F. F. Bruce dates the Apostle’s conversion in A. D. 33 and the writing of Romans in A. D. 57. (“Paul the Apostle,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE)*, Geoffrey W. Bromiley ed., 4 vols., [Eerdmans, 1988], III:699, 709)

¹¹⁶ There is a great deal of debate regarding whether or not the Apostle is speaking of a regenerated believer in Romans 7:15-23. In the end, identical language in Galatians 5:16-17, which seems most clearly to refer to the internal moral struggle of believers, provides strong evidence for our position that the Apostle is speaking of the same thing in Romans.

Do you sense the passionate **"hate"** for indwelling sin in the Apostle's words? It was not the *absence* of sin that demonstrated the Apostle possessed the Holy Spirit, but his great hatred for sin. Accordingly, it is not only the victories over sin that prove our salvation, but the very fact that we are **"waging war"** against it at all.

So much so that the Apostle recognized that, in a sense, **"it is no longer I myself who do"** the sins he hated, but the sinful habits and lies still operating in the unrenewed parts of his mind. On the contrary, he said, **"in my inner being [my real regenerated self] I delight in God's law,"** which is something the unregenerate will *never* do. And it is that very **"delight"** in obeying God, and our passionate hatred for sin, that will inevitably result in the practically holier life that the Apostle John describes so clearly.

The Apostle John's concern, then, is not the struggle with a sin here and there that all Christians experience. Rather, he is writing of the habitual and persistent pursuit, practice, and even pleasure of sins against God and our conscience. Christians do not habitually practice sin, do not persistently pursue it, and certainly do not enjoy living in it. This is what makes us radically and miraculously different than we were before our rebirth, and from the rest of the world who are still **"all under sin"** (Rom 3:9).

One could hardly make our point better than the renowned NT scholar F. F. Bruce (1910-1990) who wrote concerning the kind of assurance of salvation taught in 1 John:

Whatever high claims may be made by one who indulges in sin, that indulgence is sufficient proof that he has no personal knowledge of Christ. . . . [T]he new birth involves a radical change in human nature; for those who have not experienced it, sin is natural, whereas for those who have experienced it, sin is unnatural—so unnatural, indeed, that its practice constitutes a powerful refutation of any claim to possess the divine life.¹¹⁷

Some may find the Apostle John's instruction on the proof of salvation is too dogmatic and unqualified. However, we should be careful of watering down his statements. Of course, theoretically, one could **"not do what He [Christ] commands,"** be one who **"hates his brother,"** and **"one who continues to sin"** and still be a Christian, even though the Apostle says they would be **"a liar,"** **"still in darkness,"** and have never **"known Him"** (1 John 2:4, 9; 3:6). Perhaps a real born again Christian could live for an extended period of time in a hateful, sinful lifestyle, although we doubt it. For

¹¹⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles of John* (Eerdmans, 1970), 90, 92.

certain they would be miserable, and if not, then they truly would have no basis to believe they belong to Christ.

And this is the Apostle John's point. We doubt he intended to exclude all possibility that there could be someone whom God knows is a Christian, but whose life is so barren of holy, virtuous fruit at the moment, that to a discerning human it would not seem so. While as mere human beings we cannot be dogmatic about the true spiritual state of another human being, the Apostle John *was* dogmatic that if *agapē* love and holiness are not characteristic of a person's life, then they are a liar to claim they are a Christian. At the very least then, we can compassionately tell a sinful and selfish professor of Christianity that while they may be a born again Christian, neither we nor they have any reason to believe they are. And this is why throughout Scripture, those who claim to know Christ are encouraged to, **"be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure"** (2 Pet 2:10; cf. Phil 2:12; Heb 3:7-19; 6:1-12; 10:26-39). Therefore, a more consistent application of *virtue apologetics* would helpfully expose more of the many merely professing Christians, perhaps relieving them of their self-deception as to their true spiritual state.

A.2) Jesus' Support of Objective Assurance

And this was not only the teaching of the Apostle John. The King had made the same claim in His Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matt 7:21-27). He described people doing all sorts of things even in His **"name"** including prophesying, exorcisms, and miracles. And yet, **"many"** of these very kind of people were unsaved **"evil doers."** It was in this context that Christ said, **"Not everyone who [merely] says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the [moral] will of My Father Who is in Heaven."**

Christ went on to compare two kinds of people. There are those who **"hear these words of mine and put them into practice,"** and therefore, have a saving faith that will **"not fall."** But there are those who **"hear these words of mine and do not put them into practice"** and therefore have a "faith" **"built . . . on sand"** which will, at some point, **"fall with a great crash."** For Christ, it was obedience to His word that tested the legitimacy of a person's salvation (cf. Matt 13:18-23; John 15:1-8).

A.3) The Apostle Paul's Support of Objective Assurance

In addition, we may note here that this was precisely the Apostle Paul's point in relating the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5. In verse six he states clearly that, **"The only thing that counts [for possessing and claiming salvation] is faith expressing itself through love."** As Dr. Stott puts it here, "the faith which saves is a faith which works, a faith which issues in love,"¹¹⁸ and a love that can be objectively observed.

While throughout Galatians 5 the Apostle is certainly speaking of the internal moral battle that occurs between the **"sinful nature"** and **"the Spirit"** (Gal. 5:17) in the life of the believer, he also makes it clear in the passage that the objective "fruit" of the Spirit is the evidence that a person is **"not under law"** (v. 18, i.e. saved) and that they **"belong to Christ Jesus"** (v. 24).

On the other hand, those who do not bear the fruit of the Spirit, but by default, exhibit the **"acts of the sinful nature"** (v. 19) prove their damned state because, as the Apostle says, **"I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God"** (v. 21). No amount of subjective, peaceful, self-affirming feelings about one's relationship and standing with God can, or should, make up for a lack of the objective moral evidence of one's life.

Accordingly, the Apostle Paul testifies in Acts, **"First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds"** (Acts 26:20). This is why he told the Romans: **"Through Him and for His name's sake, we received grace and Apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the [moral] obedience that comes from [saving] faith"** (Rom 1:5). *Saving faith* will result in obedience to God and prove our salvation.

Having Christ in us is to be saved, and the Christ in us will show Himself. Paul wrote the Corinthians: **"You show that you are a letter from Christ . . . known and read by everybody . . . written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts"** (2 Cor 3:2-3).

Like the Apostle John in his epistle, the Apostle Paul reminds us that supernatural virtue is what the confidence of our salvation is based on when he says, **"Those [deacons] who have served well gain . . . great assurance [parrēsia] in their [saving] faith in Christ Jesus"** (1 Tim 3:13).¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ John Stott, *The Message of Galatians* (Intervarsity, 1994), 134.

¹¹⁹ There is a great deal of debate as to what Paul meant regarding a **"great assurance [parrēsia] in their faith in Christ Jesus"** (1 Tim

3:13). While we relate it to a confidence before God, most others apply it to a boldness in speech (cf. TEV, Calvin, MacArthur). Some allow for both meanings rather simultaneously (cf. George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles (NIGTC)* [Eerdmans, 1992], 174; John Stott, *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus* [Intervarsity, 1996], 102).

NT scholar Gordon Fee relates the options and leans toward our own view when he writes:

The meaning of this last phrase [in 1 Timothy 3] is not entirely clear. The word for great assurance often conveys the sense of having boldness or openness toward others (cf. 2 Cor. 3:12; Phil. 1:20; Philem. 8; cf. also GNB). But the word can also refer to one's "confidence" before God, as in Ephesians 3:12 (cf. Heb. 10:19, 35). Hence the NIV translates **great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus**.

This is not an easy decision. On the one hand, it would add a further dimension to what it means to have good standing, namely, the confidence in speech that comes from soundness in life and work. On the other hand, it could refer to the double nature of the "reward;" namely, a good reputation with other people and confidence before God. On the whole, the latter is to be preferred, because the qualifying prepositional phrase says "in **faith**" (not in *the* faith), implying, as throughout 1 Timothy, one's own **faith in Christ**. (*1 and 2 Timothy, Titus (NIBC)* [Hendrickson, 1988], 89-90)

The primary support for interpreting Paul here as referring to a boldness in speech is that this is what *parrēsia* literally means (*pan*, all, *rhēsis*, speech: "freedom of speech"). Accordingly, this is how it is used throughout Acts (cf. noun: 2:29; 4:13, 29, 31; 28:31; verb: 9:27f.; 13:46; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8; 26:26).

However, as with any language, it was common for the literal meanings of classical Greek words to change to more popular meanings over the centuries, and these may not have much relationship to the word's original etymology. Thus, throughout the NT, *parrēsia* is used in ways that have nothing to do with speech at all (cf. 1 John 2:28; 3:21; 4:17; 5:14; Eph 3:12; Heb 3:6; 4:16; 10:18-19, 35; Job 22:26; 27:10 in LXX).

Finally, we believe the context of Paul's statement favors our view that he is speaking of an assurance of salvation, rather than a boldness of speech. First, Paul clearly says this confidence relates to a deacon's personal "**faith in Christ**," and says nothing here about boldness of speech at all. Secondly, public speaking as in evangelism or teaching would not seem to be a primary expectation of first century deacons, but rather practical service. Finally, Paul is stating the rewards of service, and assurance of salvation would certainly be more valuable than boldness of speech.

Accordingly, Albert Barnes commented:

The sense is, that by the faithful performance of the duties of the office of a deacon, and by the kind of experience which a man would have in that office, he would establish a character of firmness in the faith, which would show that he was a decided Christian. This passage, therefore, cannot be fairly used to prove that the deacon

B) Historical Support for Assurance through Objective Virtue

While there has been considerable support for Calvin's rather mystical view of the testimony of the Spirit, we would suggest there is equal or greater historical support for the more objective view that Spirit-produced virtue is the true testimony of the Spirit to our salvation. St. Augustine (354-430) put it this way, in the context of what proves we have received the Holy Spirit:

When we laid the hand on these infants, did each one of you look to see whether they would speak with tongues, and, when he saw that they did not speak with tongues, was any of you so wrong-minded as to say, "These have not received the Holy Ghost." . . . If then the witness of the presence of the Holy Ghost be not now given through these miracles, by what is it given, by what does one get to know that he has received the Holy Ghost? Let him question his own heart. If he love his brother, the Spirit of God dwelleth in him. ¹²⁰

Elsewhere Augustine said, "Now whosoever has not charity is wicked, because this gift alone of the Holy Ghost distinguishes the children of the kingdom from the children of perdition." ¹²¹

From there, as with a lot of theology, we need to fast-forward to Martin Luther (1483-1546) who wrote:

Faith . . . is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God, John 1[:12-13]. It kills the old Adam and makes us altogether different men, in heart and spirit and mind and powers; and it brings with it the Holy Spirit. It is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is

was "a preacher," or that he belonged to a grade of ministerial office from which he was regularly to rise to that of a presbyter. (*Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM [Findex.Com, 1999], *in loc.*).

¹²⁰ Augustine, *Homily on the Epistle of St. John*, 6.10; online at www.ccel.org.

¹²¹ Augustine, *The Trinity*, xv, 18; online at www.ccel.org.

constantly doing them. Whoever does not do such works, however, is an unbeliever.¹²²

Likewise, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) completely rejected John Calvin's idea of a mystical, subjective testimony of the Spirit to our salvation. As Dr. Bloesch relates, "For Jonathan Edwards Christian [moral] practice is the cardinal sign that we have been endowed with the Spirit,"¹²³ in distinction from some subjective action of the Spirit. Accordingly, in the conclusion of Edwards' massive study on this very subject, *Religious Affections*, and after rejecting many other approaches to the assurance of salvation, including the subjective doctrine of a "testimony of the Spirit," he writes:

I shall consider Christian practice and holy life, as a manifestation and sign of the sincerity of a professing Christian, to the eye of his neighbors and brethren. . . . And that this is the chief sign of grace in this respect, is very evident from the word of God.¹²⁴

Presbyterian theologian Donald Bloesch also notes that elements of Puritanism and Pietism rejected the subjective view of the Spirit's testimony to our salvation:

[O]ne of the major debates in Puritanism revolved around the assurance of salvation. Whereas the Reformers taught that faith itself brings assurance, the Puritans . . . encouraged believers to look for signs and evidences that attest the genuineness of their commitment to Christ. . . .

While orthodox Lutherans gained their security by looking back to their baptism, the Pietists underlined the need for a new experience, a new regeneration. . . . [They insisted that] our salvation is meaningless unless it produces fruits of obedience that attest whether we belong to Christ. . . . In contrast to Lutheran orthodoxy Zinzendorf [1700-1760, a foremost leader of Pietism] held that saving faith includes the impetus to love. "Even if one believes, yet he will not be saved, if he does not love. . . . There is no saving faith which

¹²² Martin Luther, "Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, Timothy Lull ed., (Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 101.

¹²³ Bloesch, 55.

¹²⁴ Edwards, II.12.

is not simultaneously love for Him who laid down His life for us." ¹²⁵

We think Scripture proves Zinzendorf right.

C) The Superiority of *Virtue Apologetics* for the Assurance of Our Salvation

In our view, the love and righteousness displayed in the Christian's life is not only the ultimate proof to the *world* that we are uniquely saved, but it is the only acceptable proof to *ourselves* that we are saved. Therefore, we suggest that two views, particularly from the Reformed camp, are inadequate in this regard.

Some Reformed theologians seem to suggest that our sense of assurance comes simply from assuring ourselves of the trustworthiness of Christ's promises, and there is really no need to monitor the evidence in ourselves that we truly are recipients of those promises. ¹²⁶ We would agree that our *objective* certainty is based on the trustworthiness of God. However, our *subjective* assurance, how we really know that we are saved, is based on the objective moral evidence that the supernatural regeneration of the Holy Spirit produces in our lives.

Likewise, John Calvin popularized the idea of an "internal testimony of the Holy Spirit" in which the Spirit subjectively and directly communicates to us that we are saved. Others claim this rather mystical "testimony of the Spirit" is what convinces us that Christianity in general is true. Accordingly, William Lane Craig, Research Professor of Theology at Talbot School of Theology writes:

Fortunately, God has not left us to our own devices to determine whether Christianity is true but has given us the [subjective, mystical] testimony of his own Spirit. By contrast, those who subscribe to the magisterial use of reason face severe difficulties: (1) They would deny the right to Christian faith to all who lack the ability, time, or opportunity to understand and assess the [intellectual] arguments and

¹²⁵ Bloesch, 115, 119.

¹²⁶ Michael Horton has been a consistent advocate of the view that the assurance of our salvation is "outside of us" in what Christ did, rather than "inside of us" in what Christ is doing. See his *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Zondervan Kindle Edition, 2010), Kindle Locations 15295-15296.

evidence. This consequence would no doubt consign untold millions of people who are Christians to unbelief.¹²⁷

There would seem to be a few mistakes here. First, as demonstrated elsewhere, Scripture does not support Dr. Craig's idea of a subjective, direct communication of the Spirit proving Christianity.¹²⁸ The real "testimony" of the Spirit comes through the objective experience and observation of the fruits of the Spirit.

Secondly, Dr. Craig overestimates the amount of rational evidence needed by the average regenerated Christian to serve as a valuable support to their faith. It does not require an extraordinary amount of "ability, time, or opportunity" for most Christians to gain an understanding and conviction of the most helpful intellectual arguments for the Christian faith.

Thirdly, Dr. Craig shows a complete disregard for *virtue apologetics* when he assumes that the only use of reason to prove Christianity is *intellectual apologetics*. On the contrary, *virtue apologetics* requires reason as well, and is the best use of it in regards to apologetics.

Dr. Craig goes on to state, "Rational argument and evidence may confirm our Christian beliefs to us but cannot defeat them if we are walking in the fullness of the Spirit."¹²⁹ This is true, but not because the Spirit is sending us some sort of direct, mystical message that we are saved as Dr. Craig claims, but rather, because the objective, supernatural fruit of virtue that the Holy Spirit produces in our lives is more powerful evidence than any intellectual arguments against the Christian faith.

Accordingly, Gary Habermas, Distinguished Professor and Chair of the Department of Philosophy and Theology at Liberty University, although an advocate for the "testimony of the Spirit" as the ultimate proof of the Christian life, writes in response to Dr. Craig:

I agree that individual believers can rely on the witness of the Holy Spirit and still be rational even if they cannot answer difficulties. But perhaps Craig has misdiagnosed the specific problem that he has posed. In most cases, non-Christian challengers today are probably not questioning whether the Christian has [subjectively] experienced the Holy Spirit's testimony. It is far more likely that their reservations concern the Christian claims to exclusivity surrounding this

¹²⁷ Craig in Cowan, 37.

¹²⁸ For further discussion regarding the "testimony of the Spirit" specifically as it regards the assurance of salvation see chapter 3.6.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 54.

experience—or even the way Christians behave with regard to these claims.¹³⁰

Here, Dr. Habermas correctly points out why “the testimony of the Spirit” is useless as an apologetic to the world—it is an unverifiable, subjective experience that anyone else can claim as well.

In the same book, Paul D. Feinberg, Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Trinity rightly recognizes the weakness of Dr. Craig’s approach as well, stating:

If the entire case for Christianity were subjective and personal, it might make belief simply a matter of the will. One might choose to believe whatever he wanted, claiming that he had divine assurance that he was right. That is why there is also an external witness of the Holy Spirit. That witness is objective, and it is public so that under certain conditions it is available for critical scrutiny.¹³¹

Unfortunately, however, Dr. Feinberg remarkably defines this “external witness of the Holy Spirit” not in terms of the virtue He produces, but “theistic arguments,” claims of experiencing God, an objective moral law, and divine revelation. Virtually everything *but* virtue.¹³²

The first problem with making some subjective action of the Spirit the bedrock assurance of our salvation is that it is just that: subjective. NT scholar Thomas Schreiner, Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, writes that this supposed action of the Spirit is:

a religious experience that is ineffable, for the witness of the Holy Spirit with the human spirit that one is a child of God is mystical in the best sense of the word.¹³³

While we have a great deal of respect for Dr. Schreiner, we must confess that calling something “mystical” is often simply an attempt to put a spiritual spin on nothing more than a feelings-oriented, and therefore, unreliable experience. As we have discussed thoroughly throughout *Knowing Our God*, we were created to trust facts, not feelings, or even spirits.

¹³⁰ Gary Habermas in Cowan, 64.

¹³¹ Paul Feinberg in Cowan, 160.

¹³² Ibid., 160–66.

¹³³ Schreiner, 503.

Accordingly, we read in 1 John: **"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God"** (4:1). And how else can we test such things except by objective means, rather than subjective ones? And this is precisely what the Apostle prescribes when he writes: **"This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God"** (4:2).¹³⁴

Secondly, an emphasis on some sort of subjective assurance of our salvation has given some an excuse to ignore a lack of objective evidence, leading to a false assurance. For example, the NT scholar Everett F. Harrison writes in the popular *Expositor's Bible Commentary*:

A comparison of [Romans 8:]15 and 16 will bring out an important truth concerning the assurance of salvation. All too often a believer may come to the point of doubting his salvation because his sanctification has proceeded so slowly and so lamely. The Spirit, however, does not base his assuring testimony on progress or the lack of it in the Christian life.¹³⁵

Dr. Harrison and others seem to forget that it was this very lack of holiness that prompted the Apostle to exhort the Corinthians: **"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves"** (2 Cor 13:5). And the test was not to see whether or not they *felt* like they were Christians, but whether or not they were *acting* like Christians (cf. 2 Cor 12:20-13:11). Such an approach to

¹³⁴ For all of Dr. Bloesch's support of a mystical assurance from the Spirit, he seems to end up agreeing with us that the ultimate test must be objective. He writes:

I believe that the final authority for the Johannine writer is the paradoxical unity of Word and Spirit, since he appeals both to the witness of objective history that is mediated by church tradition and to the interior witness of the Spirit. The continuing witness and developing tradition of the apostolic church needs to be illumined by the Spirit if it is to have final or ultimate authority for faith. At the same time, John is not espousing subjectivism, for the spirits must be tested (1 Jn 4:1-2). (316)

First of all, we have argued especially in chapter 3.7 that the Apostle never "appeals . . . to the interior witness of the Spirit." Secondly, it would seem even Dr. Bloesch recognizes the inadequacy of such a subjective criteria and ends up with an objective one which is the kind the Apostle prescribes in order to test the spirits.

¹³⁵ Everett F. Harrison, "Romans," Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. CD-ROM (Zondervan, n.d.), *loc. cit.* For further discussion of the proper interpretation of Romans 8:15-16 see section ?

the work of the Spirit in assuring us of our salvation can serve to give many a false assurance.¹³⁶

Here we are reminded of the King's sobering words when He said:

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father Who is in Heaven. ²²Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' ²³Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!' (Matt 7:21-23)

There is little doubt that such people could have professed to an internal, reassuring sense "in their spirit" that they had a personal relationship with Christ. What is also certain is that they did not possess the fruits of the Spirit in a sincere and supernatural manner. It is just this kind of horrible deception that can be encouraged by the teaching of the "testimony of the Spirit" to our salvation.

One wonders if the reason for commonly suggesting our assurance of salvation depends on something other than objective evidence, is to give a sorry excuse for the multitude of people who claim to be born-again Christians but do not live like it. It is unfortunate that such a doctrine has given such people warrant to muster up their own internal and faulty confidence and ignore the real evidence exhibited in the way they love, talk, and think. Such a position is not only unbiblical, but also not helpful for the Christian, and dangerous to the Church.

The perspective of Edwards and Augustine is so desperately needed in a world in which so many claim to be Christians, and then stain the name of Christ by being sinful. The result is that the high and holy calling of Christian means nothing because a multitude of obviously unregenerated people are claiming it and being allowed to do so. The Church is so eager to add to its numbers, make it easy to become a "Christian," and not offend, that it is reluctant to promote supernatural virtue as the real sign of being worthy to call oneself a Christian. Have we forgotten that what causes the most trouble in our churches is unbelievers claiming to be Christians?

The result of all this is perhaps the world likes us more, but we have abandoned the example of our Savior Who called His followers to radical virtue, cared a lot for spiritual maturity, and very little

¹³⁶ For further discussion of the proper interpretation of Romans 8:15-16 see section 3.6.

about numerical quantity, and reserved His strongest rebukes for those who claimed a relationship with God but did not live like it.¹³⁷

Accordingly, John Wesley warned of such self-deceit when he wrote: "How many have mistaken the voice of their own imagination for the witness of the Spirit of God, and then idly presumed they were the children of God while they were doing the works of the devil."¹³⁸

Likewise, Wesley's contemporary during the Great Awakening, Jonathan Edwards wrote:

Here it may be proper to observe, that it is exceedingly manifest from what has been said, that what many persons call the witness of the Spirit, that they are the children of God, has nothing in it spiritual and divine; and consequently that the affections built upon it are vain and delusive. That which many call the witness of the Spirit, is no other than an immediate suggestion and impression of that fact, otherwise secret, that they are converted, or made the children of God, and so that their sins are pardoned, and that God has given them a title to heaven. . . .

What has misled many in their notion of that influence of the Spirit of God we are speaking of, is the word *witness*, its being called the witness of the Spirit. Hence they have taken it, not to be any effect or work of the Spirit upon the heart, giving [objective] evidence, from whence men may argue that they are the children of God; but an inward immediate suggestion, as though God inwardly spoke to the man, and testified to him, and told him that he was his child, by a kind of a secret voice, or impression: not observing the manner in which the word witness, or testimony, is often used in the New Testament, where such terms often signify, not only a mere declaring and asserting a thing to be true, but holding forth evidence from whence a thing may be argued, and proved to be true.

Thus Heb. 2:4, God is said to "bear witness, with signs and wonders and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost." Now these miracles, here spoken of, are called God's witness, not because they are of the nature of assertions, but [objective] evidences and proofs. . . .

Many have been the mischiefs that have arisen from that false and delusive notion of the witness of the Spirit, that it is a kind of inward voice, suggestion, or declaration from God to

¹³⁷ For further discussion of *saving faith* and *false faith* see chapter 6.6.

¹³⁸ Reference unavailable.

man, that he is beloved of him, and pardoned, elected, or the like, sometimes with, and sometimes without a text of Scripture; and many have been the false and vain (though very high) affections that have arisen from hence. And it is to be feared that multitudes of souls have been eternally undone by it.¹³⁹

Those are true and sobering words that would not seem to be heeded enough by those who promote the doctrine of the “testimony of the Spirit” to the assurance of our salvation.

A third problem with such an approach to assurance is that it becomes difficult to explain why many Christians do not have it. If it is a universal work of the Spirit on behalf of Christians then why doesn’t the Spirit assure all Christians of their salvation? Is it because they lose the Spirit, or it somehow stops “talking” to them? If it is suggested that sin can hinder the assurance of the Spirit, then we would suggest we are right back to the objective tests of salvation that we support. Which would seem to be exactly what William Craig, a proponent of the “testimony” to our assurance, is saying when he remarks, “Only as we walk in the fullness of the Spirit can we be guaranteed the assurance of which Paul speaks.”¹⁴⁰

Finally, resting the epistemological foundation of the genuineness and exclusivity of our Christian faith on something as elusive, subjective, mystical, and private as some “testimony of the Spirit,” guts the Christian faith from its most important proof for its superiority over other faiths. What would keep anyone from claiming the same “testimony,” when objective virtue is deliberately excluded as a test of it, and it is defined as merely a subjective, mystical “feeling” of assurance that one is in a right relationship with God? This is yet another reason we promote *virtue apologetics* and the claim that the objective, supernatural virtue of the indwelling Spirit is the ultimate and universal proof of the exclusivity of salvation through Christ.

Pastoral Practices

- Because many in the Corinthian church were not living up to the moral standards of authentic Christianity, Paul instructed them at the end of 2 Corinthians to, **“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not**

¹³⁹ Edwards, II.1.10-11.

¹⁴⁰ Craig, 31.

realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test? (2 Cor 13:5). Paul was exhorting them to evaluate the spiritual fruit in their lives to demonstrate that Christ was indeed living in them. We would like to suggest that you do the same for a moment. Not because the authenticity of your Christianity is in question, but rather, to really experience *virtue apologetics* for yourself.

Compare yourself to who you were before the time you believe your spiritual rebirth occurred. Or consider the life of the typical unbeliever in your neighborhood, classroom, or work place. Are you more loving? Are your motives different? Do you demonstrate the fruits of the Spirit more than you did before, and more than your relatives, co-workers, and friends who do not have the Holy Spirit? We believe such an exercise will prove our point, and be a helpful reminder that you have in fact been regenerated and sealed with the Holy Spirit for eternal life.

- It is important to teach our people a biblical perspective on assurance of salvation. This was the Apostle John's purpose in 1 John and it should be one of our purposes as well. Teaching the biblical perspective of the Apostle can help those real Christians who are unnecessarily struggling with assurance, and help merely religious people in your congregation realize they do not have the Holy Spirit or the Savior. Challenging people to more honestly look at the objective fruit of the Holy Spirit in their lives will be a good thing.

Extras & Endnotes

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) What are some references in 1 John to the fact that virtue proves our salvation?
- 2) We claim that Scripture prioritizes love among believers to demonstrate its supernatural nature. Do you agree? If this is true, why would it be?
- 3) How should we respond to someone who claims to be a Christian but is living a lifestyle of sin?

- 4) What did Christ say would expose even fakes performing miracles, exorcisms, and prophesying in His name?
- 5) What are the dangers of placing our assurance of salvation on something as subjective as an inward “testimony of the Spirit”

Recommended Reading

- For further discussion regarding John Calvin’s “testimony of the Spirit” and a refutation of the Scriptures used to support it, see chapter 3.4.

Publications & Particulars

Chapter 5.6

Modern Applications to *Virtue Apologetics*

Overall Objective

To apply the test of Christian virtue to evaluate the authentic Christian element in personal lives, churches, and modern movements.

Table of Topics

- A) Biblically Evaluating Churches & Pastors**
- B) Biblically Evaluating *Charismaticism* & *Mega Mysticism***
- C) Biblically Evaluating the Emerging Church**
- D) Biblically Evaluating George Barna's *Revolution***

Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- Nothing and no one that is not exhibiting supernatural morality has the right to the sacred name of Christian.
- No one can claim special revelatory or miracle working abilities from the Holy Spirit and then not be exemplary examples of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.
- None of the NT writers ever praises or criticizes a local church for so many of the things the modern Church uses to define success. Rather, NT critiques of local churches always focus on doctrinal errors or moral weaknesses.
- Are "Charismatic" Christians in general significantly more loving, patient, humble, sacrificial, and holy than other Christians? Obviously not, and therefore *Charismaticism* has no biblical ground to claim that they are experiencing the Holy Spirit more than others.
- Movements like the Emerging Church that too often promote worldliness, threaten its right to be called Christian.
- The growing number of "Christians" who seem quite content with not belonging to a local church, fail the biblical test of *virtue* as well.

Thankfully, *virtue apologetics* enables us to objectively evaluate the authentic Christian element in personal lives, churches, and modern movements. God's people suffer from the great abundance of damaging deception in all of these realms today and the test of virtue exposes dangerous frauds. Nothing and no one that is not exhibiting supernatural morality has the right to the sacred name of Christian.

A) Biblically Evaluating Churches & Pastors

Accordingly, virtue is the ultimate test for the true Christianity of a church. Contrary to so many today, it is not the size of its audience, buildings, programs, or budgets. "Is this church loving and holy?" is the most important question Pastors, and prospective members should be asking themselves, because this is what matters most to the Head of the Church (cf. Eph 5:23). Accordingly, one notes that none of the NT writers ever praises or criticizes a local church for so many of the things the modern Church uses to define success. Rather, NT critiques of local churches always focus on doctrinal errors or moral weaknesses.

Related to this is how we evaluate the God-ordained authority of a Pastor. It is all too common today to choose Pastors based on their business and marketing skills, spiritual gifts, or personality, because all of these fit into the faulty definition of success for churches. On the contrary, the Chief Shepherd requires exceptional *virtue* of anyone claiming to be serving Him as an under Shepherd (cf. 1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:6-9; 1 Pet 5:1-4).

So again, a required question that should be asked concerning whether or not someone should join a particular church is what kind of virtue do the Pastors have? While all Christians are obligated by Christ to be under the authority of a Pastor, no one is obligated to follow a man who does not meet the character qualifications set by God Himself.

B) Biblically Evaluating *Charismaticism*¹⁴¹ & *Mega*

¹⁴¹ By modern *charismaticism* we are primarily referring to what is commonly labeled the “charismatic” movement that began with the Pentecostals in the early 1900’s, spread into denominational churches in the 1960’s and 70’s, and has merged with what is referred to as the Third Wave churches today. Pentecostal churches include Assembly of God, Church of God, Open Bible, Apostolic, Foursquare Gospel, and Full Gospel. Third Wave churches include Vineyard and a variety of independent congregations.

We thank God for all He has done through the “charismatic” movement, and for the dear Christian brothers and sisters who would claim membership in it. However, throughout *Knowing Our God (KOG)* we refrain from referring to this movement as “charismatic,” because this erroneously implies a uniqueness and even superiority in Christian grace (*charis*), and by further implication, a superior possession or experience of the Holy Spirit.

Surely no right-minded “charismatic” would desire to claim such a superiority over their Christian brothers and sisters, especially since they cannot demonstrate one. Biblically speaking, being “**led by the Spirit**,” experiencing His power, and living “**not under law**” but by “**grace [charis]**” is most clearly manifested in the “**fruit of the Spirit**” which the Apostle Paul describes as “**love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control**” (Gal 5:4, 18, 22-3). “Charismatic” Christians in general are not superior in these virtues of love and holiness compared to other Christians, and these virtues are the real essence of Christian *charisma*, making all obedient Christians true “charismatics,” not just a particular sect.

In fact, the greatest and most important uniqueness of *charismatic* churches over other authentic Christian churches is not their love or holiness, but rather an emphasis on, and practice of: 1) emotional worship, 2) speaking and/or praying in an incoherent tongue, 3) claims to direct divine revelation through spiritual gifts such as prophecy, and 4) claims to a greater abundance of miracles in general through the gifts of healing and miracle working.

Therefore, throughout *KOG* we use the terms *emotionalism* (see chapters 4.8-11), *glossaism* (Gr. glossa: “tongue,” see Book 12: *The Truth About Tongues*), *prophetism* (see Book 9: *Divine Prophets*), and *super-supernaturalism* (see chapters 10.14-16) to refer to these distinctives respectively, while recognizing that they may exist elsewhere as well. Accordingly, we believe this allows us to address the areas of concern we have regarding the movement, and avoid speaking critically of the movement as a whole, which has many good, although not unique, attributes as well.

Likewise, we refrain from referring to those Christians who would differ from “charismatics” as “non-charismatics,” erroneously implying again that the latter is somehow lacking in grace. Rather, those who oppose the sometimes bizarre worship of *emotionalism*, the obscure utterances of *glossaism*, the extra-biblical revelations of *prophetism*, and the miracle-a-minute mindset of *super-supernaturalism* are better labeled as

Mysticism

The test of supernatural morality exposes a great number of false prophets, philosophers, and “faith healers” in our day as counterfeits, as discussed further elsewhere.¹⁴² No one can claim special revelatory or miracle working abilities from the Holy Spirit and then not be exemplary examples of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. At least no one God would want us to trust.

In terms of prophets, we have already noted the hypocritical and horrendous immorality of Muhammad. Likewise, as we discuss elsewhere, virtually all of the foremost “prophets” in the Church today have been exposed as moral frauds, clearly marking them as false prophets.¹⁴³ The “faith healers,” whose greed is evidenced by their fancy clothing, cars, jets, and mansions clearly are not getting any power they may have from Christ. As we discuss elsewhere, Jesus in fact predicted in Matthew 7:15-23 that a high concentration of fake Christians would be in *Charismaticism*.¹⁴⁴

Such fakes find a particularly safe haven where the heretical “health and wealth gospel” is taught and greed is praised as a virtue, instead of denounced as a vice. Christ’s words to the Pharisees should strike fear in their hearts if their arrogance and deception have not left them totally insane:

historicists. This reflects the fact that for at least 1600 years of Church history, the great majority belief and practice of God’s people was opposed to all of the uniquenesses that the “charismatic” movement claims today.

It is a historical fact that miraculous gifts such as healing, tongues, and prophecy ceased functioning in the church in the fourth century when the NT canon had been completed, recognized and sufficiently distributed. Accordingly, the very few people since then who have promoted bizarre forms of worship, obscure utterances in prayer, claims to extra-biblical revelation, and miracle working abilities, were always thought to be deceived and dangerous, and not accepted as biblical Christians. What those in *charismaticism* also refuse to admit, or take seriously enough, is that the modern versions of the miraculous gifts being claimed do not match the attributes of their biblical counterparts. For a great deal of discussion on these matters see books 7-12 of KOG.

¹⁴² For further discussion of the immoral behavior of prominent “miracle workers” in the Church see sections 10.14.C; 11.7.B.9; 11.8.E-F.; For so called “prophets” see sections 9.11.F.3 and 9.13.J

¹⁴³ For the exposure of many false “prophets” as frauds in the Church today see sections 9.11.F.3 and 9.13.J

¹⁴⁴ For arguments that Christ predicted a high concentration of fakes in *Charismaticism* see section 6.6.E.

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence" (Matt 23:25; cf. Matt 8:20; Luke 12:15; 1 Cor 6:9-11; Eph 5:3, 5; 1 Thess 2:5-6; 1 Pet 5:2; 2 Pet 2:3, 14).

Use the Scriptures referenced here to evaluate the lives of most of the "Christian" superstars on television and it becomes clear that they do not even deserve to be called Christian, let alone leader, Prophet, Teacher, Evangelist, or healer.

While the God-ordained test of supernatural virtue allows us to biblically evaluate the authentic Christianity of ourselves, others, and churches, it does the same in regards to movements. For example, the central claim of *Charismaticism* is that they are experiencing the Holy Spirit of God to a greater degree than other Christians. The test of *virtue* clearly helps us discern whether or not this is true because any move of the Holy Spirit will be evidenced by the fruits of the Spirit. Are "Charismatic" Christians in general significantly more loving, patient, humble, sacrificial, and holy than other Christians? Obviously not, and therefore *Charismaticism* has no biblical ground to claim that they are experiencing the Holy Spirit more than others.¹⁴⁵

Likewise, *mega mysticism* is exposed as a fraud in this way as well. *Mega mystical* Christians are claiming that God regularly "speaks" to them apart from Scripture, even about extra-biblical matters. In other words, the claim is that *mega mysticism* provides a closer relationship with God. Is this true?

While we elsewhere demonstrate that such a position is unbiblical,¹⁴⁶ perhaps the best way to determine this is by the test of virtue. In other words, it is practically certain that anyone *really* experiencing *more* personal direct revelation from God, *more* specific divine guidance for their life, and *more* intimacy with God, would have *more* spiritual fruit and maturity in their lives. Unfortunately for *mega mystics*, they do not have, nor can they prove, any such thing. In fact, in the author's experience, more *mega mystical* Christians are typically less spiritually mature because they live so much according to their feelings.

Both those in *Charismaticism* and *mega mysticism* need to be reminded that the biblical commands to "**be filled with the Spirit**"

¹⁴⁵ For further discussion of the doctrinal errors practiced in *Charismaticism* see much of Books 7-12 of KOG.

¹⁴⁶ Regarding the unbiblical nature of *mega mysticism* and its claims to extra-biblical revelation see Book 14.

(Eph 5:18), “**live by the Spirit**” (Gal 5:16, 25), “**live in accordance with the Spirit**” (Rom 8:5), and be “**led by the Spirit**” (Rom 8:14) have absolutely nothing to do with experiencing healings, performing miracles, casting out demons, receiving visions, or God “speaking” to us apart from Scripture. Rather, all of these vital biblical commands mean to live according to the moral power and fruit of the Holy Spirit which is by far more satisfying and God-glorifying than anything the *super-supernaturalists* are seeking and claiming.

C) Biblically Evaluating the Emerging Church

Another movement in modern Christianity is referred to as the Emerging Church. In their noble effort to reach postmodern culture with the Gospel, some of them have turned Christ’s mandate to “**Be [morally] perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect**” (Matt 5:48) on its head. Instead of promoting the need for us to be supernaturally holy in order to attract the lost, a core value among some Emerging Church leaders seems to be encouraging less virtue in order to reach the lost. The current, and apparently unbiased, Wikipedia entry puts it this way:

Drawing on a more 'Missional Morality', that again turns to the synoptic gospels of Christ, many Emerging Churches draw on an understanding of God seeking to restore all things back into restored relationship. This emphasizes God's graceful love approach to discipleship, in following Christ who identified with the socially excluded and ill, in opposition to the Pharisees and Sadducees and their purity rules.

Many emerging church participants therefore, do not subscribe to many of the moral standards expected of Conservative Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism such as abstaining from alcohol, profanity, and watching adult movies. Those who identify with the emerging church movement are not likely to be dogmatic about private, moral behaviors which do not hurt others or the environment.¹⁴⁷

We would heartily agree that the extra-biblical rules promoted by the Pharisees and some Fundamentalists do not please God, nor advance the Gospel. But some in the Emerging Church have given

¹⁴⁷ Wikipedia online at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emerging_church #cite_ref-60.

far too much freedom to their sinful flesh in the name of relating to the lost. For example, John MacArthur has written:

The recent wave of popular books written by leading figures in the Emerging Church movement has unleashed an unprecedented flood of vulgarity and worldliness onto Christian booksellers' shelves. Obscenity is one of the main trademarks of the Emerging style. Most authors in the movement make extravagant use of filthy language, sexual innuendo, and uncritical references to the most lowbrow elements of postmodern culture, often indicating inappropriate approval for ungodly aspects of secular culture.¹⁴⁸

Dr. MacArthur goes on to relate regarding this movement:

A secular writer doing an article on the Emerging Church movement and postmodern Christianity summed up the character of the movement this way: "What makes a postmodern ministry so easy to embrace is that it doesn't demonize youth culture-Marilyn Manson, 'South Park,' or gangsta rap, for example-like traditional fundamentalists. Postmodern congregants aren't challenged to reject the outside world."

I've noticed the same thing. Whole churches have deliberately immersed themselves in "the culture"-by which they actually mean "whatever the world loves at the moment." Thus we now have a new breed of trendy churches whose preachers can rattle off references to every popular icon, every trifling meme, every tasteless fashion, and every vapid trend that captures the fickle fancy of the postmodern, secular mind. Worldly preachers seem to go out of their way to put their carnal expertise on display--even in their sermons.

In the name of "connecting with the culture" they boast of having seen all the latest programs on MTV, memorized every episode of South Park, learned the lyrics to countless tracks of gangsta rap and heavy metal music; or watched who-knows-how-many R-rated movies. They seem to know every fad top to bottom, back to front, and inside out. They've adopted both the style and the language of the world-including lavish use of language that used to be deemed inappropriate in polite society, much less in the pulpit. The want to fit right in with the world, and they seem to be making themselves quite comfortable there.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ John MacArthur, *The Truth War* (Nelson, 2007), 139-40.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

If the Emerging Church movement really wants the privilege of claiming to be followers and representatives of the King, the first thing they need to do is have any leaders who could be described as above, submit their resignations and be publicly rebuked. Then they need to apologize to believers and unbelievers alike for claiming to be ambassadors of Christ, but showing a greater love for the world than for out-of-this-world holiness. Then, perhaps, God would grant them the right to call themselves a Christian movement.

D) Biblically Evaluating George Barna's *Revolution*

Finally, the growing number of "Christians" who seem quite content with not belonging to a local church, fail the biblical test of *virtue* as well. No Christian is being humble toward God if they are not being humble toward man, and this no doubt includes being humble toward biblically qualified Pastors in local churches (cf. 1 Pet 5:1-5). Abandoning the God-ordained authority in the local church can actually be a very prideful and selfish thing, not a Christian or virtuous thing.

Nonetheless, George Barna, in his book *Revolution* (2006), claims that 20 million of the most committed Christians are leaving the biblically prescribed vehicle of a local church led by qualified Pastors.¹⁵⁰ First, as we demonstrate further elsewhere, it would seem his statistics are an exaggeration based on his inability, and perhaps even unwillingness, to truly identify authentic Christians.¹⁵¹ Nonetheless, his claim is that:

The defining attribute of a Revolutionary [Christian] is not whether they attend church, but whether they place God first in their lives and are willing to do whatever it takes to facilitate a deeper and growing relationship with Him and other believers.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ George Barna online at

<http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdateNarrow&BarnaUpdateID=201>

¹⁵¹ For further discussion on the Barna Group's flawed definition of born again Christians and the unnecessary slander against God's people that results, see section 5.16.A.2.

¹⁵² Ibid.

Evidently, such supposed humble willingness does not include finding an assembly of sincere Christians being led by biblically qualified leadership. The assumption seems to be that all of these millions of Christians cannot find a local church with those attributes where they live. If that is true, then they should move to our town because we have several.

Of course, there are several reasons for people abandoning the local church. One close to our heart is the multitude of God's children who have been wounded by bad Pastors and churches. We are very sympathetic to them and our grave concern over these very things compels us to write much of what we do, including the importance of *virtue apologetics*.

But the solution is not to abandon the God-ordained institution of the local church. There are difficult and divorced marriages as well, but we know we should not abandon God's institution of marriage. God created marriage with parents having authority for children to grow up under. Likewise, God created the local church to have Christ-like leaders, exercising their God-given authority to build up His spiritual children (cf. 2 Cor 10:8).

Unfortunately, all of God's children who allow their wounding from a bad church to cause them to abandon the local church, are simply running from their wounding and hurting themselves more. There are godly, loving, and safe Pastors and churches in the Body of Christ and it is there that wounded children of God will best be healed.

Other "revolutionaries" as Mr. Barna calls them are simply masking their pride and selfishness with the claim that they need not be under the authority of human Pastors in order to be under Christ's authority (cf. 1 Peter 5:1-7; Eph 4:11¹⁵³). Unfortunately, Mr. Barna has the audacity to claim that such "revolutionaries" are seeking the values of the early Christians, while forgetting that the Apostle Paul wrote Titus: "**straighten out what was left unfinished** [among Christians] **and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you**" (1:5). Why would the Apostle of the King think "**elders**" were so important to these Christians' lives if there is no need for them to be under such authority as Mr. Barna claims and promotes?

Of course there is no biblical problem with house churches which operate under the authority of men with the qualifications the Apostle gave (cf. Tit 1:6-9; cf. 1 Tim 3:1-7) which included Christ-like character and considerable doctrinal knowledge. But Mr. Barna's "revolution" seems to have little respect for this biblical

¹⁵³ For further discussion of God's desire for all Christians to be under the authority of qualified spiritual leadership see section 7.14.G.

paradigm, and in the end, such a movement, if it even is one, fails the *virtue* test of humble support for qualified local church leadership, and does not biblically deserve to be called Christian.

Extras & Endnotes

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) How does Christian virtue enable us to evaluate the claims of someone to be a Christian?
- 2) What exposes many of the leaders of the modern “miracle movement” as frauds?
- 3) What are some things that seem important indicators of success in American Christianity that are not even mentioned in Scripture?
- 4) How does the test of virtue help us evaluate churches and pastors?
- 5) How does the test of virtue deny *Charismaticism* their claim that they are experiencing the Holy Spirit more than others?
- 6) We claim that the Emerging Church is too often promoting worldliness. Do you agree or disagree and why? If it does, does this threaten its right to be called “Christian” even though there are undoubtedly Christians in it?
- 7) What is wrong with a movement that encourages Christians to leave local churches?

Publications & Particulars

Book 5

Biblical Apologetics

Part II

***God's Power in
Apologetics***

- ♦ **5.7:** God's Power for *Virtue Apologetics* 119
- ♦ **5.8:** God's Plan for *Virtue Apologetics* 131
- ◆ **5.9:** The Church's Historical Testimony to & 147
Demonstration of *Virtue Apologetics*
Christianity Has Done More Good than All
Other Religions Combined

Chapter 5.7

God's Power for *Virtue* *Apologetics*

God the Holy Spirit in Us

Primary Points

- Christ living in Christians (cf. Gal 2:20) and God working in us (cf. Phil 2:13) obviously give Christians a moral superiority over non-Christians.
- The fact that we alone possess the *Holy Spirit*, and all others only have a *sinful* nature, explains our superior ability for exercising the fruits of the Spirit (i.e. virtues).
- Our New Nature is to love and live righteousness. It gives us both a unique *desire* to be virtuous, and a *power* to be so, that spiritually unregenerate people simply do not have.
- Only the Christian *can*, *does*, & *desires* to fight sin.
- By virtue of the Holy Spirit's regeneration, the born again Christian is, from a moral, spiritual, and epistemological perspective, a *different species of human being*, a "**new creation**" (2 Cor 5:17), "**created . . . to do good works**" (Eph 2:10), and "**created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness**" (Eph 4:24).
- Simply put, God lives inside of Christians, and only inside of Christians. Like Christ, we too are an incarnation of God.
- The temples that God lives in now are not the kind that are designed to hide the presence and glory of God.
- Polycarp: "Changing from good to bad is impossible for us."

If God expects superior virtue to be the ultimate proof of the Christian faith, we would expect Him to give those possessing such truth a unique ability to demonstrate such virtue. The Bible clearly and repeatedly teaches that Christians do indeed have a superior and unique ability to exercise such moral virtues. As the early Church leader Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 310-386) wrote concerning supernatural virtue: "If you have [saving] faith you will not only receive remission of your sins, you will also do things beyond human power."¹⁵⁴

A) The Power of Our Relationship with God

The first reason for the born again Christian's moral superiority is the significant difference in their relationship with God. The King was communicating this very thing when He claimed:

I am the [true spiritual] vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

As pointed out elsewhere, the "**fruit**" that the King was referring to was essentially righteousness (cf. v. 10) and love (cf. v. 12-13). Christ is the source of all genuine virtue, and without Him you will not produce it. And it is because Christians uniquely have the King, that they uniquely have virtue.¹⁵⁵

Likewise, the Apostle Paul claimed something that only a born again Christian can when he wrote: "**I no longer live, but Christ lives in me**" (Gal 2:20). If that is the unique condition of every Christian then we would certainly expect unique and superior virtue.

It is also because of our unique relationship with God that the remarkable promise in Philippians 2:13 only applies to the regenerated Christian as well: "**[I]t is God Who works in you to will and to act according to His good [moral] purpose**" (Phil 2:13). There is no such promise in Scripture that God is working in unbelievers to cause them to both desire and act virtuously, but if

¹⁵⁴ Quoted by Donald Bloesch in *The Holy Spirit* (InterVarsity, 2000), 78.

¹⁵⁵ This verse even more clearly supports our point when it is understood that the context of John 15:1-19 is a contrast between unbelievers and believers, not disobedient believers and obedient believers. "Remaining" in Christ means to be saved. To fail to remain in Christ is to be damned (cf. v. 6). All Christians will bear supernatural, virtuous fruit (cf. v. 15-16). For further on John 15:5 referring to virtue see section 5.3.B.

such is the case with born again Christians, then we would obviously expect a significant superiority in virtue among them.

B) The Power of the *Holy Spirit* in Us

The born again Christian's superior ability to exercise supernatural virtue is more specifically based on the fact that they uniquely possess the *Holy Spirit*. The fruits of the Spirit, "**love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control**" (Gal 5:22-3), are essentially moral virtues. There is no doubt that the *Holy Spirit*-indwelt Christian is much more capable of producing these virtues than any unregenerate human.

The Apostle also speaks of the unique and superior way that the *Holy Spirit* works in the Christian's life to produce supernatural virtue when he remarks: "**And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed [by God] into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, Who is the Spirit**" (2 Cor 3:18). Only those indwelt with the *Holy Spirit* are undergoing such moral transformation.

The Apostle clearly describes the moral difference between believers and unbelievers when he writes that the regenerate are uniquely: "**God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works**" (Eph 2:10). We have been recreated for the express purpose of *virtue apologetics*.

Later in Ephesians, the Apostle explains the great difference that exists between the regenerated and unregenerated in terms of moral discernment and ability:

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸**They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.** ¹⁹**Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.**

²⁰**You, however, did not come to know Christ that way.** ²¹**Surely you heard of Him and were taught in Him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.** ²²**You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;** ²³**to be made new in the attitude of your minds;** ²⁴**and to put on the new self, created to be**

like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph 4:17-24)

Although the unregenerate have a conscience (cf. Rom 2:14-15), it is constantly and severely impaired and repressed by the sinful nature and desires that rule within them. Therefore, their moral **"thinking"** is an exercise in **"futility"** (v. 17), their moral **"understanding"** is **"darkened"** (v. 18), they have **"lost all sensitivity"** to **"every kind of impurity,"** and have **"a continual lust for more"** immorality (v. 19).

The born again Christian, however, is recreated with a radically different moral makeup. They have been given something that the unregenerate do not possess: a New Nature, **"created [past tense] to be like God in true righteousness and holiness"** (v. 24). While the Christian is still responsible to **"put on the new self"** (v. 24), the choice between it and the **"old self"** (v. 22) is not between two equally attractive ways of life, but rather, our recreation has drastically altered our moral tastes such that instead of having **"a continual lust for more"** (v. 19) immorality, we have a continual lust for righteousness. That is our New Nature, to love and live righteousness. It gives us both a unique *desire* to be virtuous, and a *power* to be so, that spiritually unregenerate people simply do not have.

In Romans 8 the Apostle also vividly illustrates all of this. In essence, he makes it clear that the unregenerate possess *only* a *sinful nature*, while *only* the regenerate possess the *Holy Spirit*. Only the Christian has supernatural power over sin, and has had their sinful nature dethroned. If this is true then the expected outworking of these facts clinches the matter, and we would expect moral superiority for the spiritually regenerated.

Let's look closer at what Paul says:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus [a unique and superior spiritual standing], **because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. . . . And so He condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.**

Those who live according to the sinful nature [all the unregenerate] **have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit [Christians] have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind**

[of all the unregenerate] **is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.** Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. (Rom 8:1-9)

The first thing to notice in this passage is that the Apostle is contrasting believers with unbelievers, not sinful or "carnal" believers with "Spirit-filled" believers. In other words, some may take this passage as an exhortation for the Christian to live in control of the Spirit instead of the sinful nature. While the Apostle addresses the real and present battle that the regenerated Christian has with sin elsewhere (cf. Rom 7:14-23; Gal 5:16-25), that is not his intention here.

Rather, the Apostle wishes to contrast the *power* over sin which the Christian has with the *bondage* to sin that the unregenerate have, all of which he has been discussing in the previous two chapters. This becomes clear when he emphatically tells the Roman Christians in verse 9 that, "**You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ** [living in them], **he does not belong to Christ.**" In other words, the Apostle is saying that if you are a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit, and if you have the Holy Spirit then you *are* controlled by Him, not the sinful nature. This is not to say that Christians never allow sinful thinking to influence them, but the general course of their life will demonstrate the influence of the Spirit.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Most commentators agree on our interpretation here of Roman 8:1-9.

For example, Douglas Moo writes concerning verse 9:

So characteristic of these respective "ages" or "realms" are flesh and Spirit that the person belonging to one or the other can be said to be "in" them. In this sense, then, no Christian can be "in the flesh"; and all Christians are, by definition, "in the Spirit." We miss Paul's intention if we think of being "in the flesh" here as the condition of mortality that continues to characterize even believers (Nygren), or as the moral weakness and proneness to sin that, more lamentably, we still possess (Dunn). For the rest of the verse makes absolutely clear that (1) to be a Christian is to be indwelt by God's Spirit; and (2) to be indwelt by God's Spirit means to be "in the Spirit" and not "in the flesh." (*The Epistle to the Romans* [Eerdmans, 1996], 489).

Likewise, Thomas Schreiner writes regarding the whole passage:

Rom. 8:5-7 constitutes not an exhortation but a description of the mind-set of those of the flesh and those of the Spirit. . . . An exhortation to live according to the Spirit is not present in Rom.

Backing up in the passage then, we see that the Apostle is describing all regenerated Christians as, **"free from the law of sin"** (v. 2), living **"in accordance with the [Holy] Spirit,"** having **"their minds set on what the [Holy] Spirit desires,"** (v. 5) and having a, **"mind controlled by the [Holy] Spirit"** (v. 6).

The Apostle is obviously not implying that Christians live in sinless perfection, as just a few verses earlier he describes his own personal battle with sin. But even the difference illustrated in Romans 7:14-23 is that only the Christian consistently *can, does,* and *desires* to fight sin. Perhaps the *most* noticeable difference between the saved and damned is that the former experience a great deal of guilt and remorse over their sin, while the latter rarely do. Christians even have a holy response to their sin.

Accordingly, the Apostle describes the unregenerate **"Gentiles"** as, **Having lost all sensitivity** [to right and wrong], **they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more"** (Eph 4:19). A truly regenerated believer could simply never be described that way. Not only are regenerated Christians uniquely sensitive to sin, but they have a distaste for it that the unregenerate do not. Christians have both a unique desire and ability to be holy (cf. 1 John 2:15, 29; 3:6-9, 24; 5:18).

It should also be emphasized that it is not just any spirit that the Apostle is saying the Christian **"lives in accordance with,"** and is **"controlled"** by in Romans 8, but specifically the *Holy Spirit*. We can confidently conclude then that anyone possessed by the *Holy Spirit*, which is the sole possession of regenerated believers, will exhibit a greater degree of holiness than all the unregenerate who do not possess the *Holy Spirit*.

Accordingly, what the Apostle says in Romans 8 of the regenerate, can be compared to his description of the unregenerate. They can accurately, automatically, and universally be described as

8:5-8. Paul describes the actual mind-set of those who are according to the flesh and Spirit. This is not to deny that believers battle against the flesh (cf. 8:13), but such a struggle should not be read into verses 5-8. . . . The intention of verses 5-11, then, is scarcely to say that believers are partly dominated by the flesh and partly by the Spirit. Instead, Paul argues that those who have the Spirit manifest the mind-set of the Spirit. (*Romans* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998], 411-12).

Also, NT scholar F. F. Bruce (1910-1990) wrote regarding Romans 8, "To be 'in the Spirit' (*en pneumatic*) is the opposite of being 'in the flesh' (*en sarki*); and all believers are regarded as being 'in the Spirit' (8:9). In practice then, to be 'in the Spirit' is to be 'in Christ.'" (*The Letter of Paul to the Romans TNTC* [Eerdmans, 1985, repr. 1999], 47.)

living, **"according to the sinful nature,"** having **"their minds set on what that nature desires,"** and possessing a **"sinful mind"** that **"is hostile to God"** and that **"does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so"** (v. 5, 7).¹⁵⁷

The Apostle is clearly claiming that the unregenerate *only* have a *sinful nature*, and that *only* the born again Christian has the *Holy Spirit*. If this is so, we would not only *expect* the truly regenerate of the world to practically, consistently, and convincingly demonstrate a superior holiness, but we believe that *they actually do*. By virtue of the Holy Spirit's regeneration, the born again Christian is, from a moral, spiritual, and epistemological perspective, *a different species of human being*, a **"new creation"** (2 Cor 5:17), **"created . . . to do good works"** (Eph 2:10), and **"created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness"** (Eph 4:24).

Let us remember how the Apostle describes the unregenerate in Ephesians 2:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. (Eph 2:1-3)

More specifically, he says that instead of the *Holy Spirit* Who works in the Christian, it is the **"spirit"** of satan **"who is now at work"** in the unregenerate. That will obviously have a great moral significance.

Accordingly, Jonathan Edwards wrote concerning the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Christian:

There is no work so high and excellent; for there is no work wherein God doth so much communicate himself, and wherein the mere creature hath, in so high a sense a participation of God; so that it is expressed in Scripture by the saints "being made partakers of the divine nature," 2 Pet. 1:4, and "having God dwelling in them, and they in God," 1 John 4:12, 15, 16, and chap. 3:21; "and having Christ in them," John 17:21, Rom. 8:10; "being the temples of the living God," 2 Cor. 6:16;

¹⁵⁷ There is some question as to whether or not an unregenerated person can produce true virtue at all. Regardless of the answer, even some morality among non-Christians does not refute *virtue apologetics* because all that is needed is that Christians practice significantly more virtue, not that their virtue is exclusive. For further discussion see section 5.16.B.

"living by Christ's life," Gal. 2:20; "being made partakers of God's holiness," Heb. 12:10; "having Christ's love dwelling in them," John 17:26; . . . they are made partakers of God's fullness, Eph. 3:17, 18, 19, John 1:16, that is, of God's spiritual beauty and happiness . . .

The true saints only have that which is spiritual; others have nothing which is divine, in the sense that has been spoken of. They not only have not these communications of the Spirit of God in so high a degree as the saints, but have nothing of that nature or kind.¹⁵⁸

Likewise, J. I. Packer has written concerning God's unique enablement for holiness in the Christian:

For healthy Christians, holiness is a[n] electric word. Why? Because God has implanted a passion for holiness deep in every born-again heart. Holiness, which means being near God, like God, given to God, and pleasing God, is something believers want more than anything else in this world. . . .

In Romans 6, Paul explains that all who have faith in Christ are new creatures in him. They have been crucified with him; this means that an end has been put to the sin-dominated lives they were living before. Also, they have been raised with him to walk in newness of life; this means that the power that wrought Jesus' resurrection is now at work in them, causing them to live differently because in truth they are different at the center of their being in what Paul in Romans 7:22 calls "my inmost self" and Peter in 1 Peter 3:4 calls "the hidden person of the heart."

They have been changed by the dethroning in them of that allergic negative reaction to the law of God, which is called sin, and the creating in them . . . a "heart after God"—a deep, sustained desire to know God, draw near to God, seek God, find God, love God, honor God, serve God, please God. . . . Holiness is the naturalness of the spiritually risen man, just as sin is the naturalness of the spiritually dead man, and in pursuing holiness by obeying God the Christian actually follows the deepest urge of his own renewed being. . . .

In one who has not been united to Christ in his dying and rising, motivational holiness is so unnatural as to be impossible, because at motivational level sin has the dominion all the time. "The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot" (Romans 8:7). Loving God with heart, mind, soul, and

¹⁵⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, online at www.ccel.org, II.1.2.

strength is altogether beyond the unregenerate man's capacity.

But in one who is thus united to Christ, by faith from the human side and by the Spirit from the divine side, motivational holiness is spontaneous and natural, and the unnatural thing is for him to do violence to his renewed nature by yielding to the desires of the flesh (see Galatians 5:16-26)-which explains why backsliders are always so miserable inside.¹⁵⁹

Pastoral Practices

- The King did not come to merely rescue us from the penalty of sin, but its power as well. Nonetheless, many Christians live a rather defeated life because they do not realize the new power they have over sin. Consider giving teachings over Romans 6-8 or Galatians 5 in order to help them be more victorious.

C) The Power of Jesus Christ in Us

Simply put, God lives inside of Christians, and only inside of Christians. The Apostle Paul wrote:

What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. (2 Cor 6:15-16; cf. 1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:19)

One thing that **"a believer"** *does not* **"have in common with an unbeliever"** is that only believers **"are the temple of the living God."** That is true both collectively as the Church (Eph 2:21-22), and individually as Christians.

Concerning the latter, the King told the Twelve that after His resurrection, **"you will realize that I am in My Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you"** (John 14:20; cf. 15:4; 17:20-23). This is a remarkable statement, telling us that like the King, we too are an incarnation of God.

The fact that God lives in us is repeated throughout the NT. Accordingly, the Apostle told the Roman Christians, **"the Spirit of Him Who raised Christ from the dead is living in you"** (Rom 8:11). He told the Corinthians, **"you yourselves are God's**

¹⁵⁹ J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step With the Spirit* (Revell, 1984), 94, 107-8.

temple and . . . God's Spirit lives in you" (1 Cor 3:16; cf. 6:19; 2 Cor 1:22). He simply told the Galatians, "**Christ lives in me**" (2:20) and he told the Colossians that, "**Christ [is] in you**" (1:27). If *God* lives inside of a person, will they not be enabled to exercise miraculous virtue that humans without God cannot even imagine?

And the temples that God lives in now are not the kind that are designed to hide the presence and glory of God in an inner room, and only to be experienced by a high priest once a year. No, the Apostle says elsewhere:

God, Who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. (2 Cor 4:6-7)

The Apostle's reference to "**jars of clay**" in which God's "**light**" and "**glory**" "**shine**" undoubtedly refer to "the small earthenware oil-lamps sold . . . in the marketplaces" of Corinth.¹⁶⁰ Such vessels were designed to *let* the light inside shine *outside*, not hide it. And it is precisely because the moral light that shines from us comes from humans that do not naturally demonstrate such an ability, that the King said humanity will readily recognize such light as coming from God (cf. Matt 5:16). We, like the Apostle, confess that, "**we are [not] competent in ourselves,**" (2 Cor 3:4) to possess the moral superiority that is necessary to be "**Christ's ambassadors**" (2 Cor 5:20), "**but our competence comes from God**" (3:4), Who has personally, completely, and permanently come to live inside of us.

The irreversible nature of this moral recreation is rather unforgettably illustrated in the martyrdom of the early Christian leader Bishop Polycarp (c. 156). When a Roman official attempted to scare the Bishop into denouncing his faith by stating, "I have wild beasts; I will throw you to them, unless you change your mind," Polycarp replied, "Call them! Because changing from good to bad is impossible for us."¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Colin Kruse, *2 Corinthians (TNTC)* (Eerdmans, 1987), 106.

¹⁶¹ *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 11, online at ccel.org.

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

*Our Father, we thank You that Your Holy Spirit lives in us. We are truly grateful for all the changes He has made in our lives. We thank You also for the clear, observable proof that the fruits of the Spirit gives us for our belief that we have been irreversibly regenerated for eternal life. As John the Baptist said concerning Christ, "**He must become greater; I must become less.**" (John 3:30), we too pray that the control of the Holy Spirit in us would become greater, and our sin become less. All this for Your glory, and to prove to the world around us that the King really is "**the way, the truth, and the life.**" (John 14:6).*

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) What is the significance of Scriptures such as Galatians 2:20 and Philippians 2:13 in reference to *virtue apologetics*?
- 2) What is the significance of Romans 8:1-9 in reference to *virtue apologetics*? Do you agree with our interpretation and application of this passage? Why or why not?
- 3) What is the significance of our claim that only Christians possess the *Holy Spirit*, and all others only have a *sinful* nature, in reference to *virtue apologetics*?
- 4) We claim that only the Christian consistently *can, does, and desires* to fight sin. Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 5) We claim that in many ways, the born again Christian is a different species of human being. Do you agree or disagree?

Publications & Particulars

Chapter 5.8

God's Plan for *Virtue Apologetics*

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Primary Points

- The authenticating evidence of the stars for God's existence will not be obscured by a few clouds. Likewise, the condemning proof of God's New Creations to the Gospel will not be sufficiently muffled by our failings, for like the message of Creation, God does not intend to give the world any legitimate excuse for ignoring it.
- God's commitment to *virtue apologetics* is clearly promised when the Apostle writes, **"He Who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus"** (Phil 1:6).
- Christ's parable of "the sower and the seed" illustrates several reasons why the superior virtue of born again Christians will be demonstrated.
- God not only works "inside of us" to empower *virtue apologetics*, but He also works sovereignly "outside of us" as well. He is quite willing to allow the refining fires of difficulties, divine discipline, and even persecution to burn away the worldly dross that obscures the image of the King in us.
- Difficulties make the unregenerate bitter and the regenerate better.
- Real "power evangelism" is not performing miracles to remove suffering, but rather, the power to live a virtuous life in the midst of suffering.
- Nothing may demonstrate this more than the supernatural testimony of Christian martyrs who, like their Lord, have undoubtedly faced their deaths with more virtue than the martyrs of any other religion.
- When **"the last days"** occur, the moral state of unbelievers at that time will practically guarantee the effectiveness of *virtue apologetics*.
- Because of the purpose and power of *virtue apologetics*, we should be able to find more comfort and endurance in our difficult circumstances.
- Unbelievers will love the world and be controlled by it, believers will not.
- The Scriptures make it evident that the moral superiority of God's people was intended to be His universal and ultimate apologetic for the Gospel, and that remains true regardless of how well Christians may be fulfilling that mission.

A) God's Sovereignty & Justice

Obviously, the effectiveness of *virtue apologetics* depends on a significant difference between the morality of believers and unbelievers. Admittedly, this is not always evident, especially in a *relatively* moral country like America. While real moral failure among real born again Christians is easily and widely exaggerated,¹⁶² we have already noted that Christians still sin and our immoral choices will hinder God's intentions for *virtue apologetics*. Even so, there are several reasons we can be assured that the morality of His people will accomplish what God intends for it to accomplish.

First of all, it is important to be reminded of God's sovereignty because it is God's will for *virtue apologetics* to work. As the Prophet proclaimed, **"For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart Him?"** (Isa 14:27). The answer is no one. Accordingly, God has supernaturally equipped and enabled us to perform the supernatural virtue that He has purposed to be His ultimate and universal apologetic for the Gospel of the King.

The second reason that we can be assured of the effect of *virtue apologetics* is that God's just judgment of the human race partly depends on it working. God will send people to an eternity in Hell for not believing certain things, and because of His justice, He will ensure that humanity has no legitimate excuse for not believing those things.

This, again, is the purpose of Creation, and God has ensured that its convicting proclamation is clear enough so that, **"God's invisible qualities--His eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse"** (Rom 1:20). The authenticating evidence of the stars for God's existence will not be obscured by a few clouds. Likewise, the condemning proof of God's New Creations to the Gospel will not be sufficiently muffled by our failings, for like the message of Creation, God does not intend to give the world any legitimate excuse for ignoring it. And it is the virtue of His people that He has ordained as the universal and ultimate apologetic for the way of salvation.

B) God's Work in Us to Conform Us to Christ:

Phil 1:6

¹⁶² For further discussion regarding immorality among Christians see section 5.16.A.

How will God ensure that His ultimate purpose for *virtue apologetics* will be accomplished? We noted in the previous chapter the supernatural enablement that He has uniquely given His people. Similarly, God's commitment to *virtue apologetics* is clearly stated when the Apostle Paul promises the Philippian Christians, "**He Who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus**" (Phil 1:6).

That "**good work**" is conforming us to the character of His Son (cf. Rom 8:29), the most virtuous Person who ever lived, so that we exhibit the same supernatural virtue He has. The Apostle's confidence that this transforming work would be completed in these Christians rested on the fact that, "**it is God [Himself] Who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose**" (Phil 2:13). While this is not the place to sort out the realms of our free will and God's controlling sovereignty, the Scriptures make it evident that He ultimately rules the Universe, and that He can and will work in us to make us "**will and to act according to His good purpose.**" That "**good purpose**" includes authenticating the exclusivity of the Gospel of the King with the miracle of our superior virtue.

C) God's Work Around Us to Allow Difficulties:

The seed on rocky soil

Christ's parable of "the sower and the seed" illustrates several reasons why the superior virtue of born again Christians will be demonstrated in our world. Here, the King describes the responses of different people to the truth about the Gospel, and in the process, He clearly distinguishes between the virtue of believers and unbelievers.¹⁶³ First, He speaks of those whose real character will be exposed by God-ordained difficulties:

The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. (Matt 13:20-21)

Such falling away demonstrates a lack of such virtues as courage, loyalty, and perseverance, and it is in difficult circumstances in which such virtues are demonstrated. Endurance,

¹⁶³ Contrary to some, the parable of The Sower and the Seed is not contrasting worldly Christians with holy ones, but rather fake Christians with real ones. For further discussion see section 6.6.B.

and even joy in the midst of persecution is the mark of a true Christian (cf. Matt 5:10-12; 24:9-13; Acts 5:40-42; 13:49-52; 1 Cor 4:9-12; 2 Cor 6:4-5; 11:23-27; Col 1:24; 1 Thess 1:4-6; 2 Thess 1:4; Heb 10:32-34; 11:25-27; 1 Peter 3:15; Rev 2:3, 10), something that the merely professing Christian will not be able to do.

This is why God not only works "inside of us" to ensure the effectiveness of *virtue apologetics* as described in the previous chapter, but He also works sovereignly "outside of us" as well. He knows that when circumstances are easy, real virtue is more difficult to see and the moral differences between believers and unbelievers can be obscured. Accordingly, the influential Reformed theologian John Gerstner remarks:

[P]agans are often so pleasing largely because they have nothing much to test their patience or their virtue. . . . They may be born with silver spoons in their mouths and have so many of the gifts of this world that their charm reflects no great credit on them. . . . [I]t is not necessarily any favorable reflection on the effect of his philosophy or ethic that he is so-and-so, but merely an indication of the kindness of providence toward him.¹⁶⁴

And this is why God will intentionally "turn up the heat" in an individual's life by causing difficult circumstances to occur in their life, family, workplace, city, country, or world. Like metal, a person's true qualities are exposed by fire, and God has the power, wisdom, and right to subject believers and unbelievers to His "heat" in order to ensure the effectiveness of *virtue apologetics*. It is in such difficult circumstances that the unregenerate get bitter and the regenerate get better. Difficulties expose the fake virtue of the one and reveal and refine the potential of real virtue in the other. As Jonathan Edwards put it:

True virtue never appears so lovely, as when it is most oppressed; and the divine excellency of real Christianity, is never exhibited with such advantage, as when under the greatest trials: then it is that true faith appears much more precious than gold!¹⁶⁵

Edwards later explains this is precisely why the Scriptures call trials by this name:

¹⁶⁴ John Gerstner, *Reasons for Faith* (Harper & Row, n.d.), 222.

¹⁶⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, online at www.ccel.org, I.

These things are all over the Scripture called by the name of trials or proofs. And they are called by this name, because hereby [mere] professors are tried and proved of what sort they be, whether they be really what they profess and appear to be; and because in them, the reality of a supreme love to God is brought to the test of experiment and fact. ¹⁶⁶

Elsewhere again, Edwards writes eloquently of the purpose and blessing of our trials regarding our own assurance of our saving faith:

The surest way to know our gold, is to look upon it and examine it in God's furnace, where he tries it for that end, that we may see what it is. If we have a mind to know whether a building stands strong or no, we must look upon it when the wind blows. If we would know whether that which appears in the form of wheat, has the real substance of wheat, or be only chaff, we must observe it when it is winnowed. If we would know whether a staff be strong, or a rotten broken reed, we must observe it when it is leaned on, and weight is borne upon it. . . .

[W]hen God is said by these things to try men, and prove them, to see what is in their hearts, and whether they will keep his commandments or no; we are not to understand, that it is for his own information, or that he may obtain evidence himself of their sincerity (for he needs no trials for his information); but chiefly for their conviction, and to exhibit evidence to their consciences. ¹⁶⁷

No doubt this is one reason why God allows difficult circumstances in the lives of His children. Therefore, Moses said to the Israelites:

Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order [for you] to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep His commands. (Deut 8:2; cf. Judg 2:21-22, 3:1-4; Exod 16:4; Job 23:10; Ps 66:10; James 1:2-3; 1 Pet 1:6-7; Rev. 3:17-18)

The fire of trial reveals the moral and spiritual superiority that Christians have over unregenerated humanity. The Apostle Paul speaks to this very thing when he tells the Philippians to not be:

¹⁶⁶ Edwards, II.12.2.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

frightened in any way by those who oppose [persecute] you. [Because] This is a [supernatural] sign [endeixis: proof, demonstration] to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God (1:28).

The Apostle believed that the supernatural fearlessness (a virtue) of the persecuted Christians would be a powerful apologetic argument for the Gospel to the unbelievers.

Nothing may demonstrate this more than the supernatural testimony of Christian martyrs who, like their Lord, have undoubtedly faced their deaths with more virtue than the martyrs of any other religion. A very, very great number of historical and contemporary examples could be given.¹⁶⁸ Accordingly, Archibald Alexander, the nineteenth-century Princeton theologian, summarized the testimony of Christian martyrs when he wrote in his textbook on Christian apologetics:

Persons of all ages, of all conditions of life, and of both sexes, exhibited under protracted and cruel torments, a fortitude, a patience, a meekness, a spirit of charity and forgiveness, a cheerfulness, yea often a triumphant joy, of which there are no examples to be found in the history of the world. They rejoiced when they were arrested; cheerfully bade adieu to their nearest and dearest relatives; gladly embraced the stake; welcomed the wild beasts let loose to devour them; smiled on the horrible apparatus by which their sinews were to be stretched, and their bones dislocated and broken; uttered no complaints; gave no indication of pain when their bodies were enveloped in flames; and when condemned to die, begged of their friends to interpose no obstacle to their felicity (for such they esteemed martyrdom), not even by prayer for their deliverance. By what spirit were these despised and persecuted people sustained?¹⁶⁹

A supernatural Spirit, the fruits of which are best observed in such difficult times and are the ultimate and universal truth that only Christians are possessed by God, and therefore, a possession of God.

Along these lines, Joseph Addison wrote in his classic treatise, *Evidences of the Christian Religion*:

¹⁶⁸ For a collection of some examples of *virtue apologetics* see chapter 5.18.

¹⁶⁹ Archibald Alexander, *Evidences of the Christian Religion*, at www.ccel.org.

Under this head, I cannot omit that which appears to me a standing miracle in the three first centuries. I mean, that amazing and supernatural courage or patience which was shewn by innumerable multitudes of martyrs, in those slow and painful torments that were inflicted on them.

I cannot conceive a man placed in the burning iron chair at Lyons, amid the insults and mockeries of a crowded amphitheatre, and still keeping his seat; or stretched upon a gate of iron, over coals of fire, and breathing out his soul among the exquisite sufferings of such a tedious execution, rather than renounce his religion or blaspheme his Saviour. Such trials seem to me above the strength of human nature, able to overbear duty, reason, faith, conviction, nay, and the most absolute certainty of a future state. . . .

Let any man calmly lay his hand upon his heart, and, after reading these terrible conflicts in which the ancient martyrs and confessors were engaged, when they passed through such new inventions and varieties of pain as tired their tormentors, and ask himself, however zealous and sincere he is in his religion, whether, under such acute and lingering tortures, he could still have held fast his integrity, and have professed his faith to the last; without a supernatural assistance of some kind or other.

For my part, when I consider that it was not an unaccountable obstinacy in a single man, or in any particular set of men, in some extraordinary juncture; but that there were multitudes of each fact, of every age, of different countries and conditions, who, for near 300 years together, made this glorious confession of their faith in the midst of tortures, and in the hour of death; I must conclude, that they were either of another make from what men are at present, or that they had such miraculous supports as were peculiar to those times of Christianity; when without them the very name of it might have been extinguished.

It is certain that the deaths and sufferings of the primitive Christians had a great share in the conversion of those learned Pagans who lived in the ages of persecution, which, with some intervals and abatements, lasted near three hundred years after our Saviour. Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Lactantius, Arnobius, and others, tell us, that this first of all alarmed their curiosity, roused their attention, and made them seriously inquisitive into the nature of that religion which could endue the mind with so much strength, and overcome the fear of death, nay, raised an earnest desire of it though it appeared in all its terrors.

This they found had not been affected by all the doctrines of those philosophers whom they had thoroughly studied, and who had been labouring at this great point. The sight of these dying and tormented martyrs engaged them to search into the history and doctrines of him for whom they suffered. The more they searched, the more they were convinced; till their conviction grew so strong, they themselves embraced the same truths, and either actually laid down their lives, or were always in readiness to do it, rather than depart from them.¹⁷⁰

Such testimonies should not surprise us as Christ Himself uniquely promised real Christians: **"My [supernatural] peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives"** (John 14:27), and neither does He give His peace to the world. By virtue of God's unique presence in our life, we can not only have **"the [miraculous] peace of God, which transcends all understanding"** (Phil 4:7), but a peace that surpasses anything that non-Christians will experience in similarly difficult circumstances.

Yet, circumstances need not become so drastic for the superior virtue of born again Christians to be displayed. Indeed, the Apostle confirmed how easy it is to shine our moral light when he simply said:

Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life. (Phil 2:14-16)

Because we live in such **"a crooked and depraved generation,"** all a Christian needs to do in order to **"shine like stars in the universe"** is **"Do everything without complaining or arguing."** That may be harder than it would seem, but it is surely something every Christian can attain to. And because of the increasing moral depravity in our country, it is getting increasingly easier for Christians to shine their light.

In fact, God is so committed to *virtue apologetics* that He will intentionally discipline His people when their moral light fades. This purpose is implied when the Apostle remarks:

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us—they help us learn to endure. And endurance develops strength of character in us. (Rom 5:4 NLT)

¹⁷⁰ Joseph Addison, *Evidences of the Christian Religion*, VII:4, 6-7.

Likewise, the writer to the Hebrews explains:

Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (Heb 12:10-11)

And it is these very difficulties that help us be more virtuous and a better witness to the superiority and exclusivity of the Christian faith, all of which makes such trials more than worthwhile.

While we have described contemporary tests of virtue that the Christian will uniquely pass, the Scriptures also speak of a future test that will demonstrate the same. The Apostle wrote:

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. (2 Tim 3:1-4)

When “**the last days**” occur, the moral state of unbelievers at that time will practically guarantee the effectiveness of *virtue apologetics*. Whatever superficial, self-centered, law abiding morality exists today, it will completely vanish when this world is about to end.

Along these lines, the King said that in the course of those days, His people:

will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of Me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other. . . . Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. (Matt 24:9-10, 12-13)

Those who understand that the regeneration and salvation that the Holy Spirit grants us in conversion is irreversible, will understand Christ's words here better. It is not real Christians who will be falling away, but the fake ones. Real Christians will “**stand firm to the end**” because all real Christians are really saved. But in those days there will be an “**increase of wickedness [and] the love of most will grow cold**” making the moral and spiritual superiority of born again believers more evident than ever. In that

day, at least, only a blind fool will claim that there is no significant or perceptible difference in the virtues of regenerated followers of the King compared with the rest of the world.

The German Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer recognized where Nazism was headed in his day, and he eventually was martyred for standing for Christ against it. In one of his writings he quoted another man, whose words are important for all Christians anticipating persecution:

This commandment, that we should love our enemies and forgo revenge, will grow even more urgent in the holy struggle which lies before us . . . The Christians will be hounded from place to place, subjected to physical assault, maltreatment and death of every kind. We are approaching an age of wide-spread persecution . . .

Soon the time will come when we shall pray . . . It will be a prayer of earnest love for these very sons of perdition who stand around and gaze at us with eyes aflame with hatred, and who have perhaps already raised their hands to kill us . . . Yes, the Church which is really waiting for its Lord, and which discerns the signs of the times of decision, must fling itself with its utmost power and with the panalopy of its holy life, into this prayer of love.¹⁷¹

Because God intends the virtue of His people to be the ultimate apologetic for His Gospel, He is quite willing to allow the refining fires of difficulties, divine discipline, and even persecution to burn away the worldly dross that obscures the image of the King in us. Like many things in life such as athletics, a person's real potential is not demonstrated until the circumstances call for it. Such is the case with the potential for supernatural virtue in believers, and God will see to it that it is drawn out for His glory.

Because of the purpose and power of *virtue apologetics*, we should be able to find more comfort and endurance in the difficult circumstances we encounter. Not only is God allowing these to help us grow, but also to display our supernatural abilities in virtue to a watching world. Therefore, our temporary difficulties could be a part of leading someone to eternal salvation, which gives us even more reason to embrace them cheerfully and supernaturally.

Pastoral Practices

Helping the saints properly respond to life's difficulties is a foremost task of Pastors. Next time you teach on this topic,

¹⁷¹ John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, (1978), 120-21.

consider adding the perspective described here, that at least one purpose for them is to be a witness to the power of God to unbelievers.

D) Our Resistance to the World's Temptations: *The seed in weedy soil*

Not only will the difficulties of this world clearly differentiate the virtue of believers and unbelievers, but the temptations of this world will do so as well. Accordingly, the King goes on to say in the parable of "the sower and the seed": **"The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful"** (Matt 13:22). To be **"unfruitful"** is to be damned (cf. John 15:1-6; Matt 3:10; 7:19; Luke 13:7-9). And the world will have a power over the unregenerate that will expose their true lack of virtue. Unbelievers will love the world and be controlled by it, real believers will not.

Accordingly, the Apostle John says:

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world. (1 John 2:15-16)

John makes it clear throughout his epistle that if **"the love of the Father is not in"** you, God is not in you and you don't have God.¹⁷² And this is the condition of **"anyone [who] loves the**

¹⁷² Other translations of 1 John 2:15 make it more apparent that John is saying to love the world is to not have God. The RSV renders it: **"If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him."** The TEV is the same. The NEB reads: **"Anyone who loves the world is a stranger to the Father's love."** Likewise, the CEV has it: **"If you love the world, you cannot love the Father."** Other statements in John concerning the love of God being in us indicate that this is another way of John saying that we are Christians, and to not have such love in you is not to be a Christian (cf. 2:15; 3:17; 4:12, 16-18).

Accordingly, John Stott writes regarding 1 John 2:15:

The reason why we are enjoined not to love the world is because 'love for the Father' (RSV) and love for the world are mutually exclusive. If we are engrossed in the outlook and pursuits of the world which rejects Christ, it is evident that we have no love for the Father. 'Friendship with the world is hatred towards God' (Jas. 4:4).

world." And the love for the world in the unbeliever's life will eventually draw out of them the immorality that really rules their hearts. The enticements of this world will cause selfishness, pride, greed, fear, and lust to raise their ugly head and the superficially spiritual or moral person will be exposed for who they really are. Jonathan Edwards noted:

A man may be restrained from sin before he is converted; but when he is converted, he is not only restrained from sin, his very heart and nature is turned from it unto holiness: so that thenceforward he becomes a holy person, and an enemy to sin. ¹⁷³

The spiritually regenerated hate sin and the temptations that cause it. But the unregenerate are no enemy to sin at all, and in fact welcome it as a friend when it serves their purpose. And sooner or later, sin will serve the unbeliever's purpose and their true moral and spiritual poverty and inconsistency will be exposed.

Finally, Christ describes the true believer in the parable of "the sower and the seed" when He says:

But the one who [truly] received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. (Matt 13:23)

The "**crop**" here undoubtedly includes virtue, and compared with the relative absence of such fruit in the lives of those who do not have Christ, and therefore have no true spiritual roots or are spiritually choked, the real believers produce an abundance of virtue.

E) Tag! We're It

Some may remain unconvinced that God not only *intends* virtue to be His universal and ultimate apologetic for the Gospel of the King, but that He will also *ensure* that this intention is accomplished. To these we would first claim that accurate research

'No-one can serve two masters' (Mt. 6:24; Lk. 16:13), and if we cannot serve God and mammon, neither can we love the Father and the world. (*The Letters of John*, TNTC, rev. ed., [Eerdmans, 1988], 104)

¹⁷³ John Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 3 vols. (Berea, 1991), III.7.

on the morality of born again Christians would prove their moral superiority. However, elsewhere we explain the difficulty of such scientific data.¹⁷⁴

Even so, we would also suggest that even if such research did not confirm the superior and supernatural virtue of born again Christians, the biblical expectation concerning *virtue apologetics* would not be changed. In other words, the Scriptures make it evident that the moral superiority of God's people was intended to be His universal and ultimate apologetic for the Gospel, and that remains true regardless of how well Christians may be fulfilling that mission.

If we cannot honestly and legitimately claim an overwhelming moral superiority over all followers of all other religions, then we have absolutely no business whatsoever of claiming that, **"there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus"** (1 Tim 2:5). Of course, the Gospel remains true regardless of our behavior, but an immoral Christian has no right to claim it is true.

Both believers and unbelievers can judge how well Christians today are fulfilling their God-given calling to be the moral salt and light of the world, but make no mistake about it, God is not going to give this calling to anyone else. Indeed, Christians may not always "shine" to their fullest potential, but the only real moral light that will ever shine in this world will come from Christians, and if we go dim, the whole world goes dim, because God has ordained no other authentic spiritual and moral light source for the world. Tag! We're it.

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Our Father in Heaven, we thank You for the privilege of being Your representatives on this dark planet. Thank You that you have given us the supernatural power to prove ourselves to be Your followers and messengers. Help us to exercise it as we choose to be miraculously joyful, peaceful, and loving in even the most difficult

¹⁷⁴ Regarding the difficulty of objective data on Christian morality see section 5.16.A.

circumstances, all to bring glory to You in both Heaven and on Earth.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) How does the fact of God's justice help to ensure that *virtue apologetics* will be effective?
- 2) What promise in Philippians 1:6 helps ensure that *virtue apologetics* will be effective?
- 3) How does Christ's example of the "seed in the rocky soil" demonstrate the eventual effectiveness of *virtue apologetics*?
- 4) What is at least one reason that God allows difficulties in the lives of His own children? Does this fact encourage you?
- 5) What are some of the most remarkable ways in which *virtue apologetics* has been demonstrated in the history of the Church?
- 6) How does Christ's example of the "seed in the weed soil" demonstrate the eventual effectiveness of *virtue apologetics*?
- 7) Why do we claim that *virtue apologetics* will be the easiest in "the last days"?
- 8) We claim that regardless of how well Christians carry out their responsibility ensure *virtue apologetics* throughout the world, that this approach remains God's universal and ultimate plan for proving the Gospel to the world. Do you agree or disagree and why?

Publications & Particulars

Chapter 5.9

The Church's Historical Testimony to & Demonstration of *Virtue* *Apologetics*

*Christianity Has Done More Good than All Other
Religions Combined*

Primary Points

- Early Church leaders boasted about the superior virtue of Christians.
- The Church did not emphasize apologetics in the Reformation era.
- Edwards: "Christian practice is . . . the chief of all the marks of grace, the sign of signs, and evidence of evidences."
- Spurgeon to an agnostic who challenged the superiority and veracity of his faith, "The God who answereth by orphanages, let Him be God."
- Unfortunately, in the last 200 years it is very difficult to find Christian leaders who will support the value and place of *virtue apologetics*.
- The real God is the real source of any real love and real Christians have been the superior source of such supernatural love.
- All of the other religions *combined* do not even begin to compare with the religion that is really from God in regards to loving humanity.
- Addison: "As it spread through the world it seemed to change mankind into another species of beings."
- Pinnock: "Eastern religions seem to produce stagnant societies, and Islam, intolerant ones."
- Gerstner: "The ultimate proof of the divinity of the Christian religion [is] its influence in the world during the past twenty centuries."
- Gerstner: "No society which has once lapsed into barbarism has ever been known to rise to civilization except by the Christian religion."
- Any student of history can confirm that the level of morality and virtue of any given culture has been in direct proportion to the presence and vitality of Christianity.
- Kennedy: "Despite its humble origins, the Church has made more

A) The Church's Historical Testimony to *Virtue Apologetics*

A.1) Early Church

We have suggested and demonstrated in previous chapters that virtue is the ultimate apologetic prescribed in the Scriptures. This same perspective was shared by the generation of Christians immediately following the Apostles as well. The apologists of the ancient Church used several apologetic approaches in their effort to defend the new religion of Christianity to the culture of their day. However, contrary to the suggestion of many, they were not primarily concerned to demonstrate the intellectual superiority of Christian belief over Greek philosophy and pagan superstition. Rather, like Christ and the Apostles, their most repeated and important apologetic approach was the supernatural virtue displayed in the Christian community.

Thus, Justin Martyr (c. 100-165; who earned his namesake by dying for his faith) addressing his *Apology* to the Roman Emperor Antoninus Pius about the year 150 declared:

Since our persuasion by the Word . . . we who formerly delighted in fornication now cleave only to chastity. We who exercised the magic arts now consecrate ourselves to the good and unbegotten God. We who valued above all else the acquisition of wealth and property now direct all that we have to a common fund, which is shared with every needy person. We who hated and killed one another, and who, because of differing customs, would not share a fireside with those of another race, now, after the appearance of Christ, live together with them. We pray for our enemies, and try to persuade those who unjustly hate us that, if they live according to the excellent precepts of Christ, they will have a good hope of receiving the same reward as ourselves, from the God who governs all.¹⁷⁵

Around the same time, an apology for the Christian faith was written to the Roman Emperor Hadrian by a Christian philosopher named Aristides (died c. 134). We see that *virtue apologetics* was the foundation of his approach as he writes:

Other than Him, no god do they [the Christians] worship. They have the commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ

¹⁷⁵ Justin Martyr, *The First Apology of Justin*, I.14 (online at www.ccel.org).

Himself impressed upon their hearts, and they observe them, awaiting the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. They do not commit adultery nor fornication, nor do they bear false witness, nor covet the goods of other men. They honor father and mother and love their neighbors; and they render just judgment. What they would not want done to them, they do not do to another. They make appeal to those who wrong them, and win them to themselves as friends.

They hasten to do good to their enemies. They are gentle and reasonable. They abstain from every unlawful exchange and from all uncleanness. They despise not the widow, nor do they distress the orphan. Whoever has, distributes liberally to him that has not. Should they see a stranger, they take him under roof, and rejoice over him as over a blood brother. For not after the flesh do they call themselves brethren, but after the spirit. For the sake of Christ they are ready to lay down their lives. They keep His commands without wavering, living holy and just lives as the Lord God commanded them; and they give thanks to Him every hour for all their food and drink and for the rest of their goods. ¹⁷⁶

Likewise, Athenagoras of Athens (c. 133-190) relied upon *virtue apologetics* when he wrote his *Plea for the Christians* to the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius around the year 180. His treatise contained such chapter headings as "The Elevated Morality of the Christians," and "The Vast Difference in Morals Between the Christians and Their Accusers." Among other things, he wrote:

We are so far from practicing promiscuous intercourse, that it is not lawful among us to indulge even a lustful look. . . . [Christians] are to be called to account for their very thoughts, how can any one doubt that such persons practice self-control? For our account lies not with human laws, which a bad man can evade, but we have a law which makes the measure of rectitude to consist in dealing with our neighbor as ourselves. ¹⁷⁷

In the same vein, Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch (c. 185), described the general morality of the day in his *Apology to Autolycus* and countered:

But far be it from Christians to conceive any such deeds; for with them temperance dwells, self-restraint is practiced,

¹⁷⁶ *The Apology of Arrestees the Philosopher*, (online at www.ccel.org.)

¹⁷⁷ Athenagoras, *Plea for Christians*, 32 (online at www.ccel.org).

monogamy is observed, chastity is guarded, iniquity exterminated, sin extirpated, righteousness exercised, law administered, worship performed, God acknowledged: truth governs, grace guards, peace screens them; the holy word guides, wisdom teaches, life directs, God reigns.¹⁷⁸

Around the year 220, a Roman Christian lawyer named Minucius Felix wrote in an apology to the authorities for his faith:

If we Christians be compared to you [Roman society in general], although some of us may not be equal to our standards, we shall be found to be much better than you. You forbid adultery, yet you do it. We, however, are known as men only to our wives. You punish crimes when they have been committed. With us, it is a sin even to consider a crime. You fear witnesses. We fear even our own conscience, which we cannot escape. And finally, the jails are full of your people; but there is no Christian there, unless his crime be his religion. Otherwise, he is an apostate.¹⁷⁹

About the same time, the famous Tertullian (c. 160-c. 220) wrote, "We are not recognized in any other way than by the reformation of our former vices."¹⁸⁰ A little over a hundred years later, the great early Church leader Chrysostom (c. 345-407), taught that the most effective means of evangelism was the example of Christian living and said, "There would be no more heathen if we would be true Christians."¹⁸¹

Likewise, Chrysostom thought such virtue was the most powerful miracle:

When [Christians] are careless about virtue, and those who [see] it withdraw themselves far from our ranks, how are we to subdue our enemies? For even if miracles were wrought now, who would be persuaded? For so it is, that our upright living seems unto the many the more trustworthy argument of the two; miracles admitting of a bad construction on the part

¹⁷⁸ Theophilus, *To Autolytus*, II.15 (online at www.ccel.org).

¹⁷⁹ Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 35.5-6; excerpted from *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, William A. Jurgens (Liturgical Press, 1970), 110.

¹⁸⁰ Tertullian, *To Scapula*, 2.10 (online at www.ccel.org).

¹⁸¹ Quoted by Kenneth Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 2 vols., (Hendricksen, 1975), 99.

of obstinate bad men; whereas a pure life will have abundant power to stop the mouth of the devil himself.¹⁸²

An additional reason that the leaders of the post-apostolic Church used *virtue apologetics* to support their claims of spiritual superiority was that the miraculous *sign gifts* such as healing and tongues had ceased. Elsewhere, we quote several of these early Church leaders as testifying to this very thing, and because such apostolic miracle working was no longer occurring in order to authenticate the Gospel, *virtue apologetics* was preferred.¹⁸³ Although, we would suggest the “**greater works**” (John 14:12) of the spiritual miracle of supernatural virtue was even preferred by Christ and the Apostles who could work physical miracles.

A.2) Middle Ages & Reformation

While *virtue apologetics* was at the heart of proving the superiority of the Christian faith in its early history, the foremost apologist of the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274), focused primarily on *intellectual apologetics*. Nonetheless, Christian apologist Alan Richardson notes:

St. Thomas Aquinas pointed out that Mohammed had won men to his allegiance by promising carnal delights, whereas the greatest of all the Christian miracles was that Christianity effected the conversion on a vast scale of wise and simple alike, despite the fact that it promised not carnal but spiritual rewards-with persecutions.

This "wondrous conversion of the world to the Christian faith" is proof that the miraculous signs did take place and were seen to guarantee the truth of the revelation in Christ. Mohammed had had to rely not merely on carnal promises but also on fables; "nor did he add any signs of supernatural agency, which alone are a fitting witness to divine inspiration, since a visible work that can be from God alone proves the teacher of truth to be invisibly inspired: but he [Mohammed]

¹⁸² Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, 6.8; online at www.ccel.org.

¹⁸³ For testimonies concerning the cessation of *sign gifts* in the early Church and their replacement with supernatural virtue see chapter 5.7 and 6.13.

asserted that he was sent in the power of military arms—a sign that is not lacking even to robbers and tyrants.¹⁸⁴

In addition, some of the monasteries at that time were the preserve of authentic Christian piety and were often exemplars of *virtue apologetics*. *Virtue apologetics* is precisely what one of their foremost leaders, St. Francis of Assisi (1182–1226) was referring to when he famously said, “Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary use words.”¹⁸⁵

As we move into the Reformation period, we still do not see an emphasis on the objective moral proof that regeneration provides to authenticate Christianity.¹⁸⁶ Nonetheless, Martin Luther (1483–1546) wrote in his *Preface to the New Testament*:

Truly, if [saving] faith is there, he cannot hold back; he proves himself, breaks out to good works, confesses and teaches this Gospel before the people, and stakes his life on it. . . . That is what Christ meant when at the last he gave no other commandment than love, by which men are to know who were his disciples [John 13:34–35] and true believers. For where works and love do not break forth, there faith is not right, the Gospel does not yet take hold, and Christ is not rightly known.¹⁸⁷

Likewise, in Luther’s *Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* we read:

[Saving] Faith, however, is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God, John 1[:12–13]. It kills the old Adam and makes us altogether different men, in heart and spirit and mind and powers; and it brings with it the Holy Spirit. It is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this [saving] faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good

¹⁸⁴ cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Contra Gentiles*, Book 50, Chap. vi.; See Richardson, *Christian Apologetics* [Harper, 1948], 154, 156–7)

¹⁸⁵ Reference unavailable.

¹⁸⁶ For example, John Calvin, in his commentary on Matthew 5:13–16 regarding Christ’s statement that Christians are the salt and light of the world, seems to suggest these words were merely directed to the twelve Apostles, and, at any rate, does not even hint at their apologetic application which is precisely the one Christ is making (cf. v. 16; *Commentaries*). Calvin, of course, introduced the idea of a subjective, and really unprovable, “inward testimony of the Spirit,” which we discuss further in chapter 3.4.

¹⁸⁷ Martin Luther, *Preface to the New Testament*, in Timothy Lull, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings* (Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 111.

works incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them. Whoever does not do such works, however, is an unbeliever. . . . Because of it [saving faith], without compulsion, Christians are ready and glad to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer everything, out of love and praise to God who has shown them this grace.¹⁸⁸

Along these lines we can quote the Puritan theologian John Owen (1616–1683):

Yea, of all the external arguments that are or may be pleaded to justify the divine authority of the Scripture, there is none more prevalent nor cogent than this of its mighty efficacy in all ages on the souls of men, to change, convert, and renew them into the image and likeness of God, which hath been visible and manifest.¹⁸⁹

Nonetheless, apologetics in general was not an emphasis during the Reformation. We would suggest this was because they were more concerned with preaching the Gospel, then arguing about it, as we discuss elsewhere.¹⁹⁰

Post-Reformation apologetics seemed to focus again on the *intellectual* kind as evidenced in the popular works of ones like John Locke (1632–1704) and William Paley (1743–1805).

A.3) Eighteenth Century

However, in the eighteenth century, we find one of the best statements concerning *virtue apologetics* in the writings of the foremost skeptic of miracles in the history of the world, even though it was probably sarcasm. In the process of concluding the most famous critique of Christianity's appeal to the authentication of miracles, David Hume (1711–1786) wrote in his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*:

Upon the whole we may conclude that the Christian religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., *Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans*, Lull, 101.

¹⁸⁹ John Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*; online at www.ccel.org, VI.6.

¹⁹⁰ For further discussion of Luther's view of defending the Gospel in general see section 2.2.C.

day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one. Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity. And whoever is moved by faith to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience.¹⁹¹

A clearer statement describing *virtue apologetics* would be hard to find. Although we would affirm that the “continued miracle in his own person” would be objective evidence to base a reasonable conclusion on, something that Hume would have denied.

As we move to the American scene in the eighteenth century, we encounter Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) who, while not at all neglecting *intellectual apologetics*, did much to further *virtue apologetics* with the publication of his lengthy *A Treatise on Religious Affections*. Here he forcefully argued that the godliness of truly born again Christians is unique, and that it is virtues that ultimately prove a Christian’s spiritual superiority to themselves and others. After minutely discussing a multitude of other evidences, Edwards shares his conclusions in the final part of the *Treatise*, some of which we have excerpted in the following:

I shall consider Christian practice and holy life, as a manifestation and sign of the sincerity of a professing Christian, to the eye of his neighbors and brethren. . . . And that this is the chief sign of grace in this respect, is very evident from the word of God. [Christ taught] men's fruits must be the chief evidence of what sort they are . . . so it is the evidence that Christ has mainly directed us to give to others, whereby they may judge of us: Matt. 5:16. . . . Doubtless, when Christ gives us a rule how to make our light shine, that others may have evidence of it, his rule is the best that is to be found. . . . Thus it is plain, that Christian practice is the best sign or manifestation of the true godliness of a professing Christian, to the eye of his neighbors. . . .

Christian practice is plainly spoken of in the word of God, as the main evidence of the truth of grace, not only to others, but

¹⁹¹ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, excerpted from *In Defense of Miracles*, Douglas Geivett, Gary R. Habermas, eds. (InterVarsity, 1997), 44. We do not desire to misinterpret Hume here. He can be taken at face value or could even be interpreted as speaking sarcastically. At the very least, we can say that while Hume may have not believed that “a continued miracle in his own person” was adequate proof for the superiority of the Christian religion, he did seem to recognize it as an apologetic claim of the Christian.

to men's own consciences. It is not only more spoken of and insisted on than other signs, but in many places where it is spoken of, it is represented as the chief of all evidences. . . .

Another thing which makes it evident, that holy practice is the chief of all the signs of the sincerity of professors, not only to the world, but to their own consciences, is, that this is the grand evidence which will hereafter be made use of, before the judgment seat of God; according to which his judgment will be regulated, and the state of every professor of religion unalterably determined [cf. Matt 25:31-46]. . . .

Now from all that has been said, I think it to be abundantly manifest, that Christian practice is the most proper evidence of the gracious sincerity of professors, to themselves and others; and the chief of all the marks of grace, the sign of signs, and evidence of evidences, that which seals and crowns all other signs.¹⁹²

Just one of the biblical evidences Edwards gave for the superiority of *virtue apologetics* was his remarks on the sixth chapter of Hebrews:

And the Apostles do mention a Christian practice, as the principal ground of their esteem of persons as true Christians. As . . . in the 6th chapter of Hebrews. There the Apostle, in the beginning of the chapter, speaks of them that have great common illuminations, that have been enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come, that afterwards fall away, and are like barren ground, that is high unto cursing, whose end is to be burned: and then immediately adds in the 9th verse (expressing his charity for the Christian Hebrews, as having that saving grace, which is better than all these common illuminations): "But beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation; though we thus speak."

And then in the next verse, he tells them what was the reason he had such good thoughts of them: he does not say that it was because they had given him a good account of a work of God upon their souls, and talked very experimentally;

¹⁹² Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise on Religious Affections*, II.12.1, 2.5; online at www.ccel.org.

but it was their work and labor of love; "For God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labor of love."¹⁹³

Likewise, while Edwards obviously believed in the evangelistic power of preaching, in a sermon on Psalm 139:23-24 he said:

If those who call themselves Christians, thus walked in all the paths of virtue and holiness, it would tend more to the advancement of the kingdom of Christ in the world, the conviction of sinners, and propagation of religion among unbelievers, than all the sermons in the world.¹⁹⁴

Another well known Puritan at heart, Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892), also emphasized *virtue apologetics* in his ministry and evangelism. One of his biographers describes the enormous social welfare work conducted in London under Spurgeon's leadership and remarked:

The Almshouses and the orphanage were, of course, the fruit of Christianity, and they stood out in sharp contrast to the lack of such institutions among the unbelievers. England had then its 'Free Thinkers' Societies and its Agnostic Associations, but those organizations did nothing to help the poor and the suffering. They labored to denounce Christianity, but they knew nothing of self-sacrifice for the sake of the needy. Like the Levite in the parable, they "passed by on the other side."

But evangelical Christians had long been associated with the building of homes for the aged and for orphaned children. Professor Francke had erected and maintained a great orphanage in Germany, and George Whitefield had molded his life around such a project in the American colony of Georgia. George Müller was conducting an orphanage that was home to more than two thousand youngsters in England. Dr. Barnardo gave up his medical practice to devote himself to aiding homeless children.

To an agnostic who one day accosted him and challenged his Christian beliefs, Spurgeon pointed out the failure of the unbelievers' organizations to take on any definite and sustained program of help to the thousands of needy around them. In contrast he pointed to the works that sprang from evangelical Christianity, and he closed the conversation by paraphrasing the triumphant cry of Elijah, vigorously

¹⁹³ John Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 3 vols. (Berea, 1991), I.307.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, III.128-9.

asserting, as well he might, "The God who answereth by orphanages, let Him be God." ¹⁹⁵

We would suggest that virtually every strain of Christianity today, including Evangelical, Reformed, Anglican, Roman, Orthodox, Lutheran, and Charismatic, are all in desperate need of reestablishing Chrysostom's, Edwards' and Spurgeon's emphasis on *virtue apologetics*. Thus we can hardly find any testimonies to such a thing in the last 200 years.

While it is unfortunately extremely difficult to find a contemporary Christian book or commentary that will assert *virtue apologetics*, several years ago Dr. Yandall Woodfin, Professor of Philosophy of Religion at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, stated what should be obvious:

One can hold the Christian faith to be true only to the degree that it is capable of demonstrating its claim in the arena of pragmatic confirmation. . . . [T]he final proof of theology is found in the quality of one's life. The world can learn that Christianity has received the ultimate and final revelation only when Christians present the exclusiveness of this claim through the demonstration of their love. ¹⁹⁶

B) The Church's Historical Demonstration of *Virtue Apologetics*

If it is true that born again Christians are expected and equipped by God to be morally superior to others, in order to prove their epistemological and spiritual superiority to others, we would expect this superiority to be demonstrated throughout the history of the Church. And it has. The real God is the real source of any real love and it must be at least admitted by any unbiased observer of human history that real Christians have been the superior source of such supernatural love.

If anyone would doubt this, we can simply ask how many orphanages, medical missions, hospitals, disaster relief organizations, homeless shelters, food banks, and a myriad of other human welfare institutions have been started, served, and funded by Christian individuals and countries compared with those of any other religion in the world? All of the other religions *combined* do

¹⁹⁵ Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography* (Banner of Truth Trust, repr. 1999), 129-30.

¹⁹⁶ Yandall Woodfin, *With All Your Mind: A Christian Philosophy* (Abingdon, 1980), 30, 172.

not even begin to compare with the religion that is really from God in regards to loving humanity.

B.1) Early Christianity

Although there has been an inexcusable lack of writing and research regarding *virtue apologetics* for the Christian faith, especially in our generation, some can be found. For example, concerning the early Church compared with competing religions of the time, NT scholar William Baird notes:

[A]fter Alexander [the Great], syncretistic cults, combining Greek and oriental ideas, moved from the East to the West. Carried by soldiers and migrants, these cults spread their message by written and oral propaganda, rituals and rumors of miracles. They promised escape from fate and death; they satisfied curiosity about the world and the mysteries of the East. Yet the surprising thing is the slowness of the change which they effected in the fundamental temper of the people among whom they took root. Within this world of competing religions, Nock notes that Christianity was remarkably successful.¹⁹⁷

Likewise, we read in *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*:

Christianity burst into a corrupt world with a brilliantly new moral radiance. . . . The moral level of society was dismal, and sin prevailed in many forms. . . . Into this discouraged world came Christ and his Spirit-transformed disciples, filled with holy joy, motivated by a love which the pagans could not grasp.¹⁹⁸

Also, Joseph Addison in his apologetic writings noted:

There was one other means enjoyed by the learned Pagans of the three first centuries, for satisfying them in the truth of our Saviour's history which I might have flung under one of the foregoing heads but as it is so shining a particular, and does so much honour to our religion, I shall make a distinct article of it, and only consider it with regard to the subject I

¹⁹⁷ William Baird, *History of New Testament Research* 2 Vols., (Fortress, 1992, 2003), II.431.

¹⁹⁸ "Evangelical Social Concern," in *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Baker, 1973), 223-24.

am upon: I mean the lives and manners of those holy men who believed in Christ during the first ages of Christianity.

I should be thought to advance a paradox, should I affirm that there were more Christians in the world during those times of persecution than there are at present in these which we call the flourishing times of Christianity. But this will be found an indisputable truth, if we form our calculation upon the opinions which prevailed in those days, that every one who lives in the habitual practice of any voluntary sin actually cuts himself off from the benefits and profession of Christianity, and whatever he may call himself, is in reality no Christian, nor ought to be esteemed as such.

In the time that we are now surveying, the Christian religion shewed its full force and efficacy on the minds of men, and by many examples demonstrated what great and generous souls it was capable of producing. It exalted and refined its proselytes, to a very high degree of perfection, and set them far above the pleasures, and even the pains, of this life. It strengthened the infirmity, and broke the fierceness of human nature. It lifted up the minds of the ignorant to the knowledge and worship of him that made them, and inspired the vicious with a rational devotion, a strict purity of heart, and an unbounded love to their fellow-creatures.

In proportion as it spread through the world it seemed to change mankind into another species of beings. No sooner was a convert initiated into it, but, by an easy figure, he became a new man, and both acted and looked upon himself as one regenerated and born a second time into another state of existence.

It is not my business to be more particular in the accounts of primitive Christianity which have been exhibited so well by others, but rather to observe, that the Pagan converts, of whom I am now speaking, mention this great reformation of those who had been the greatest sinners, with that sudden and surprising change which it made in the lives of the most profligate, as having something in it supernatural, miraculous, and more than human.

Origen represents this power in the Christian religion, as no less wonderful than that of curing the lame and blind, or cleansing the leper. Many others represented it in the same light, and looked upon it as an argument, that there was a certain divinity in that religion which showed itself in such strange and glorious effects.

This therefore was a great means not only of recommending Christianity to honest and learned Heathens, but of confirming

them in the belief of our Saviour's history, when they saw multitudes of virtuous men daily forming themselves upon his example, animated by his precepts, and actuated by that Spirit which he had promised to send among his disciples.¹⁹⁹

More recently, Kenneth Latourette, Yale Professor of Church History, suggested that virtue was the reason for the early Church's rapid growth when he writes:

Christianity has become the most potent single force in the life of mankind. . . . Why was it that Christianity had this amazing expansion? How shall we account for the fact that, beginning as what to the casual observer must have appeared a small and obscure sect of Judaism, before its first five centuries were out it had become the faith of the Roman state and of the vast majority of the population of that realm and had spread eastward as far as Central Asia and probably India and Ceylon and westward into far away Ireland? Why of all the many faiths which were competing for the allegiance of the Roman Empire, many of them with a much more promising outlook, did it emerge victor? . . .

In spite of the divisions which we are to describe in the next chapter, the Christian churches were the most inclusive and the strongest of all the various associations in the Roman world. They cared for their poor and for those of their number imprisoned for their faith. In times of distress churches would help one another by gifts of money or food. A Christian holding membership in a local unit of the Church would be among friends in whatever city or town he found others of his communion. The only fellowship approaching that of the Christians in solidarity was that of the Jews, and in contrast with the churches, which welcomed all, regardless of race, this was as much racial and cultural as religious. . . .

The constancy of the martyrs under torture impressed many non-Christians. As we have seen, by no means all Christians stood up under trial. Many wilted. Yet enough remained firm to give convincing evidence of a power which nerved children, old men, and weak women as well as stalwart youths to hold to their faith under grueling and prolonged torment and to do so without bitterness towards their enemies. One of the apologists was obviously speaking truth when he declared that when reviled, the Christians blessed.

¹⁹⁹ Joseph Addison, *Evidences of the Christian Religion* (John Denio, 1812), sec IX; online at www.ccel.org.

Moreover, Christianity worked the moral transformation which it demanded. Augustine was by no means the first or the only morally defeated individual who found victory in the Gospel. This was so frequent as to be almost normal. The apologists rang the changes on the welcome given by the Christian community to the tarnished, weak dregs of society and on the regenerating vigour of the faith. . . . Through the Spirit promised by Jesus came the moral transformations which were so marked in the Christian fellowship. . . .

The exceeding greatness of the power was displayed primarily in the transformation of those men and women who became followers of Christ, who put their trust in him. Even now, so Jesus had said, men might enter the kingdom of God, and, indeed, were entering it. To use other figures employed in the New Testament, men could be born again, they could die to sin and, by the same power which raised Jesus from the dead, they could be raised to walk in newness of life. The proof that they had experienced this new birth, this resurrection to a new life, was to be seen in their "fruits," in the "fruits of the Spirit."

It was chiefly through such lives that the creative impulse was released which produced the Church and Christian literature, theology, and worship, which swept away the pagan cults of the Roman Empire, which wrestled with the problems of war and with the relation to the state, property, marriage, and the popular amusements. It was through these lives that within the Church the position of women and children was lifted, dignity was given to labour, and much of the sting was taken from slavery.

No individual attained fully to the "high calling of God in Christ." . . . Yet here, in earthen vessels, was a power at work which, in spite of what looked like chronic frustration, out of human material apparently hopelessly and basically marred and twisted, was achieving the seemingly impossible, the re-creation of thousands of men and women until they displayed something of the quality of life which was seen in Jesus Christ.²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ Kenneth Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (Hendricksen, 1975), xii, 104-7, 263-4. Predictably, many critics have claimed that the reason for the rapid and non-violent (contra Islam) expansion of early Christianity was Emperor Constantine's support of it. Latourette puts this view in perspective when he writes:

One of the factors to which is attributed the triumph of Christianity is the endorsement of Constantine. But, as we have suggested, the faith was already so strong by the time when Constantine espoused it

Along the same lines, Charles Colson has written:

Consider the rise of the Christians during the Roman era. People were drawn to Christians, not because of evangelistic outreaches or crusades, or through mass media-those didn't exist. The church grew because Christians were doing the gospel and had a community-a local church-where people really loved each other.

During the great plagues that swept Rome in the second century, all of the doctors fled, but the Christians stayed and took care of the sick. They embodied what Christians are called to do. Although many Christians died because they took care of the sick, pagans were drawn to Christ because they saw both the love of Christians and Christianity itself as a better way of life.

When Constantine declared Rome the Holy Roman Empire, people thought he did that for political reasons, but he didn't. It was already Christianized; he just recognized the realities of what really happened.²⁰¹

B.2) Christianity & the Nations

Along the same lines, John McClintock (1814-1870) and James Strong (1822-1894) wrote a century ago in their very influential, *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, that the Christian's unique spiritual standing is proven by the effect of their virtue:

[T]he superiority of Christian nations over heathen nations is in the possession of those characteristic qualities which are gifts of the Spirit, in the establishment of such customs, habits, and laws as are agreeable thereto, and in the exercise of an enlightening and purifying influence in the world. . . .

Those nations which are now eminent in power and knowledge are all to be found within the pale of Christendom—not, indeed, free from national vices, yet, on the whole,

that it would probably have won without him. Indeed, one of the motives sometimes ascribed to his support is his supposed desire to enlist the cooperation of what had become the strongest element in the Empire, the Christian community. (105)

²⁰¹ Charles Colson in *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity . . . and Why It Matters*, David Kinnaman, (Baker, 2007), 87.

manifestly superior both to contemporary unbelievers and to paganism in its ancient days.²⁰²

Likewise, James Orr (1844-1913), a highly respected teacher of apologetics and systematic theology in Scotland wrote:

The presence of the Holy Spirit in human hearts, in communities, in history, is as verifiable a fact as any we know. There is a Holy Spirit in the Church--the Fountain of light, of holiness, of power; the Source of sanctification, of renewal, of peace and joy. This effect-- itself supernatural-- needs a cause, and, tracing it back, the cause is only to be found in Acts 2.²⁰³

One of the more helpful advocates of *virtue apologetics* is NT scholar Alan Richardson who wrote:

It cannot be too strongly stressed that the Church's own life and witness are the true apology for the Christian faith. The facts of contemporary Church history should therefore be made known as widely as possible. . . .

The unique phenomenon of Christian faith and life extending across the centuries is the significant fact which must be explained. The testimony of those who have in every age translated into deeds and life the faith of the Church is the primary apologetic evidence of a continuing special revelation of God.²⁰⁴

We can even find some support from Dr. Clark Pinnock, Emeritus Professor of Theology at McMaster Seminary, in spite of the fact that he is a foremost proponent of *inclusivism*. This position claims that essentially all religious roads can lead to Christ, even though

²⁰² "Holy Spirit" in *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (M&S), CD-ROM ver. (Ages Software, 2000).

²⁰³ James Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration* (Eerdmans, 1952), 125.

²⁰⁴ Alan Richardson, *Christian Apologetics* (NY: Harper, 1948), 137-8. Richardson adds:

The story of the Church's expansion and activity during the last century and a half and in our own days constitutes as impressive a record of victorious living as anything which previous centuries can show. Amongst recent short books dealing with this theme we may mention: H. P. Van Dusen, *What is the Church Doing?* and *They Found the Church There*; John Foster, *Then and Now and World-Church*; K. S. Latourette, *The Unquenchable Light*; E. A. Payne, *The Church Awakes*, W. A. Visser 't Hooft, *The Wretchedness and Greatness of the Church*. (Ibid.,. 137).

people may not know it is Christ they are encountering and being saved by. Nonetheless, Dr. Pinnock is honest about the superiority of Christian virtue when he writes:

What exactly is saintliness anyway? Is it a life of service to the poor (a hallmark of Christianity) or a life of other-worldly contemplation (found in other religions)? . . . I look and see blessings such as universal human rights, the demythologizing of the state, the care of the sick and the poor, . . . and the ideal of self-giving service, and I notice that it is mostly the fruit of the Christian Gospel and possibly proof of its superior sanctifying power. Eastern religions seem to produce stagnant societies, and Islam, intolerant ones.²⁰⁵

One of the most helpful and contemporary defenses of *virtue apologetics* comes from the pen of John Gerstner in his excellent Christian apologetic, *Reasons for Faith*. Dr. Gerstner concludes that "The ultimate proof of the divinity of the Christian religion [is] its influence in the world during the past twenty centuries."²⁰⁶

Among other evidences, Dr. Gerstner mentions the research of Dr. Warneck who "was another great student of primitive cultures and the impact of missions upon them." Dr. Gerstner adds, "His many studies and researches in the field concluded that no society which has once lapsed into barbarism has ever been known to rise to civilization except by the Christian religion."²⁰⁷ This should not surprise us, as any student of history can confirm that the level of morality and virtue of any given culture has been in direct proportion to the presence and vitality of Christianity. No such claim can be made for any other religion.

Dr. Gerstner adds:

While we are speaking about barbaric customs, let us mention in passing what Christianity has done for barbaric peoples generally. Christlieb was one of the most comprehensive students of missions among primitive peoples. He tells us, among many other things, what Christ has done for the Hottentots . . .

[T]hirty years ago, [a Portuguese] might express a doubt as to whether the Gospel could elevate and heal the most degraded heathen [i.e. the Hottentots]. But today the Portuguese can no longer maintain that the Hottentots are a

²⁰⁵ *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, Dennis Okholm, Timothy Phillips, eds. (Zondervan, 1996), 61.

²⁰⁶ John Gerstner, *Reasons for Faith* (Harper & Row, n.d.), 230.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 158-9.

race of apes, incapable of Christianization. You can no longer find written over church doors in Cape Colony, "Dogs and Hottentots not admitted," as at the time when Dr. Van der Kemp fought there for the rights of the downtrodden natives.

Today no one could be found to agree with the French governor of the island of Bourbon, who called out to the first missionary to Madagascar, "So you will make the Malagasy Christians? Impossible. They are mere brutes, and have no more sense than irrational cattle"; since there are hundreds of evangelical congregations established there.²⁰⁸

While Muslims and Marxists have imposed their religion on people with human force, Christianity has done so with a divine message authenticated by divine virtue. D. A. Carson, Professor of NT at Trinity writes the following in support of *virtue apologetics* in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount:

For a variety of reasons, Christians have lost this vision of witness [i.e. *virtue apologetics*], and are slow to return to it. But in better days and other lands, the faithful and divinely empowered proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ so transformed men that they in turn became the light of the world (Matt. 5:14).

Prison reform, medical care, trade unions, control of a perverted and perverting liquor trade, abolition of slavery, abolition of child labor, establishment of orphanages, reform of the penal code—in all these areas the followers of Jesus spearheaded the drive for righteousness. The darkness was alleviated. And this, I submit, has always been the pattern when professing Christians have been less concerned with personal prestige and more concerned with the norms of the kingdom.²⁰⁹

More recently, the late Presbyterian scholar, Dr. D. James Kennedy, has chronicled the unique historical effect of Christian

²⁰⁸ Ibid. 159.

²⁰⁹ Dr. Carson adds:

I recommend the reading of such books as J. W. Bready's *England: Before and After Wesley* (in the abridged American edition, the title is *This Freedom—Whence?*), or D. W. Dayton's more recent *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage*. Although I am not always convinced by their theological analyses, nevertheless such books teach us how almost all valuable social trends were spawned by the Evangelical Awakening under such men of God as George Whitefield, John Wesley, Howell Harris, Lord Shaftesbury, William Wilberforce and others. (*Sermon on the Mount*, [Baker, 1978], 31-32).

virtue throughout the world in his book, *What If Jesus Had Never Been Born?: The Positive Impact of Christianity in History*. Dr. Kennedy writes:

Despite its humble origins [one man and a few disciples], the Church has made more changes on earth for the good than any other movement or force [let alone religion] in history. To get an overview of some of the positive contributions Christianity has made through the centuries, here are a few highlights:

Hospitals, which essentially began during the Middle Ages. Universities, which also began during the Middle Ages. . . . Literacy and education for the masses. . . . Representative government . . . Civil liberties. The abolition of slavery, both in antiquity and in more modern times. . . . The elevation of women. Benevolence and charity; the good Samaritan ethic. Higher standards of justice. The elevation of the common man. The condemnation of adultery, homosexuality, and other sexual perversions. This has helped to preserve the human race, and it has spared many from heartache.

High regard for human life [like working against abortion]. The civilizing of many barbarian and primitive cultures. The codifying and setting to writing of many of the world's languages. Greater development of art and music. . . . The countless changed lives transformed from liabilities into assets to society because of the Gospel. The eternal salvation of countless souls! ²¹⁰

While some critics may balk at Dr. Kennedy's claims, he offers plenty of evidence to support them. As we discuss elsewhere, even a more accurate understanding of such historical incidents as the Spanish Inquisition and the Crusades will serve to prove our point.

²¹¹ Dr. Kennedy addresses twelve different areas of human life and history, and demonstrates that Christian virtue has had the most positive impact upon them of any other group of people that can be named: political, cultural, religious, or otherwise.

Here, we can only briefly touch on the impact that Christian missionaries have had on the morality of cultures. For example, Dr. Kennedy relates:

²¹⁰ D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe, *What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?: The Positive Impact of Christianity in History* (Thomas Nelson, 1997), 3-4.

²¹¹ We discuss several historical events often thought to detract from the moral record of Christianity in section 5.17.

The morality of any society can be easily judged by the view it holds of human life. In 1844, H. L. Hastings visited the Fiji Islands. He found there that life was very cheap and that it was held in low esteem. You could buy a human being for \$7.00 or one musket! That was cheaper than a cow. After having bought him you could work him, whip him, starve him, or eat him, according to your preference-and many did the latter.

He returned a number of years later and found that the value of human life had risen tremendously. One could not buy a human being for \$7.00 to beat or eat. In fact, you could not buy one for seven million dollars. Why? Because across the Fiji Islands there were 1,200 Christian chapels where the Gospel of Christ had been proclaimed, and people had been taught that we are not our own; that we have been purchased with a price, not with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ.²¹²

Dr. Kennedy shares an interesting anecdote that illustrates the power of *virtue apologetics* on even one of Christianity's greatest foes:

In the last century, there was a great attack on foreign missionaries in the *London Times*. An experienced traveler wrote a letter to the editor in which he criticized this attitude. The letter writer said that such an attitude on the part of a voyager was particularly inexcusable-for should he happen to be cast ashore on some uncharted island, he would devoutly pray that the lesson of the [Christian] missionary had preceded him! The writer of the letter was no less than Charles Darwin, later an enemy of the Christian faith. Nonetheless, he recognized the utilitarian value of the faith.²¹³

Dr. Kennedy goes into some detail in documenting what he then concludes:

The religion of Jesus Christ has done more to elevate moral standards than any other force in history. Had Jesus never come, it's unlikely the Ten Commandments would be known beyond the Jews. Had Jesus never come, many of us-those who are of Anglo-Saxon stock-might still be drinking out of human skulls as they used to. Had Jesus never come, the Scandinavians might still be out plundering and terrorizing

²¹² Kennedy, 27.

²¹³ Ibid., 157.

their neighbors as their ancestors, the Vikings, used to, until the Gospel of Christ took hold. Had Jesus never come, many of the formerly cannibalistic tribes of Africa, Asia, or the Americas would no doubt still be gorging on human flesh.

But Jesus did come, and He elevated morality and life on earth to a much higher level than ever before. . . . As many in the West continue to reject Him and His standards of right and wrong, we seem to be regressing to the vile and unspeakable sins that besmirched the ancient pagan world.²¹⁴

As an example, Dr. Kennedy shares about one missionary woman named Mary Slessor:

Literally hundreds of stories from the modern missionary movement could be told at this point; stories that underscore the fact that the Gospel of Jesus Christ changes the morality of people by transforming their hearts. I will tell of only one, Mary Slessor of Calabar (1848-1915), who was from Scotland.

She was converted in her teens, and after doing mission work in the slums of Dundee, she felt the call of God to serve as a missionary to Africa. In 1876, she left for Nigeria. She learned that beyond Okoyong, deeper in the heart of Africa, around Calabar, was an area in which lived four million savages so ferocious, so fierce, that even the government soldiers feared to penetrate the land. These four million cannibals were so degraded, their customs so vile, that it stretches the imagination to consider the types of things they did.

Witchcraft and drunkenness were rampant. The savages worshiped fetishes; they murdered twins; they turned the mother of twins out into the jungle to be devoured by beasts because they believed twins were brought about by a conjunction with a demon. Almost half of the population was slaves. When a man died, they would eat fifty slaves; twenty-five more would have their hands tied behind them and their heads would be whacked off. Unmarried women were chattel. They could be raped, tortured, or murdered at will. . . . Children were considered no better than animals, often simply left to die.

Mary's heart was touched by the plight of twins always left to die or ground to pieces in a pot. She would snatch them up and take them in. At first the people were astonished because they believed that anybody who touched a twin would die, but Mary didn't die. So she gathered around her over the years

²¹⁴ Ibid., 170-71.

many of these young "bairns," as she called them, to nurture them. . . .

Perpetual warfare among the different tribes had continued for innumerable centuries, but when she would hear of a tribe of warriors going out to attack another tribe, she would run barefoot through the jungle, where there were poisonous snakes and plants. She would head them off, standing in front of a whole host of armed cannibals with outstretched arms to demand that they stop. They did!

In incredible ways, by her faith in God, in her prayer, her winning countenance, the love she demonstrated, she was accepted. People milled around her and looked. . . . She began to teach them about the Son of God who had loved them enough to die for their sins. Astonishingly, God opened up their hearts. They became very willing to hear.

One after another the chiefs of the various villages yielded their lives to Christ. One after another the tremendously horrible customs plaguing these people for years were abolished; the murder of twins, infanticide, the slaughter of wives and slaves, the trial by poison and boiling oil, and all other terrible customs. Through her ministry, thousands from the Ibo tribe became Christians and abandoned their degrading ways. Indeed, the moral standards of many parts of the world have risen dramatically because of Christianity.²¹⁵

There is no other religion in the world that can boast, or will ever be able to boast, that it has even *one* Mary Slessor. Neither Buddhism, Hinduism, Humanism, Islam, Marxism, or New Age. And the history of Christianity can boast of a multitude more, both those who are well known, and those who are not.

Therefore, it is neither the mere duration nor popularity of a religion which proves its divinity. This fact exposes the error of the well known "Christian" philosopher John Hick who is a foremost promoter of *pluralism*, or the idea that virtually any religion is as good as another. For example, Dr. Hick writes:

Every conception of the divine which has come out of a great revelatory experience and has been tested through a long tradition of worship, and has sustained human faith over time and in millions of lives, is likely to represent a genuine encounter with divine reality.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Ibid., 167-9.

²¹⁶ John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, (MacMillan, 1977), 141.

Nonsense. Not even Dr. Hick's eloquence can overcome the fact that again, *no other religion* other than Christianity can boast of even *one* Mary Slessor. Both biblical and historical facts seem to clearly demonstrate our position that God intends supernatural virtue to be the ultimate proof that the followers of the King are spiritually superior to the followers of any other religion in the world. We do not claim that such moral superiority is our own doing, but rather the result of God indwelling us with God the Holy Spirit.

Because *virtue apologetics* provides evidence for the moral and spiritual superiority of Christianity, it also serves to prove its exclusivity as the only religion that is accepted by the real God. This is because only those who follow the King have such superior virtue, and it was He who said, **"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me"** (John 14:6).²¹⁷

Pastoral Perspective

- Does your church have anyone with testimonies concerning *virtue apologetics*? Elicit them and communicate them in some way in order to instruct and encourage people to imitate this vital part of being an Authentic Christian.

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Father, we glory today in the service of Your saints throughout history. They have lived a life of love, even dying for the sake of humanity. What a tremendous testimony to Your own power and character! May we revive and carry on the tradition of such earthen vessels, seeking Your strength to do so, and giving up whatever comforts or pleasures are necessary in order to burn as a light for You.

Gauging Your Grasp

²¹⁷ For further applications of *virtue apologetics* to several wider issues in Christianity see chapter 5.6.

- 1) Why do you think it was characteristic of Early Church leaders to boast about the superior virtue of Christians to public authorities, but this does not occur today?
- 2) Why do you think apologetics in general did not seem to be an emphasis in the writings of the leaders of the Protestant Reformation?
- 3) Jonathan Edwards wrote: "Christian practice is . . . the chief of all the marks of grace, the sign of signs, and evidence of evidences." Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 4) We claim: All of the other religions *combined* do not even begin to compare with the religion [Christianity] that is really from God in regards to loving humanity. Give several specific lines of evidence for this. Do you agree or disagree and why? If you agree, what are the implications of this?
- 5) Why isn't such *virtue apologetics* being promoted, discussed or practiced much in our day in American Christianity?
- 6) Why wouldn't the popularity of a religion be a good indication of its divinity?

Recommended Reading

- *What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?: The Positive Impact of Christianity in History*, D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe, (Thomas Nelson, 1997).
- *Reasons for Faith*, John Gerstner (Harper & Row, n.d.).

Publications & Particulars

Book 5
Biblical Apologetics
Part III
Virtue vs. Intellectual
Apologetics

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Chapter 5.10

The Current Status of Apologetics

The Woeful Neglect of Virtue Apologetics

Primary Points

- *Intellectual apologetics* refers to scientific, philosophical, and historical arguments for the existence of God and the superiority of the Christian faith.
- *Classic apologetics* focuses on proving the existence of God.
- *Evidential apologetics* includes proving the divinity of Christ and Scripture.
- The current apologetic emphasis is either on *intellectual apologetics* reflecting modernism, or a self-effacing "humble" apologetics reflecting postmodernism.
- Contrary to the Apostle John in his epistle, there is a great lack of boldness in contemporary Christianity to compare religions on the basis of virtue.
- Despite the biblical and historical emphasis on *virtue apologetics*, there is an almost complete disregard for it in contemporary Christian literature.
- The present miracle resulting from our personal spiritual resurrection has as much apologetic value as the ancient miracle of Christ's physical resurrection.
- Real "power evangelism" is not performing miracles to remove suffering, but rather, the power to live a virtuous life in the midst of suffering.
- Perhaps it is a perceived lack of virtue among Christians that makes us shy about the biblical mandate for *virtue apologetics*.
- Perhaps the neglect of *virtue apologetics* reflects the modern attraction to easy shortcuts. It is easier to learn and expound intellectual arguments for Christianity rather than exuding hope in the midst of painful trials like 1 Peter 3:15 is really talking about.
- C. S. Lewis: "[T]he new men are dotted here and there all over the earth. . . . Every now and then one meets them. Their very voices and faces are different from ours: stronger, quieter,

In previous chapters we demonstrated the biblical support for claiming that the Christian's spiritual and epistemological superiority is verified by the Christian's superior moral virtue. We also contended that *virtue apologetics* is the ultimate and universal apologetic that God intended for the fact that salvation is only through saving faith in the King. More than that, we will demonstrate in the next chapters that the most popular type of Christian apologetics (*intellectual apologetics*) was denounced by the Apostle Paul, has no biblical support whatsoever, and is inferior to *virtue apologetics* in relation to unbelievers in every way.

All of which makes the current status of Christian apologetics rather alarming. There is an unwarranted, unfortunate, and even unbiblical neglect of *virtue apologetics* in contemporary theology. Unfortunately, the apologetic emphasis today would seem to be on: 1) *intellectual apologetics* reflecting a modern approach, 2) a self-effacing "*humble*" *apologetics* reflecting a postmodern approach, or 3) "power evangelism" reflecting a *super-supernaturalists* ²¹⁸ approach. And in the process, the biblical mandate and emphasis on the classic Christian approach of bold and confident *virtue apologetics* is neglected.

A) Intellectual Apologetics

A.1) Types of Intellectual Apologetics

We use the term *intellectual apologetics* to refer to those approaches which emphasize extra-biblical scientific, philosophical, and historical arguments for the existence of God and the superiority of the Christian faith. There are several varieties, all of which are rather complex, difficult to categorize because of their similarities, and each often claiming to be superior to the others as an approach to convincing the unbeliever of the Christian faith. While Christian apologists themselves admit that categorizing the

²¹⁸ *Super-supernaturalism* is the unbiblical over-expectation of God's miraculous intervention, accompanied by the belief that the miraculous *sign gifts* of the biblical Prophets and Apostles are still operating today. For further discussion see chapters 10.13-16

different types of *intellectual apologetics* are difficult, ²¹⁹ we will suggest two broad categories here including *classic* and *evidential*.

First, there is *classic apologetics* which focuses on proving the existence of God. Contemporary promoters of such an approach include Norm Geisler and R. C. Sproul. While such good men would deny that anyone can be saved apart from *saving revelation* from God, they do seem to insist that salvation must at least begin with reasoned arguments for the existence of God. Dr. Geisler, for example, writes:

The heart of this [*classical*] apologetic approach is that the Christian is interested in defending the truths that Christ is the Son of God and the Bible is the word of God. However, prior to establishing these two pillars on which the uniqueness of Christianity is built, one must establish the existence of God. For it makes no sense to speak about an act of God (i.e., a miracle) confirming that Christ is the Son of God and that the Bible is the Word of God unless of course there is a God who can have a son and who can speak a Word.

Theism, then, is a logical prerequisite to Christianity. What is more, an adequate test for truth is a methodological prerequisite to establishing theism. For unless the Christian apologist has a test by which he can show other systems to be false and theism to be true, then there is no way to adjudicate the conflicting claims of various religions and world views. ²²⁰

Under the heading of *classic intellectual apologetics* we can suggest three different approaches to proving the existence of God. First, there is the *cosmological argument* which is essentially based on the idea that Creation had a beginning and that beginning was God. The recognized founder of this approach was Thomas Aquinas

²¹⁹ For discussion of categorizing approaches to Christian apologetics see introductions to *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims*, Gordon R Lewis (Moody, 1976) and; *Five Views on Apologetics*, Steven Cowan, ed. (Zondervan, 2000). Norm Geisler admits as well that, "There are differing kinds of apologetic systems, and no universally-acknowledged way to categorize them." (*Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (BECA) [Baker, 1999], 41). Dr. Geisler uses five categories: Classical, Evidential, Historical, Experiential, and Presuppositional. In our opinion, the historical approach is best discussed under the evidential approach. Also, Dr. Geisler unfortunately limits his experiential approach to non-verifiable mystical experiences, rather than including objective *virtue apologetics*, making this category rather meaningless.

²²⁰ Norm Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Baker Book House, 1976), 8-9.

(1225-1274) and it is perhaps best known today from the writings of William Lane Craig.

The second approach of *classic intellectual apologetics* is the *ontological argument* which suggests that the fact that we can even contemplate such a being as God, proves that He exists. Its recognized originator was Anselm (1033-1109), the eleventh century Archbishop of Canterbury, and Alvin Plantinga is a contemporary representative of this view.

The third recognized approach of *classic intellectual apologetics* is the *teleological argument* which suggests that the intricate design of the universe proves the existence of God. A traditional promoter of this view was William Paley (1743-1805) and a contemporary one is Richard Swinburne, and an increasing number of those promoting *intelligent design*.²²¹

While the *classic intellectual* approach to apologetics focuses on proving the existence of God, the *evidential* approach broadens its scope to include such topics as proving the deity of Christ and the divinity of Scripture. While the *classic apologist* normally insists that the existence of God must be proven first, the *evidential apologist* believes that there are a variety of valuable starting points for proving Christianity. *Evidential apologists* include C. S. Lewis (1898-1963), Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984),²²² Josh McDowell, J. W. Montgomery, E. J. Carnell, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Gary Habermas, Paul Feinberg, and Basil Mitchell.

What all approaches to *intellectual apologetics* generally have in common is the belief that several truths must be proven before Christianity can make an exclusive claim to salvation. These include the existence of God, reliability of Scripture, and the deity of Christ. While biblical statements are used in *intellectual apologetics* there is understandably a reliance on more "objective" extra-biblical data from philosophy, history, and science.

As demonstrated more fully below in our discussion of the neglect of *virtue apologetics*, the *intellectual* kind is by far the most popular in contemporary Christianity. So much so, that in virtually

²²¹ For further discussion regarding *classic apologetics* see section 2.12.D.

²²² As noted below under "Recommended Reading," Dr. Schaeffer wrote one of the few modern discourses concerning *virtue apologetics* in his booklet *The Mark of the Christian*. Nonetheless, he wrote much more that would be considered *intellectual apologetics* and even wrote in the above mentioned booklet: "We should have an intellectual apologetic. The Bible commands it and Christ and Paul exemplify it." ([Intervarsity, 1970], 16). We would offer sections 2.2.C and 2.3.B.1.b-c as a refutation of Dr. Schaeffer's claim.

every discussion of the issue, the word “apologetics” is used to refer to only the *intellectual kind*.

A.2) The Problems of *Intellectual Apologetics*: Unbiblical & ineffective in evangelism

Throughout *Knowing Our God* we discuss several problems with *intellectual apologetics*. In chapter 2.2 we detailed why it is unnecessary to begin a systematic theology, or any presentation of biblical truth, with intellectual arguments to make it palatable to those who do not have the Spirit. Unfortunately, in our supposedly postmodern day, there is a lot of ink and effort wasted on trying to convince those without the Spirit, of the things of the Spirit. *Intellectual apologetics* would seem to ignore the Apostle’s warning: **“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned”** (1 Cor 2:14).

In the previous Book 4, chapters 4.12-4.15 we further demonstrate the epistemological differences between regenerate and unregenerate humans, explaining why the *devil-darkened reason* of unbelievers makes the arguments of *intellectual apologetics* rather worthless.

In the next chapter (5.11) we argue that Paul actually denounced the use of intellectual arguments to persuade and evangelize unbelievers. Likewise, in chapters 5.12-5.13 we further argue the unbiblical nature of *intellectual apologetics* by addressing what we see as the misuse of other Scriptures to deny what Paul clearly stated to the Corinthians.

Finally, in chapter 5.14 we point out several aspects in which *virtue apologetics* is far superior to *intellectual apologetics*.

In summary, *intellectual apologetics* is first of all denounced by Scripture for the purposes of evangelism. Therefore, it is not surprising that it is ineffective, and inferior to biblical *virtue apologetics*. What is surprising then is that apologetics in modern Christianity is virtually synonymous with the unbiblical, ineffective kind, and the biblical, effective *virtue apologetics* is virtually absent in Christian literature.

A.3) The Value of *Intellectual Apologetics*: The building of the believer’s faith

In our claim of the unbiblical and ineffective nature of *intellectual apologetics* in the context of unregenerated people, we do not wish to diminish its value among believers. Accordingly, we have written elsewhere regarding the faith of regenerated believers:

The first source of faith-building evidence we will suggest is research, of both biblical and extra-biblical sources. . . .

Extra-biblical sources as well can be very helpful in building our faith in God. The Scriptures invite the Christian to believe that several supernatural events have occurred in human history. While we might possess an adequate level of certainty in these events simply because they are recorded in documents that we regard as divine revelation, there is no doubt that our certainty is strengthened when additional evidence is found for them as well.

For example, we read in Genesis that God, “**made the stars**” (1:16). While we would certainly be inclined to believe such a statement simply because it is stated in Scripture, our faith is reinforced by the fact that astronomical data has convinced a large number of scientists that the probability of it being otherwise is *unbelievably* small. . . .

In the same way, geological, archeological, and linguistic evidence has strongly supported Scripture’s testimony to a world-wide flood, the Tower of Babel incident, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire, the collapse of the walls of Jericho, the Hebrew Patriarchs, and the fulfillment of several prophecies.²²³ . . .

In fact, as stated elsewhere, we would suggest that Christian apologetics as a whole proves to be much more valuable for building the faith of *believers*, than sparking the faith of *unbelievers*. Even a Christian apologist such as Gary Habermas, who ardently believes in the value of evidential apologetics for unbelievers, is willing to say, “Not only is apologetics exceptionally useful with believers, it may even be its major value.” We couldn’t agree more, and it is because our *Spirit-liberated reason* thrives on evidence in building our own faith.²²⁴

Which is why books on *intellectual apologetics* are so popular in American Christianity. Not because these arguments have proven so capable of convincing unbelievers and causing evangelistic revival. Which is what they would do if they were as necessary and

²²³ For further discussion of these evidences for the authority of Scripture see chapter 2.7. and 9.8.

²²⁴ Excerpt from section 6.12.C.1.

powerful in evangelism as many claim. No, the reason books on *intellectual apologetics* are so popular is that they bolster the Christian's faith.

But *intellectual apologetics* really only works for born again believers who can appreciate the evidence. Unfortunately, many are claiming that *intellectual apologetics* is the answer keeping young people from leaving the faith. Accordingly, Sean McDowell writes:

A young person may walk away from God for many reasons, but *one* significant reason is intellectual doubt. According to the National Study of Youth and Religion, the most common answer nonreligious teens offered for why they left their faith was intellectual skepticism.

This is why David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group, writes in his book *unchristian*, "We are learning that one of the primary reasons that ministry to teenagers fails to produce a lasting faith is because they are not being taught how to think."²²⁵

Isn't the reason anyone leaves the faith the fact that they never really had it? The statistics reflect how many unregenerated youth are growing up in a church context. They do not suggest that instilling more reasons for the faith in such people would save them. In addition, there are many, many things more important for sustaining the faith of youth than *intellectual apologetics*. Experiencing the virtue in them because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is among them.

Finally, as we note elsewhere, we have witnessed youth who had considerable training in *intellectual apologetics* who were not born again, and their exceptional knowledge of Christianity actually hindered them in recognizing they needed a Savior. Which, again, is why the Apostle denounced the use of *intellectual apologetics* in evangelism, "**so that [saving] faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power**" (1 Cor 2:5).

²²⁵ Sean McDowell, in *Apologetics for a New Generation*, Sean McDowell, ed. (Harvest House, 2009), 19.

B) Other Approaches to Christian Apologetics

B.1) The Growing Popularity of "*Humble*" Apologetics

While an overemphasis on *intellectual apologetics* has tended to detract from *virtue apologetics*, the unwarranted influence of *pluralism* ²²⁶ and *postmodernism* ²²⁷ would seem to have made it unpopular as well. There is a great lack of boldness in contemporary Christianity to compare religions on the basis of virtue. It may be helpful at this point to be reminded of the Apostle John's approach in defending and distinguishing Christianity in the pluralistic world he lived in. He simply and *unapologetically* wrote:

Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who does what is sinful is of the devil . . . No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are [the only two kinds of people on the planet]: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother. (1 John 3:6-10)

Far too many Christians today think such words are too simplistic and too bold. Accordingly, we fear that among some modern apologists and theologians that there is a greater desire to be politically correct, rather than biblically correct. James M. Boice, a very respected Reformed Bible teacher of our day wrote of this growing tendency when he said:

We live in such a mindlessly pluralistic society that it is thought uncouth if not wickedly immoral to suggest that some religions may be better than others or, even worse, that some

²²⁶ *Pluralism* is essentially the belief that all moral religions provide salvation. For further discussion see section 6.10.B.

²²⁷ *Postmodernism* in its most radical form, denies the possibility of any absolute, objectively authoritative truth. For further discussion see section 2.6.A; chapter 2.11 and section 3.1.C.4.f.

religions may be wrong. But some are wrong. In fact, all are wrong that do not call us to faith in Jesus Christ.²²⁸

A politically correct approach to apologetics is evident in the recent writings of Dr. John Stackhouse, Professor of Apologetics at Regent College, who writes in his book *Humble Apologetics*: “many believers in other faiths are more admirable than many of us Christians.”²²⁹ We would respectfully suggest this is dishonest flattery, rather than humble honesty, and it does not reflect the Scripture’s teaching on the spiritual and moral uniqueness and superiority of the born again Christian. A moral superiority, by the way, that is required to even call oneself a Christian. And even as an *intellectual apologist*, Dr. Stackhouse is willing to write later, “I believe, frankly, that the generally dismal state of the churches in the West continues to be the single most important factor in the difficulty we face as apologists.”²³⁰ This would seem to highlight the importance of *virtue apologetics*, despite his neglect and denial of it.

Obviously, those who support *pluralism*, or the belief that all ethical religions can lead to eternal salvation, would disdain *virtue apologetics* as well. While we discuss this view more thoroughly elsewhere, it applies directly to our current topic.²³¹ British philosopher John Hick is probably the most influential proponent of such a view today, and his most powerful argument for *pluralism* is a direct attack on the uniqueness of the born again Christian’s spiritual and moral superiority. He writes in an entry to *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*:

Coming to know both ordinary families, and some extraordinary individuals, whose spirituality has been formed by these different [religious] traditions and whose lives are lived within them, I have not found that the people of the other world religions are, in general, on a different moral and spiritual level from Christians. They seem on average to be neither better nor worse than are Christians. . . .

But is this what we would expect if Christians have a more complete and direct access to God than anyone else and live in

²²⁸ James M. Boice, “A Better Way: The Power of the Word and Spirit” in *Power Religion: The Selling Out of the Evangelical Church*, Michael S. Horton ed. (Moody, 1992), 119.

²²⁹ John G. Stackhouse, *Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 120. Underlining added.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 193.

²³¹ For further discussion of *pluralism* see section 6.10.B.

a closer relationship to him, being indwelt by the Holy Spirit? Should not the fruit of the Spirit, which according to Paul is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23), be more evident in Christian than in non-Christian lives? . . . Surely the average level of these virtues should be noticeably higher among Christians than among non-Christians. Yet it does not seem to me that in fact Christians are on average noticeably morally superior to Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, or Buddhists. . . .

[I]f we define salvation as an actual human change, a gradual transformation from natural self-centeredness to a radically new orientation centered in God and manifested in the "fruit of the Spirit," then it seems clear that salvation is taking place within all of the world religions-and taking place, so far as we can tell, to more or less the same extent.²³²

While we might expect such a view from a pagan philosopher like Dr. Hick,²³³ several evangelical Christians have agreed with him.

²³² John Hick in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, eds. (Zondervan, 1996), 39, 41, 43.

²³³ We confidently describe Dr. Hick as an unbeliever in spite of his claim to have "underwent a powerful evangelical conversion under the impact of the New Testament figure of Jesus" in his college days. (*Four Views*, 29). Dr. Hick spends a good deal of ink in the book we have quoted him, to purposely attempt to persuade the reader that he is indeed an evangelical Christian, and in fact he does speak and write in many Christian forums. However, a man's doctrine reveals his heart. Accordingly, Norm Geisler writes:

John Hick is one of the most important philosophers of religion of the late twentieth century. His literary output and influence has been a strong force against orthodox Christianity at several crucial junctures. (*BECA*, 316. Underling added).

Dr. Hick's heresies include: 1) The denial that Scripture possesses divine authority (Froelich, 12), 2) The belief that eventually all people will be saved (Geisler, 746), 3) That reincarnation is valid (*Ibid.*, 639), 4) The denial that there is an eternal punishment after death (*Death and Eternal Life* [1976], 244), and 5) A rather odd habit of referring to God as merely "the Ultimate Reality" or the "Real" (*Four Views*, 17).

While all of these *may* unfortunately be the belief of an authentic Christian, at least an immature one, we would suggest that Dr. Hick's denial of the deity of Jesus Christ cannot be (cf. Rom 10:9). He has written: "That Jesus was God the Son incarnate is not literally true, since it has no literal meaning." ("Jesus and the World Religions," in *The Myth of God Incarnate*, ed. John Hick [Westminster, 1977], 178). Christ's deity will be very "literal" when Dr. Hick is called to give an account before His throne some day.

For example, Michael McKenzie, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Liberty University praises the extraordinary virtue of Mother Teresa and remarks: "Such people of virtue need not belong to a particular religious tradition."²³⁴ Then later, he adds: "Are acts of virtue religious? . . . At first glance, the answer is "no." In fact, that is part of their beauty: they are accessible and performable by anybody."²³⁵

First, Mr. McKenzie seems to ignore the fact that Mother Teresa (1910-1997) professed and proved a very real relationship with Christ. She was a Holy Spirit indwelt Christian if there ever was one. Which is precisely why she is virtually synonymous with supernatural virtue all over the world. Secondly, even if "anybody" could act virtuous as Mr. McKenzie claims, a more biblical Christian apologist would be defending the divine mandate and objective reality of Christianity's moral superiority, instead of suggesting morality doesn't matter in claims to spiritual salvation.

Likewise, in the book from which we quoted Dr. Hick, even someone with the evangelical reputation of Alister McGrath, surrenders to Dr. Hick's challenge when he responds: "Anyone who argues that a Christian is, by virtue of his or her faith, morally

Nonetheless, Dr. Hick suggests that the Scripture's teaching regarding the deity of Christ is merely a metaphor intended to function as a religious myth (Ibid. 177-8). Therefore, we do not accept the philosopher's claim to be a Christian, nor are we surprised that he would promote the idea that Christianity is not unique in any way for the salvation of human souls.

It will be noted here as well that we think Dr. Hick's doctrine of *eschatological verification* is insufficient and not rooted in reality. He seems to suggest that we do not need evidence *now* for our beliefs, but merely a promise or hope that the evidence will be provided later. Obviously such a belief fits in well with his desire to claim all ethical religions are equal. To the contrary, however, God is in the business of giving us evidence *now* for those things we are to believe in and **"has given us the Spirit [now] as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come [later]."** (2 Cor 5:5). And it is precisely because Dr. Hick does not seem to have the Spirit that he is groping for some imagined verification in the future. God save his soul!

For further study on the heresies of John Hick see, "The Disintegration Of John Hick's Christology," Douglas McCready, *JETS* 39:2 (June 1996) p. 257-270.

²³⁴ Michael McKenzie, "Listening To Virtue's Voice: The Connection Between Ethics And Apologetics," *Journal of Christian Apologetics* 1:2 (Winter 1997), 52. Evidently for Mr. McKenzie, there is no connection.

²³⁵ Ibid., 57.

superior to a Confucian is open to serious criticism.”²³⁶ Similarly, the editors of the book, Dennis Okholm and Timothy Phillips, both Professors of Theology at Wheaton College, state in their introduction: “Hick’s argument for the moral parity of the religions appears to equate religion with moral development, a thesis no world religion [apparently including Christianity] accepts.”²³⁷ We would ask what, apart from salvation which is invisible to humans, would be more important to “equate religion with” than “moral development?”

Finally, R. Douglas Geivett and W. Gary Phillips, who even argue in the book for the *exclusive* view that salvation is only in Christ, rather weakly respond to Dr. Hick by saying:

Inter-traditional comparisons of virtue are . . . irrelevant. What matters is the person’s standing before God. . . . The unique moral superiority of Christianity is not founded on the moral character of fallible Christians but is attested by Jesus’ own sinless life. . . . Christians have no business trying to establish their own moral superiority.²³⁸

On the contrary, we have just as much business proving the reality of our present spiritual resurrection as we do Christ’s past physical resurrection. And if we cannot, then we have no business telling the rest of the world that we alone possess the *Holy Spirit*.

In addition, we would point out that Dr. Hick is lumping together all those who merely *profess* to follow the Christian religion (like he does), with those who uniquely have a personal relationship with Christ and really possess the Holy Spirit. We would readily admit that there may be little spiritual and moral difference between merely professing Christians and devoted followers of any ethical religion. But the same cannot be said regarding those whom the Spirit of Christ, which is the only *Holy Spirit*, has indwelt. This is discussed further in chapter 5.16. Finally, we would offer the entire discussion in chapters 5.2-5.4 as our refutation of the above authors. They are all simply unbiblical.

May we never let the fakes, no matter how convincing, ever skew our understanding of what the Scriptures teach regarding the spiritual and moral enablement of the saints, and the biblical

²³⁶ *Four Views*, 68.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 78.

mandate for *virtue apologetics*.²³⁹ Likewise, may we never let some false, self-deceiving humility keep us from honestly recognizing and legitimately claiming the miraculous life transformation that has occurred through our belief in Christ. If the world knows that Christ's deliverance from the *power* of sin is superior, it will help them believe that His deliverance from its *penalty* is exclusive. By denying the former, "humble" apologetics does not advance the latter.

"Humble" apologetics is founded on a lie, which tells us right away, it is not Christian at all. The lie is that having the King live in us really doesn't morally transform us more than other religions and techniques in the world. That seems like something the devil would say, and it is precisely what "humble" apologists are saying.

Such a lie is promoted by the popular Christian author John Eldredge when he writes:

I doubt that many of us would go so far as to say we're transformed. Our names are written down somewhere in heaven, and we have been forgiven. Perhaps we have changed a bit in what we believe and how we act. We confess the creeds now, and we've gotten our temper under control . . . for the most part. But transformed seems a bit too much to claim. How about forgiven and on our way? That's how most Christians would describe what's happened to them.²⁴⁰

We don't think so. If most of us Christians were to tell our salvation testimony, we would be able to provide abundant evidence that we have changed more than just "a bit in what we believe and how we act." In fact, according to the Apostle John, as opposed to the author John, if our love for people and morality hasn't changed a lot, then we are not even Christians.²⁴¹

B.2) The Non-apologetic of *Presuppositionalism*

²³⁹ Obviously this statement involves several issues that must be supported elsewhere. For a discussion of *false faith* see chapter 6.6.

²⁴⁰ John Eldredge, *Waking the Dead* (Thomas Nelson, 2003), 57.

²⁴¹ See extended discussion of the Apostle John's description of born again Christians in chapter 5.5.

While both the *classic* and *evidential* approaches to *intellectual apologetics* involve a reasoned, evidence-based method for supporting the superiority of Christianity, the next two approaches do not, making it questionable as to whether they can even be classified as Christian apologetics at all.

First, there is the *presuppositional* approach founded by Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987), and defended more recently by John Frame, both men having teaching positions at Westminster. Drs. Van Til and Frame suggest that the beginning point of apologetic discussions is to *presuppose* that the real God has revealed Himself uniquely in Scripture, for only then can anyone know the truth about Christianity. *Presuppositionalists* do not normally value the *classic* approach to proving the existence of God.

Here, we immediately see both the strength and weakness of this view as an apologetic. First, it rightly emphasizes the limitations of unregenerated humanity in being affected by evidences for God or Christianity. However, it is difficult to classify it as an apologetic at all, when it immediately demands that one presuppose the truth of Christianity's claims. In addition, as we have discussed elsewhere, those *presuppositionalists* who claim that no one can really know anything unless they know God, are in danger of falling into philosophical skepticism.²⁴²

Nonetheless, it should be noted that the *Presuppositional* approach may have more biblical support than all of the *intellectual* approaches. Elsewhere we demonstrate that the Apostle Paul habitually “**argued from the Scriptures**” in his Gospel presentations.²⁴³ This is a point that all *Presuppositional* apologists would make. Accordingly, *Presuppositionalism* is more of an approach to evangelism rather than apologetics.

B.3) The Nonsense of Reformed Epistemology

Another *intellectual*, although non-evidential approach to apologetics is what has been labeled *Reformed epistemology*. This view also seriously doubts the value of the evidences for the existence of God or the claims of Christianity. In fact, *Reformed epistemology* suggests that particularly the existence of God need not be proven at all by logical reasoning because such a belief is self-evident to every human. This idea is essentially based on John

²⁴² For further discussion of *presuppositionalism* see section 2.12.D.

²⁴³ Regarding Paul's proving the Gospel through the Scriptures see section 5.13.B.

Calvin's (1509-1564) suggestion that humans are created with a "sense of divinity," which acts as an internal witness to the existence of God. As with *presuppositionalism*, it is difficult to classify this approach as a Christian apologetic at all. Nonetheless, because of its growing popularity, we discuss it further elsewhere, and conclude that it is rather philosophical nonsense.²⁴⁴

B.4) The Fraud of "Power Evangelism" in *Charismaticism*²⁴⁵

Many Christians today would agree that the ultimate apologetic today is miracles. Unfortunately, we would suggest they have the wrong miracles in mind. John Wimber, the modern originator of what is called "power evangelism," said that the two most important miracles for impressing unbelievers are 'falling [being "slain"] in the power of the Spirit and filling teeth' that had cavities.²⁴⁶

On the contrary, and as demonstrated elsewhere, when the King promised His people that we would do even "**greater works**" than He after He left, He was not talking about greater *physical miracles* (cf. John 14:12).²⁴⁷ How could we do something in the physical realm that would be *greater* than giving life to a man like Lazarus who had been dead for three days (cf. John 11:38-44), something that we seriously doubt *anyone* has done since? What *would* be greater, however, is giving people *spiritual and eternal* life, and this is what has been happening since Christ left the Earth and sent the Spirit He promised. And we partake in this greatest of all miracles by sharing the Gospel, an essential ingredient in the miraculous process of spiritual regeneration and conversion.

Advocates of "power evangelism" do not consider carefully enough that all the "miracles" they claim to perform can all be done by the power of humans or the devil (cf. Matt 7:21-23).²⁴⁸ It is not supernatural deeds that ultimately distinguish someone spiritually,

²⁴⁴ For further discussion regarding *Reformed Epistemology* see chapter 2.8.

²⁴⁵ For a definition of modern *charismaticism* see endnote 1 in chapter 5.6.

²⁴⁶ Erwin Lutzer, *Who Are You to Judge?* (Moody, 2002), 214.

²⁴⁷ For further discussion of Christ's meaning of "greater works" in John 14:12 see section 10.5.B.2.

²⁴⁸ For further discussion regarding the fraud and demonic nature of many so called "miracles" in modern *super-supernaturalism* see sections 11.7.B.9 and 11.8.E-F.

but rather supernatural virtue.²⁴⁹ It is “character miracles” not “charismatic miracles” by which God intends to prove Christianity today. Consequently, real “power evangelism” is not performing physical miracles to remove suffering, but rather, the power to live a virtuous life in the midst of suffering. This is something that proponents of “power evangelism” normally don’t want to accept because of their unbiblical expectation of physical healing.

With that said, it should not be denied that there are times when God will perform miracles, especially to introduce an area to the Gospel. One only needs to read accounts of the revival in China to see this happening.²⁵⁰ But such occurrences fade by God’s own design, always leaving *virtue apologetics* to be His ultimate means of proving the Gospel. Along these lines, and a long time ago, the Church Father John Chrysostom (c. 347–407) preached something that proponents of “power evangelism” need to ponder:

Now if twelve men leavened the whole world, imagine how great our baseness, in that when we being so many are not able to amend them that remain; we, who ought to be enough for ten thousand worlds, and to become leaven to them. “But they,” one may say, “were apostles.” And what then? Were they not partakers with thee? Were they not brought up in cities? Did they not enjoy the same benefits? Did they not practice trades? What, were they angels? What, came they down from Heaven?

“But they had signs,” it will be said. It was not the signs that made them admirable. How long shall we use those miracles as cloaks for our own remissness? Why, many who had actually cast out devils, because they wrought iniquity, instead of being admired, did even incur punishment [cf. Matt 7:21-23].

And what can it be then, he will say, that showed them great? Their contempt of wealth, their despising glory, their freedom from worldly things [all of which are greatly desired by many of the foremost leaders of “power evangelism”²⁵¹]. Since surely, had they wanted these qualities, and been slaves of their passions, though they had raised ten thousand dead, so far from doing any good, they would even have been

²⁴⁹ For further discussion of distinguishing demonic and divine miracle working see chapter 11.13.

²⁵⁰ For accounts of such direct divine miracles see especially sections 10.2.A; 10.2.C; 10.3.C; 10.4.A.1.

²⁵¹ For further discussion of the immoral behavior of prominent “miracle workers” in the Church see sections 11.7.B.9; 11.8.E-F.

accounted deceivers. Thus it is their life, so bright on all sides, which also draws down the grace of the Spirit. . . .

And Himself too, when He was making laws for His own disciples, what said He? "Do miracles, that men may see you"? By no means. But what? "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven." And to Peter again He said not, "If thou lovest me," "do miracles," but "feed my sheep." . . .

For when he [Paul] had said, "Covet earnestly the best gifts, and yet show I unto you a more excellent way;" he did not speak next of a sign, but of charity, the root of all our good things. If then we practice this, and all the self-denial that flows from it, we shall have no need of signs; even as on the other hand, if we do not practice it, we shall gain nothing by the signs.²⁵²

Not only do we deny that many "power evangelists" are actually working miracles at all, but we deny that such an approach is widely being used by God today, or that He desires to do so. And one sure reason that God would value *virtue apologetics* over "power evangelism" is the differences in what they teach the young convert. While we should not be at all particular about *how* people come to Christ, it should be acknowledged that those who come to Christ through the supernatural love of other Christians have a better chance of understanding that the essence of authentic Christianity is virtue. On the other hand, those who might be initially attracted to the faith because of miracles, would be in danger of thinking that such things are essential to Christianity, and have a skewed, *super-supernaturalist*²⁵³ perspective on spirituality.

B.5) The Inadequacy of *Experiential Religion* in Liberal Theology

Finally, we should note that *virtue apologetics* has nothing to do with the *experiential apologetics* promoted by such theologians as Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), Paul Tillich (1886-1965), John Hick, and espoused by a long line of Christian mystics. Such an appeal to experience is no different than that found in Eastern religious traditions that emphasize meditative practices, such as

²⁵² John Chrysostom, *Homily on Matthew*, (online at www.ccel.org), 46.

²⁵³ *Super-supernaturalism* is the over-emphasis on the miraculous popular in Christianity today. For further discussion, see chapters 10.13-16.

Zen Buddhism and forms of Hinduism. In these, contact with the real God is confirmed merely by attaining an experience of emotional enlightenment or higher states of emotional consciousness.

Unlike the religious mystic who claims an experience which is self-authenticating with no rational proof possible, we claim there is objective proof for the truth of the Christians' experience of salvation. While it should be obvious that an apologetic or religion based on subjective feelings has nothing in common with one based on objective virtue, some have confused them and therefore rejected the latter as an apologetic foundation of religion.

Epistemological certainty about spiritual matters cannot be based on feelings, and neither can anything else be verified in this way either. As James Orr wrote: "Religion based on mere feeling is the vaguest, most unreliable, most unstable of all things."²⁵⁴ Likewise, the Christian apologist E. J. Carnell writes:

If a man by an inward 'crisis' experience thinks that he is called to rule the world, as did Hitler, then the validity of his act is as secure as the validity of his [feeling]. . . . Against all forms of argument from religious experience we pit the argument that feelings are not qualified to critique themselves.

If feeling rather than intellect is the most qualified organ of man to know God, it follows that all of the feelings must be normative witnesses. Schleiermacher preferred the feeling of personal piety, but his selection does not exhaust the possibilities. There is also anger, jealousy, laughter, spite, love, and the like. Which of these feelings is the best channel through which to approach the Divine?²⁵⁵

C) The Woeful Neglect of *Virtue Apologetics*

In chapters 5.2-5.4 of *Knowing Our God* we demonstrated the great deal of biblical references to *virtue apologetics*. In chapter 5.11 we will argue that the Apostle Paul denounced *intellectual apologetics* as an approach to evangelism. In chapters 5.12-5.13 we further demonstrate the lack of biblical support for *intellectual apologetics*.

²⁵⁴ James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World* (Regent College, 1997), 20.

²⁵⁵ Edward J. Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* (Eerdmans, 1956), 79.

These facts alone make it very difficult to understand why, in modern Christian literature, there is both an almost complete disregard for *virtue apologetics*, and an overwhelming emphasis on *intellectual apologetics*. While we do not wish to deny the value of the latter, as we have discussed above, it is simply inexcusable that Christian commentaries, reference works, and even books on apologetics, basically ignore the place of *virtue apologetics*.²⁵⁶

For example, A. J. Hoover includes at least eight different types of apologetic approaches in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, but none of them could be identified with *virtue apologetics*.²⁵⁷ The renowned Protestant theologian and apologist Bernard Ramm in his entry under "Biblical Apologetics" in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* says, "the root of the NT apologetic is christological and incarnational,"²⁵⁸ which, in our opinion, could have been a great introduction to pointing out the objective moral evidence that Christ lives in the Christian. There is, however, no such discussion. Neither is there in Dr. Ramm's otherwise very helpful, *Types of Apologetic Systems*.²⁵⁹

This is true as well of Gordon R. Lewis' *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims* and Zondervan's *Five Approaches to Apologetics* which together, enumerate a large number of popular and respected types of Christian apologetics, but none of them even hinting at *virtue apologetics*. Likewise, in Peter Jensen's recent contribution to the highly respected *Contours of Christian Theology* series, he claims that the three apologetic proofs of the Gospel are 1) NT fulfillment of OT prophecies, 2) the historical testimony of the Apostles, and 3) its philosophical merits.²⁶⁰ Apparently the objective moral effects of the born again experience are not even worthy of mention by this first rate Bible scholar.

²⁵⁶ Perhaps the only exception in the last several decades of Christian scholarship is Francis Schaeffer's little booklet, *The Mark of a Christian* (Intervarsity, 1970). It is excellent, just not long or popular enough.

²⁵⁷ See the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (EDT), Walter Elwell ed. (Baker, 1984), 69-70.

²⁵⁸ Bernard Ramm, "Biblical Apologetics" in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (ISBE), Geoffrey W. Bromiley ed., 4 vols., (Eerdmans, 1988), I:190.

²⁵⁹ Bernard Ramm, *Types of Apologetic Systems* (Van Kampen, 1953).

²⁶⁰ Peter Jensen, *The Revelation of God* (InterVarsity, 2002), 40-42.

Along the same lines is R. C. Sproul's co-authored book *Classical Apologetics*.²⁶¹ It is a fine presentation of *intellectual apologetics*, however, we perceive no mention of anything like *virtue apologetics*, in spite of the fact that, as we demonstrated in chapter 5.9, it has been a vital part of "Classical Apologetics" since the beginning of the Church.²⁶² Finally, Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli have no mention of *virtue apologetics* in their popular and otherwise helpful *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*.²⁶³

While the above references completely ignore *virtue apologetics*, other Christian apologists, while neglecting it, at least hint at it. For example, one could wish that the great twentieth century Christian apologist C. S. Lewis would have turned his genius more toward *virtue apologetics* rather than just the *intellectual* type. Nonetheless, even he found space to note in his very popular *Mere Christianity*:

When we Christians behave badly, or fail to behave well, we are making Christianity unbelievable to the outside world. . . . Our careless lives set the outer world talking; and we give them grounds for talking in a way that throws doubt on the truth of Christianity itself.²⁶⁴

Likewise, in speaking of the fact that Christians are spiritually regenerated Dr. Lewis wrote one of our favorite quotes in all of human literature:

[T]he new men are dotted here and there all over the earth. . . . Every now and then one meets them. Their very voices and faces are different from ours: stronger, quieter, happier, more radiant. . . . They love you more than other men do, but they need you less.²⁶⁵

Characteristically eloquent, but we would have hoped for more in such an influential apologetic book.

²⁶¹ R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsey, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Academie Books, 1984).

²⁶² For the testimonies of early Church leaders to *virtue apologetics* see chapter 5.9.

²⁶³ Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (InterVarsity Press, 1994)

²⁶⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Harper Collins, 2001), 208.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 223.

Likewise, in Dr. Lewis' otherwise insightful study, *The Four Loves*, he never mentions the virtue in the context as an apologetic for the Christian faith.²⁶⁶ It is not as though others have written on the subject of *virtue apologetics* sufficiently to warrant other Christian apologists neglecting it.

Likewise, we would wish to see more on *virtue apologetics* from our favorite theologian J. I. Packer. Nonetheless, he writes the following:

Ecumenical goals for the church are defined nowadays in terms of the quest for social, racial, and economic justice, but it would be far healthier if our first aim was agreed to be personal and relational holiness in every believer's life. Much as the modern West needs the impact of Christian truth, it needs the impact of Christian holiness even more, both to demonstrate that godliness is the true humanness and to keep community life from rotting to destruction. The pursuit of holiness is thus no mere private hobby, nor merely a path for a select few, but a vital element in Christian mission strategy today. The world's greatest need is the personal holiness of Christian people.²⁶⁷

Somewhat surprising is the admission of William Lane Craig, a foremost *intellectual apologists*, when he writes:

Raised in a non-evangelical home, I became a Christian my third year of high school, not through any careful consideration of the evidence, but because those Christian students who shared the gospel with me seemed to be living on a different plane of reality than I was. Their faith in Christ imparted meaning to their lives along with a joyous peace, which I craved.

Once I became a Christian, I was eager to share the truth of my newfound faith with my family and high school friends, and thus I soon became engaged in presenting [intellectual] arguments for becoming a Christian.²⁶⁸

It would seem that while Dr. Craig recognized that it was *virtue apologetics* that prepared him for the Gospel, he immediately pursued *intellectual apologetics* to attract others to the Gospel.

In a similar fashion, well known Christian apologist Lee Strobel, author of the best seller *The Case for Christ*, is a contributing

²⁶⁶ C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (Collins, 1960).

²⁶⁷ J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step With the Spirit* (Revell, 1984), 103.

²⁶⁸ William L. Craig in Cowan, 26.

author to the very helpful *Holman Apologetics Study Bible*. The majority of his introductory article, "How Apologetics Changed My Life" not surprisingly describes his study of scientific and historical evidence for Christianity. He concludes the article with: "For me, [intellectual] apologetics proved to be the turning point of my life and eternity." But that would not seem to be true. Earlier in the article he explains that he was an atheist who "married an agnostic named Leslie." Leslie "decided to become a follower of Jesus." Then Mr. Strobel describes the real apologetic that led him to seek Christ:

Then [after his wife became a Christian] something amazing occurred. [the language of a miracle]. During the ensuing months, I began to see positive changes in her character, her values, and the way she related to me and to the children. The transformation was winsome and attractive [i.e. apologetic]. So one day when she invited me to go to church with her, I decided to comply.²⁶⁹

We believe that Mr. Strobel would have been more accurate to say it was the supernatural virtue of his wife that "proved to be the turning point" of his spiritual life, and accordingly, he missed a great opportunity to promote the place of *virtue apologetics*.

One of the most disappointing publications regarding Christian apologetics is *Baker's Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* authored by the *intellectual apologist*, Norm Geisler. Due to the author's personal persuasion, we would not expect a promotion of *virtue apologetics*. Nonetheless, considering the immense amount of biblical commands regarding *virtue apologetics*, one would think that a book with this title having 841 pages would devote at least one entry to it. It does not. In Dr. Geisler's entire *Encyclopedia* there is no entry for anything like *virtue apologetics*, even within rather lengthy articles under such headings as, "Apologetics, Types of"²⁷⁰ or "Holy Spirit, Role in Apologetics."²⁷¹ The only possible exception is a brief mention that some *evidentialist apologists* appeal to "changed lives," however, the example Dr. Geisler gives is Saul of Tarsus instead of contemporary examples.²⁷² In fact, speaking exclusively of the physical miracles performed by Christ

²⁶⁹ Lee Strobel "How Apologetics Changed My Life" *The Apologetics Study Bible*, (Holman, 2007).

²⁷⁰ Geisler, *BECA*, 41-45.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 330-37.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 42.

and the Apostles, Dr. Geisler claims, "If miracles have no evidential value, then there is no objective, historical evidence to support the claims of historic, Orthodox Christianity."²⁷³ On the contrary, the spiritual miracles of *virtue apologetics* provide precisely what Dr. Geisler is looking for.

Nonetheless, Dr. Geisler is willing to write the following under the entry concerning "Pluralism":

It is debatable [we would say impossible] whether practitioners in nonChristian religions can really display what Galatians 5:22-23 calls "the fruit of the Spirit": love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Certainly nonChristians do loving things and feel the heart emotion of attachment that we call love. And others are gentle, good, kind, and self-controlled. But are they able to manifest agape love?

One can lead a philanthropic life and even die in a stand for personal beliefs, yet not show God-founded holistic true love (see I Cor. 13:3). Christians are to have a qualitatively different kind of love for one another and especially for God. While God's common grace enables evil people to do good (see Matt. 7:11), only the supernatural love of God can motivate a person to express true agape (cf. John 15:13; Rom. 5:6-8; 1 John 4:7). . . .

Before one conclude too quickly that William James [nineteenth century psychologist] demonstrated the equality of all forms of saintliness in *Varieties of Religious Experiences*, Jonathan Edwards' *A Treatise on Religious Affections* should be perused. Edwards argues forcefully that manifestations of Christian godliness are unique, [there being] a difference in the highest level between Christian and non-Christian piety. . . .

A close comparison of the attitudes, goals, and motivations, as well as the actions, of [between] Mother Teresa and Mohandas Gandhi would demonstrate the superiority of Christian compassion for the needy. On the modern religious scene, one must also sort out what is inherent to the moral system of another religion and what has become incorporated into it as the result of Christian missionary activity.

Hinduism as a system did not generate social compassion in Gandhi. Gandhi was a student of Christianity who seriously considered conversion. He proclaimed his admiration for Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. The social

²⁷³ Ibid., 452.

compassion found in some forms of current Hinduism is a foreign import from Christianity, the influence of those like Gandhi who had been touched by Christian principles. Even then it fell short of the full-orbed Christian compassion of Mother Teresa.²⁷⁴

A bolder defense of *virtue apologetics* could hardly be found today, yet, it warrants no further discussion in this otherwise valuable publication.

This author had the personal opportunity to ask Dr. Geisler after a presentation why the superior virtue of Christians was not a respected approach to apologetics. He graciously, but briefly answered, "It is not objective enough." Likewise, the author had the opportunity to have lunch with Josh McDowell and asked him the same question. The answer was essentially the same. We would respond in several ways.

First, *virtue apologetics* is at least as objective as the interpretation and sources of ancient history that are relied upon for much of *intellectual apologetics*. Secondly, as noted elsewhere, Dr. Geisler admits that there are objective moral norms in humanity, and if so, it would seem there would be some basis for objectively evaluating the morality of religions.²⁷⁵

Thirdly, we would claim that the most important and effective apologetic approach will not be the one that may gain the most respect from pagan scientists or philosophers, but the approach that is the most available for the individual Christian, and most powerful for the vast majority of unbelievers. Let us remember, that most of the elect that we are searching for could be described the same way as Paul did the Corinthian converts: "**Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards**" (1 Cor 1:26). Christian apologetics is for the purpose of influencing our lost friends, not the academy. Accordingly, this is a prevalent context and purpose in which the Bible always discusses apologetics.

Another example of the neglect of *virtue apologetics* in Christian literature comes from the pen of one of our favorite theologians, Herman Bavinck (1854-1921). Remembering the numerous quotes provided in the previous chapter regarding the *virtue apologetic* approach of the early Church, Dr. Bavinck's views seem inadequate, if not inaccurate. In the context of summarizing the apologetic

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 598.

²⁷⁵ Regarding objective morals by which we can evaluate other religions see section 5.15.A and 5.16.B.2.

approach of the early Christians, he inexplicably lists just about everything else *but* the virtue of the early Christians:

[For the early apologists] this [philosophical] agreement [between pagans and Christians] does not cancel out the enormous difference in substance that exists between Christianity and the other religions. Comparative research reveals a series of differences, which demonstrate the superior excellence of Christianity over all [other] religions and can therefore serve as so many proofs for its truth.

Belonging to these internal criteria are the knowledge of the one true God who has been revealed only in Christianity, the complete redemption from sin and death, which has been won and is given by Christ, and the hope of eternal life, which has been brought to light by the gospel of Christ. Also included are the holy character and life of the prophets and apostles and above all of Christ himself [what about ancient and modern Christians which is an even more effective apologetic!].

Finally, it includes the antiquity and unity, the sublimity and simplicity, the riches and many-sidedness of Holy Scripture, which as a second book has been added by God to the first book (nature) and is in complete harmony with it, the predictions along with their fulfillment and the miracles, which lift the truth of Christian doctrine above all doubt.²⁷⁶

It is hard to understand Dr. Bavinck's apparent dismissal of the most important apologetic approach in early Christian writing, unless it is intentional. And as we noted above in section B.1, there *are* some intentional efforts to downplay or even discredit *virtue apologetics* within the Christian ranks.

One of the more surprising assaults on *virtue apologetics* comes from the highly respected Reformed theologian Michael Horton, Professor of Theology and Apologetics at Westminster. From his contribution to a book which contains the writings of many of the most influential evangelical teachers of our day, we read:

Christianity does not rest on our testimonies of changed lives, for the Mormons, drug treatment centers, and psychotherapists can offer such examples. Nor is Christianity to be trusted because of a personal experience. How many times have we had personal experiences that turned out to be misunderstood? The Christian faith rests on the claim of its Founder that He was the Messiah, God incarnate, the Savior of

²⁷⁶ Herman Bavinck, *Prolegomena, Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 1 (Baker, 2003), 509.

the world, and the claim of its apostles that they were eyewitnesses to His resurrection.²⁷⁷

If Dr. Horton is claiming that the ontological (i.e. its basis in reality) foundation of Christianity rests on scriptural and historical claims, we would agree. Without such documents and events there would be no Christianity. However, the claims of Christianity are no more "self-authenticating" than the claim of other religions, and its apologetical foundation cannot rest on these things.

Additionally, we would respectfully disagree with Dr. Horton that anyone else, including "Mormons" and "psychotherapists" can claim the type of supernatural, enduring, moral transformation that occurs with the acceptance of the Christian Gospel. Also, *virtue apologetics* does not involve subjective experiences, but rather, objectively demonstrated and recognized moral behavior.

In addition, concerning the resurrection of Christ, we do not deny its immense apologetic value and recognize that it is repeatedly reflected in Scripture. However, we would insist that the present miracle resulting from our personal spiritual resurrection has at least as much apologetic value as the now rather ancient miracle of Christ's physical resurrection. The Apostle Paul was right, of course, to insist that, **"if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins"** (1 Cor 15:17).²⁷⁸ However, as we have detailed elsewhere, the Apostle John clearly claims the same futility concerning our faith if there is an absence of supernatural morality.²⁷⁹

Theologically speaking, the resurrection of Christ is the foundation of the Christian faith. However, apologetically, this historical event would be significantly weakened if the Christian's own deliverance from spiritual death could not be presently demonstrated by supernatural deeds of virtue. Purely from an apologetic perspective, the outworking of our spiritual resurrection can stand alone to prove the superiority of the Christian faith much better than the bare fact of Christ's resurrection. As the old hymn says, "You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart." While the resurrection of Christ proves that Christ saves, it does not

²⁷⁷ Michael S. Horton, "Recovering the Plumb Line" in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, John H. Armstrong, ed. (Moody, 1996), 257.

²⁷⁸ For further discussion of the significance of the historical fact of Christ's resurrection see section 2.5.D.

²⁷⁹ Regarding the futility of our faith without supernatural morality see chapter 5.9.

prove to us or the world that we are saved. Superior and supernatural virtue empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit does.

Even more recently, Christian apologist Arthur Lindsey has written, *Love the Ultimate Apologetic: The Heart of Christian Witness*.²⁸⁰ One would think with a title like that, we would not have needed to write a biblical and historical defense of *virtue apologetics*. However, the main intention of the writer is to address non-moral “religions” such as atheism and New Age. While there is a place for this, there is very little discussion of “moral” religions (e.g. Islam, Buddhism). Therefore, in our opinion, the author falls far short of establishing “Love” as “the ultimate apologetic” for Christianity.

Even in-depth and insightful studies on biblical love fail to provide any mention of the concept’s relation to apologetics. Accordingly, perhaps the most exhaustive study of the topic in Evangelical Christianity is Leon Morris’ otherwise very good book, *Testaments of Love: A Study of Love in the Bible*.²⁸¹ Yet, there is no mention of the need, or biblical mandate for Christian love to be an apologetic for the Christian faith.

Tim Keller’s book, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* was *World* magazine’s book of the year. It too focuses on *intellectual apologetics* and outright rejects *virtue apologetics*. Dr. Keller claims Christians should realize that the unregenerate “will live lives morally superior to their own.” This would not be consistently true of real Christians who possess the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, the best apologetic Pastor Keller can offer for the Gospel is: “I can give you enough rational reasons to believe in God that fall short of demonstrable proof but that cumulatively give me warrant to say that Christianity makes more sense than alternate views of reality.”²⁸² On the contrary, we believe God has given us more apologetic ammunition than that.

Finally, we will discuss perhaps the most influential *intellectual apologists* in Church history: Josh McDowell. We believe that the publication of his *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* was another example of the inexplicable disconnect between the type of apologetics that impressed him, and the kind he has committed a life of research to. Mr. McDowell purposely and unmistakably begins his well known *intellectual apologetic*, with a stirring testimony of

²⁸⁰ Arthur Lindsey, *Love the Ultimate Apologetic: The Heart of Christian Witness*. (Intervarsity, 2008).

²⁸¹ Leon Morris, *Testaments of Love: A Study of Love in the Bible* (Eerdmans, 1981).

²⁸² See interview with Tim Keller in *World*, June 28, 2008, 69-71.

the power of *virtue apologetics*. Relating how *virtue apologetics* led to his own seeking of Christ he writes:

[T]here was something . . . about this group that caught my attention. It was love. These [Christian] students and professors not only loved each other, they loved and cared for people outside their group. They didn't just talk about love; they got involved in loving others. It was something totally foreign to me, and I wanted it. So I decided to make friends with this group of people. . .

About two weeks later, I was sitting around a table in the student union talking with some members of this group. . . . Then I turned to one of the girls in the group and said, "Tell me, what changed your lives? Why are you so different from the other students and faculty?" She looked me straight in the eye and said two words I had never expected to hear in an intelligent discussion on a university campus: "Jesus Christ!"

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While it is true that Mr. McDowell implies that "the overwhelming [historical] evidence I was accumulating that Jesus Christ was God's Son," also played a part in his conversion, it was *virtue apologetics* that gave him sufficient interest and reason to pursue the *intellectual* kind. Mr. McDowell goes on to relate a wonderful story of the power of *virtue apologetics*:

After I prayed [to receive Christ], nothing happened. There was no bolt of lightning. I didn't sprout angel wings. If anything, I actually felt worse after I prayed, almost physically sick. I was afraid I had made an emotional decision that I would later regret intellectually. . . . I really felt I had gone off the deep end.

But over the next eighteen months my entire life was changed. . . . One of the biggest changes occurred in how I viewed people. . . . [A]fter I placed my trust in Christ, my thinking changed. Instead of using others to serve me, I wanted to be used to serve others. Becoming other-centered instead of self-centered was a dramatic change in my life.

Another area that started to change was my bad temper. I used to blow my stack if somebody just looked at me wrong. I still have the scars from almost killing a man during my first year in the university. My bad temper was so ingrained that I didn't consciously seek to change it. But one day, when faced with a crisis that would ordinarily have set me off, I discovered

²⁸³ Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Josh McDowell, 1999), xxiv

that my bad temper was gone. I'm not perfect in this area, but this change in my life has been significant and dramatic.

Perhaps the most significant change has been in the area of hatred and bitterness. I grew up filled with hatred, primarily aimed at one man whom I hated more than anyone else on the face of this earth. I despised everything this man stood for. I can remember as a young boy lying in bed at night plotting how I would kill this man without being caught by the police. This man was my father.

While I was growing up, my father was the town drunk. I hardly ever saw him sober. My friends at school would joke about my dad lying in the gutter downtown, making a fool of himself. Their jokes hurt me deeply, but I never let anyone know. I laughed along with them. I kept my pain a secret.

I would sometimes find my mother in the barn, lying in the manure behind the cows where my dad had beaten her with a hose until she couldn't get up. My hatred seethed as I vowed to myself, "When I am strong enough, I'm going to kill him." When Dad was drunk and visitors were coming over, I would grab him around the neck, pull him out to the barn, and tie him up. Then I would park his truck behind the silo and tell everyone he had gone to a meeting, so we wouldn't be embarrassed as a family. When I tied up his hands and feet, I looped part of the rope around his neck. I just hoped he would try to get away and choke himself.

Two months before I graduated from high school, I walked into the house after a date to hear my mother sobbing. I ran into her room, and she sat up in bed. "Son, your father has broken my heart" she said. She put her arms around me and pulled me close. "I have lost the will to live. All I want to do is live until you graduate, then I want to die."

Two months later I graduated, and the following Friday my mother died. I believe she died of a broken heart. I hated my father for that. Had I not left home a few months after the funeral to attend college, I might have killed him.

But after I made a decision to place my trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord, the love of God inundated my life. He took my hatred for my father and turned it upside-down. Five months after becoming a Christian, I found myself looking my dad right in the eye and saying, "Dad, I love you." I did not want to love that man, but I did. God's love had changed my heart.

After I transferred to Wheaton University, I was in a serious car accident, the victim of a drunk driver. I was moved home from the hospital to recover, and my father came to see me.

Remarkably, he was sober that day. He seemed uneasy, pacing back and forth in my room. Then he blurted out, "How can you love a father like me?"

I said, "Dad, six months ago I hated you, I despised you. But I have put my trust in Jesus Christ, received God's forgiveness, and He has changed my life. I can't explain it all, Dad. But God has taken away my hatred for you and replaced it with love.'

We talked for nearly an hour, then he said, "Son, if God can do in my life what I've seen Him do in yours, then I want to give Him the opportunity." He prayed, "God, if You're really God and Jesus died on the cross to forgive me for what I've done to my family, I need You. If Jesus can do in my life what I've seen Him do in the life of my son, then I want to trust Him as Savior and Lord.' Hearing my dad pray this prayer from his heart was one of the greatest joys of my life.

After I trusted Christ, my life was basically changed in six to eighteen months. But my father's life was changed right before my eyes. It was like someone reached down and switched on a light inside him. He touched alcohol only once after that. He got the drink only as far as his lips, and that was it-after forty years of drinking! He didn't need it any more. Fourteen months later, he died from complications of his alcoholism. But in that fourteen-month period over a hundred people in the area around my tiny hometown committed their lives to Jesus Christ because of the change they saw in the town drunk, my dad.

You can laugh at Christianity. You can mock and ridicule it. But it works. If you trust Christ, start watching your attitudes and actions-Jesus Christ is in the business of changing lives.

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While in our opinion, Mr. McDowell's book is the best ever written on *intellectual apologetics*, we would suggest the five pages McDowell devotes to *virtue apologetics* are an infinitely more powerful apologetic than the over 700 pages of *intellectual apologetics* that the rest of the book is devoted to. All of which, again, makes it most surprising that there is no discussion at all of *virtue apologetics* anywhere in a book entitled *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*.

However, perhaps Mr. McDowell is changing his perspective. In a more recent book, *Apologetics for a New Generation*, he writes:

²⁸⁴ Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Josh McDowell, 1999), xxv-xxvii.

Most people assume I came to Christ through the intellectual route. Certainly, there can't be more than a few people who have documented more evidences to the faith than I have. And yet, all the evidence I have documented—on the reliability of the Bible, the deity of Jesus Christ, and the evidence for the resurrection—never brought me to faith in Christ.

That's right. The evidence did not bring me to Christ. The evidences got my attention, but it was God's love that drew me. It was the love I saw between a group of genuine believers who loved not only Jesus Christ but also each other—and even me! The evidence got my attention, but love drew me. . . .

When I arrived at Kellogg College in Battle Creek, Michigan, I met a group of Christians who exposed me for the first time to the love of God. Oh, how they loved each other. And I wanted what they had so badly that I would have paid anything for it. I would have pawned my soul to have what they had. That love—and the desire for that kind of friendship—paved the road of faith for me, and thus began my journey of faith.²⁸⁵

We do not desire to be disrespectful to a man that has been used greatly by God. However, the reason, "Most people assume [McDowell] came to Christ through the intellectual route" is that he has often portrayed it that way. Even in this very book where Mr. McDowell claims, "the evidence did not bring me to Christ," his son Sean, in an effort to argue the importance of *intellectual apologetics* for evangelism, writes what would seem to contradict his own dad:

[T]hose [unbelievers] who respond to [*intellectual*] apologetics often become people of significant influence who are deeply committed to the faith. This has certainly been the case in the life of my father, Josh McDowell. He became a believer as a pre-law student while trying to refute the evidence for Christ.

²⁸⁶

Nevertheless, Josh McDowell, perhaps the most influential *intellectual apologist* of our time, writes what we have wanted to demonstrate in this book about *virtue apologetics*:

[I]t was not the proclamation of the truth that turned the world upside down [in first century Christianity]. You see, what happened in the first century—and the task we face

²⁸⁵ Josh McDowell in *Apologetics for a New Generation*, Sean McDowell, ed. (Harvest House, 2009), 65.

²⁸⁶ Sean McDowell, 21.

today, as well—involved far more than a strictly modernist approach which appeals to the intellect. It also involved more than an extreme postmodern approach, which treats the truth as an irrelevance. Our first century forbears would be unsatisfied with both modernism, which exalts truth but minimizes relationships, and postmodernism, which minimizes truth and exalts relationships. . . . The world we live in—the great host of people all around us—is desperate for truth that is firmly grasped, grounded, and communicated in the context of relationships.

[A] thoroughly biblical apologetic [is] what Paul referred to when he depicted the process that brought the Thessalonians to a vibrant faith in Christ: “Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us” (1 Thessalonians 2:8).

That’s what turned the world upside down in the first days of church history! . . . The way they lived their lives was further proof of the truth of the message (1 Thessalonians 1:5 NLT) ²⁸⁷

It was more than “further proof.” It was the ultimate proof.

What then are the reasons for the conspicuous lack of discussion regarding the very biblical notion of *virtue apologetics*? Perhaps, as we refute in chapters 5.16-17, it is a perceived lack of virtue among Christians that makes us shy about the biblical mandate for *virtue apologetics*. However, we also fear it is another reflection of the worldly habit of desiring easy shortcuts to accomplish our goals. Which is easier, to learn and expound some intellectual arguments for Christianity, or to exude hope in the midst of painful trials like 1 Peter 3:15 is really talking about? As we stated elsewhere: “one primary reason that *intellectual apologetics* is so highly promoted, and *virtue apologetics* is so neglected in America, is probably because the one only requires study, and the other suffering.” ²⁸⁸ American Christians too often desire rather painless shortcuts like politics, programs, and arguments to change people. Actually, the Great Commission and real Christian apologetics requires something much more—supernatural sacrificial love.

Pastoral Practices

²⁸⁷ Josh McDowell, 23.

²⁸⁸ Quoted from 5.4.B.2.

Do you have people in your church that could share powerful testimonies about their salvation? Encourage them to do so, and it can be encourage the believers and help unbelievers come to Christ.

Extras & Endnotes

Table 5.10: A Comparison of Apologetic Approaches

Type	Features	Problems	Biblical Support	Scholarly Support
Classical	Philosophical/scientific evidence to prove God’s existence including the <i>cosmological</i> , <i>ontological</i> , and <i>teleological</i> arguments.	Doesn’t directly prove or distinguish the Gospel and too complex.	Very little	Much
Evidential	Collecting a variety of evidences including historical evidence for Resurrection and authority of Scripture	Dependent upon historical evidence which is less convincing than contemporary evidence.	Little	The most
Presuppositional	Asks the unbeliever to presuppose the existence of God and the truth of Scripture.	Not really an apologetic at all.	Some	Some
Reformed Epistemology	Claims humans are born with an internal belief in God.	Not really an apologetic at all.	None	Growing

<i>Virtue</i>	Claims that the supernatural virtue empowered by the Holy Spirit in Christians uniquely proves the superiority of the Christian Gospel.	Moral weaknesses in individual Christians and misconceptions of Church history.	A lot	None
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Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) How is *intellectual apologetics* defined?
- 2) What are other approaches to Christian apologetics, and why do we claim they are inferior to *virtue apologetics*? Do you agree or disagree?
- 3) We claim that the current apologetic emphasis is either on *intellectual apologetics* reflecting modernism, or a self-effacing “humble” apologetics reflecting *postmodernism*. Would you agree or disagree and why?
- 4) We claim that, contrary to the Apostle John in his epistle, there is a great lack of boldness in contemporary Christianity to compare religions on the basis of virtue. Would you agree or disagree and why?
- 5) What is typically known as “power evangelism”? Why do we claim it is inferior to *virtue apologetics*? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 6) What is *experiential apologetics*? Why do we claim it is inferior to *virtue apologetics*? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 7) We claim that the present miracle resulting from our personal spiritual resurrection has as much apologetic value as the ancient miracle of Christ’s physical resurrection. Would you agree or disagree and why?
- 8) What two possibilities do we suggest for the reason that *virtue apologetics* is neglected? What reasons would you offer?

Recommended Reading

- The rest of Book 5: *Biblical Apologetics in Knowing Our God*.
- Francis Schaeffer, *The Mark of a Christian* (Intervarsity, 1970). A short booklet, and rather limited in scope, but perhaps the only example of any Christian literature devoted to the topic of *virtue apologetics* in the last several decades.

Publications & Particulars

Chapter 5.11

Paul's Rejection of *Intellectual Apologetics*

"My message was not with wise and persuasive words"

Table of Topics

A) Paul's Rejection of *Intellectual Apologetics* in Evangelism

A.1) 1 Cor 1:17-2:5

A.2)

Primary Points

A.3) • Paul taught that using philosophical reasons to attract people to the Gospel actually neutralized its power to save. *Intellectual apologetics* is an unbiblical tool for evangelism.

B) Hist • **"I didn't use . . . brilliant ideas to tell you God's message. For I decided to concentrate only on Jesus Christ and His death on the cross"** (NLT 1 Cor 2:1-2).

been • Contrary to *intellectual apologetics*, God wants to **"frustrate the intelligence of the intelligent"** and is not interested in being attractive to the unregenerated **"wise man," "scholar,"** or **"philosopher of this age"** (1 Cor 1:19-20).

C) W • Ineffe

D) Why

Extras &

• If unregenerated humans find our preaching attractive instead of foolish, then we are probably not preaching **"the Gospel"** (1 Cor 1:17), **"the message of the cross"** (1:18), and **"Christ crucified"** (1:23).

• Few people take Paul's warning seriously enough that if **"words of human wisdom"** are used in our evangelistic message, the message of **"the cross of Christ [will] be emptied of its power"** (1:17).

• The Apostle Paul made it clear that it is the power of the Holy Spirit, rather than the power of our arguments, that is needed if people are to take even the first step toward Christ.

• We fear at times that the emphasis on *intellectual apologetics* in American Christianity is more about justifying ourselves before the world rather than saving the world.

• The Apostle commanded Timothy and Titus not to argue with unbelievers about the doctrines of the Christian faith.

A) Paul's Rejection of *Intellectual Apologetics* in Evangelism

A.1) 1 Cor 1:17-2:5

It is in Paul's letters to the Corinthian church that we get the best description of his own approach to evangelism. And it is both surprising and sobering to recognize how strongly the Apostle actually denounced the popular approach to evangelism that *intellectual apologists* promote. We have defined *intellectual apologetics* as the promotion of extra-biblical scientific, philosophical, and historical arguments for the existence of God, the authority of Scripture, and the superiority of the Christian faith in general.²⁸⁹ While we have recognized the value of such extra-biblical study and arguments for the building of a Christian's faith,²⁹⁰ we have questioned its use in the context of evangelizing unregenerated unbelievers.²⁹¹ *Intellectual apologetics* is extra-biblical in the fact that it primarily seeks scientific, philosophical, or historical evidence outside of Scripture to make its defense of what Scripture says.

More specifically, *intellectual apologists* believe such arguments are an important, if not necessary, part of unbelievers getting saved. For example, the rightly respected Reformed theologian R. C. Sproul has written:

[*Intellectual*] Apologetics is indispensable for the establishing of [the intellectual assent to Christian truth that occurs before someone gets saved]. Though apologetics may not be evangelism, it is a vital part of pre-evangelism.²⁹²

On the contrary, the Apostle taught that using philosophical reasons to persuade people to accept the Gospel actually neutralizes its power to save. In a word, *intellectual apologetics* is

²⁸⁹ For further discussion of different aspects of *intellectual apologetics* see section 5.10.A.

²⁹⁰ Regarding the value of *intellectual apologetics* for the Christian see section 6.12.C.1.

²⁹¹ For further discussion of the impotence of *intellectual apologetics* for unbelievers see section 2.2.B-C.

²⁹² R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsey in *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Academie Books, 1984), 22.

an unbiblical approach to evangelism. The Apostle said so when he wrote:

¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the Gospel—not with words of human wisdom [*sophia logon*: lit. “wisdom of speech”], lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. ¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

¹⁹ For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”

²⁰ Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know Him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²² Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called [to salvation], both Jews and Greeks, Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God [for salvation]. . . .

²⁶ Brothers, think of what you were when you were called [to salvation]. Not many of you were wise ["intellectuals" ²⁹³] by human standards . . . ²⁷ God chose [for salvation ²⁹⁴] the foolish things of the world [i.e.

²⁹³ Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans, 2000), 175.

²⁹⁴ Both the divine "call" (1:26) and the divine "choosing" mentioned three times in this passage (vs. 27-28) are referring to a calling and choosing to eternal salvation. Accordingly, Charles Hodge writes in commenting on 1 Cor. 1:26:

Your calling does not mean mode of life, profession, or station, as the word *vocation* often does with us. The Greek word is never used in this sense in the New Testament, unless 1 Corinthians 7:20 be an exception. It always refers to the call of God by his word and Spirit. It is to be so understood here. 'You see, brethren, your conversion, that not many wise are converted.' In this sense we speak of "effectual calling." (*Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*; online at www.ccel.org).

Like Dr. Hodge, John MacArthur writes regarding the same verse: "Paul always uses the term *calling* to refer to the saving call of God, the effectual call that results in redemption." (*MacArthur's New Testament Commentary*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM [Parsons Technology, 1997], 1 Cor 1:26).

Leon Morris does not make this point, but speaks as if the choosing of God merely results in those who are "in the church" (1 *Corinthians* [Eerdmans, 1985], 47).

While C. K. Barrett translates the "calling" in 1:6 as "your own calling as Christians," he does not clearly state that God's choosing repeatedly mentioned in these verses applies to eternal salvation, and, in our opinion, does not even clearly interpret v. 30 in this way. (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (BNTC) [Hendrickson, 2000], 56-59)

Neither does Dr. Thiselton, and like Dr. Morris, concentrates on the meaning of being "in Christ" in v. 30 rather than on Paul's main point that this standing is a gift from God. (189ff.)

Gordon Fee is better, summarizing 1:26-31 as follows:

Paul turns from the content of the Gospel to the existence of the Corinthians themselves as believers. Not from the world's "beautiful people," but from the lower classes, the "nobodies," God chose those who for the most part would make up his new people. . . .

God's choosing of them is asserted to have the same design as the cross itself—to save them, but at the same time to "shame" and "nullify" the very values in which they are currently boasting. The election of such people reveals the ultimate divine intent (1:29): to obliterate all human grounds for "boasting" [about salvation]" (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT [Eerdmans, 1987], 78-9).

Dr. Fee elsewhere points out that the "call" in 1:26 "refers to their call to salvation" (79).

people, Gospel] **to shame the wise; God chose** [for salvation] **the weak things of the world to shame the strong.** ²⁸ **He chose** [for salvation] **the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not** [the “nobodies” ²⁹⁵]**—to nullify the things that are,** ²⁹⁶ ²⁹ **so that no one may boast before Him** [about their salvation]. ³⁰ **It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus** [i.e. saved]. . . ³¹ **Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”**

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom [*uperoxēn logon ē sophias*: lit. “preeminent words, ideas, or wisdom,” ²⁹⁷] **as I proclaimed to you the testimony** ²⁹⁸ **about God.** ² **For I resolved to know** [nor preach] **nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.** ³ **I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.** ⁴ **My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power,** ⁵ **so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.** (1 Cor 1:17-2:5)

This passage of Scripture would seem to denounce *intellectual apologetics* in the context of evangelism or even “pre-evangelism.”

²⁹⁵ For this interpretation see Fee, 78.

²⁹⁶ Paul’s words were certainly recognized by the 2nd century critic of Christianity, Celsus, who mockingly wrote of those becoming Christians:

Let no cultured person draw near, none wise and none sensible, for all that kind of thing we count evil; but if any man is ignorant, if any man is wanting in sense and culture, if anybody is a fool, let him come boldly [to become a Christian]. We see them in their own houses, wool dresses, cobblers, the worst, the vulgarest, the most uneducated persons. They are like a swarm of bats or ants creeping out of their nest, or frogs holding a symposium around a swamp, or worms convening in mud.

²⁹⁷ For this translation see Thiselton, 208 and Barrett, 63. The latter writes of the NIV phrase “**eloquence or superior wisdom**”: “They represent the outward and inward means by which men may commend a case, effectiveness of language, and skill of argumentation.”

²⁹⁸ For a defense of the use of “**testimony** [*marturion*]” in the original text see Fee, 88, 91.

As we have demonstrated in the evangelistic ministry of Christ, Paul's approach to evangelism was very *unapologetic*.²⁹⁹

First, it is important to understand the religious context in which the Apostle writes. This is succinctly described when he says "**Greeks look for wisdom**" (1:22). Accordingly, NT scholar Leon Morris writes:

Some at least of the Corinthians were setting too high a value on human wisdom and human eloquence in line with the typical Greek admiration for rhetoric and philosophical studies. . . . The Greeks were absorbed in speculative philosophy. No names were more honored among them than the names of their outstanding thinkers.³⁰⁰

It would seem that like the Corinthians, *intellectual apologists* as well are "setting too high a value" on the "rhetoric" that the Greeks so much admired. "Rhetoric" is simply persuasive speech, whether because of its oratory style, argumentative format, or persuasive content. While such logical and reasonable argumentation certainly has its place in effectively teaching Christians, as we will see, the Apostle believed this approach was dangerous in the context of evangelizing unregenerated humans with *devil-darkened reason*.³⁰¹

In light of the Corinthian context of valuing philosophical argumentation in the presentation of ideas such as the Gospel, the words *logos* [trans. "**words**" v.17; 2:4; "**word**" v. 1:18; "**speech**" v. 2:2, 4]; and *sophia* [trans. "**wisdom**" vs. 1:17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 30; 2:2, 4 "**wise**" vs. 1: 26, 27] take on a negative sense here. The Apostle is intentionally contrasting his evangelistic ministry to that of Greek orators who would speak in Corinth and other Greek cities to persuade people of their philosophies.³⁰²

The Greek philosophers spoke with "**words of human wisdom**" (1:17), making arguments that people would think were "**wise**" and "**intelligent**" (1:19). They strived for "**superior wisdom**" (2:1) and "**wise and persuasive words**" (2:4) and "**men's wisdom**" (2:5) in order to convince people by the sheer power of their logic,

²⁹⁹ For further discussion of Christ's unapologetic approach to evangelism see section 5.13.A.

³⁰⁰ Morris, 42, 45.

³⁰¹ For further discussion of the epistemological darkness of unregenerated humans see chapters 4.12-14.

³⁰² For commentary on Scriptures that speak of Paul speaking persuasively see the next chapter 5.12. On specifically Acts 18:4 see section 5.13.B.5.

arguments, intelligence, and debating skills.³⁰³ Accordingly, NT

³⁰³ There is some debate as to which aspect of the "wise speech" of Greek orators that Paul was condemning. Some would suggest it was merely the eloquent *style* of their discourses, rather than their typically philosophical, logical and argumentative *content*. John Calvin thought the Apostle was only referring to eloquence, but then labored to explain how people could preach the Gospel with eloquence and not violate the Apostle's words (online at www.ccel.org). This may point to another reason that mere *style* of speech was not Paul's concern.

No doubt, the Apostle desired to distance himself from both and accordingly states "**I did not come with eloquence** [attractive style] **or superior wisdom** [attractive arguments] **as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God**" (2:1).

Nevertheless, we note some confusion or obscurity in some commentators on what Paul means by the "**words of human wisdom**" (1:17) he is denouncing. Dr. Fee writes concerning the phrase:

[It] means something like "not with a kind of *sophia* that is characterized by rhetoric [i.e. persuasive speech] or perhaps reason or logic. Thus the emphasis is first of all on content. . . [H]ere the contrast . . . makes a . . . turn toward the *content* of the preaching, not its manner or effect. (64-5)

However, later concerning 2:1, Dr. Fee writes:

In a way similar to 1:17 Paul describes his preaching as (lit.) "not according to excellence of word or wisdom. . . . The NIV is misleading in suggesting that "excellence" is an adjective modifying "wisdom," and especially in translating the phrase "superior wisdom." "According to excellence" most likely refers to his manner [style] of preaching, hence "not in such a way as to distinguish myself" (Conzelmann)." (90).

Dr. Fee seems to contradict himself here and there is nothing in either the Greek text or the passage to suggest Paul is "first of all" referring to the content of what is spoken in 1:17, but to merely the "manner" of the speaking in 2:1. Accordingly, the NIV translation is a good one.

Likewise, Dr. Thiselton seems to imply that the Apostle is primarily concerned to denounce merely the style of Greek orators, rather than their propensity for persuasive argumentation. Even more so, his description of what the Apostle is referring to is quite unclear in our opinion. He translates *logoi* as "calculative communication" and *sophia* as "practical instrumental cleverness" and the two together as "clever rhetoric" (143), all phrases that seem rather meaningless to us. Nevertheless, Dr. Thiselton does note "The issue goes deeper than the traditional remark of many commentators that clever rhetoric merely stresses the importance of form at the expense of content." (Ibid.)

Dr. MacArthur also seems to merely refer to style rather than argumentative form and content when he writes regarding 1:17: "He [Paul] saw no place for calculated theatrics and techniques to manipulate response." (*in loc.*). On the contrary, the Apostle intended to say more than that.

Charles Hodge was also somewhat confusing on this issue. Like Dr. Fee above, he seems to think the Apostle has something different in mind between 1:17 and 2:1-5. Concerning the **"words of human wisdom"** (1:17) he gives three possible meanings and none of them have to do with the reasoned argumentation of Greek orators.

Nonetheless, Dr. Hodge wrote regarding 2:1-5:

The true foundation of faith is not reason, but the testimony of God . . . In his endeavors to bring men to the obedience of the faith, he did not rely upon his own skill in argument or persuasion. (*in loc.*)

This seems closer to the truth, but still might imply that the Apostle *used* "skill in argument and persuasion" but just didn't ultimately "rely" on it to save people. On the contrary, Paul intentionally did not even *use* any of his "skill in argument and persuasion" when presenting the Gospel to unbelievers **"lest the message of the cross be emptied of its power"** (1:18).

Accordingly, we do not completely agree with Dr. Hodge's summary of 1 Cor 2:1-5:

In these verses, therefore, we are taught, that the proper method to convert men in any community, Christian or Pagan, is to preach or set forth the truth concerning the person and work of Christ [exactly!]. Whatever other means are used must be subordinate and auxiliary [how about non-existent if we are follow the Apostle?], designed to remove obstacles, and to gain access for the truth to the mind, just as the ground is cleared of weeds and brambles in order to prepare it for the precious seed. (*in loc.*)

In our opinion, the good Dr. lapses in his reformed beliefs here regarding the spiritually dead state of unregenerated unbelievers. Spiritual death is the real "obstacle" to belief and cannot be cured with arguments.

More recently, we believe Gordon R. Lewis, Professor of Systematic Theology at Denver Theological Seminary, and a noted *intellectual apologist* himself, has misinterpreted Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5 as well. He is similar to Dr. Hodge in interpreting Paul as saying that the content of his preaching was not human information but divine revelation. Dr. Lewis writes in his book on *intellectual apologetics*:

It has often been alleged that I Corinthians is anti-apologetic. On the contrary, it only opposes naturalistic philosophies. A divisive party spirit had developed at Corinth as some followed Peter, some Apollos, and some Paul. So Paul distinguished the wisdom of all men from the wisdom of God. He said, "yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away" (I Co 2:6). If Paul's wisdom is not drawn from the elements of nature by men, what is its source? It is the wisdom of God (I Co 2:7) which God revealed through the Holy Spirit's inspiration and illumination (I Co 2:10-14).

Although to the unbeliever the divinely revealed message may appear to be foolishness, it is not foolishness. It is the wisdom of God. The cause of offense is the content of the message, not its illogical presentation. So the apologist for divinely revealed wisdom

scholar C. K. Barrett writes that the method of "**superior wisdom**" that Paul denounces refers to "skill of argumentation."³⁰⁴ Likewise, Dr. Morris interprets this as "the way [a] mind marshaled . . . facts."³⁰⁵ It is clear that the Apostle's descriptions of the Greek philosophers and what he rejected is heavily reflected in modern *intellectual apologetics* directed to unbelievers. Even the great *intellectual apologist* Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) summarized the Apostle's thoughts here as follows:

Hence, just as he had said earlier that it was not his intention to make his preaching rest on philosophical reasoning [1:17], so now he says that it was not his intention to make it rest on persuasions of rhetoric [2:4].³⁰⁶

hardly merits identification with those who disclaim such revelation. In no way does I Corinthians oppose speaking in favor of the wisdom of God. Paul does not contradict his own ministry, "I am appointed for the defense of the Gospel" (Phil 1:16). And all members of the church share "in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel." (Phil 1.7) (*Testing Christianity's Truth Claims* [Moody, 1976])

First, neither we nor Paul was opposed to using biblical revelation in communicating the Gospel. However, much of the content of the *intellectual apologetics* Dr. Lewis is promoting is *extra-biblical*, humanly discovered and developed philosophical, scientific, or historical information. For example, such apologists do not normally use biblical information to support the authority of Scripture. Dr. Lewis admits that "**God's wisdom**" in this passage is that "which God revealed through the Holy Spirit's inspiration and illumination" and is a "divinely revealed message" all of which has nothing to do with the source or content of the vast majority of *intellectual apologetics* except, perhaps, when the include fulfilled biblical prophecy.

Secondly, if Dr. Lewis is suggesting that "**the mature**" in 1 Cor 2:6 who are candidates for a "**message of wisdom**" refers to unbelievers, we would claim otherwise, as all NT scholars we know of. Thirdly, Dr. Lewis himself admits that Paul is saying a logical presentation of the Christian faith will seem foolish to unbelievers, therefore negating its value. Finally, we address what seems to be Dr. Lewis' misinterpretation of Philippians 1:7, 16 in the next chapter 5.12 section B.

³⁰⁴ Barrett, 63.

³⁰⁵ Morris, 50.

³⁰⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. Fabian Larcher, online at <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/SS1Cor.htm#21>, para. 77. Nonetheless, we would suggest there is a weakness in Aquinas' application of 1 Cor 1:17-2:5 when he describes it as, "the suitable way to present Christian doctrine," (para. 73) apparently even to believers. This was not the Apostle's intent.

The purpose of the Greek orators was to make their message as attractive to their listeners as possible; an approach that certainly makes sense from a human-centered point of view, but which the Apostle warned would be ineffective and even misleading in the preaching of the Gospel.

Accordingly, the Apostle condemned the approach of both ancient Greek rhetoricians and modern *intellectual apologists*. The Apostle's approach to evangelizing unbelievers was, "**to preach the Gospel**" (1:17), "**the message of the cross,**" (1:18), and "**Christ crucified**" (1:23). In fact, in Paul's evangelistic ministry He intentionally "**resolved to know**" and therefore preach "**nothing . . . except Jesus Christ and Him crucified**" (2:2). As Dr. Morris puts it, Paul's method of evangelism was:

a plain, unvarnished setting forth of the simple gospel. There had been nothing attractive about it. But precisely because it was so simple and unpretentious its results convincingly demonstrated the power of God. . . . Paul is denying that he used the methods of human wisdom when he preached.³⁰⁷

Intellectual apologists claim that Paul's references to "**the wisdom of God**" (1:24) and the "**testimony about God**" (2:1) refer to all kinds of philosophical, historical, and scientific arguments. However, for the Apostle, these were the simple Gospel. How many *intellectual apologists* could describe their evangelistic ministry (or would even *want* to describe their ministry) as the Apostle Paul did when he wrote?:

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. ³ I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. ⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words (2:1-4)

The NLT translates Paul in 2:1-2 this way: "**I didn't use . . . brilliant ideas to tell you God's message. For I decided to concentrate only on Jesus Christ and His death on the cross**" (NLT 2:1-2). On the contrary, modern apologetic ministries to unbelievers are all about confidently proving a "**superior wisdom**" over others through "**brilliant ideas**" for the purpose of propping

³⁰⁷ Morris, 50, 51.

up the Gospel to supposedly make it more acceptable to the unregenerated.

Paul intentionally restrained himself to be a preacher who simply explained the Gospel, not an *intellectual apologist* who argued to defend the Gospel. The proof of the Gospel was not in how reasonable some persuasive, extra-biblical arguments could make it appear to unregenerated humans. This was even when his audience in Corinth and elsewhere wanted intellectual debate and reasoning.

Some would claim that the Apostle remarkably seemed to violate a cardinal rule of his evangelistic ministry. He wrote the Corinthians elsewhere that he was willing to, **"become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some"** (2 Cor 9:22). Accordingly, he was willing to act like **"a Jew,"** as **"one under the law,"** as **"those not having the law,"** and for **"the weak"** he **"became weak, to win the weak"** (vs. 20-22). *But he was not willing to become wise to win the wise,* because that would not help them believe the Gospel.

The proof, and therefore the power of the Gospel would come with a **"demonstration of the Spirit's power"** (1 Cor 2:5) in convicting people of the need for a Savior (cf. John 16:8), and regenerating their broken minds resulting in the gift of *saving faith* in the Savior.³⁰⁸ The Apostle described this very same **"demonstration of the Spirit's power"** in converting unbelievers when he wrote the Thessalonians: **"For we know, brothers loved by God, that He has chosen you, because our Gospel came to you not simply with words [and certainly not with a lot of intellectual argumentation], but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction"** (1 Thess 1:4-5).

What then was the **"demonstration of the Spirit's power"**? The supernatural conviction and rebirth that occurs through the working of the Holy Spirit *only* in the context of a clear presentation

³⁰⁸ For further discussion of *saving faith* see chapters 6.2-5. For further discussion on the psychological process of how *saving faith* occurs see chapter 4.16.

of the simple Gospel *only* in the presence of God's elect. ³⁰⁹ Accordingly, NT scholar Anthony Thiselton comments:

The [Greek] rhetorical background makes it virtually certain that Paul gives rhetorical or *logical demonstration* . . . a distinctive turn [more accurately a complete rejection] by ascribing **proof** ultimately to the agency of the **Holy Spirit** as effective **power**. ³¹⁰

While *intellectual apologists* strive to make Christianity attractive to especially the more intellectual unbeliever, "**God was pleased through the foolishness [not a perceived reasonableness] of what was preached to save those who believe**" (1:21). In fact, contrary to *intellectual apologetics*, God *wants* to "**frustrate . . . the intelligence of the intelligent**" and is not interested in the least about being attractive to the unregenerated "**wise man,**" "**scholar,**" or "**philosopher of this age**" (1:19-20).

And it is precisely the idea, that striving to make the Gospel intellectually attractive to unbelievers is a good idea, that is part of "**the wisdom of the world**" that "**God [has] made foolish**" (1:20). Of course, *intellectual apologetics* fits in very well with how things work in the world. If you think you need to persuade someone of something, the way to do it is through "**wise and persuasive words**" (2:4). Unfortunately, *intellectual apologists* have adopted a worldly paradigm and method for something that requires, and is intended to display "**the power of God**" (2:5).

Not only did the Apostle Paul's evangelistic strategy not have the *content* that *intellectual apologists* suppose, but it did not have the *effect* that they are looking for either. The Apostle's Greek audience

³⁰⁹ For further support of this interpretation of 1 Corinthians 2:5 see section 5.13.B.5. Along these lines, Dr. Fee ends up with essentially the right answer, although his Pentecostalism peeks through:

But to what powerful demonstration of the Spirit does this refer? It is possible, but not probable given the context of [Paul's] "weakness," that it reflects the [miraculous] "signs and wonders" of 2 Cor. 12:12. More likely it refers to their actual conversion, with its concomitant gift of the Spirit, which was probably evidenced by spiritual gifts, especially tongues.

This seems to be more in keeping with Paul's concern. The evidence [of the Gospel] lies not in external [intellectual] "proofs" that Paul will muster against mere wisdom and rhetoric. Rather, the evidence lies with the Corinthians themselves and their own experience of the Spirit as they responded to the message of the Gospel. (Fee, 95)

³¹⁰ Thiselton, 220.

wanted intellectual, philosophical, winsome, worldly wise, and persuasive justification for his message. They would have considered such things as an attractive virtue. But because the Apostle simply preached the claims of the Gospel, his approach came across as "**foolishness**" (1 Cor 1:18, 21, 23), the exact opposite of what *intellectual apologists* strive so hard to accomplish.

Accordingly, God *is not pleased* with a worldly evangelistic approach that attempts to make the Gospel seem attractive and "wise" to unregenerated humans. In fact, if unregenerated humans find our preaching attractive instead of foolish, then we are probably not preaching "**the Gospel**" (1:17), "**the message of the cross**," (1:18), and "**Christ crucified**" (1:23), but rather, man-made philosophical, historical, and scientific arguments intended to make Christianity attractive and acceptable to unregenerated reason on merely a human level. Such arguments may be true, and supportive of our faith, but the Apostle believed they lacked any power to truly help people repent of their sin and submit to a Savior.

Not only did the Apostle think *intellectual apologetic* arguments were worthless in an evangelistic ministry, but he believed they were detrimental and dangerous. Such a human-centered approach, involving human arguments, human persuasion, and striving merely for a human decision, all detract and obscure the fact that salvation from beginning to end and at every point in between, is God's work, not a human work. If we make the salvation of souls ultimately or even partly a human work or decision we militate against it being purely a work of God, and in fact, *people will not get saved from our preaching*.

All of which exposes a fundamental error in the theology of *intellectual apologetics*. Their methods imply that the unbeliever's initial problem is ignorance that can be cured with extra-biblical human arguments. On the contrary, the initial obstacle for anyone to be saved is that they are spiritually dead, deaf, and blind³¹¹ and that can only be cured by spiritual regeneration through "**the Spirit's power**" (2:4).

Notice then why the Apostle excluded the use of *intellectual apologetics* from his evangelistic ministry. It was to facilitate, rather than hinder, the working of the "**Spirit's power**" (1 Cor 2:4) or "**God's power**" (2:5) in giving *saving faith* to people. Few people take Paul's warning seriously enough that if "**words of human wisdom**" are used in our evangelistic message, the

³¹¹ For further discussion of the spiritual/mental/epistemological condition of unregenerated humans in relation to receiving the Gospel see chapters 4.12 and 4.14.

message of **"the cross of Christ [will] be emptied of its power"** (1:17). Paul warns again that if our evangelistic ministry is **"with wise and persuasive words"** to argue and defend the Gospel at a human level, that we are in danger of forfeiting **"a demonstration of the Spirit's power"** (2:4) necessary for people to get saved, all because we are trusting too much in our power to save. It would seem that *intellectual apologists* need to be reminded that not only are people not saved by *their* works, but they are not saved by ours either.

When God sees men arrogantly thinking they need to improve on His humble Gospel with their intelligent and attractive arguments, He is likely to withdraw His Spirit for fear that He alone will not receive all the glory for being the only ultimate reason anyone gets saved. And because God withdraws His Spirit, and the people's faith is based on persuasive intellectual arguments, their faith is a *false faith* that **"rest[s] on men's wisdom"** instead of **"God's power"** (2:5) and they do not get saved.³¹² If *intellectual apologetics* is an integral part of our evangelism, we will encourage false conversions to Christ that have nothing to do with **"God's power."** Accordingly, Dr. Barrett interprets the Apostle here as saying:

[Gospel] preaching that depended for its effectiveness on the logical and rhetorical [persuasive] power of the preacher could engender only a faith that rested upon the same supports, and such a faith would be at the mercy of any superior show of logic and oratory, and thus completely insecure. . . . Paul's preaching, however, leads to a **faith** which, like itself, does **not depend on men's wisdom, but on God's power.**³¹³

We, in fact, know of people in our ministry who were well versed in *intellectual apologetics* and had attended weeks long retreats for this purpose, but did not become a Christian through it. It was precisely because of their great knowledge of Christian evidences that they were deceived into thinking they were Christians. Eventually, the Holy Spirit really did come into their life, but not because of more knowledge. It was, in fact, as they observed the supernatural character of real Christians in our ministry, that God revealed spiritual needs in their life.

All of this is why **"God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe"** (1:21).

³¹² For further discussion of the vital biblical topic of *false faith* see chapter 6.6.

³¹³ Barrett, 66.

When we please God instead of ourselves by embracing the apparent “**foolishness**” of the Gospel, instead of being embarrassed by it, God’s power is free to operate because salvation by God’s work and for God’s glory is being recognized and facilitated. On the other hand, when we think we must rescue the Gospel from accusations of “**foolishness**” with our humanly-invented, extra-biblical arguments, such *intellectual apologetics* in evangelism facilitates *human* power, work, and glory. The Apostle is warning us that *intellectual apologetics* threatens to rob God of His pleasure and glory, rob the Gospel of its power, rob salvation of its grace, and at least temporarily rob even the elect of their salvation.

On the necessary “**foolishness**” of the Gospel (cf. 1:18, 21, 23, 27), NT scholar Gordon Fee writes:

No mere human, in his or her right mind or otherwise, would ever have dreamed up God’s scheme for redemption—through a crucified Messiah. It is too preposterous, too humiliating, for a God [and for *us*?]. . . .

It is hard for those in the Christianized West, where the cross for almost nineteen centuries has been the primary symbol of faith, to appreciate how utterly mad the message of a God who got himself crucified by his enemies must have seemed to the first-century Greek or Roman. But it is precisely the depth of this scandal and folly that we *must* appreciate [and embrace and promote and boast about] if we are to understand both why the Corinthians were moving away from it toward wisdom and why it was well over a century before the cross appears among Christians as a symbol of their faith.³¹⁴

Contrary to *intellectual apologetics*, mere human reasoning is not the beginning of the knowledge of God. This is clearly proven by what unregenerated humanity has done with the clear message of Creation (cf. Rom 1:18-21).³¹⁵ Accordingly, God says, “**The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge**” (Prov 1:7; cf. 9:10; 15:33; Ps 111:10; Job 32:8 margin), not reasoned inquiry or debate. The Apostle believed, “**the Gospel . . . is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes**” (Rom 1:16), not philosophical debate. It would also seem that the Church is far too interested in making its message seem winsome and

³¹⁴ Fee, 68, 76.

³¹⁵ For further discussion of how unregenerated humanity has generally interpreted the revelation of Creation see section 4.13.A.

respectable to unbelievers, instead of relying on that supernatural convicting power that is reserved for the "foolish," "ridiculous" Gospel.

All of which is why we must preach a **"message of the cross"** (1:18) that will sound too simple, ugly, foolish, and even offensive to those who need salvation. Evangelistic messages that are more sophisticated, attractive, and "wise," than **"Christ crucified"** (1:23) are in danger of not being blessed with the Spirit's power to save people. God promises and provides the regenerating power necessary for anyone to receive the Gospel, only where the **"message of the cross"** (1:18) is preached, because only **"the Gospel . . . is the power of salvation."** (Rom 1:16). *Intellectual apologetics* reflects a lack of confidence and perhaps even a sense of being **"ashamed of the Gospel"** (Rom 1:16), in that it believes all sorts of things must be added to the Gospel in order for it to be persuasive and effective. In an important sense, such an approach to evangelism is unfortunately a "salvation of works."

As we have already noted, *intellectual apologetics* seems to have a fundamental misunderstanding of even why and how people get saved.³¹⁶ Even here in 1 Corinthians, the Apostle reminds his readers that there are two kinds of people: Those who think the message of **"Christ crucified"** is **"a stumbling block . . . and foolishness"** and those who think it is **"the wisdom of God"** for salvation (1:23-24). And the only and pivotal difference between the two is that **"God has called,"** (1:24, cf. v. 26) and **"God chose"** (1:27, 28) the latter to be saved.

Accordingly, the Apostle means to exclude any human claims to having a decisive part in their salvation when he concludes: **"It is because of Him [the God Who chose and called] that you are in Christ Jesus [saved]. . . Therefore, as it is written: 'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.'**" (1:30-31).

Unfortunately, *intellectual apologetics* for the purpose of evangelism invites the very boasting that Paul condemned. Boasting about how knowledgeable we are about the extra-biblical philosophical, historical, and scientific arguments for the Christian faith. Boasting about how we can become proficient in our knowledge to victoriously debate unbelievers and refute their arguments. Boasting that our extra-biblical apologetic knowledge may have saved someone who otherwise would not have been. Boasting that something other than the simple Gospel should be communicated for effective evangelism, or "pre-evangelism."

³¹⁶ For further discussion on our concerns about the misunderstanding in *intellectual apologetics* of how and why people get saved see section 2.2.C and 6.2.

Boasting that the solution to "**the message of the cross** [being perceived as] **foolishness to those who are perishing**" is *intellectual apologetics* rather than "**the power of God**" (1:18).³¹⁷

It is, in fact, the great value, effort, and trust we give *intellectual apologetics* in American Christianity that exposes our idolatrous mistrust and devaluing of "**the power of God**" for salvation. It belies a belief that people are ultimately saved by human works and persuasion rather than completely by God's works and grace. As Dr. Fee reminds us, "A God discovered by human wisdom will be . . . a source of human pride."³¹⁸

We fear at times that the emphasis on *intellectual apologetics* in American Christianity is more about justifying ourselves before the world rather than saving the world. Paul *wanted* to appear foolish in the eyes of the intellectuals of his day. "**God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe**" (1:21). But because of our pride, we despise the fact that the Gospel seems foolish to the world, which makes us look like fools for merely preaching it with no intellectual defense. And because we crave the world's respect more than the pleasure of God, the grace of God, the glory of God, and demonstrations of the power of God, we seek to add our *intellectual apologetics* to the message of the simple, unattractive, "foolish," and offensive Gospel.

The Apostle reminds us that our part in providing saving truth is communicating the message of Christ crucified for their sins—the simple Gospel. To claim we need to, and can do more, may reveal more human pride, and a "**knowledge**" which "**puffs up**" (1 Cor 8:1) than many would be willing to admit.

Along these lines, John MacArthur comments on 1 Corinthians 2:

Remembering God's sovereignty in salvation is the foundation of a proper perspective on evangelism. Salvation does not depend on clever evangelistic strategies, or the skill of the preacher, or a masterful presentation. It is not a human work at all; it is God's work. "I planted," Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth" (1 Cor. 3:6-7).

³¹⁷ Accordingly, Dr. Barrett remarks on 1:18: "It is at first surprising to find that the counterpart to *foolishness* is not 'true wisdom' or 'God's wisdom,' but God's *power* (52). This is again because the problem in evangelism is not an intellectual one but a supernatural spiritual one—namely spiritual death.

³¹⁸ Fee, 73.

In 1 Corinthians 2:1-4, Paul described his evangelistic approach to the Corinthians Although an accomplished scholar, adept at handling the Scriptures, Paul recognized that mere human persuasiveness saves no one. The other early evangelists also knew that truth; one searches the evangelistic messages in Acts in vain for any sort of clever manipulation. Instead, they are filled with interpretation and application of Scripture, and the proclamation of the gospel (cf. 2:14ff., 41; 3:12ff.; 5:42; 8:4-5; 13:15ff.; 16:30-32; 17:10-12).

Many in our day foolishly act as though God were wholly dependent on them to reach the lost. Nothing could be further from the truth. A. W. Tozer points out:

Probably the hardest thought of all for our natural egotism to entertain is that God does not need our help. We commonly represent Him as a busy, eager, somewhat frustrated Father hurrying about seeking help to carry out His benevolent plan to bring peace and salvation to the world; but as said the Lady Julian, "I saw truly that God doeth all-thing, be it never so little." The God who worketh all things surely needs no help and no helpers.

Too many missionary appeals are based upon this fancied frustration of Almighty God. An effective speaker can easily excite pity in his hearers, not only for the heathen but for the God who has tried so hard and so long to save them and has failed for want of support. I fear that thousands of young persons enter Christian service from no higher motive than to help deliver God from the embarrassing situation His love has gotten Him into and His limited abilities seem unable to get Him out of.³¹⁹

The most important element of any gospel presentation is clarity of content. To present the gospel clearly requires invoking the power of the Spirit and leaving the results to God.

³²⁰

Nonetheless, while the Apostle thought *intellectual apologetics* was dangerous in the context of evangelizing those seeking "wisdom," he adds, "**We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature**" (1 Cor 2:6) Christians, reflecting the

³¹⁹ A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (Harper & Row, 1975), 41.

³²⁰ MacArthur, *Commentary*, Acts 16:11-15.

value of *intellectual apologetics* for believers, as we have discussed elsewhere.³²¹

A.2) 2 Cor 4:1-5

Likewise, in 2 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul made it clear that it is the power of the Holy Spirit, rather than the power of our arguments, that is needed if people are to take even the first step toward Christ. The Apostle writes:

Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry [of evangelism], we do not lose heart. ² Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth [the Gospel, cf. next v.] plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

³ And even if our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, Who is the image of God. ⁵ For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.
(2 Cor 4:1-5)

There is no mention here of argumentative apologetics as a part of the Apostle's "**ministry**" (v. 1). Rather, he "**plainly**" preached the "**Gospel**" (vs. 2-3), and "**Jesus Christ as Lord**," apparently skipping the whole discussion of whether Christ existed, was God, or was alive, points which *intellectual apologists* deem so vital to prove to unbelievers. This was because the Apostle knew what we are ultimately up against: "**the god of this age [who] has blinded the minds of unbelievers**" (v. 4). The battle in evangelism is a spiritual one, not an intellectual one, and it is the Gospel that is promised the spiritual power to defeat the devil, not apologetic arguments.

A.3) Instructions to Timothy & Titus: *Don't argue with obstinate unbelievers*

³²¹ Regarding the value of *intellectual apologetics* for believers see section 6.12.C.1.

Again, we would suggest that the Apostle Paul explicitly prohibited the use of *intellectual apologetics* in his writings to his fellow Evangelists, Timothy and Titus. In the context of writing to men who were given the responsibility of defending and promoting the Gospel, he tells Timothy and Titus to **"command," "have nothing to do with," "avoid," "silence," "rebuke sharply,"** and **"warn"** unbelievers ³²² who believe and teach, **"false doctrines [and] myths," "meaningless talk," "old wives' tales," "controversies and quarrels about words," "godless chatter," "foolish and stupid arguments,"** and **"foolish controversies"** (1

³²² A careful study of how Paul describes the false teachers throughout the Pastoral Epistles strongly suggests that he views them as unbelievers who are actually opposed to the Gospel, rather than recipients of it (cf. 1 Tim 1:11; 18-20; 4:1-2; 6:3-5; Tit 1:15 **"those who are corrupted and do not believe,"** and Gordon Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, NIBC* [Hendrickson, 1988], 8, 40).

In fact, we would suggest that those Timothy is told to **"gently instruct"** in 2 Tim 2:25 are the believers who have been influenced by the false teachers, not **"those who oppose"** as the translations have it. Accordingly, Gordon Fee writes on this passage:

Finally, he must **gently** (cf. 1 Tim. 6:11; Titus 3:2) **instruct those who oppose him**. This last phrase presents some considerable difficulties. The verb (*paideuo*) can mean either to instruct or "to educate" (cf. *apaideutos* in v. 23; see esp. disc. on Titus 2:12), or to "correct" or "discipline" (cf. 1 Tim. 1:20). The greater difficulty is with the word translated **those who oppose him**, an extremely rare word that can refer either to the opponents themselves or to "those who are adversely affected" (Bernard) by the opponents. Is Timothy to discipline his opponents [which would not be gentle], as 1 Timothy 1:20 might allow? Or is he to instruct or re-educate those who have been "taken in" by the false teachers? This is not easy to determine, since both are elsewhere seen as entrapped by Satan (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1-2; 3:7; 6:9). It is probably safe to say that it at least includes the people who have been so ensnared and may also include the false teachers themselves (although 3:6, 9, 13 do not seem to be so hopeful). (Fee, 265; cf. Knight, 424 who says it could be either).

Dr. Fee is right to point out that Paul never holds much hope for converting false teachers, as we have pointed out in this section, which explains the response that Paul encourages (i.e. **"command," "have nothing to do with," "avoid," "silence," "rebuke . . . sharply,"** and **"warn"**), which would seem quite distinct from gently instructing them. Gentleness was hardly Christ's approach to the Pharisees who publicly opposed His teaching. This does not mean that we are to be harsh with heretics and skeptics, but the gentleness that Paul speaks of would be much more appropriate for the believers who have been affected by the false teaching, rather than the false teachers themselves.

Tim 1:3-4, 6; 4:7; 6:4; 2 Tim 2:16; 2:23; Tit 1:11, 13; 3:9; cf. 2 Tim 2:14).³²³

Such descriptions certainly apply to all of the modern pagan philosophies that Christians have been prone to debate, argue about, and interact with, rather than simply rebuking or avoiding their proponents.

The first reason that the Apostle suggests it is unwise to debate with such people is because there is little hope of helping them. He writes concerning someone who, **"does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching . . . [and] has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words"** that they are **"conceited [i.e. not receptive] and understand nothing [having a] . . . corrupt mind"** (1 Tim 6:3-5). Is this really the kind of people God wants us throwing our pearls to?

We are here reminded of Christ's instructions to His own Evangelists in such a circumstance: **"If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town"** (Matt 10:14). Accordingly, Timothy was not to **"have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments [and the people who espouse them], because . . . they produce quarrels,"** not conversions (2 Tim 2:23).

Rather than being important candidates for our evangelism, false teachers are, **"always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men oppose the truth—men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected"** (2 Tim 3:7-8).

Elsewhere the Apostle describes, **"rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group,"** as **"those who are corrupted and do not believe, [and for whom] nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. . . . They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good"** (Tit 1:15-16), including having a profitable apologetic debate. Obstinate

³²³ George Knight summarizes:

The false teachers are characterized by an interest in myths (1 Tim. 1:4; 4:7; Tit. 1:14; 2 Tim. 4:4) and genealogies (1 Tim. 1:4; Tit. 3:9), a concern with the law or a Jewish orientation (1 Tim. 1:7; Tit. 1:10, 14; 3:9), an interest in "antitheses" that they identify as "knowledge" (1 Tim. 6:20), a tendency toward controversy, argumentation, and speculation (1 Tim. 1:4, 6: 6:4, 20; Tit. 1:10; 3:9; 2 Tim. 2:14, 16, 23). (*The Pastoral Epistles (NIGTC)* [Eerdmans, 1992], 11).

unbelievers who would be argumentative about **"foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law,"** are to be considered **"warped and sinful"** (Tit 3:11), not seeking the truth.

The first reason that we are not to debate obstinate unbelievers is that there is little hope of helping them. The second reason is that it is not helpful for believers either. Such debate will **"promote controversies** [*ekzētesis* "useless speculation" BAGD ³²⁴] **rather than God's work—which is by faith"** (1 Tim 1:4). Likewise, **"controversies and quarrels about words** [with unbelieving false teachers] **result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth"** (1 Tim 6:4-5). Along the same lines, the Apostle says, **"foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels . . . are unprofitable and useless"** (Tit 3:9).

Also, the Apostle wrote:

Keep reminding them [believers] **of these things** [sound doctrine]. **Warn them before God against quarreling about words** [*logomachei*: lit. "fight about words/ideas"]; **it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen** [including other Christians!]. ¹⁵ **Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.** ¹⁶ **Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly.** ¹⁷ **Their teaching will spread like gangrene.** (2 Tim 2:14-17)

Obviously, the Apostle certainly is not condemning humble but serious debate about the meaning of Scripture among sincere believers, which is necessary to fulfill the biblical commands to defend sound doctrine. It is the unbiblical and **"godless chatter"** that we are not to debate over with obstinate unbelievers. ³²⁵ Accordingly, the Apostle says elsewhere:

Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care [sound doctrine, by humble, serious debate if necessary, cf. 2

³²⁴ See John Stott, *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus* (Intervarsity, 1996), 45.

³²⁵ Unfortunately, Knight seems quite wrong to suggest that by **"words"** in 2 Timothy 2:14 Paul is referring to "the kind of serious dispute about the meaning and significance of words relating to the Christian faith" (410). On the contrary, that kind of thing can be very commendable, God-honoring, helpful, and precisely what Dr. Knight does in his own fine commentary.

Tim 2:23-6]. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some [unbelievers] have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith. (1 Tim 6:20-21)

A third danger in trying so hard to accommodate the Christian faith to the thinking of unbelievers is that the Christian faith may be compromised in order to do so.

Fourthly, as we warned concerning the promotion of *intellectual apologetics* with unbelievers, arguing sound doctrine with false teachers may be motivated too much by our pride and an unhealthy desire to be "**quarrelsome**," (1 Tim 3:3) which actually disqualifies a man from being one of God's teachers (cf. 2 Tim 2:23-26).

B) Historical Support for Paul's Rejection of *Intellectual Apologetics* for Evangelism:

Lloyd-Jones: "apologetics has been the curse of evangelical Christianity for the last twenty to thirty years"

We have found a few, but important testimonies of respected Bible teachers of the past who seem to reflect our interpretation and application of 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5 and the rejection of *intellectual apologetics* in the context of evangelism. It was such a belief that led Ambrose (c. 339–397) to say long ago: "It is not by argument that it pleased God to save His people, for the kingdom of God consists in simplicity of faith, not in wordy contention,"³²⁶ which, unfortunately, describes a lot of Christian apologetics today.
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Martin Luther (1483-1546) memorably wrote:

[I]f the people will not believe [in the authority of Scripture], then be silent; for you are not held to compel them to receive Scripture as God's book or Word . . . [I]f they take exceptions and say: 'You preach that one should not hold to man's doctrine, and yet St. Peter and Paul, and even Christ, were men' - when you hear people of this stamp, who are so blinded and hardened as to deny that what Christ and the Apostles spoke and wrote is God's Word, or doubt it, then be silent, speak no more with them, and let them go. Only say:

³²⁶ St. Ambrose, *Exposition of the Christian Faith*, I.5.42. (online at www.ccel.org).

³²⁷ For further discussion of the limits of typical Christian apologetics see section 2.2.B-C.

'I will give you reasons enough from Scripture; if you will believe it, it is well; if not, go your way.'

Will you say: Then God's Word must suffer defeat? Leave that to God! . . . [It is] blasphemy [to say] 'St. Matthew, Paul, Peter were also men; therefore their doctrine is also the doctrine of men'. . . If you hear such thoroughly hardened and blinded blasphemers, turn from them or plug your ears; they are not worthy to be spoken to.³²⁸

We would suggest that Luther's approach would require more God-pleasing humility, than the pride that might motivate others to defend their faith. When we understand that people can only be saved where God is working, we will be more humble about trying to argue people into the kingdom.

Accordingly, Dr. Timothy Lull, former Professor of Systematic Theology at Pacific Lutheran, and a recognized authority on Luther, wrote:

Luther had come to think that the trouble with the whole tradition [i.e. *intellectual apologetics*] that had developed from [the Roman Catholic] Thomas Aquinas was that it tended to be dominated by its opening theological moves. Since the existence of God could be shown rationally or philosophically a style of theology developed that moved too smoothly from what could be known and comprehended clearly in creation, to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Though Thomas himself was clear that the saving mysteries could not be known by reason, much of the energy of subsequent theology went into these foundational [intellectual apologetical] questions.

This could obscure what St. Paul had taught so forcefully: the cross of Christ is not a concept compatible with human wisdom and philosophy, but only with deep folly and offense. The cross is not inspiring but a scandal. Therefore the true theologian is not the one who argues from visible and evident things (following Aristotle), but rather the one who has learned from the cross that the ways of God are hidden (*deus absconditus*), even in the revelation of Jesus Christ.³²⁹

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), was a man well-versed in the extra-biblical topics of *intellectual apologetics* including philosophy,

³²⁸ Quoted in Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. 1 (Concordia, 1950), 296.

³²⁹ Timothy Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 47.

history, and even science. Nonetheless, we are not aware of him using such *intellectual apologetics* in an evangelistic sermon. "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" is typical of the messages Edwards preached as a leader of the Great Awakening and the greatest revival ever to occur in our country. Accordingly, Edwards wrote something that *intellectual apologists* should hear:

The Gospel of God doesn't go abroad a begging for its evidence so much as some think; it has its highest and most proper evidence in itself. ³³⁰

This "evidence" for Edwards was the supernatural effects of believing the Gospel. ³³¹

Along the same lines, the great Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) said:

We want again Luthers, Calvins, Bunyans, Whitefields, men fit to mark eras, whose names breathe terror in our foes' ears. We have dire need of such. Whence will they come to us? They are the gifts of Jesus Christ to the Church, and will come in due time. He has power to give us back again a golden age of preachers, a time as fertile of great divines and mighty ministers as was the Puritan age, and when the good old truth is once more preached by men whose lips are touched as with a live coal from off the altar, this shall be the instrument in the hand of the Spirit for bringing about a great and thorough revival of religion in the land.

I do not look for any other means of converting men beyond the simple preaching of the gospel and the opening of men's ears to hear it. The moment the Church of God shall despise the pulpit, God will despise her. ³³²

Likewise, the Bible scholar Albert Barnes (1798-1870) commented on 1 Corinthians 1:17:

The preaching of the gospel depends for its success on the simple power of its truths, borne by the Holy Spirit to the hearts of people; and not on the power of argumentation. ³³³

³³⁰ Edwards, *Affections*, I.1.

³³¹ For evidence that Jonathan Edwards supported *virtue apologetics* see section 5.9.A.3.

³³² Charles H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Volume 1: The Early Years (Banner of Truth, 1962), v.

³³³ Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Findex.Com, 1999), 1 Cor 1:17.

At the same time, Charles Hodge (1797–1878) wrote in his commentary on 2 Corinthians 10:1-5:

The success of the gospel depends on its being presented, not as the word of man, but as the word of God; not as something to be proved, but as something to be believed. It was on this principle Paul acted . . . ³³⁴

Likewise, Dr. Hodge wrote in his *Systematic Theology*:

The great complaint against the apostles, especially in the Grecian cities (i.e. Corinth, Athens; cf. 1 Cor 1-2, Acts 17), was that they did not present their doctrines as propositions to be proved; they did not even state the philosophical grounds on which they rested or attempt to sustain them at the bar of reason.

Paul gave a twofold answer to this complaint: (1) Philosophy, the wisdom of men, had proved itself utterly incompetent to solve the great problems of God and the universe, of sin and redemption. It was in fact neither more nor less than foolishness, so far as all its speculations as to the things of God were concerned.

(2) The doctrines which the apostles taught were not the truths of reason, but matters of revelation to be received not on rational or philosophical grounds, but on the authority [and by the power] of God. The apostles were not philosophers, but witnesses; they did not argue using the words of man's wisdom, but simply declared the counsels of God. Faith in their doctrines, then, was to rest not on the wisdom of men, but on the powerful testimony of God. ³³⁵

A century later, D. M. Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981), a preacher who was known for his spiritual insight, said:

There is no hope for him [humanity] unless God in His kindness and grace and love chooses to *reveal Himself*. Now the full position for which we stand is that God *has* definitely done just this, and that until any enquirer comes to that point there is really no basis for discussion. . . .

³³⁴ Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Findex.Com, 2003). While the application is correct, Dr. Hodge derived this statement from what we believe to be an incorrect interpretation of 2 Corinthians 10:1-5 as argued below in section ?.

³³⁵ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Edward N. Gross ed., abridged version, (Presbyterians & Reformed Publishing, 1992), 441, underlining added.

Whatever his reason, Paul determined solemnly at Corinth 'not to know anything among them, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified'. This was a deliberate decision, reinforced by strong determination on his part. In other words, Paul decided that he was not going to waste his time with them in arguing about presuppositions. He was not going to start with a preliminary philosophical argument and then gradually lead them on into the truth. No! He begins by proclaiming authoritatively the Lord Jesus Christ. . . .

I have an increasing feeling that we must come back to this. I fear that [intellectual] apologetics has been the curse of evangelical Christianity for the last twenty to thirty years. I am not saying that apologetics is not necessary. But I am suggesting that, with a kind of worldly wisdom, we have been approaching the world on the grounds of apologetics instead of (with the apostle Paul), determining not to know anything 'save Christ crucified'. ³³⁶

We could hardly communicate our own concerns any better, and believe it is unfortunate, and against God's will, that Dr. Lloyd-Jones' words have not been more seriously considered. On the contrary, *intellectual apologetics* for the purpose of evangelism has become much, much more a part of Evangelical Christianity since his day. One wishes he could still be here and be a voice to return us to the Apostle's perspective on evangelism.

More recently, NT scholar Colin Brown has said:

Christianity was, at its inception, 'foolishness to the Greeks' and remains a scandal - something not readily acceptable to the ordinary reasonable man. Indeed there is something almost blasphemous in the notion that Christianity is or ought to be accepted because it 'makes better sense' than alternatives. Not only does it not commend itself to the contemporary world as reasonable and sensible; it ought to challenge and at times condemn our ordinary standards of what is reasonable and sensible. The God of the philosophers is not the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. ³³⁷

Intellectual apologetics is "blasphemous." Strong words, but it would seem more true than many would admit.

³³⁶ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Authority*, (Staples, 1958), 13-14, underlining added.

³³⁷ Colin Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind* (Eerdmans, 1984), 207, underlining added.

C) Why *Intellectual Apologetics* is Ineffective

The evidences for both the existence of God and the truth of the Gospel are more than sufficient for a rational human being to believe. The problem is not intellectual but spiritual. Unregenerated humans are spiritually dead and they are unable to perceive and process spiritual truth. Therefore, while evidences for the Christian faith are reasonably adequate to prove it, the *devil-darkened reason* that all unregenerate humans possess is unreasonable.³³⁸ B. B. Warfield explained:

Evidence cannot produce belief, faith, except in a mind open to this evidence, and capable of receiving, weighing, and responding to it. A mathematical demonstration is demonstrative proof of the proposition demonstrated. But even such a demonstration cannot produce conviction in a mind incapable of following the demonstration.³³⁹

Accordingly, we have demonstrated elsewhere from Romans chapter one that unbelievers already know that Creation proves God, it is just that they refuse to accept it.³⁴⁰ Unbelievers already know what *intellectual apologists* are attempting to prove to them, but it is not a mental, rational problem that keeps it from being accepted, but rather a spiritual one. This is precisely why God describes salvation in the following terms: **"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh"** (Ezek 36:26) because a **"heart of stone"** will not believe.³⁴¹

We do not reject *intellectual apologetics* because it is based on logic, as some *fideists* would do. Rather, we reject it because unbelievers have *devil-darkened reason* that will not accept the claims of the Gospel.

In our opinion, *intellectual apologists* do not adequately consider the limited epistemological capabilities of spiritually dead humans.

³³⁸ For further on the vital biblical concept of the *devil-darkened reason* of unregenerate humanity see chapters 4.12-4.14.

³³⁹ B. B. Warfield, "On Faith In Its Psychological Aspects," in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Oxford University Press, 1932; Repr. 2000 by Baker), IX: 335-6.

³⁴⁰ For further discussion regarding the "insanity of humanity" particularly regarding Creation see section 4.13.A.

³⁴¹ For a particularly good critique of *natural theology* see Peter Jensen, *The Revelation of God* (Intervarsity, 2002), 98-117.

For example, William Lane Craig, a foremost *classical apologist* writes:

On balance, then, it seems to me that on the basis of the *kalam cosmological argument*, a person who is sufficiently informed and whose faculties are functioning properly ought to agree that it is more likely than not that a Creator of the universe exists. This argument can thus serve as one link in the natural theologian's cumulative case for theism.³⁴²

Dr. Lane admits that two things are necessary for his approach to apologetics to be successful. First, the person must be "sufficiently informed." We have noted elsewhere that the fact that such apologetic arguments for God's existence are so complex, they are significantly limited in their usefulness for most people.³⁴³ How many people have even heard of the "*kalam cosmological argument*" let alone understand it? Secondly, Dr. Lane admits that the person's mental "faculties" must be "functioning properly" which the Apostle clearly denies for unregenerated humanity as discussed elsewhere (cf. Rom 1:18-31; 8:1-9; Eph 4:17-19).³⁴⁴

Intellectual apologists are wrong to promote intellectual arguments as an important means of preparing people for salvation. Accordingly, we can address some of the statements made in Christianity concerning the evangelistic value of *intellectual apologetics*.

Sean McDowell writes:

[*Intellectual*] apologetics is critical for ministry today . . . [because] human nature . . . does not change. People have questions, and we are responsible to provide helpful answers. . . we are rational, personal beings who bear the image of God."³⁴⁵

Likewise, the rightly respected Reformed Teacher Tim Keller, author of the bestselling apologetic book, *The Reason for God*, says:

³⁴² William Lane Craig in *Five Views on Apologetics*, Steven Cowan, ed. (Zondervan, 2000), 51.

³⁴³ For further critique of the complexity of *intellectual apologetics* see section 5.14.F.

³⁴⁴ For further discussion regarding the "insanity of humanity" particularly regarding Creation see section 4.13.A.

³⁴⁵ Sean McDowell, in *Apologetics for a New Generation*, Sean McDowell, ed. (Harvest House, 2009), 17.

Christians are saying that the rational [argument] isn't part of evangelism. The fact is, people are rational. They do have questions. You have to answer those questions."³⁴⁶

Along the same lines, Joel Hunter, senior pastor of Northland church in Longwood, Florida has said, "We need to preach [the Gospel] with apologetics in mind, with a rational explanation and defense of the Christian faith in mind."³⁴⁷

On the contrary, as demonstrated elsewhere from Scripture, unregenerated humans *are not* rational, but *insane* when it comes to perceiving and accepting spiritual truths.³⁴⁸ And how do these men reconcile their belief with the Apostle's mandate: "**¹ When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. . . . My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.** (1 Cor 1:1-2, 4-5)

Yet, *intellectual apologists* insist that God has used such apologetics to lead people to Christ. Norman Geisler writes:

The charge is made that no one ever comes to Christ through apologetics. If this implies that the Holy Spirit never uses apologetic evidence to bring people to Christ, this is clearly false. C. S. Lewis noted that "nearly everyone I know who has embraced Christianity in adult life has been influenced by what seemed to him to be at least a probable argument for Theism." Lewis is an example of an atheist who came to Christ under the influence of apologetics. God has used evidence and reason in some way to reach virtually all adults who come to Christ.³⁴⁹

This presents a difficult question. On one hand, the Apostle said he would not use *intellectual apologetics* in his evangelism ministry, and in the following chapters (5.12-5.13) we demonstrate this approach to evangelism is never found in the Bible. On the other

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 20.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 25.

³⁴⁸ For further discussion regarding the "insanity of humanity" particularly regarding Creation see section 4.13.A.

³⁴⁹ Norm Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Baker Book House, 1976), 41.

hand, we have people claiming that it played a significant part in leading them to salvation.

One possible response is that there may be some confusion on the part of those who testify this way. We document elsewhere how even Josh McDowell has portrayed *intellectual apologetics* as having a primary place in his salvation, but writing recently that it was actually *virtue apologetics* that initially drew him to Christianity.³⁵⁰

Secondly, for those who had an especially powerful experience with *intellectual apologetics* in their salvation, we would suggest the possibility that it was because the Spirit had already come into their life at that point. Conversion is a mysterious process, and often people do not know the exact moment it occurs. Only afterwards, as they experience and observe changes in their life, do they recognize conversion has occurred. The point at which intellectual evidence for the faith started becoming convincing, could be after they were regenerated. Everyone who would claim to have been saved through *intellectual apologetics* was indwelt at some point in that journey and it could have been earlier in the process rather than later. One thing is for certain. If the Holy Spirit does not regenerate a person, no spiritual truth will be effective, including the best intellectual arguments for the faith.

May we suggest again that one fundamental problem with some *intellectual apologists* is an unbiblical understanding of even how people get saved? The Bible teaches that God unconditionally (i.e. by grace) chose who would be saved **"before the creation of the world"** (Eph 1:4; cf. Rom 11:5-7; 1 Cor 1:26-31), and **"those He predestined,"** He will call and regenerate so that they may be **"justified"** (Rom 8:30). The process of salvation is initiated and completed by God, because, **"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned"** (1 Cor 2:14). All we would suggest here is that many *intellectual apologists* give more credit to unregenerated humans than is due, and assume more human, rather than divine ingredients in the process of conversion than is biblically warranted.³⁵¹

The "epistemological problem" has never been, nor ever will be a philosophical one. The problem has always been, and always will be *pride*, not philosophy. As the Presbyterian theologian Donald Bloesch says:

³⁵⁰ For further regarding Josh McDowell's testimony see section 5.10.C.

³⁵¹ For further discussion on the ingredients of *saving faith* see chapter 6.3.

Against philosophical irrationalism [of which postmodernism is an example], [Christian] theology contends that it is sin, not reason, that constitutes the major obstacle to true understanding. Against rationalism, theology says that it is not reason but divine grace that brings us into contact with ultimate reality.³⁵²

Pride is why people won't believe even the very first sentence of the Bible, and **"When pride comes, then comes disgrace** [because of foolishness], and only **"with humility comes wisdom"** (Prov 11:2). **"Jesus said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children'"** (Matt 11:25).

God has always been in the business of shaming the worldly wise and teaching the spiritually humble. Humility is the key to really knowing the truth, and God ultimately holds that key. We cannot humble people, and it is only to the extent that someone is humble that they will receive, recognize, and retain the truth.

While the symptoms of the epistemological disease of human pride will vary, the cure has always been the same one Christ prescribed when He preached *unapologetically*: **"Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near"** (Matt 4:17). One will search in vain to find a modern, philosophical, intellectual apologetic approach to unbelief in the teachings of Christ. We seriously doubt that the intellectual pride of contemporary postmodernists, humanists, atheists, or other modern skeptics is any different than the arrogance and ignorance that Christ encountered, and no doubt His response would be the same today: **"Repent."**

Pastoral Practices

A pastor must seriously consider the above two sections regarding his own evangelism and evangelism in his church. First, is the interpretation of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5 accurate? How do we apply the Apostle's instruction in the Pastoral Epistles regarding debating with unbelievers? Accordingly, what elements of *intellectual apologetics* in evangelism need to be eliminated so that **"the Gospel"** will remain **"foolishness to those who are perishing,"** and **"the message of the cross"** not **"emptied of its power"** to save the elect (1 Cor 1:17-18)?

³⁵² Donald Bloesch, *A Theology of Word & Spirit* (InterVarsity, 1992), 59.

D) Why *Virtue Apologetics* but not *Intellectual Apologetics*?

A final question that can be addressed here is why would the Apostle encourage and pursue *virtue apologetics* as demonstrated in chapter 5.4, but denounce *intellectual apologetics* as argued above? If proofs of the Gospel truly are wasted on the unregenerate, wouldn't even the evidence of supernatural character be wasted as well?

The best answer would seem to be that while the Apostle refused to *prove* the Gospel, he was very keen on communicating it in the most effective way. *Intellectual apologetics* takes all kinds of detours instead of simply communicating the simple, powerful Gospel. On the other hand, *virtue* is a necessary characteristic of the messenger of anything to be believed.

For example, it is our responsibility to communicate the Gospel clearly and in the language of the hearer, all of which is necessary for even the simple Gospel to do its work (cf. Col 4:4). Likewise, it must be communicated with a perceived sincerity and integrity which the virtue of the preacher can provide. God did not make humans to understand a message not in their language. Likewise, He did not make humans, unregenerated or regenerated, to trust communication from people who do not seem trustworthy. Accordingly, as we demonstrated in Paul's ministry, being a virtuous person is a basic necessity to communicating the "**message of the cross**" (1 Cor 1:18).³⁵³ This is true even if the elect are to be saved. *Virtue apologetics* is the power God uses to draw people to Him, much like the Gospel is the power God uses to save them (cf. Rom 1:16).

This is not true of all that *intellectual apologetics* would add to the communication of the simple Gospel. Virtue is a necessary accompaniment that *facilitates* the effective communication of even a simple Gospel. Philosophical, scientific, and historical arguments *add* elements to the presentation of the Gospel that Paul warns detract from it, making evangelism too human-centered and works-oriented.

Another difference is that *virtue apologetics* requires humility and is blessed by God to engender humility in unbelievers. *Intellectual apologetics*, however, can be motivated by pride, and its argumentative nature can even engender more pride in the

³⁵³ For further on *virtue apologetics* in Paul's ministry see section 5.4.A.

unbeliever regarding their own "superior knowledge." This is certainly another reason that the Apostle refused to play the game of the Greek philosophers in his evangelistic work.

Our point here is not that God is uninterested in proving the exclusivity of the Christian faith, but that the *intellectual apologetics* that so many deem so important is not God's chosen means. In other words, maybe the efforts of Christian apologists and evangelists would be best spent on describing and *demonstrating* born again Christianity (*virtue apologetics*), rather than debating Darwinism, humanism, atheism, agnosticism, postmodernism, and whatever other "ism" that contradicts the Gospel of Christ.

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Father, we thank you for the power of the Gospel to save. Help us to trust it more than our arguments. Help us to be humble in our evangelism because we understand conversion is Your work. And may we be virtuous ambassadors of this message.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) How would you describe *intellectual apologetics*?
- 2) What are some points we make from 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5? Would you agree or disagree and why?
- 3) What practical conclusions should we draw from the fact that the Apostle commanded Timothy and Titus not to argue with unbelievers about the doctrines of the Christian faith?
- 4) Why would D. M. Lloyd-Jones say, "I fear that apologetics has been the curse of evangelical Christianity for the last twenty to thirty years"? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 5) Why is *intellectual apologetics* ineffective?
- 6) What is a possible explanation for those who claim an especially powerful experience with *intellectual apologetics* in their conversion?
- 7) Why do we suggest that the Apostle Paul encouraged and pursued *virtue apologetics* but denounced *intellectual apologetics*? Do you agree or disagree and why?

Publications & Particulars

Chapter 5.12

**Rescuing Other Scriptures from
*Intellectual Apologetics***

Table of Topics

- A) Demolishing Arguments?:** *2 Cor 10:3-5*
- B) Defending and Confirming the Gospel?:** *Phil 1:7*
- C) Contending for the Gospel?:** *Phil 1:27*
- D) Know How to Answer Everyone?:** *Col 4:5-6*
- E) Persuading Men?:** *2 Cor 5:11*

Publications & Particulars

Primary Points

- *Intellectual apologetics* is too prone to taking every biblical reference to "defending the faith" or making a "defense" as support for their ministry.
- Paul's reference to "**demolish[ing] arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God**" (2 Cor 10:5) referred to his teaching ministry and "**the authority the Lord gave**" him "**for building . . . up**" the Corinthian Christians in their faith.
- Paul's reference to "**defending and confirming the Gospel**" (Phil 1:7) is referring to the formal trial he was awaiting in prison at the very time he wrote the Philippians.
- Neither is his reference to "**contending as one man for the faith of the Gospel**" (Phil 1:27) a reference to *intellectual apologetics* in contradiction to his rejection of this very thing in 1 Corinthians. The Apostle may be encouraging the Philippians to unitedly *spread* "**the faith of the Gospel**" or *defend* it against false teachers in the Church, just as Jude had.
- Paul's reference to our "**conversation**" with "**outsiders**" being "**seasoned with salt**" (Col 4:5-6) relates to its virtuous, not eloquent

There are, of course, several passages of Scripture that *intellectual apologetics* uses to support their place in the evangelism of unbelievers. We have already discussed 1 Peter 3:15 and found it to actually support *virtue apologetics* and not the *intellectual* kind at all.³⁵⁴ Likewise, we have come to a similar conclusion regarding other passages.

Part of the problem is that every reference to “defending the faith” or making a “defense” is claimed by *intellectual apologists* as support for their ministry. For example, Norm Geisler writes in the context of offering Scripture to support *intellectual apologetics*:

Titus 1:9 makes knowledge of Christian [intellectual] evidences a requirement for church leadership. An elder in the church should “hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”³⁵⁵

The problem with Dr. Geisler’s application of this Scripture is that the contents of “**the trustworthy message**” Titus was to protect had absolutely nothing to do with the extra-biblical, philosophical, scientific “evidences” that Dr. Geisler refers to. The “**trustworthy message**” was the doctrines of Scripture and the Gospel.

In a similar way, Jude’s encouragement to “**contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints**” (Jude 1:3) is not an encouragement to pursue *intellectual apologetics* as too many assume. Jude goes to explain what truth is being attacked when he writes: “**For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord**” (v. 4). The issue of “**the faith**” that Jude wanted his readers to “**contend for**” involved the effort of some to “**change the grace of our God into a license for immorality**” and had nothing to do with extra-biblical arguments to defend the faith.

A) Demolishing Arguments?: 2 Cor 10:3-5

³⁵⁴ For a correct interpretation of the pivotal statement in 1 Peter 3:15 see section 5.4.B.2.

³⁵⁵ Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (BECA) [Baker, 1999], 37.

A passage that is commonly used to support the need for *intellectual apologetics* is 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. Accordingly, Norm Geisler writes on this passage:

This means we should confront issues in . . . the expressed thoughts of others that prevent . . . them from knowing God. This is what apologetics is all about.³⁵⁶

The full passage reads:

¹ **By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am “timid” when face to face with you, but “bold” when away!** ² **I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world.**

³ **For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does.** ⁴ **The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.** ⁵ **We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.** ⁶ **And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.**

⁷ **You are looking only on the surface of things. If anyone is confident that he belongs to Christ, he should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as he.** ⁸ **For even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than pulling you down, I will not be ashamed of it.** ⁹ **I do not want to seem to be trying to frighten you with my letters.** ¹⁰ **For some say, “His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing.”** ¹¹ **Such people should realize that what we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present.** (2 Cor 10:1-11)

Perhaps the most popular application of this passage is to focus on the Apostle's statement that **“we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ”** (v. 5), and suggest he is referring to the need for the individual Christian to personally and continually monitor their thoughts, ensuring they reflect the truth of Christ. This is true, of course, and there are other Scriptures that clearly encourage this (cf. Phil 4:8; Rom 13:14; 1 Cor 14:20).

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

However, the Apostle's wording is not in the first person here as if he is describing something he does to himself, and which we are to individually apply to ourselves. Rather, he is describing what the Apostles hope to do in their ministry *to others* against the **"strongholds . . . arguments and every pretension"** they believe, and **"every thought"** and even **"every act"** **"that sets itself up against the knowledge of God"** (vs. 4-6). The Apostle is talking about his ministry to help others reject lies and believe the truth.

Accordingly, proponents of *intellectual apologetics* are understandably eager to apply Paul's references of demolishing **"strongholds . . . arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God"** (10:4-5). The implication is that the Apostle is referring to his efforts with unbelievers to refute their anti-Christian philosophies in order to prepare them for the Gospel.³⁵⁷ The NLT would seem to reflect this perspective when it reads: **"With these weapons we break down every proud argument that keeps people from knowing God. With these weapons we conquer their rebellious ideas."** While such a translation helps to see that the Apostle is speaking of his ministry to others, refuting the first popular perspective noted above, it seems to imply that the Apostle is speaking of his evangelistic ministry to unbelievers. We don't believe either interpretation reflects the Apostle's intent.

It would seem that several contextual clues point to the Apostle speaking of his teaching ministry to the Corinthian believers to help them grow in their Christian faith. Most commentators agree that Paul is defending his ministry against critics in Corinth who say that, **"Paul [is] . . . 'timid' when face to face . . . but 'bold' when away!"** (v. 1); and **"His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing"** (v. 10).³⁵⁸

³⁵⁷ Commentators suggesting that Paul is specifically speaking of defending the Gospel to unbelievers in 2 Corinthians 10:1-5 include Albert Barnes (*Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM [Findex.Com, 1999]), Charles Hodge (*Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM [Findex.Com, 2003], and Colin Kruse (*2 Corinthians*, TNTC [Eerdmans, 1987], 173-4).

³⁵⁸ See C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (BNTC) [Hendrickson, 1997], 254. Likewise, Paul Barnett suggests:

His immediate application in this verse [4], however, may be to his detractors among the Corinthians. . . . Perhaps Paul has in mind [in verse 5]. . . the self-elevated Corinthian critics . . . (*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT) [Eerdmans, 1997], 465)

Accordingly, this is Paul's theme in the proceeding chapters and perhaps is summed up in chapter 12 when he writes, **"Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you [as the purpose of our ministry]? We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ; and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening"** (12:19). And it is this very spiritual **"strengthening"** that Paul is speaking of back in chapter 10.

Thus, the key statement to Paul's thoughts is 10:8: **"even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you [the Corinthian Christians] up rather than pulling you down, I will not be ashamed of it."** And it is his ministry and **"authority"** from **"the Lord . . . for building up"** the Corinthian believers that the Apostle is speaking of in terms of his teaching against their **"strongholds . . . arguments and every pretension"** and **"every thought"** and even **"every act"** **"that sets itself up against the knowledge of God"** (vs. 4-6). Accordingly, his goal for this church is **"to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete"** (v. 6). Whatever the Apostle means in this rather difficult statement, he is not primarily talking about a ministry of evangelism, but rather discipleship.

Therefore, we believe the Apostle's references to teaching against the Corinthian's **"strongholds . . . arguments and every pretension"** and **"every thought"** and even **"every act"** **"that sets itself up against the knowledge of God"** (vs. 4-6) to be analogous to the ministry he described to the Colossian church:

²⁴ **Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of His body, which is the church.**

²⁵ **I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness—** ²⁶ **the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.** ²⁷ **To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.**

However, Dr. Barnett does not seem consistent in this application, suggesting that Paul's reference to **"the knowledge of God"** be confined to the Gospel (465).

Calvin seems to embrace all three of the contexts we list here, and evidently doesn't see any problem with that. (online at www.ccel.org, *in loc.*)

²⁸ We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. ²⁹ To this end I labor, struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me.

¹ I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. ² My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴ I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. ⁵ For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is. (Col 1:24-2:5)

While these teaching ministries described in 2 Corinthians 10 and Colossians 1-2 certainly included defending the Gospel, it was not for the purpose of persuading unbelievers, but protecting and disciplining believers, helping them be "**obedient to Christ**" (2 Cor 10:5), their "**obedience**" to be "**complete**" (v. 6), for "**building . . . up**" their Christian faith (v. 8) and "**strengthening**" them as Christians (12:19). Accordingly, the "**knowledge of God**" (2 Cor 10:5) which Paul wishes to defend cannot be confined to only the Gospel.

In addition, those who would claim that in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 the Apostle is speaking of arguing with unbelievers about their pagan philosophies for the purpose of evangelism, completely forget that this is precisely what he had told the Corinthians he would not do (cf. 1 Cor 1:17-2:5).³⁵⁹

It also ignores Paul's clear admission in this very letter that the real obstacle unbelievers have to getting saved is not intellectual, but spiritual, because, "**The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ**" (2 Cor 4:4; cf. 1 Cor 2:14).³⁶⁰

B) Defending and Confirming the Gospel?: *Phil 1:7*

³⁵⁹ For this interpretation of 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5 see section 5.11.A.1.

³⁶⁰ For further discussion on the mental state of unregenerated humans see chapters 4.12-14.

The Apostle wrote the Philippians: “**whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the Gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me. . . . I am put here for the defense of the Gospel**” (Phil 1:7, 16). Many interpret the Apostle’s reference to “**defending [apologia] and confirming [bebaiōsei] the Gospel**” (Phil 1:7) and working for its “**defense [apologian]**,” as clear biblical support that he was habitually involved in *intellectual apologetics*.

Along these lines, Gordon R. Lewis, Professor of Systematic Theology at Denver Seminary has written:

In no way does I Corinthians [1:17-2:5] oppose speaking in favor of the wisdom of God. Paul does not contradict his own ministry, “I am appointed for the defense of the Gospel” (Phil 1:16). And all members of the church share “in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel.” (Phil 1.7) ³⁶¹

Dr. Lewis shared this in a book promoting *intellectual apologetics* and the defense of the Gospel to unbelievers using philosophical and/or scientific arguments. In response we would say first, the Apostle said that the Philippians “**share in God’s grace with**” him, not in a ministry of apologetics as Dr. Lewis claims. Secondly, notice that Dr. Lewis is willing to completely set aside Paul’s clear denunciation of using “**superior wisdom,**” “**preaching . . . with wise and persuasive words,**” or preaching anything “**except Jesus Christ and Him crucified**” (1 Cor 2:1-5) and intentionally making the Gospel seem foolish to unbelievers. And Dr. Lewis sets aside Paul’s clear teaching by assuming that the kind of “**defense of the Gospel**” (Phil 1:16) the Apostle is speaking of in Philippians is Dr. Lewis’ *intellectual apologetics*.

Rather, we believe the Apostle is referring to the formal trial he is awaiting in prison for at the very time he wrote the Philippians. In fact, he says, “**I am put here** [in prison awaiting trial before government authorities] **for the defense of the Gospel.**” (Phil 1:16). ³⁶² As Dr. Barnes writes: “He is probably referring to the time when he made his defense before Nero, and vindicated himself from the charges which had been brought against him.” ³⁶³ And as we will see in a moment, the numerous such defenses the Apostle

³⁶¹ Gordon R. Lewis, *Testing Christianity’s Truth Claims* (Moody, 1976).

³⁶² Dr. MacArthur only sees this view as a possibility (Phil 1:3-8). Peter O’Brien says our view is “likely” but not complete, suggesting that both views that Dr. Martin describes below are true. (*The Epistle to the Philippians NIGTC* [Eerdmans, 1991], *in loc.*)

³⁶³ Barnes, Phil 1:7.

made before government authorities involved Paul's testimony of a changed life and his character (i.e. *virtue apologetics*) and never the philosophical or scientific arguments of *intellectual apologetics*.

NT scholar Ralph P. Martin succinctly describes two common views of what Paul is referring to in Philippians 1:7, 16:

Paul's being *in chains or defending and confirming the gospel* may be interpreted in two ways. It may refer to his ministry of preaching [in general]: so [J. A.] Motyer.³⁶⁴ In this case 'defending the gospel' means disarming prejudice and overcoming objections to the truth (for this sense see 2 Cor. 7:11), and 'confirming' means the positive declaration of the truth.

Or the phrase may be taken as having to do with his imprisonment [currently in Rome when he writes the Philippians]. In this case, *defending* and *confirming*, *apologia* and *bebaiosis*, are legal terms which describe his trial before the imperial court (cf. 2 Tim. 4:16 [and 1 Cor 9:3; Acts 22:1; 25:16]) or his provincial judges. The second view is taken by recent writers, such as [F. F.] Bruce³⁶⁵ and [G. F.] Hawthorne,³⁶⁶ following Moulton-Milligan³⁶⁷ who state that, on the evidence of the papyri, 'the word (*bebaiosis*) must always be read with the technical [legal-"court room"] sense in mind'.³⁶⁸

The first reason to reject the notion that Paul is speaking of a consistent practice in his evangelistic ministry to engage in "disarming prejudice and overcoming objections," perhaps in the manner that *intellectual apologetics* would suggest, is that Paul denounced this very kind of ministry in 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5³⁶⁹ and there are no descriptions of him doing otherwise in the NT. The second reason is to remember the emphasis that the Apostle placed on *virtue apologetics* to defend himself throughout his writings.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁴ J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians*, 1984.

³⁶⁵ F. F. Bruce, *Philippians*, 1983.

³⁶⁶ G. F. Hawthorne, "The Interpretation and Translation of Philippians 1:28b," *ExpTim* 95 (1983), 80-81.

³⁶⁷ J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, (1914-1930).

³⁶⁸ Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians TNTC* (Eerdmans, 1987, repr. 1999), 65.

³⁶⁹ For further discussion of Paul's rejection of *intellectual apologetics* at 1 Cor 1:17-2:5 see section 5.11.A.1.

³⁷⁰ For further discussion of Paul's emphasis on defending himself with his character (*virtue apologetics*) see section 5.4.A.3.

In addition, the consistent use of *bebaios* ["**confirming**" Phil 1:7] in ancient Greek writings to refer to a legal defense before a judge would seem conclusive. In addition, this is a consistent use of *apologia* ["**defending**" Phil 1:7] in the NT as well. Accordingly, Governor Festus tells King Agrippa, "**I told them that it is not the Roman custom to hand over any man before he has faced his accusers and has had an opportunity to defend [apologian] himself against their charges**" (Acts 25:16).

Therefore, if we want to know what the Apostle meant by "**defending [apologia] and confirming [bebaiōsei] the Gospel**" (Phil 1:7), we can look at rather detailed descriptions of him doing this. We have written in chapter 5.4:

[W]hen Paul spoke to an angry crowd in Jerusalem, he introduced his speech with, "**Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense [apologia]**" (Acts 22:1). What then was the Apostle's apologetic approach? He sought to prove that Christ had personally commissioned him to, "**be a witness to all men**" (v. 15) of salvation in Christ by reminding them that he had previously, "**persecuted the followers of this Way to their death**" (v. 4; cf. vs. 5, 19-20; 2 Tim 1:12-13). He testified to his supernaturally changed life in order to provide proof for his supernatural claims.

Likewise, before Governor Festus and King Agrippa, Paul made "**his defense [apelogeito]**" of his Christian faith (Acts 26:1) to "**persuade**" them (vs. 28-29). And he simply relates that a personal encounter with Christ (cf. vs. 12-18) supernaturally transformed him from a man who was violently persecuting Christianity (cf. vs. 10-11), into a man who was sacrificially preaching Christianity (cf. vs. 19-23).

Along the same lines, in answer to the accusations of false Apostles in Corinth, the Apostle said, "**This is my defense [apologia] to those who sit in judgment on me**" (1 Cor 9:3), and then proceeded to describe in detail how he had ministered there without expecting money, which set him apart from his adversaries (cf. 1 Cor 9:1-18).³⁷¹

This is *virtue apologetics*, not the *intellectual* kind.

Regarding the Apostle's reference to "**confirming the Gospel**" (Phil 1:7) we have absolutely no biblical evidence that this referred to intellectual arguments. However, we have considerable biblical data that the Apostles uniquely confirmed the Gospel by performing miracles (Acts 14:3; cf. 2 Cor 2:12; Heb 2:3-4). However, while *super-supernaturalists* erroneously claim we can and should do the

³⁷¹ Excerpt from section 5.4.A.3.

same today,³⁷² the “**greater works**” (John 14:12) Jesus promised us was the supernatural moral transformation that comes with the preaching of the Gospel and regeneration.³⁷³ And this is precisely what the “**demonstration of the Spirit’s power**” (1 Cor 2:5) was in Corinth, and the Apostle wrote of such supernatural confirmation of the Gospel in Thessalonica:

For we know, brothers loved by God, that He has chosen you,⁵ because our Gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. . . .⁶ You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.⁷ And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.⁸ The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it,⁹ for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. (1 Thess 1:4-9)

Such confirmation of the Gospel by supernatural *virtue* rather than intellectual arguments was something the Apostle was very concerned about. Accordingly, he wrote the Corinthians: “**My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power,⁵ so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power**” (1 Cor 2:4-5).

In summary, then, the Apostle’s reference to “**defending [apologia] and confirming [bebaiōsei] the Gospel**” (Phil 1:7) as he awaited trial in prison was to just one of numerous such defenses he made before government authorities in which he used *virtue apologetics*, not the *intellectual* kind.

C) Contending for the Gospel?: Phil 1:27

³⁷² For refutation of the “power evangelism” view that the modern preaching of the Gospel is to be accompanied and confirmed by physical miracles of healing see chapter 11.6.

³⁷³ For arguments that Christ’s reference to Christians doing “**greater [miraculous] works**” (John 14:12) is to the spiritual miracle of regeneration through the preaching of the Gospel, instead of greater or more physical miracles than Christ performed, see section 10.5.B.2.

At Philippians 1:27 the Apostle writes to the believers:

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man [*synathlountes*: "shared struggle"] **for the faith of the Gospel.**

We have discussed the obvious elements of *virtue apologetics* in this verse elsewhere.³⁷⁴ Here we are concerned with what he meant by the Philippian church unitedly "**contending . . . for the faith of the Gospel.**" Again, some may see allusions to making *intellectual* defenses of the Gospel to unbelievers. But would Paul tell the Philippians to do something that he had told the Corinthians he did not do? We doubt it. Accordingly, there are two interpretations that are better.

One is that the Apostle may be encouraging them to unitedly spread "**the faith of the Gospel.**" This would be analogous to his thanksgiving of their "**partnership in the Gospel**" (1:5) which obviously included their financial support (cf. 4:15-16), but could have included evangelism in Philippi as well.

However, some understand Paul to be encouraging the Philippians to *defend* "**the faith** [doctrine] **of the Gospel**" against false teachers in the Church. As demonstrated above, Jude's reference to "**contend[ing] for the faith**" (1:3) referred to this very thing. Accordingly, Dr. Martin shares this view convincingly:

What object are they striving to maintain? *The faith* seems to be the objective content of their testimony, the 'grand deposit' of Christian truth committed to the church (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:14; Jude 3) to proclaim to the world. 'Faith of our fathers! Holy faith' has been the rallying call of God's people in every age, and never more so than in days of persecution and doctrinal laxity. 'There is no agreement (possible) unless there is agreement as to what constitutes the gospel' (Motyer). The enmity of surrounding paganism and the more insidious inroad of false teaching (3:18ff) will set the Philippians on their guard, and inspire them to maintain the faith against the latter, and to resist boldly the former.³⁷⁵

³⁷⁴ For further commentary on Philippians 1:17 see section 5.4.A.1.

³⁷⁵ Martin, 89. Dr. MacArthur agrees (Phil 1:27-30). Dr. O'Brien merely offers the rather generic interpretation: "[T]he Philippians are to present

D) Salty conversation?: Col 4:5-6

The Apostle wrote the Colossians:

Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. (Col 4:5-6)

Once again, many have used the Apostle's words to suggest that God expects Christians to be so knowledgeable about the extra-biblical, philosophical, scientific, and historical arguments for the defense of Christianity that they "**may know how to answer everyone.**" Actually, this is just one more passage of Scripture that speaks clearly of *virtue apologetics*, and has unfortunately been obscured by *intellectual apologists*.

The Apostle's reference to being "**wise**" here has nothing to do with being knowledgeable about intellectual arguments for the Christian faith, but rather, concerns the way we "**act**" in relation to unbelievers.³⁷⁶ As we have demonstrated elsewhere in *KOG*, "wisdom" in the Bible is synonymous with being moral, not smart.

a united and unwavering front against the attacks of the enemy in their conflict for the Gospel. (151)

³⁷⁶ Dr. Barnes comments on the meaning of "**wise**" here: "That is, conduct uprightly and honestly. Deal with them on the strictest principles of integrity, so that they may not have occasion to reproach the religion which you profess. (Col 4:5)

N. T. Wright says:

Be wise in the way you act is literally 'walk in wisdom,' that is, follow Christ as God's pattern for full and authentic human living. Their lives are to reflect this wisdom *towards outsiders*. Paul knew only too well (1 Cor 10:32) the importance of giving the world no reason to criticize or gossip about the behavior of Christians. Blameless life lays the foundation for gracious witness. (*Colossians and Philemon* (TNTC) [Eerdmans, 1986, repr. 1999], 153)

Peter T. O'Brien interprets acting "wise" here as follows:

These readers are to be godly, giving no occasion for valid criticism (cf. 1 Cor 10:32, "Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God"). They should be tactful on one hand, yet bold in their Christian witness to outsiders on the other. (*Colossians, Philemon* (WBC) [Word, 1982], 241)

³⁷⁷ One aspect of being wise is to **"make the most of every opportunity"** to share the Gospel with **"outsiders,"** the very ministry that Paul has just been speaking about in the previous verses.³⁷⁸

In our efforts to share that Gospel with unbelievers, our **"conversation"** needs to be **"full of grace"** (i.e. gracious) and patience, not arguments. Accordingly, our communication of the Gospel should be **"seasoned with salt."** As commentators agree, this is speaking of the *style* of our speech. Unfortunately, however, it is all too common to see interpretations like that of NT scholar N. T. Wright:

The metaphor of "salty" speech was a common one in the ancient world. Paul knows that a tedious monologue is worse than useless in evangelism. Christians are to work at making their witness interesting, lively, and colorful.³⁷⁹

Likewise, the *Life Application Bible* reads at Colossians 4:5: "Speech that is *seasoned with salt* is interesting (as opposed to dull) . . . adds "spice" to a discussion (by penetrating to deeper levels)." NT scholar Peter T. O'Brien believes Paul means:

Their words must not be dull or insipid but should be interesting. . . . This could be taken as 'witty.' . . . Here Paul's statement has particular reference to Christians responding with the right word to those who ask questions of the community.³⁸⁰

Once again, too many commentators have forgotten the Apostle's own description of his evangelistic ministry: **"When I came to you, brothers, [to communicate the Gospel] I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. . . . ³ I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. ⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words"**

³⁷⁷ For further discussion on the biblical meaning of wisdom see chapters 14.17-14.18.

³⁷⁸ Dr. MacArthur claims, "Paul is not speaking here of preaching the gospel, but general conversation" (Col 4:2-6). There is no reason to exclude evangelism from the **"conversation"** with **"outsiders"** that Paul is speaking of, especially in light of the fact that in the verses immediately preceding these, he is praying for his own evangelistic ministry to unbelievers.

³⁷⁹ Wright, 153.

³⁸⁰ O'Brien, 242-3.

(1 Cor 2:1, 3-4). So, in fact, endeavoring to make our Gospel presentations seem “lively,” “colorful,” and “witty,” is actually unbiblical.

While “salty” speech certainly has to do with its style, Paul did not intend for it to refer to its eloquence. Rather, in keeping with the idea of acting morally wise and having gracious speech toward unbelievers, our “**conversation**” being “**seasoned with salt**” relates to its virtuous nature. We would suggest then that Paul’s metaphor of speech being “**seasoned with salt**” is essentially synonymous with speech that is “**full of grace**.”

Salt was understood in the ancient world as an element that would preserve things from corruption. As we have argued elsewhere, this was the King’s meaning when he proclaimed Christians as “**the salt of the Earth**” (Matt 5:13).³⁸¹ We are uniquely the moral preservative of human society. Likewise, for the purpose of the *virtue apologetics* that the Apostle is encouraging here, “**conversation**” being “**seasoned with salt**” refers to speech that is virtuous, holy and loving, in addition to being “**full of grace**.”

Accordingly, several commentators see a parallel to “salty” speech in Paul’s description of Christian speech in Ephesians when he writes:

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. . . .³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander . . .⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. (Eph 4:29, 31, 2:4)

Of course, to exhibit any of these sinful characteristics in our speech to “**outsiders**” (Col 4:5) would make any efforts to communicate the Gospel ineffective.

Now we can better understand the Apostle’s thought: “**Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone**” (Col 4:5). Virtuous, not intellectual, speech is “**how to answer everyone**.” Again, the emphasis here is on how we are *acting* and *speaking*, not on *what* we are speaking. Paul is not speaking of “what” we should “**answer everyone**,” but “**how**” we should do it. The Apostle’s concern again is not so much on how intellectual the content of our “**conversation**” with unbelievers may be, but rather, the morality

³⁸¹ For further discussion of the fact that Christ was referring to morality when He used the metaphor of “**salt**” see section 5.3.D.1.

of our actions toward them, and the graciousness of our speech with them.³⁸² Almost any virtuous response to critics is more powerful than an intellectual one. Once again, love is the most important apologetic for the Gospel.

Paul's words in Colossians 4:5-6 are analogous to Peter's in 1 Peter 3:15: **"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."** We have elsewhere that Peter is simply referring to a Christian telling someone "I'm a Christian" in response to their question of how they have so much **"hope"** in a difficult circumstance. Peter is not implying that the **"reason for the hope"** we would communicate is all kinds of intellectual arguments for the Christian faith. Like Paul, Peter is saying that not only our virtue wins a hearing of the Gospel with unbelievers, but the Gospel itself should be communicated with virtue.³⁸³

E) Persuading Men?: 2 Cor 5:11

Paul says in 1 Corinthians, **"My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words"** (2:4). How do we reconcile this with his statement in 2 Corinthians that **"we try to persuade men"** (5:11)? We believe he is speaking of two different audiences.

In 1 Corinthians he is clearly speaking of his ministry to the unregenerated (**"those who are perishing"** v. 1:18). Accordingly at 2:1 he states, in contrast to only using plain speech with unbelievers, that **"We do, however, speak a message of [persuasive] wisdom among the mature"** (2:6). Here we clearly

³⁸² Unfortunately, Dr. Barnes seems to give an *intellectual apologist* spin to Paul's thoughts when he interprets him: "be prepared to answer anyone who may question you about your religion in a way that will show that you understand its nature. (Col 4:6)

Likewise, Dr. MacArthur writes:

Believers must also know how to **respond to each person**. They must know how to say the right thing at the right time. In Peter's words, they must be "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" (1 Pet. 3:15).

If this is referring to an *intellectual apologist's* approach, then we demonstrate otherwise regarding 1 Peter 3:15 at section 5.4.B.2.

³⁸³ For further on the correct interpretation of 1 Peter 3:15 see section 5.4.B.2.

see that when ministering to the unregenerated he did not use persuasive wisdom, but he did when ministering to the believers.

Likewise, we would expect the Apostle to be consistent in his second letter to the Corinthians. Accordingly, when he says there **"we try to persuade men"** (5:11), we should take his teaching in 1 Corinthians into consideration and assume that he is again speaking of his ministry to believers. And indeed, the whole context of the statement reveals this:

So we [believers] make it our goal to please Him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. ¹⁰ For we [believers] must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Since, then, we [Apostles] know what it is to fear the Lord [because believers will "appear before the judgment seat of Christ"], we try to persuade men [believers to do good works]. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience [believing Corinthians]. ¹² We are not trying to commend ourselves to you [believing Corinthians] again, but are giving you [believing Corinthians] an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. ¹³ If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you [believing Corinthians]. (2 Cor 5:9-13)

We see then that the "persuasion of men" (v. 11) applies to the fact that **"we [believers] must "make it our goal to please" God because "we [believers] must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ"** (vs. 9-10). Accordingly, it is a mistake to interpret Paul's reference to persuading men as referring to his **"ministry of reconciliation"** with unbelievers, which he begins describing later in v. 18.

Our interpretation agrees with other statements of Paul (cf. 1 Cor 1:18-2:5 and Col 1:28 with a careful recognition that the context is discipleship not evangelism; cf. 1:24). ³⁸⁴

Publications & Particulars

³⁸⁴ For a discussion of Acts 18:4 see section 5.13.B.5.

Chapter 5.13

Biblical Evangelism vs. *Intellectual Apologetics*

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Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- Christ does not desire to be *defended*, as much as He wants to be *preached*.
- Jesus and the disciples believed that preparing hearts to receive the Gospel was the Holy Spirit's job, lessening, if not eliminating the need for human, *intellectual apologetics*.
- Accordingly, Jesus told His followers that if people did not "**welcome**" or "**listen to**" their Gospel message, they were simply to leave them, not argue with them.
- While *intellectual apologists* point to Luke's description of the Apostle Paul *reasoning* with people in his presentation of the Gospel (cf. Acts 17:2, 17; 18:4, 19), this does not refer to extra-biblical arguments, but rather, it is usually clear that the Apostle "**reasoned with them from the Scriptures** (17:2)
- According to *intellectual apologists*, Paul's evangelism in Athens is the "classic" text to support their view. However, the first description we get of what the Apostle actually preached to the Athenian philosophers is that, "**Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.**" There were no *intellectual apologetics*, but rather his approach in Athens is again reminiscent of how he described his ministry in Corinth. Accordingly, NT scholar F. F. Bruce concludes: "he does not condescend to his hearers' level by arguing from first principles as one of their own philosophers might do."

A) Christ's Approach to Evangelism: *Matt 7:6; 10:14*

It would be good at this point to be reminded of Christ's approach to evangelism. Particularly His repeated command for unbelievers to *repent*, which is to admit they are morally sinful and intellectually mistaken and to change their mind to align with what God says in Scripture. This is a very politically incorrect approach in our culture of tolerating sin and error. At times, it would seem that far too many in the Church are guilty of a cultural cowardice which lives to please men instead of God. They simply refuse to command people to repent, and congratulate themselves on the public relations work they are doing for Christ. Christ does not desire to be *defended*, as much as He wants to be *preached*.

Christ would rather have them imitate Him, Who from the very beginning of His ministry, **"began to preach, 'Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near'"** (Matt 4:17; cf. Luke 13:1-5), a message that in any age or culture would be considered very unapologetic. Elsewhere we read:

Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," He said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:14-15)

According to the King, the command to repent was an essential part of **"the good news"** of the Gospel. Which is why all of His true followers preached the same.

John the Baptist **"came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, 'Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.'" What was the result? "People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River"** (Matt 3:1-2, 5-6). It's clear that John did not have much concern for accommodating his message to the minds of unrepentant unbelievers, but was after the humble who were ready to repent.

Likewise, when the King sent out His twelve disciples, giving them instructions on how to really reach the lost, **"They went out and preached that people should repent"** (Mark 6:12; cf. Luke 15:7). And that was the habit of His messengers thereafter. After the Apostle Peter unapologetically told a crowd in Jerusalem, **"be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, Whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ,"** he then commanded them, **"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins"** (Acts 2:36, 38;

cf. 3:19). There was no debate here about who really was Lord, or who really was guilty.

As further proof of Christ's approach to apologetics and evangelism, it is interesting to note how He communicated the Gospel to those on the road to Emmaus: **"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself"** (Luke 24:27). There was not a defense of the Scriptures, but an explanation of them.

In general, it would seem that the King and His messengers were more inclined to believe that the preparing of hearts to receive the Gospel was essentially the Holy Spirit's job, lessening, if not eliminating the need for human, *intellectual apologetics* (cf. John 16:8-10; Acts 16:14; 1 Cor 2:14; 1 Thess 1:4-5). Accordingly, Christ told His preachers: **"If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town"** (Matt 10:14). Notice that Christ did not imply that we are to try to persuade people to listen to us, nor certainly to argue with them. If they do not **"welcome"** or **"listen to"** our Gospel message, we are to simply leave them, apparently only communicating their condemnation as we go.³⁸⁵ Again, a very *unapologetic* approach with no indication that the disciples were to argue with anyone. And we have record of the Apostles doing this very thing throughout their ministry (cf. Acts 13:51; 18:6).

Similarly, Christ had taught His disciples:

Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces. (Matt 7:6)

Bible teacher John MacArthur succinctly summarizes Christ's meaning:

Jesus' point is that certain truths and blessings of our faith are not to be shared with people who are totally antagonistic to the things of God. Such people are spiritual **dogs** and **swine**,

³⁸⁵ D. A. Carson comments on the disciples shaking the dust off their feet as they left a town:

For the disciples to do this to Jewish homes and towns would be a symbolic way of saying that the emissaries of Messiah now view those places as pagan, polluted, and liable to judgment (cf. Acts 13:51; 18:6). The actions, while outrageously shocking, accord with Matthew 8:11-12; 11:20-24. ("Matthew" *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (EBC), Frank E. Gaebelein, ed. CD-ROM [Zondervan, n.d.], Matt 10:14.

who have no appreciation for that which is holy and righteous. They will take that which is **holy**, the **pearls** of God's Word, as foolishness and as an insult.³⁸⁶

Likewise, NT scholar D. A. Carson notes here:

"Dogs" and "pigs" cannot refer to all Gentiles but, as Calvin rightly perceived, only to persons of any race who have given clear evidences of rejecting the gospel with vicious scorn and hardened contempt. The disciples are later given a similar lesson (10:14; 15:14), and the postresurrection Christians learned it well (cf. Acts 13:44-51; 18:5-6; 28:17-28; Titus 3:10-11). So when taken together vv. 1-5 and v. 6 become something of a Gospel analogue to the proverb "Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you" (Prov 9:8).³⁸⁷

Likewise, Archbishop Michael Green writes in his commentary:

Jesus goes on to warn his disciples against wasting time on the hardened (6). Some people hear the message of God's kingdom and do not want to know. It is an irresponsible use of time and effort to continue to hammer on a door that is firmly closed. The disciples should push on a door and, if it is ajar, enter in. If it is firmly bolted, that is the indication to move on elsewhere. '*Do not throw your pearls to pigs,*' he says. They would rather have truffles or acorns! Disciples of Jesus are not to be storm-troopers for the kingdom of God. They should be equipped with the most sensitive radar to see where the Spirit of God is already preparing the way, and only then move in.³⁸⁸

None of this is a contradiction to the divine command that, **"this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations"** (Matt 24:14). Indeed, there is no way for us to know if the Spirit is working on people's hearts *until* we preach the Gospel to them and observe their reaction. If the **"Gospel"** comes **"not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction"** (1 Thess 1:5), then **"we know . . . He has chosen"** to save the people we are preaching to (v. 4). However, if after hearing the truth, a person

³⁸⁶ John MacArthur, *MacArthur's New Testament Commentary* (Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Parsons Technology, 1997), Matt 7:6.

³⁸⁷ Carson, "Matthew," Matt 7:6.

³⁸⁸ Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew (BST)* (Intervarsity, 2000), 106.

remains obstinate and hardened, that is probably not ground that God wants us to keep plowing and sowing with more "apologetics."

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³⁸⁹ John MacArthur attempts to share the balance between being discerning about how much truth we share with unreceptive people and our mandate to preach the Gospel everywhere:

God does not call his servants to minister only where the gospel is immediately and eagerly received. Many fields of service are extremely resistant to the gospel. But the focus of ministry in any area or circumstance should be on those people who are most receptive. (*Commentary*, Matt 14:13)

There is important truth in Dr. MacArthur's words, but we would question whether or not God would perceive those who "are extremely resistant to the gospel" as a "field of service." Jesus said if a town "**will not welcome you or listen to your words . . . leave that . . . town**" (Matt 10:14). Doing otherwise can be a waste of a minister's precious time, and in the end only bring harsher judgment on such people (cf. Matt 11:20-24; Luke 12:47-48).

A careful reading of Calvin's commentary on Matthew 7:6 seems to share the important balance. Note that even one who believed so staunchly in predestination to salvation, encouraged the diligent preaching of the Gospel.

Christ reminds the Apostles, and, through them, all the teachers of the Gospel, to reserve the treasure of heavenly wisdom for the children of God alone, and not to expose it to unworthy and profane despisers of his word.

But here a question arises: for he afterwards commanded to *preach the Gospel to every creature*, (Mark 16:15;) and Paul says, that the preaching of it is *a deadly savor to wicked men*, (2 Corinthians 2:16;) and nothing is more certain than that it is every day held out to unbelievers, by the command of God, for a testimony, that they may be rendered the more inexcusable. I reply: As the ministers of the Gospel, and those who are called to the office of teaching, cannot distinguish between the children of God and *swine*, it is their duty to present the doctrine of salvation indiscriminately to all. Though many may appear to them, at first, to be hardened and unyielding, yet charity forbids that such persons should be immediately pronounced to be desperate.

It ought to be understood, that *dogs* and *swine* are names given not to every kind of debauched men, or to those who are destitute of the fear of God and of true godliness, but to those who, by clear evidences, have manifested a hardened contempt of God, so that their disease appears to be incurable. . . .

Hence it is evident, how grievously the words of Christ are tortured by those who think that he limits the doctrine of the Gospel to those only who are teachable and well-prepared. For what will be the consequence, if nobody is invited by pious teachers, until by his obedience he has anticipated the grace of God? On the contrary, we

B) Paul's Evangelism in Acts: Reasoning with unbelievers?

Some advocates of *intellectual apologetics* will point to Luke's description of the Apostle Paul *reasoning* with people in his presentation of the Gospel (cf. Acts 17:2, 17; 18:4, 19). It is suggested then that he was using the philosophical reasoning used by *intellectual apologists* today in attempts to prove the existence of God or the truth of Christianity. We do not believe this is true and will therefore take a brief tour of Paul's evangelistic ministry as recorded in Acts.

B.1) First Ministry in Damascus: Proving that Jesus is the Christ through Scripture

Soon after the Apostle's conversion, it would seem he engaged in evangelism. Accordingly we read:

At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. . . . Saul [Paul] grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ. (Acts 9:20, 22).

The first description we get of the Apostle Paul's evangelistic method reveals something that will show up repeatedly: In the Apostle's evangelistic ministry, he focused on using the Scriptures for "**proving that Jesus is the Christ**" (9:22). What other source or evidence would he use?

are all by nature unholy, and prone to rebellion. The remedy of salvation must be refused to none, till they have rejected it so basely when offered to them, as to make it evident that they are reprobate and *self-condemned*, (αὐτοκατάκριτοι,) as Paul says of *heretics*, (Titus 3:11.)

There are two reasons, why Christ forbade that the Gospel should be offered to lost despisers. It is an open profanation of the mysteries of God to expose them to the taunts of wicked men. Another reason is, that Christ intended to comfort his disciples, that they might not cease to bestow their labors on the elect of God in teaching the Gospel, though they saw it wantonly rejected by wicked and ungodly men. His meaning is lest this inestimable treasure should be held in little estimation, *swine* and *dogs* must not be permitted to approach it. There are two designations which Christ bestows on the doctrine of salvation: he calls it *holy*, and compares it to *pearls*. Hence we learn how highly we ought to esteem this doctrine. (*Commentaries*, in loc. at www.ccel.org)

B.2) First Missionary Journey: *Telling the good news*

Later in Acts 13 Luke begins a description of the Apostle's first official missionary journey: "**When [Paul and Barnabas] arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues**" (13:5). This merely confirms our point above that the source of the Apostle's evangelistic preaching was not philosophical arguments, but Scripture.

Afterwards, the Apostle evangelized in "**Pisidian Antioch**" and "**entered the synagogue**" (13:14). Both Jews and "**Gentiles who worship God**" were present (v. 16). Essentially, after the Apostle reviews OT history (vs. 17-22), and relates the historical facts concerning the arrival, life, and death of Christ (vs. 23-31) he concludes:

We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers [in Scripture] He has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. . . . ³⁸ Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. ³⁹ Through Him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. (vs. 32-3, 38-9)

Once again, the Apostle simply referred to the message of the OT Scriptures regarding "**What God promised our fathers**" concerning a coming Messiah Who would provide "**the forgiveness of sins.**" This is not apologetics. Those listening in the synagogue already believed in the authority of Scripture. The Apostle was simply *teaching* the Scriptures to them and relating it to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus for their salvation.

As we discussed thoroughly in the previous chapter (5.5), Paul's message and approach here is clearly reminiscent of the Apostle's claim to the Corinthians to have preached the simple "**message of the cross**" (1 Cor 1:18). And even though the "**Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom,**" the Apostle "**preach[ed] Christ crucified**" (1 Cor 1:22-3). We are reminded as well that the Apostle had told the Corinthians that the ultimate reason they were saved and his ministry to them was effective was God "**called**" and "**God chose**" them to be saved (1 Cor 1:26-7) and it was "**because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus**" (v. 30). Likewise, Luke records in Pisidian Antioch regarding the response to the simple biblical story of the Gospel: "**When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of**

the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). No *intellectual apologetics* are mentioned.

Subsequent descriptions are rather scant, but suggest the same approach and method:

At Iconium Paul and Barnabas . . . spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. . . . Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord . . . [T]hey . . . fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, where they continued to preach the good news. (14:2-3, 6-7)

The Apostles "**spoke . . . effectively**" but there is no hint of them communicating extra-biblical philosophical or scientific reasons for the faith, but rather they simply "**continued to preach the good news.**"

Later regarding their ministry in Lystra, Luke records them as preaching:

We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, Who made Heaven and Earth and sea and everything in them. ¹⁶ In the past, He let all nations go their own way. ¹⁷ Yet He has not left Himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; He provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy. (Acts 14:15-17)

Again the Apostles summarized their evangelistic message and approach in Lystra as, "**bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God**" (v. 15). But unfortunately, their purpose of evangelism was severely sidetracked by the people's response to Paul's healing of the crippled man. While God intended to use such a miracle to confirm that the Apostles spoke new divine revelation for Him, ³⁹⁰ these spiritually dead, deaf, and dumb Greeks interpreted it as evidence that "**The gods have come down to us in human form!**" (v. 11) in the persons of Paul and Barnabas. In fact, they believed them to be the gods "**Zeus**" and "**Hermes**" (v. 12).

At this point, evangelism *per se* was no longer the issue. Rather, the Apostles intent was simply to persuade them, "**We too are only men, human like you**" (v. 12), and the blessings that these Greeks thought were coming from the Apostles, were coming

³⁹⁰ For further discussion of the biblical purpose of miracle working see section 10.5.A.1 and 11.1.F.

from the one Creator God. And that is virtually all the Apostles are trying to communicate here. They were not trying to prove the existence of God, but rather trying to prove they were not gods. The Greeks in this crowd were not atheists, and in fact already believed much of what the Apostles said here.³⁹¹ They believed the gods worked in Nature to grow their crops and provide their food, which is why they sacrificed to these gods. But because their polytheism had now extended to thinking that even Paul and Barnabas were gods (cf. 14:11), the Apostles preached that there was only one God behind all of Creation. Accordingly, even here the Apostles were not communicating protracted scientific and philosophical reasons to convince atheists to be theists as *intellectual apologists* insist is the Christian's duty.

B.3) Thessalonica & Berea: Reasoning from the Scriptures

We noted above that some interpret Luke's description of Paul "reasoning" with unbelievers as an indication that he engaged in *intellectual apologetics*. The first use of this phraseology in Acts 17:1-4 helps us to understand what kind of "reasoning" the Apostle used:

When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned [*dielexatō*: "conversed"] with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women. (Acts 17:1-4)

The Apostle Paul "**reasoned with them from the Scriptures**" (17:2), not the philosophers. His "**explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead**" was "**from the Scriptures**" and not the philosophers either.³⁹² And even the fact

³⁹¹ Contrary to our view, Norman Geisler writes: "The apostle Paul did apologetics at Lystra when he gave evidence from nature that the supreme God of the universe existed and that idolatry was wrong (Acts 14:6-20)." (*Baker Encyclopedia of Apologetics* [Baker, 2000], 39).

³⁹² I. H. Marshall comments on Paul's ministry in Thessalonica and suggests it was rather typical:

that he **"reasoned"** does not mean he debated or argued. As NT scholar Albert Barnes pointed out regarding the Greek word translated "reasoned" (*dielexatō*):

No argument should be drawn from the word that is used here to prove that Paul particularly appealed to reason, or that his discourse was argumentative . . . the word used here means simply as he discoursed, and is applied usually to making a public address, to preaching, etc., in whatever way it is done, Acts 17:2; 18:4, 19; 19:8-9; 24:12.³⁹³

Dr. Barnes' point regarding *dielexatō* will be important to keep in mind as we discuss other places in Acts where Paul is said to have **"reasoned"** with unbelievers.³⁹⁴ Accordingly, Alfred Marshall's

Luke indicated at some length the kind of discourse that Paul would give in a synagogue setting. . . . It was based on the Scriptures. . . . He opened up the meaning of the Scriptures and brought forward what they said as evidence for his case. (*The Acts of the Apostles* (TNTC) [Eerdmans, 1980, reprint, 1999], Acts 17:3)

³⁹³ Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Findex.Com, 1999), Acts 24:25. Nonetheless, Dr. Barnes interprets the use of *dielegatō* in 17:17 as "He engaged in argument with them." But as Dr. Barnes himself pointed out, this is not reflected in the meaning of this word.

³⁹⁴ Further information on this word group for "reasoned" comes from the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (NIDNTT):

The meaning of *dialogomai* in cl. and Hellenistic Gk. is expressed by our loan-word dialogue; it means hold a conversation, chat. It was used by the poets with a neutral sense, but in the philosophers it came to mean conversation with teaching as its object. . . .

[E]xamples of *dialogomai* in the NT are found in Acts 17-24 (17:2, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8 f.; 20:7, 9; 24:12, 25). The word here has become a technical term for Paul's teaching in the synagogue and approaches the meaning of give an address, preach. It refers to the reading and exposition of the OT . . . The RSV rendering "argue" is justified in so far as the audience was permitted to ask questions. (*D. Furst* "Think, Mean, Consider, Reckon," III.820-1)

Accordingly, Dr. MacArthur seems to exaggerate what was occurring when he writes:

Reasoned is from *dialogomai*, from which the English word *dialogue* derives. It describes not a formal sermon but a discussion, during which Paul repeatedly fielded questions from his hearers. That was the way he commonly ministered in the synagogues (cf. Acts 18:4, 19; 19:8-9).

Effective Christian witness includes being able to answer questions about the faith. Peter commanded believers to "sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to

literal translation of *dielexatō* here is “**lectured.**”³⁹⁵ As NT scholar I. Howard Marshall notes on the use of this word in Acts: “for Luke ‘argue’ means ‘preach’ rather than ‘debate’.”³⁹⁶

Luke probably reflects the essence of Paul’s evangelistic message in Thessalonica when he records the Apostle claiming *unapologetically* “**This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ**” (v. 3). As he described in Corinth, the Apostle *proclaimed*

everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” (1 Pet. 3:15).

Scripture provides the truth for such a defense. The foundation of Paul’s apologetic method was not the emptiness of human wisdom, or the extrabiblical traditions so revered by the Jews. Instead, Paul reasoned with them from the Old Testament Scriptures. (Acts 17:26-34)

The suggestion that “Paul repeatedly fielded questions” in his evangelistic addresses seems to us to be somewhat of an exaggeration of the meaning of *dialegomai*. For example, Dr. MacArthur’s reference to Acts 18:4, 19 refer to his ministry in Corinth where the Apostle says:

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. ³ I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. ⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words (2:1-4)

Accordingly, we don’t believe “Paul repeatedly fielded questions” in either Thessalonica or Corinth as Dr. MacArthur claims. In Athens we note below that some simply asked the meaning of what Paul was preaching, and nothing at all like asking a lot of detailed questions as Dr. MacArthur implies.

In addition, as we demonstrate in section 5.4.B.2, Dr. MacArthur’s interpretation/application of 1 Peter 3:15 is inaccurate. Nonetheless, we appreciate him noting that the Apostle used the Scriptures for his explanation of the Gospel, instead of “human wisdom” or “extra-biblical traditions.”

³⁹⁵ Alfred Marshall, *The Interlinear NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek and English* (Zondervan, 1993)

³⁹⁶ Marshall, 283.

the Gospel to unbelievers, rather than *defending* it.³⁹⁷ Accordingly, he was **"explaining . . . that the Christ had to suffer,"** something which, as we pointed out above, the Greeks would have found quite offensive in regard to a god they were to worship.³⁹⁸ Likewise, according to the Apostle's enemies in Thessalonica, he was very *unapologetic* in, **"defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus"** (17:7).

Nonetheless, the power of the simple Gospel empowered by the Spirit (cf. 1 Thess 1:4-5) apparently resulted in salvations: **"Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women"** (17:4).

After Thessalonica, the Apostle arrived in **"Berea"** (17:10). What was the content of his messages there? We get an indication when Luke rather famously records: **"Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true"** (v. 11). Evidently, **"the message . . . Paul said"** could only be evaluated by the OT Scriptures because it was derived from them, and not extra-biblical philosophical arguments. Like Thessalonica, Paul **"reasoned with"** the Bereans **"from the Scriptures"** (17:2).

B.4) Athens: Telling Philosophers to Repent

³⁹⁷ Accordingly, we would disagree with Richard N. Longenecker who writes in the *Expository Bible Commentary* at Acts 17:1-2:

In portraying the extension of the gospel to the main cities bordering the Aegean Sea, Luke lays special emphasis on the fact that Paul's preaching consisted of both proclamation and persuasion--interlocking elements of the one act of preaching. . . . "reason," "prove," and "persuade"--words that describe Paul's method of preaching--imply his careful dealing with his hearers' questions and doubts. . . (Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. CD-ROM [Zondervan, n.d.], *in loc.*).

This simply does not seem true, and certainly cannot be derived from Luke's use of *dielexatō* to describe Paul's preaching ministry. Dr. Longenecker seems to forget that Paul **"reasoned from the Scriptures"** and there is no hint whatsoever that he entertained any and every question his listeners had. Finally, he seems to also ignore the Apostle's clear description of his evangelistic ministry in Corinth as discussed in the previous chapter.

³⁹⁸ For further discussion of the "foolishness" perceived in Greeks by a crucified God see section 5.11.A.1.

After Thessalonica, the Apostle was left in Athens. Here again, **“he reasoned [*dielegeto*: “conversed”] in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there”** (Acts 17:17). As noted above regarding his ministry in Thessalonica, *dielegeto* usually does not mean to “argue,” or “debate” but to “converse”.³⁹⁹ And again, Paul no doubt **“reasoned from the Scriptures”** (Acts 17:2) in this synagogue as he had previously.

Nonetheless, it is in this account that many claim biblical support for an *intellectual apologist’s* approach to evangelism, and it is therefore perhaps the most discussed passage in all of Acts.⁴⁰⁰ Accordingly, the *intellectual apologist* Norman Geisler writes:

The classic case of apologetics in the New Testament is Acts 17 where Paul reasoned with the philosophers on Mars Hill. He not only presented evidence from nature that God existed but also from history that Christ was the Son of God. He cited pagan thinkers in support of his arguments. Apologetics was done in the Bible whenever the truth claims of Judaism or Christianity came in conflict with unbelief.⁴⁰¹

This is primarily assumed on the grounds that, **“A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute [*syneballon*] with him”** (v. 18), and **“All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas”** (v. 21). This, of course, would have seemed to be an ideal environment for Paul to debate these “philosophers” with extra-biblical philosophical,

³⁹⁹ See discussion of *dielegatō* above in section A.3. It does not mean “argued.”

⁴⁰⁰ Referring to Acts 17:22-31, Dr. Bruce comments: “Probably no ten verses in Acts have formed the text for such an abundance of commentary as has gathered around Paul’s Areopagus speech” (333). Unfortunately, much of this discussion has been among liberal scholars who deny and debate the question of whether or not Paul actually spoke as Luke records him. Of course he did.

⁴⁰¹ Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (BECA) (Baker, 1999), 39.

scientific, or historical arguments for the Christian faith.⁴⁰² He does not.

First of all, the Apostle did not “debate” with the philosophers at all. The Greek word *synballo* is used six times in the NT and only by Luke. Accordingly, we have a good idea of what he meant by it. The word simply means “to discuss, consider, meet with” and is variously translated elsewhere in the NIV as to have “**conferred**” with others (Acts 4:15), to “**meet**” with others (Luke 14:31; Acts 20:14), and even to have “**helped**” others (Acts 18:27), and to have “**pondered**” something (Luke 2:19). We would suggest the NIV translators read too much into the context here when they translated *synballo* as “**dispute**” in Acts 17:18, suggesting an argument occurred. Accordingly, the NASB and ESV translate that the “**philosophers were conversing with**” Paul, and simply responding to his message as the text shows.⁴⁰³

If Luke had thought that “debate” was more descriptive of the conversation Paul had with the philosophers, it would seem he would have used a word like *diemaxonto* (“argue”) as he did to describe the “**Pharisees [who] stood up and argued vigorously**” against the Sadducees about the resurrection (Acts 23:9), or *syzētountes* which really does mean “dispute” “argue” and “debate” and which Luke used to describe how “**the Jews . . . began to argue with Stephen**” (Acts 6:9). Luke knew the difference between a debate and a conversation and he intentionally portrayed Paul’s interaction with the philosophers in Athens as the latter.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰² Dr. MacArthur points out concerning Athens:

By Paul’s day, Corinth had replaced Athens as the most important political and commercial center in Greece. Yet Athens had lost none of its cultural significance, was still the philosophical center of the ancient world, and was the home of the world’s most famous university. Athens was also a religious center, where almost every god in existence was worshiped. The pagan writer Petronius sarcastically quipped that it was easier to find a god in Athens than a man. Every public building was dedicated to a god, and statues of gods filled the city (*Commentary*, Acts 17:16-34)

⁴⁰³ Compare this with “**debate**” (NLT, RSV), and “**argued**” (NCV), which are not good translations of *synballo*.

⁴⁰⁴ Accordingly, we disagree with Dr. MacArthur’s description of Paul’s preaching in Athens as, “Among those he engaged in debate were some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.” (Acts 17:26-34). On the contrary, the strongest meaning we can derive from the text is that the philosophers voiced disagreement with Paul, which is not the same as claiming Paul “engaged in debate” with them.

Likewise, there is no reason to assume as Dr. Barnes does that the Apostle, “engaged in an argument with them” (Acts 17:17). Calvin is

Of course, some of the philosophers disliked what Paul was saying, calling him a “**babbler** [*spermologos*],” derogatory Athenian slang for a novice philosopher.⁴⁰⁵ Did Paul then launch into a philosophical diatribe to earn their respect as a philosopher as *intellectual apologetics* encourages us to do? Not at all.

Accordingly, Luke shows clear contempt for the fact that the Athenians “**spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas**” (v. 21). As Dr. Marshall comments, “his tone is distinctly sarcastic.”⁴⁰⁶ While modern *intellectual apologists* may value such a philosophical context and engage in the same thing, it seems clear that the Apostle and his companions did not have any interest in such things.

In addition, even the questions that Luke records the philosophers asking seem to reflect more of a desire for understanding, rather than disagreeing:

Some of them asked, “What is this babbler trying to say?” Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. (Acts 17:18)

Notice that the first description we get of what the Apostle actually preached to the Athenian philosophers is that, “**Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.**” There were no *intellectual apologetics*, but rather his approach in Athens is again reminiscent of how he described his ministry in Corinth where he preached “**the Gospel**” (1 Cor 1:17), “**the message of the cross**” (v. 18), and “**resolved to know [or preach] nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified**” (2:2).

Immediately after this we read that the Athenians wanted to hear an *explanation* of the Gospel, not a philosophical *defense* of it:

Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean [not why you think they are true].” (Acts 17:19-20)

even worse when he writes: “Luke addeth now that Paul had a combat with the philosophers” (online at www.ccel.org, *in loc*)

⁴⁰⁵ Dr. Bruce translates “**babbler** [*spermologos*]”: “a retailer of second-hand scraps of philosophy . . . someone who picked up scraps of learning wherever he could. (331).

⁴⁰⁶ Marshall, 285.

And the Apostle then tells these philosophers *unapologetically*:

²² Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. ²³ Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you [not defend to you].

²⁴ The God Who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of Heaven and Earth and does not live in temples built by hands. ²⁵ And He is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything because He Himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.

²⁶ From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth [just as the OT Scriptures said]; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. ²⁷ God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. ²⁸ ‘For in Him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are His offspring.’ ²⁹ “Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man’s design and skill [like you believe].

³⁰ In the past God overlooked such [philosophical] ignorance, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent. For He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the man [Christ Jesus] He has appointed. He [God the Father] has given proof of this to all men by raising Him [God the Son] from the dead. (Acts 17:23-31)

Admittedly, the Apostle meets the Athenians “where they are at” so to speak, acknowledging that they were, “**very religious**” (v. 22) and had made an inscription on one of their pagan altars, “**TO AN UNKNOWN GOD**” (v. 23). The Athenians believed in a god, and even that their existence and daily life depended on a god. Accordingly, the Apostle pointed out that “**some of your own poets have said, ‘We are His offspring’**” and “**in Him we live and move and have our being**” (v. 28). ⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁷ Dr. Longenecker comments on Paul’s use of Greek poets:

It is here again that most *intellectual apologists* claim that the Apostle is practicing their craft—establishing the existence of God among atheists or agnostics and using extra-biblical sources to do so. However, quoting Greek poets to support something the Athenians *already believed* is a far cry from the philosophical and scientific argumentation *intellectual apologists* engage in to convince atheists, which is a major purpose of *intellectual apologetics*. On the contrary, the Apostle believed he was speaking to people who already believed in a creator god, and he was merely acknowledging something they were agreed on.⁴⁰⁸

In support of this teaching about man, Paul quotes two maxims from Greek poets. The first comes from a quatrain attributed to the Cretan poet Epimenides (c. 600 B.C.), which appeared first in his poem *Cretica* and is put on the lips of Minos, Zeus's son, in honor of his father:

They fashioned a tomb for thee, O holy and high one--
The Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies!
But thou art not dead; thou livest and abidest for ever,
For in thee we live and move and have our being

(M.D. Gibson, ed., *Horae Semiticae* X [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1913], p. 40, in Syriac; italics mine).

The second comes from the Cilician poet Aratus (c. 315-240 B.C.): "It is with Zeus that every one of us in every way has to do, *for we are also his offspring* [italics mine]" (*Phaenonlena* 5); which is also found in Cleanthes's (331-233 B.C.) earlier Hymn to Zeus, line 4.

By such maxims, Paul is not suggesting that God is to be thought of in terms of the Zeus of Greek polytheism or Stoic pantheism. He is rather arguing that the poets his hearers recognized as authorities have to some extent corroborated his message [and their own belief]. In his search for a measure of common ground with his hearers, he is, so to speak, disinfecting and rebaptizing the poets' words for his own purposes. Quoting Greek poets in support of his teaching sharpened his message.

But despite its form, Paul's address was thoroughly biblical and Christian in its content. It is perhaps too strong [maybe not] to say that "the remarkable thing about this famous speech is that for all its wealth of pagan illustration its message is simply the Galilean gospel, 'The kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the tidings'" (Williams, p. 206). (Acts 17:24-28)

On the other hand, Dr. Barnes perhaps exaggerates and ignores 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5 when he says of Paul's quotation of pagan poets, "It is one instance among thousands where an acquaintance with profane learning may be of use to a minister of the gospel" (Acts 17:28).

⁴⁰⁸ Dr. Longenecker comments on Paul's desire to "meet the Athenians where they were at":

[F]or one who elsewhere said he was willing to be "all things to all men" for the sake of the gospel (1 Cor 9:20-22), Paul's approach to

Long before this, the preeminent Greek philosopher Plato (427 BC-347 BC) had taught the same things the Apostle was saying.⁴⁰⁹ Accordingly, many ancient witnesses “considered the Athenians to be the most religious of all human beings.”⁴¹⁰ Likewise, Paul’s statement that God, “**is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything because He Himself gives all men life and breath and everything else**”(17:25) was an “insight . . . shared by educated pagans, and numerous examples of the sentiment can be quoted” from Greek philosophers.⁴¹¹

In fact, it would appear that by focusing his arguments on the Athenians idol worship, he rather ignored confronting the intricate and differing philosophies of the Epicureans and Stoics who would have ridiculed the practice as well, as “the Epicureans attacked superstitious, irrational belief in the gods, expressed in idolatry.”⁴¹²

his Areopagus audience is by no means out of character. On the contrary, in his report of this address, Luke gives us another illustration of how Paul began on common ground with his hearers and sought to lead them from it to accept the work and person of Jesus as the apex of God’s redemptive work for humanity. (Acts 17:22-23).

⁴⁰⁹ cf. Marshall, 286.

⁴¹⁰ See quotes in Bruce, 335.

⁴¹¹ Marshall, 287.

⁴¹² Marshall, 281-2. The relationship between Paul’s speech in the Aeropagus and the philosophies of Epicureans and Stoics is debated, and in the end, perhaps rather fruitless. Dr. MacArthur claims Paul’s speech was especially designed for the purpose of refuting these philosophies:

Paul’s bold assertion that **God made the world and all things in it** was a powerful and upsetting truth for some of the Athenians to hear. It ran contrary to the Epicureans, who believed matter was eternal and therefore had no creator, and to the Stoics, who as pantheists believed everything was part of God. (Acts 17:16-34)

No doubt Dr. MacArthur’s descriptions of Epicurean and Stoic philosophy are accurate, but it was not true of the “**men of Athens**” (v. 22) in general whom Paul is especially addressing. The Apostle describes his audience as those who were “**very religious**,” had made an “**altar**” of “**worship**” to a “**god**,” (vs. 22-23), and had popular poets speaking of a God who was the creator and controller of their life (v. 28). In essence, then, the Apostle seems to have completely ignored “the philosophers” and appealed to the masses who did believe in the supernatural.

Somewhat contrary to Dr. MacArthur, Dr. Marshall comments on the relationship between the Apostle and the philosophers as follows:

Paul’s speech, which is delivered before the philosophers, has often been thought to be rather irrelevant to their concerns, since it was directed more against popular idolatry [which is our view]. In fact,

Nor should we believe that the Apostle had done any special study to know what some Greek poets had written. NT scholar F. F. Bruce noted:

however, it would have been very relevant to Epicureans, who thought it unnecessary to seek after God and had no fear of his judgment, and to Stoics, whose concept of God was pantheistic.

Paul in fact uses the insights of the philosophers in his attack on the beliefs of the Athenian populace; the Epicureans attacked superstitious, irrational belief in the gods, expressed in idolatry, while the Stoics stressed the unity of mankind and its kinship with God, together with the consequent moral duty of man. What Paul was doing was to side with the philosophers, and then demonstrate that they did not go far enough. (281-2)

Which is it then? Was Paul's speech in agreement or disagreement with the philosophers? Apparently both, which is another reason we don't think they were really Paul's intended audience. His intention was to preach about the real God to ignorant pagans, and as a result of this purpose, he would inadvertently have points of both agreement and disagreement with the various philosophical schools, which even had significant disagreements with one another. Paul's speech does not revolve around the intricate, differing philosophies of the Epicureans and Stoics, but rather, the biblical truth about God.

Likewise, Dr. Bruce notes that:

Here again parallels to Paul's argument can be adduced from Greek literature and philosophy" (337; cf. fn. 66 for examples), suggesting that the Apostles' claims were largely in agreement with the "**men of Athens.**" But once again, the Apostle was obviously preaching biblical truth (cf. 1 Kgs 8:27; Isa 66:1-2; Ps. 50:9-12). . . .

The speech as it stands admirably summarizes an introductory lesson in Christianity for cultured pagans. The first thing the Athenians, like the Thessalonians, had to learn was to "turn to God from idols, to serve a living and true God" (1 Thess 1:9). Therefore the greater part of the speech is, as Dieblius observed "a *hellenistic* speech about the true knowledge of God." But would the historical Paul, with his policy of being "all things to all" (1 Cor 9:22), have tried to win the Athenians from paganism with a *Hebraic* speech about the knowledge of God? . . . The essential content of the speech is biblical, but the presentation is Hellenistic [a culture- not a philosophy].

The knowledge of God set forth here is no merely philosophical discipline: it involves moral and religious responsibilities, and for lack of this knowledge . . . the hearers are summoned to repentance. . . . [T]he "delicately suited allusions" to Stoic and Epicurean tenets which have been discerned in the speech, and the direct quotations from pagan poets, have their place as [cultural] points of contact with the hearers, and illustrate the argument in terms familiar to them, but they in no way commit the speaker to acquiescence in [or argue about] their philosophical presuppositions. (341)

It is quite probable that Paul acquired the rudiments of Greek learning in Gamaliel's [Jewish] school. . . . The knowledge of Greek literature and thought that [Paul's] letters attest was part of the common stock of educated people in the Hellenistic world of that day; it bespeaks no formal instruction received from Greek teachers. . . .

We can recognize in his writings concepts and expressions, drawn especially from popular Stoicism, which were in the air at the time and which he freely pressed into service in a Christian context; but while he preached the gospel to the Hellenes, it was no Hellenized gospel that he preached. His proclamation of deliverance and life through Christ crucified brought his gospel into basic conflict with accepted standards of Hellenistic value and gave it the quality of "folly" which it had in the eyes of those of his hearers who made their assessments by what Paul called "the wisdom of the world" (1 Corinthians 1:20 ff.)⁴¹³

Accordingly, the Apostle was *unapologetically* preaching biblical *facts* for the Athenians to believe, not extra-biblical *reasons* to believe. Accordingly the essence of what he told these intellectual unbelievers was that their beliefs were "**ignorance**" and they needed to "**repent**" or God would "**judge**" them (17:30).

And contrary to *intellectual apologists*, the only justification the Apostle gave for his claims was one we only have recorded in Scripture—"God . . . raising Him [Christ] **from the dead**" (v. 31). As Dr. Marshall comments, "he treats the resurrection as historical fact,"⁴¹⁴ again, something to be believed rather than proven.

Luke then records: "**When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, 'We want to hear you again on this subject.'**" (v. 32). Dr. Marshall comments: "Not only was the cross 'folly to Gentiles', but so also was the resurrection."⁴¹⁵ Note that after hearing of the need for them to repent to escape the judgment of Christ, the Athenians, for the most part, do not repent (cf. Acts 2:36-41; 1 Thess 1:4-5). In fact, Luke records them as rather ignoring the essential part of Paul's message and focusing in on the general idea of "**the resurrection of the dead**," not even the meaning of Christ's resurrection in particular.

⁴¹³ F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, (Eerdmans, 2000), 126-27.

⁴¹⁴ Marshall, 290.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 291.

In response to Paul's claim of Christ's resurrection, "**Some . . . sneered,**" apparently rejecting the message altogether. Others seemed to show little interest in repenting, but much interest in discussing the topic of resurrection. While we would not expect the Apostle to speak much further with those who "**sneered,**" it would seem he also never gave an opportunity for further discussion to those merely interested in discussing "**the resurrection of the dead.**" However, Luke records, "**At that, Paul left the Council. . . . After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth**" (17:33, 18:1), implying that the Apostle did not accommodate those who merely wanted to talk about the idea of "**the resurrection of the dead.**" While this would be in keeping with Paul's practice and instructions demonstrated in the previous chapter from 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5 and the Pastoral Epistles, it would seem to be a refutation of what modern *intellectual apologists* pursue.⁴¹⁶

If there was ever a place for the Apostle to engage in *intellectual apologetics*, Athens would have been it. If there was ever a place where Luke would have described the Apostle's preaching as including philosophical arguments, this would have been it. If God had intended to give us a biblical example to support the modern and immense effort and attention given *intellectual apologetics* in the context of evangelism, this would have been it. But there are no hints of the Apostle engaging in philosophical debate with the

⁴¹⁶ Likewise, Dr. MacArthur comments:

When they heard Paul speak of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, since there was no place in Greek thought for a bodily resurrection. **Others,** a little more charitably, **said, "We shall hear you again concerning this."** They never would however, since **Paul went out of their midst** and soon left Athens, never to return. (Acts 17:26-34)

However, Dr. Longenecker writes:

But because no action had been taken [by the Aeropagus] to approve Paul's right to continue teaching in the city, his hands were legally tied. All he could do was wait in Athens till the council gave him the right to teach there or move on to some other place where his message would be more favorably received. And with a vast territory yet to be entered and a great number of people yet to be reached, Paul chose the latter. (Acts 17:33-34).

This implies that it was because of legal reasons that Paul left Athens so quickly. But this seems to ignore the fact that some wanted to hear more and at least one member of the Aeropagus became a follower. Accordingly, Dr. Bruce writes: "Before this body, then, Paul was brought, not to stand trial in a forensic sense, nor yet to be examined with a view to being licensed as a public lecturer, but simply to have an opportunity of expounding his teaching before experts." (331-2).

Athenian philosophers, but rather, Paul preached a very *unapologetic* message of biblical facts.

Accordingly, Dr. Bruce summarizes what we believe to be a proper interpretation of Paul's ministry in Athens when he writes in his commentary:

[T]he present speech is . . . well designed to serve as a sample of his preaching to pagans (cf. the briefer summary in 14:15-17). Here he does not quote the Hebrew scriptures which would have been quite unknown to his hearers; the direct quotations in this speech are quotations from Greek poets.

But he does not condescend to his hearers' level by arguing from first principles as one of their own philosophers might do [and as *intellectual apologists* popularly do]. His argument is firmly based on biblical revelation; it echoes throughout the thought, and at times the very language, of the Old Testament. Like the biblical revelation itself, his argument begins with God the creator of all and ends with God the judge of all. ⁴¹⁷

Elsewhere in his well-regarded study of Paul, Dr. Bruce wrote regarding the Apostle's ministry in Athens:

[T]he knowledge of God presented in the speech is not rationalistically conceived or established; it is the knowledge of God taught by Hebrew prophets and sages. It is rooted in the fear of God . . . Unlike some later Christian apologists, the Paul of Acts does not cease to be fundamentally biblical in his approach to the Greeks, even when his biblical emphasis might seem to diminish his chances of success. . . .

There is nothing . . . to commend the suggestion that "the word of the cross" was tactfully omitted from the *Areopagitica* because it was known to be folly to Gentiles: any mention of the cross could not have appeared more foolish to these particular Gentiles than did the note on which the speech concluded—the resurrection of the dead. ⁴¹⁸

Accordingly, Paul's evangelistic ministry and approach in Athens was essentially the same as that which he took up in the very next city he is recorded to preach in: Corinth. ⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁷ Bruce, 335.

⁴¹⁸ Bruce, *Paul*, 245-6.

⁴¹⁹ Dr. Bruce comments on the relationship between Paul's speech in Athens and his ministry in Corinth:

B.5) Corinth: *My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words*

Luke continues in Acts 18 to describe the Apostle's evangelistic ministry in Corinth. As was Paul's custom, we read:

Every Sabbath he reasoned [*dielegetō*] in the synagogue, trying to persuade [*epeithen*] Jews and Greeks. ⁵ When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. (Acts 18:4-5)

No matter how we might interpret Luke's description that Paul "reasoned [*dielegetō*]" and was "trying to persuade Jews and Greeks," in Corinth, we must not contradict the Apostle's own description of his evangelistic ministry in the same city (cf. 1:17-2:5). As thoroughly discussed in the previous chapter, he said:

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. . . . ⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. (1 Cor 2:1-3, 5)

First, we should recognize that 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5 is a fairly lengthy discourse specifically focused on, and intended by Paul to rather precisely describe the manner of his evangelistic preaching in Corinth. Luke's statement could be interpreted as simply a one sentence, rather off-hand remark about the effect of Paul's preaching. In other words, if we want the most accurate description of the Apostle's evangelistic preaching, it is in 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5, not Acts 18:4.

The idea, popular with many preachers, that his determination, when he arrived in Corinth, to "know nothing" there "except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2), was the result of disillusionment with the line of approach he had attempted in Athens, has little to commend it. (cf. Ned B. Stonehouse, *Paul Before the Aeropagus and Other New Testament Studies* [1957], pp. 31-40).

Secondly, as demonstrated above, *dielegetō* does not usually carry the idea of “arguing” or “debating” in Scripture, but merely conversing.⁴²⁰ Thirdly, any reasoning or persuading in Corinth must be understood the same as that described in Thessalonica, which was a reasoning “**from the Scriptures**” (Acts 17:2) instead of extra-biblical philosophy.

Finally, the Greek that Luke uses here could refer to an *effect* rather than a mere *attempt*. In other words, Luke could be understood as saying that the *result* of Paul’s preaching was that people were being persuaded even though he did not use persuasive speech. This would accord well with how Paul himself describes his ministry in the same city—he did not use “**wise and persuasive words**” (1 Cor 2:4), but it was nonetheless persuasive and effective as Luke tells “**many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized**” (Acts 18:8).

Therefore, it would seem to be a mistake for most English translations to assume Luke meant Paul was merely *attempting* to be persuasive, rather than that Paul was actually successful. For example, the NIV and most English translations imply that Paul was “**trying to persuade,**” indicating attempts that may not have been successful. Accordingly, the NET Bible translates that Paul was “**attempting to persuade them.**”

⁴²⁰ On the meaning of *dielegetō* see section B.3 above.

However, the verb Luke uses (*epeithen*) is in the imperfect tense which can just as easily refer to something that is *successful* rather than just *attempted*.⁴²¹ In other words, Luke could be referring to the *result* of Paul's preaching rather than its manner. Accordingly, other English translations give more of this sense. The RSV, KJV and NKJV translate the imperfect: "**And he argued in the synagogue every sabbath, and [successfully] persuaded Jews and Greeks,**" allowing for the idea of a successful, not just attempted action. Translating the imperfect verb in this way is the best approach to reconciling Paul and Luke on the manner of Paul's evangelistic preaching.⁴²²

B.6) Ephesus: Leaving instead of debating stubborn unbelievers

Likewise we read of two instances of ministry in Ephesus:

⁴²¹ We read in William Mounce's *Basics of Biblical Greek*:

The Greek imperfect tense is both limited and versatile in its usage. It is limited in that it only occurs in the indicative mood, but in that mood it has some interesting nuances of meaning. Basically, the imperfect expresses linear action in past time. That action may be repetitive, prolonged or just beginning. Sometimes, however, the imperfect expresses repeated *attempts*.

This is true in Galatians 1:13 where Paul says, "For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how I violently persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it." Both verbs in the second clause of this verse are imperfects. The first one [*ediōkon*: "**persecuted**"] simply expresses repeated action in the past. Paul is saying that he often [*successfully*] persecuted the church.

The second one [*eporthoun*: "**to destroy**"] is "tendential," i.e., it expresses attempted action. (This is why the *NIV* adds the word "tried," which does not occur in the Greek.) Paul repeatedly [and successfully] persecuted the church, but his violent acts did not, indeed could not, destroy it. His actions were only attempts, and feeble ones at that. Jesus' promise about his church was true then, as it is now: "The gates of Hades will not overcome it." (Zondervan, 1993)

⁴²² Unfortunately, if you do not like how we have reconciled or at least addressed this obvious difficulty in how Paul's evangelistic ministry is described by himself in 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5 as opposed to Luke in Acts 18:4, then you have to come up with your own suggestion. This is because no commentator we could find, ancient or modern, even recognizes or addresses, let alone reconciles, these two descriptions. This absence of commentary on Acts 18:4 is not only found in commentaries on Acts, but on 1 Corinthians as well.

Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, ¹⁹ They arrived at Ephesus . . . He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned [*dielexatō*] with the Jews. (Acts 18:18-19)

Luke records events less than a year later ⁴²³ that are "Paul's final major task as an evangelist": ⁴²⁴

¹ While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. . . . ⁸ Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively [*dialekomenōs kai peithon*] about the kingdom of God. ⁹ But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. (Acts 19:1, 8-9)

In 18:19 we again encounter Luke's typical word for how Paul dialogued in "**the synagogue**." As we have pointed out above, it does not carry the meaning of arguing or debating, but merely conversing. Which is why the NIV translation of the same word in 19:8 as "**arguing**" seems incorrect. But even if we are to understand the Apostle as debating with people or "**arguing persuasively**," he was doing so "**about the kingdom of God**," which clearly implies he was following the custom described in Thessalonica of reasoning "**from the Scriptures**." From what other source would he be "**arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God**"?

And notice again, that when "**some of them became obstinate . . . [and] refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way**" (19:9) as so many opponents of *intellectual apologists* do, "**Paul left them**" instead of debating with them. As discussed in the previous chapter (5.5), this reflects his repeated instruction in the Pastoral Epistles to do the same thing. Accordingly, *intellectual apologists* will find no support here either for the idea that God desires we include extra-biblical, philosophical arguments in our evangelistic ministries.

B.7) Rome: *Convincing them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and the Prophets*

⁴²³ Cf. Longenecker, (Acts 19:1-19).

⁴²⁴ Marshall, 308.

The final recorded act of Paul preaching the Gospel occurred while he was under guard in Rome awaiting trial. Luke records that the Apostle called together the leaders of the Jews (Acts 28:17) and that, **"They . . . came in large numbers to the place where he was staying"** (v. 23). Subsequently, **"From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the Kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets"** (v. 23). Once again, the Apostle was **"reasoning from the Scriptures"** (Acts 17:2), not the philosophers.

Pastoral Practices

- Ponder Luther's advice:
[I]f the people will not believe [in the authority of Scripture], then be silent; for you are not held to compel them to receive Scripture as God's book or Word . . . [W]hen you hear people of this stamp, who are so blinded and hardened as to deny that what Christ and the Apostles spoke and wrote is God's Word, or doubt it, then be silent, speak no more with them, and let them go. Only say: 'I will give you reasons enough from Scripture; if you will believe it, it is well; if not, go your way.'

Of course there are sincere seekers who will humbly ask legitimate questions because of their ignorance, but desire to better understand. And those like this who are teachable should be ministered to. But ministers have often wasted too much time trying to convince hardened skeptics. God needs to humble them in life before they are ready to hear Him in Scripture.

- Let us preach the simple Gospel boldly, consistently, and clearly, trusting the Holy Spirit's desire to use it to do the supernatural work that must be done for conversion to occur. We fear, like Dr. Jones, that the great emphasis on *intellectual apologetics* in our day may have obscured the Gospel and distracted us from merely preaching it.

- Like the Apostle Paul, do not rely on human persuasion to bring about conversions, as this can lead to a lot of false conversions. Gently but firmly preach repentance as the King and the Apostles did.

Extras & Endnotes

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) What are some conclusions you can draw from Christ's instructions and example concerning evangelism?
- 2) What are some conclusions you can draw from Paul's example of evangelism?
- 3) *Intellectual apologists* use several of the passages in Acts to support their approach to evangelism. We attempt to argue at every point that this is not so. Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 4) What is the meaning of *dialexō* and why is it important in properly understanding Paul's evangelism method in Acts?

Publications & Particulars

Chapter 5.14**The Superiority of *Virtue Apologetics***

And the Inferiority of Intellectual Apologetics

Table of Topics

- A) *Virtue Apologetics* Focuses on the Gospel**
- B) *Virtue Apologetics* More Effectively Distinguishes Religions**
- C) *Virtue Apologetics* Provides Personal Evidence**
- D) *Virtue Apologetics* has Universal Appeal**
- E) *Virtue Apologetics* is the Most Difficult to Argue Against**
- F) *Intellectual Apologetics* is Usually Too Complex**
- G) *Intellectual Apologetics* Hinders Evangelism**
- H) *Virtue Apologetics* is Confirmed by Our Experience**
- I) *Virtue Apologetics* is Most Effective in a Postmodern Culture**
- J) *Virtue Apologetics* is the Most Helpful for Discipleship**

Publications & Particulars

Primary Points

- While *intellectual apologetics* focuses on merely proving the existence of God or the uniqueness of the Bible, *virtue apologetics* more directly and clearly defends the exclusivity of specifically the Christian Gospel.
- The ultimate goal of *intellectual apologists* to prove that Christianity “makes the best sense of the world” is rather useless to distinguish it from other theistic and/or “moralistic” religions such as Islam.
- The personally experienced evidence of *virtue apologetics* is much more convincing than the ancient historical evidence of *intellectual apologetics*.
- *Virtue apologetics* is uniquely universal because love is a language that speaks loudly and persuasively in every culture.
- It is actually quite easy to refute the arguments of *intellectual apologetics*.
- Many aspects of *intellectual apologetics* are too complex to be useful.
- We must promote the superiority of *virtue apologetics* if we do not want to abdicate this personal responsibility to a small class of intellectuals.
- Some Christians hesitate to evangelize because they feel unable to answer all the questions that *intellectual apologists* claim they will be asked and have to answer.
- Far, far more people have been won to Christianity by *virtue apologetics* than all other apologetic approaches combined, if it played any part at all.
- The best weapon against postmodern skepticism is not more or better intellectual arguments, but love.
- If we cannot prove the exclusivity of Christianity by our virtue than we have no business trying to prove it any other way.
- *Intellectual apologetics* makes no difficult moral demands on Christians, and we fear this is precisely why some people are so eager to embrace it.
- One possible reason that many Christians are morally coasting with the spiritual power they have instead of soaring is because *virtue apologetics* has been grossly neglected for so long.

Obviously, the greatest advantage of *virtue apologetics* over *intellectual apologetics* in the context of evangelism is that there are an abundance of biblical commands and references to the former, and the latter is outright denounced.⁴²⁵ Accordingly, it should not surprise us that there are a number of practical advantages to *virtue apologetics* as well.

A) Virtue Apologetics Focuses on the Gospel

A first reason that *virtue apologetics* is superior to the *intellectual* kind is that the former most directly and clearly defends the exclusivity of specifically the Christian Gospel. The strength of other approaches seems to be more in simply proving the existence of God (such as the *cosmological argument*), or the uniqueness of the Bible (such as fulfilled prophecy). These arguments have their place and value, but, we would suggest, they are also unnecessary for someone to be saved through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In addition, we would again suggest that such arguments have more value in building the faith of believers than sparking the interest of unbelievers, particularly when compared to *virtue apologetics*.⁴²⁶

B) Virtue Apologetics is More Effective in Distinguishing Between Religions

This relates to a second reason that *virtue apologetics* is superior to the *intellectual* kind: the latter has difficulty distinguishing the Christian religion from others. For example, Norm Geisler writes:

The moral manifestation of a belief does not settle the truth question. . . . There is evidence for whether something is true other than the lifestyle of its adherents. Truth is what corresponds to reality and, hence, a religion is true if its central tenets correspond to the real world, not merely

⁴²⁵ The biblical nature of *virtue apologetics* has been demonstrated in chapters 5.2-4 5.9, 5.13. The unbiblical nature of *intellectual apologetics* was demonstrated in section 5.10.A and chapters 5.11-13.

⁴²⁶ For further discussion of the claim that the primary value of apologetics is for believers see section 6.12.C.1.

whether its followers live a good life or even a better one than adherents of another religion.⁴²⁷

Dr. Geisler is right, of course, that virtue is not the only evidence for the truth of a religion and that such a religion is only true if it corresponds to the real world. However, is his *intellectual apologetics* the best way to convince an atheist, pluralist or Muslim that Christianity uniquely does so? We would suggest that the popular approach to apologetics is no different than the one favored by Islam of which R. L. Rambo notes:

[T]he Muslim believes that the propositional tenets of his faith are self-evident if they are properly presented and understood, and the focus of his proselytization is the proclamation of these tenets rather than the experiences of human beings.⁴²⁸

For such faiths as Islam, Mormonism, and Jehovah's Witnesses which believe in a Creator God, how would *intellectual apologists* even prove the relatively insignificant philosophical point that it "makes the best sense of the world"? If we limit the test of the salvific value of a religion to how well, "its central tenets correspond to the real world" as Dr. Geisler suggests, we would suggest that it would be difficult to prove the superiority of the Christian Gospel without considering its moral impact. However, we believe that the moral superiority of regenerated Christians could be demonstrated in comparison with unregenerated members of any religion or Christian cult.

Therefore, we would respectfully disagree with Dr. Geisler and suggest that, "the moral manifestation of a belief" *does* and should "settle the truth question." Dr. Yandall Woodfin, Professor of Philosophy of Religion at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary agrees when he writes: "The world can learn that Christianity has received the ultimate and final revelation only when Christians present the exclusiveness of this claim through the demonstration of their love."⁴²⁹

⁴²⁷ Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (BECA) (Baker, 1999), 599.

⁴²⁸ L. R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (Yale University Press, 1993), 1.

⁴²⁹ Yandall Woodfin, *With All Your Mind: A Christian Philosophy* (Abingdon, 1980), 30, 172.

C) ***Virtue Apologetics* Provides Personal Rather Than Historical Evidence**

A third weakness of *intellectual apologetics* is that particularly the *evidential* approach is completely dependent upon historical research and evidence which is normally less convincing than contemporary evidence that people can experience for themselves. We do not deny that the authenticating miracles of Christ and the Apostles have just as much historical veracity as any other historical events that are accepted without doubt. However, knowing human nature, we believe God desires an apologetic that provides convincing miracles *today*, which is the supernatural virtue of His people. Another way of saying it is that *personal experiences* (of another's supernatural virtue) are much more convincing than *intellectual arguments* (concerning the historicity of Christ's resurrection).

The eighteenth century German theologian G. E. Lessing was famous for his "Lessing's Ditch" which can be defined with his statement that, "Accidental truths of history can never become the necessary truths of reason."⁴³⁰ While we would contend that Lessing and his followers such as Soren Kierkegaard went too far in diminishing the truth value of human history,⁴³¹ there would seem to be some practical truth in his statement that:

Miracles, which I see with my own eyes, and which I have the opportunity to verify for myself, are one thing. Miracles, of which I know only from history that others say they have seen them and verified them, are another.⁴³²

What God wants our unconverted neighbors, workmates, classmates, friends and family members to see is a living miracle, and that is precisely what He intends to provide through the supernatural virtue empowered by the Holy Spirit uniquely living in us.⁴³³

Intellectual apologetics focuses on convincing people of miracles that occurred long ago. *Virtue apologetics* promotes moral miracles

⁴³⁰ Geisler, 420.

⁴³¹ For further discussion of historical skepticism see chapter 2.7

⁴³² G. E. Lessing, *Theological Writings* (Stanford University Press, 1957), 57.

⁴³³ For further discussion regarding the superiority of *virtue apologetics* over the evidential approach concerning Christ's resurrection see section 2.7.A.2.

that can be observed now. The superiority of this can be demonstrated in many ways. For example, if someone can speak very intelligently about all kinds of philosophical, scientific and historical arguments for the Christian faith, but those listening know the person doesn't act very Christian, their intellectual arguments will mean virtually nothing. On the other hand, if people know a Christian who really lives like a Christian, but does not have well-informed answers to philosophical, scientific, or historical questions about Christianity, a person will remain significantly impressed with the Christian themselves.

Nonetheless, this brings up perhaps the most persuasive thing about someone well versed in *intellectual apologetics*: their virtue! Intelligence and reason are considered virtues by most people and when someone is knowledgeable about their faith it will be considered attractive. However, it will not necessarily be the perceived value of the intellectual arguments themselves that will be convincing, but rather, the knowledge and obvious effort put into gaining that knowledge. In other words, someone might be unimpressed with the arguments for Christianity, but remain impressed with how the Christian excels in the virtues of being reasonable and knowledgeable.

D) *Virtue Apologetics* has Universal Appeal

Fourth, we would suggest that *virtue apologetics* is uniquely universal. Accordingly, we would respectfully disagree with someone like John Stackhouse of Regent College when he says:

There is, in short, no "one size fits all" universal apologetic. . . . The epistemological reality of widely varying cognitive styles, worldviews, and so on can entail simply a barrier of unintelligibility that is not going to be breached . . . ⁴³⁴

While the *intellectual apologetics* that Dr. Stackhouse is speaking of may be hindered by such barriers, *virtue apologetics* will not be, as Christ expected love to be a language that would speak to "**all men**" (cf. John 13:34-35).

Along these lines, Francis Schaeffer commented:

Jesus did give the mark that will arrest the attention of the world, even the attention of the modern man who says he is just a machine. Because every man is made in the image of

⁴³⁴ John G. Stackhouse, *Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 154.

God and has, therefore, aspirations for love, there is something that can be in every geographical climate-in every point of time-which cannot fail to arrest his attention. What is it? The love that true Christians show for each other [cf. John 13:34-5].⁴³⁵

This is because love is a language that speaks loudly and persuasively in every culture.

E) *Virtue Apologetics* is the Most Difficult to Argue Against

Fifth, while there are admittedly difficulties and potential arguments against *virtue apologetics*, the same would seem even more true for other apologetic approaches. It is actually quite easy to amass arguments against scientific or historical evidence and philosophical theories. In fact, even Christian theologians have provided convincing critiques of the *ontological argument* of Anselm, Descartes, and Plantinga, the *cosmological argument* of ones like William Lane Craig, and the *teleological argument* of ones like William Paley, F. R. Tennant, and Richard Swinburne.⁴³⁶ As we have noted elsewhere, the reason that so many Christian apologists argue for the superiority of one *intellectual apologetic* approach over another is that they all have weaknesses.

However, love has a way of bringing a hushed silence upon even the most learned critic, and love is among the things most difficult to argue against, particularly when you are the recipient of it, and a Christian is the source. In fact, *intellectual apologetics* is rather synonymous with arguing because it consists of arguments. And that approach can immediately cause people to put up their defenses. Love, however, can lower those defenses.

Before the invasion of France in World War II, the French built a very heavy line of defenses on their eastern border called the Maginot Line. The preparations included trenches, walls, fences,

⁴³⁵ Francis Schaeffer, *The Mark of a Christian* (Intervarsity, 1970), 16.

⁴³⁶ For a succinct and convincing critique of several *intellectual apologetic* approaches see William Abraham, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Prentice-Hall, 1985), 24-35. In addition, Kelly James Clark makes a good case for the inadequacy of apologetics in general to convince the unbeliever of Christianity apart from regeneration in his entry to *Five Views on Apologetics*, Steven Cowan, ed. (Zondervan, 2000), 138-143.

and a multitude of heavy gun positions, not to mention their heaviest concentration of soldiers. Hitler could have thrown divisions of tanks, artillery, and men against those defenses and may never have invaded France. So what did he do? Hitler just went around the Maginot Line and took over France rather effortlessly.

This is the mistake *intellectual apologetics* makes. Trying to *attack* the strongest defenses of the enemy, when in fact, we can go right around them and bypass them with *virtue apologetics*. We can teach atheists the truth, after they get saved.⁴³⁷

F) *Intellectual Apologetics* is Usually Too Complex

Sixth, *intellectual apologetics* is too complex to be of use to most believers and unbelievers alike. The intricacies of many types of such apologetics, which include the ontological, cosmological, and teleological approaches, require at least some philosophical training to even understand them, let alone appreciate them.

Accordingly, one notes that the *intellectual apologetics* that God uses in His Creation is not prohibitively complex at all. The miraculous intricacy of the Universe is readily apparent to humans such that even the most simple of them is "**without excuse**" (Rom 1:20).⁴³⁸

⁴³⁷ For a remarkable example of the effect of *virtue apologetics* on an atheist see the rather famous video of the magician Penn Jillette at http://www.crackle.com/c/ComicCon/A_Gift_of_a_Bible/2415037. Penn is a rather renowned and aggressive atheist. It is instructive to imagine what would have happened if the Christian who spoke with Penn would have come to him with intellectual arguments about Christianity like so many no doubt have. Instead, this brother bypassed all of Penn's intellectual defenses with virtue that was supernatural enough that not even this hardened atheist could deny or ignore it.

⁴³⁸ Accordingly, Thomas Schreiner writes regarding Romans 1:18-23:

Neither is Paul suggesting that knowledge of God's existence and power is the result of careful deduction and reasoning, so that the text can be used to encourage sophisticated rational argumentation as an apologetic for God's existence (Hooker 1959-60: 299). Instead, this knowledge of God is a reality for all people, not simply for those who possess unusually logical minds. They come to a knowledge of God through the created world because "God made it manifest to them" (v. 19).

Of course, this knowledge is mediated through observation of the created world. His attributes of power and divinity "have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made" (v. 20). To

Let us remember, that most of the elect that we are searching for could be described the same way as Paul did the Corinthian converts: **"Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards"** (1 Cor 1:26). Fortunately, even the most simple unbeliever can recognize and appreciate love.

G) *Intellectual Apologetics* Hinders Evangelism

Seventh, an emphasis on *intellectual apologetics* makes Christian apologetics something primarily carried out by the professional philosophers instead of any Spirit-filled Christian. To really become proficient at *intellectual apologetics* requires years of careful study that most Christians are not naturally or spiritually gifted for. Along these lines, William Abraham, Professor of Theology and Philosophy at SMU writes concerning such an approach:

It involves the invention of a highly formal conception of God, which requires considerable intellectual skill if it is to be understood. Moreover, the debate about God turns on mastery of this concept as the fundamental element in religion. The debate itself requires even more elaborate intellectual skill if it is to be followed. Ordinary believers sit on the sidelines . . .

As a result, ordinary believers become second-class citizens in the kingdom of faith. They become dependent on philosophical theologians to explain to them the "true" meaning of religious concepts and doctrines. . . . The meaning of religion, therefore, becomes more and more remote from ordinary believers.

So too does the justification of their cherished convictions. Justification means mastering elaborate philosophical arguments developed by experts. Unfortunately the experts disagree. Even if the experts sound convincing, believers seem to be dependent on works of great genius before they have any right to believe. The ordinary believer seems

understand that Paul does not refer to a long process of reasoning by which people come to a knowledge of God's existence and power is critical (so also Wilckens 1978: 106). God has stitched into the fabric of the human mind his existence and power, so that they are instinctively recognized when one views the created world. (*Romans*, [1998], 86).

thoroughly naive when compared with such brilliant defenders of the faith.⁴³⁹

In particular, and unfortunately, sharing the Gospel has almost become synonymous with *intellectual apologetics*. Far too many Christians hesitate to share the Gospel because they feel inadequate to answer all the questions that *intellectual apologists* claim they will be asked. Listen to how intimidating the son of Sean McDowell sounds when he describes his efforts to reach an unbelieving friend named John:

He has not become a Christian yet, but he is inching along. We continue to have good discussions about God and the meaning of life. . . . Had my youth pastor, parents, and teachers not trained me in apologetics, I couldn't have helped him at all. You and I can't be ambassadors without having answers to tough questions.⁴⁴⁰

Really? Without his extraordinary opportunities (like Josh McDowell being his dad) and grasp of intellectual arguments for the Christian faith Sean, "couldn't have helped him at all"? Most Christians hope that isn't true, and fortunately it isn't, because the *virtue apologetics* that all Spirit-indwelled Christians can practice is far more powerful and important to "be ambassadors" than "having answers to tough questions."

Accordingly, the King commanded every Christian to be an apologist by their love and holiness (cf. Matt 5:14-16; John 13:34-35). Therefore, we must promote the superiority of *virtue apologetics* if we do not want to abdicate this personal responsibility to wield our sword of the Spirit, instead of delegating apologetics to a small class of intellectuals who, in comparison, are using the ineffective "**weapons of this world**" (2 Cor 10:4).

H) *Virtue Apologetics* is Confirmed by Our Experience

Eighth, most people know in their own hearts and experience that the value and affect of *virtue apologetics* far surpasses any other. Far, far more people have been won to Christianity by *virtue apologetics* than all other apologetic approaches combined, if apologetics has played any part at all.

⁴³⁹ Abraham, *Philosophy*, 100-101.

⁴⁴⁰ Sean McDowell, 26.

I) ***Virtue Apologetics* is Most Effective in a Postmodern Culture**

Postmodernism is essentially the idea that there is no such thing as objective truth. *Intellectual apologists* understandably spin their wheels trying to convince a postmodern skeptic that there is such a thing as objective truth, and they focus on what they purport to be objective arguments.

How much better to supernaturally love the postmodern skeptic and give him the *subjective* personally convincing evidence they are looking for! Instead of battering against the massive front gate of the postmodern fortress with intellectual arguments, why not go through the open back door, which is the fact that all postmoderns want to be loved. In fact, whatever popularity or influence postmodernism has in our culture, makes the use of *virtue apologetics* over the intellectual kind all the more effective and critical. In a postmodern age, we need to crank up our virtue, not our “objective” arguments. Along these lines, Christian pollster David Kinnaman writes:

Most people, by personality, are not logical thinkers and are not likely to change their beliefs because of elegant argumentation or apologetics. . . most people do not become Christians because of the overwhelming evidence. And since Mosaics and Busters are more likely to possess a nonlinear, fluid way of processing life, they are increasingly comfortable with subtlety, nuance, ambiguity, and contradiction. So even if you are able to weave a compelling logical argument, young people will nod, smile, and ignore you.⁴⁴¹

In support of *virtue apologetics*, however, Mr. Kinnaman writes elsewhere:

Apologetics is changing because young people are resistant to mere intellectual arguments, yet they seem to be as open as any generation to meaningful, transparent, long-term, and loving relationships. Our research confirms this over and over.

⁴⁴²

⁴⁴¹ David Kinnaman, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity . . . and Why It Matters* (Baker, 2007), 72.

⁴⁴² David Kinnaman, “Forward” in *Apologetics for a New Generation* (2009), 10.

Actually, we believe research a hundred or even thousand years ago would have revealed the same, because people are people and ones like Mr. Kinnaman seem to exaggerate cultural shifts. Nonetheless, he provides support for our view of apologetics.

Accordingly, we have written elsewhere:

Not only do we refuse to accommodate *postmodern* philosophy in a biblical theology, neither do we think it has much place in evangelism as well. Accommodating our message to the latest epistemological fad among the heathen is a dangerous thing, especially when that fad is so counter-Christian. It will always be love that gains us an opportunity to communicate the Gospel in words, and such words will always be all that the Spirit needs to make the Gospel **"the power of salvation for everyone who believes"** (Rom 1:16), whether their perspective on truth is premodern, modern, postmodern, or post-postmodern.⁴⁴³

J) *Virtue Apologetics* is the Most Helpful for Discipleship

Finally, an emphasis on *intellectual apologetics* with a corresponding absence of *virtue apologetics* reinforces the plague in American Christianity that believes spiritual maturity is growing in knowledge, instead of character. **"Knowledge puffs up but love builds up"** (1 Cor 8:1). This is why it is better for someone to come to Christ through *virtue apologetics* instead of the intellectual kind. Again, while we are not particular about how people come to a saving knowledge of Christ, we would suggest that the person who was attracted to the Savior through the supernatural love of Christians, better understands from the very beginning of their discipleship that Authentic Christianity is about virtue, not mere knowledge.

Intellectual apologetics is a sad substitute for virtue. It is embarrassing to see so many Christian theologians denying virtue as an apologetic, and suggesting that the intellectual kind can suffice. If they feel they need to do so because of a perceived lack of virtue among professing Christians, it is understandable. But to completely ignore the biblical prescription for this very thing is inexcusable. And let us be honest and admit that if we cannot prove the exclusivity of Christianity by our virtue than we have no business trying to prove it any other way. If Christians are immoral

⁴⁴³ Excerpt from chapter 2.12.

they have simply lost any right or opportunity to be a testimony for their faith. Nothing can make up for a lack of virtue because it is the ultimate apologetic for a religion that claims to be the only one accepted by the Creator.

Virtue apologetics motivates Christians to live up to their God-given moral potential in a way that other apologetic approaches will not. *Intellectual apologetics* makes no moral demands on the Christian, and we fear that this is precisely why some people are so eager to embrace and promote it. It is precisely because of what *virtue apologetics* can do for the life of *believers*, that God intended it to be the ultimate and universal proof of Christianity.

It is when we understand that God wants us living our lives on a stage for the unbelieving world to see, that we will take our mandate to be this planet's moral salt and light more seriously. As in most areas of life, a response to a serious and significant challenge or need brings out a person's fullest capabilities. One possible reason that many Christians are morally coasting instead of soaring with the spiritual power they have, is because *virtue apologetics* has been grossly neglected for so long. *Virtue apologetics* is the biblical challenge needed to push the world's only spiritual butterflies to consistently live above the caterpillars. May we fly like God has uniquely recreated us to!

Pastoral Practices

- Based on the importance that Scripture places on *virtue apologetics*, it would seem important to teach this to our churches at some point in time, for all the reasons given here.

Publications & Particulars

Book 5

Biblical Apologetics

Part IV

***Challenges to Virtue
Apologetics***

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Chapter 5.15

Moral Relativism & Insanity

Table of Topics

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B) Moral Insanity Among Non-Christians

B.1) Moral Depravity Perverts Moral Reasoning

B.2) The Vice of "Toleration" Distorts the Virtue of Moral Standards

Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- If love and righteousness are either unrecognizable, unimportant, or defined differently by a particular culture, then virtue ceases to be an apologetic basis for a religion's superiority over others.
- As is the case in many arenas, it would seem that the popularity of *moral relativism* differs between the academy and the man on the street.
- Contrary to *moral relativism*, humanity possesses a sufficiently universal & objective sense of morality for *virtue apologetics* to be effective.
- Universal moral standards are in human culture because they are recognized as beneficial and humans have consciences.
- While moral relativist may claim to deny universal morals, they themselves are consistent in condemning certain behaviors.
- Accordingly, God is not even interested in proving anything to such people and God's intentions for *virtue apologetics* do not include people whose "**consciences are corrupted**" (Tit 1:16) such that their minds are morally depraved.
- As the "toleration" of immorality increasingly becomes a virtue in our culture, the Christian's real virtuous stand for biblical morality (e.g. homosexuality) will be perceived as a vice.

Part of the reason for the neglect and even denial of a biblical approach to Christian apologetics is the perceived philosophical and historical difficulties of claiming the moral superiority of those uniquely having God the Holy Spirit live in them. We will address these in the next three chapters, and find that by and large, the biblical mandate for *virtue apologetics* remains the ultimate and universal approach God has ordained to prove the exclusivity of Christianity in this world.

A) The Challenge of Moral Relativism Among Cultures

Many question whether morality is understood universally and objectively enough to be the means to prove anything. In other words, if love and righteousness are either unrecognizable, unimportant, or defined differently by a particular culture, then virtue ceases to be an apologetic basis for a religion's superiority over others. The position we are describing can be labeled *moral relativism*.

Accordingly, Louis Pojman writes in his excellent book on ethics: Ethical relativism holds that there are no universally valid moral principles, but rather that all moral principles are valid relative to culture or individual choice. It is to be distinguished from moral skepticism-the view that there are no valid moral principles at all (or at least we cannot know whether there are any).⁴⁴⁴

As is the case in many arenas, it would seem that the popularity of *moral relativism* differs between the academy and the man on the street. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland claim that, "The majority of moral philosophers and theologians do not embrace [moral] relativism because of the seriousness of the criticisms raised against it."⁴⁴⁵ However, Dr. Pojman believes that such an attitude is fairly popular among non-academics and comments:

[I]n polls taken in my ethics and introduction to philosophy classes over the past several years (in three different universities in three areas of the country) students affirmed by a two to one ratio, a version of moral relativism over moral

⁴⁴⁴ Louis P. Pojman, *Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong* (Wadsworth, 1990), 28.

⁴⁴⁵ William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Inter Varsity, 2002), 410.

absolutism with barely three percent seeing something in between these two polar opposites.⁴⁴⁶

The most common objection to the universality of morality is the differences that actually exist in some cultures. For example, Dr. Pojman observes:

Eskimos allow their elderly to die by starvation, whereas we [Americans] believe that this practice is morally wrong. The Spartans of ancient Greece believed, and Dobu of New Guinea believe today, that stealing is morally right, but we believe that it is wrong. The Nuer of East Africa throw deformed infants to the hippopotamus, but we abhor infanticide.

Ruth Benedict describes a tribe in Melanesia that views cooperation and kindness as vices, and Colin Turnbull had documented that the Ik in Northern Uganda have no sense of duty toward their children or parents. [Pojman shares elsewhere that the Ik culture actually “enjoys watching its own children fall into fires”⁴⁴⁷—their name seems to fit them well].

Some societies make it a duty for children to kill (sometimes strangle) their aging parents. Eskimos sometimes abandon their elderly as they move on to new locations. Sexual practices vary over time and clime. Some cultures permit homosexual behavior, whereas others condemn it. Some cultures practice cannibalism, whereas we detest it.⁴⁴⁸

While it is admitted by most that such moral aberrations are relatively rare, they obviously do exist. Still, their presence does nothing to change the fact that God intends for virtue to be the ultimate and universal apologetic for the superiority of the Christian faith.

First, even if it could be proven that the fruit of the Holy Spirit (cf. Gal 5:22-23) would be unimpressive in a certain culture, it can still be true that such virtue is God’s intended apologetic. It could likewise be argued that the apologetic message God intends to send through His Creation is thwarted if an individual is blind. Nonetheless, Creation remains God’s ultimate and universal apologetic for His existence.

Likewise, would we dismiss all the value of *intellectual apologetics* simply because there are a few mentally handicapped or insane people who do not have the mental capacity to appreciate

⁴⁴⁶ Pojman, 27.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., 40.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 19.

and evaluate such evidence? In the same vein, the presence of a morally blind or insane culture, (like the Ik of Uganda?), would not change the fact that Christian virtue remains God's ultimate and universal apologetic for His Gospel. The morally blind and insane would be those whose consciences are so hardened by sin that no apologetic for the real God will work, and even God Himself makes sure it won't work as a part of His judgment on them (cf. Rom 1:18-32; 9:17-18). It is not those whom the Bible says have morally crossed the "point of no return" that *virtue apologetics* or any other Christian apologetic is, or needs to be concerned with. As we have discussed elsewhere, such people are only increasingly damned by any evidence for Christianity.⁴⁴⁹

Secondly, we would maintain that even if a culture has some moral aberrations, that plenty of moral absolutes would remain among them that would coincide with Christian virtues. If there is an isolated culture somewhere in which stealing is even praiseworthy (which could be true of an American inner city gang as much as an Amazonian inner jungle tribe), we would still expect there to be some virtues that are highly regarded (such as courage, working hard, etc.) and that a Christian's superiority could be recognized in.

Thirdly, differences in morality between cultures can be exaggerated. Accordingly, Dr. Pojman concludes after a detailed analysis of the topic that: "[I]n every morality a certain core will remain, though we apply it somewhat differently because of differences in environment, belief, tradition, and the like."⁴⁵⁰ For example, in several cultures where euthanasia is practiced, it is considered an act of love and mercy, not murder. The moral principal of the sanctity of human life still exists, but is simply applied differently, and such an example would not strongly support *moral relativism*.

As Christian apologist Norm Geisler puts it:

Moral absolutes are unavoidable. Even those who deny them use them. The reasons for rejecting them are often based on a misunderstanding or misapplication of the moral absolute, not on a real rejection of it. That is, moral values are absolute, even if our understanding of them or the circumstances in which they be applied are not.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁹ For further discussion regarding those with an irreversibly ruined conscience see section 4.13.C.

⁴⁵⁰ Pojman, 53.

⁴⁵¹ Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (BECA) (Baker, 1999), 502. An additional defense of the objectivity and universality of morality across cultures can be found in Pojman. Also see

Likewise, David Stewart remarks:

[T]he alleged differences in morality among different cultures is probably greatly exaggerated. A truly different moral system would be one in which, for example, murder is approved and cowardice considered a virtue, where honesty is considered vile and loyalty is looked upon as stupid.⁴⁵²

Along these lines, C. S. Lewis noted in his well known apologetic *Mere Christianity* that:

I know that some people say the idea of a Law of Nature or decent behaviour known to all men is unsound, because different civilizations and different ages have had quite different moralities. But this is not true. There have been differences between their moralities, but these have never amounted to anything like a total difference.

If anyone will take the trouble to compare the moral teaching of, say, the ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, Hindus, Chinese, Greeks and Romans, what will really strike him will be how very like they are to each other and to our own. Some of the evidence for this I have put together in the appendix of another book called *The Abolition of Man*.⁴⁵³

A summary of Lewis's argument for a universally objective moral understanding includes:

There must be a universal moral law, or else: (a) Moral disagreements would make no sense, as we all assume they do. (b) All moral criticisms would be meaningless (e.g., "The Nazis were wrong."). (c) It is unnecessary to keep promises or treaties, as we all assume that it is. (d) We would not make excuses for breaking the moral law, as we all do.⁴⁵⁴

J. Budziszewski, *Written on the Heart: The Case for Natural Law* (InterVarsity, 1997); *The Reconstruction of the Christian Revelation Claim* by Stuart Hackett, (Baker, 1984), 152-161; C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Harper Collins, 2001), 3-34, 207-227; Craig and Moreland, 409-416; Peter Kreeft, *A Refutation of Moral Relativism: Interviews with an Absolutist* (Ignatius, 1999).

⁴⁵² David Stewart, *Exploring the Philosophy of Religion*, David Stewart, ed. (Prentice-Hall, 1998), 83.

⁴⁵³ Lewis, 5-6.

⁴⁵⁴ Geisler, 500.

A fourth response to *moral relativism* is that one of the reasons that there will always be universal moral standards in any human culture is because they are universally recognized as being beneficial. As discussed elsewhere, the motives behind such *moral utilitarianism* make it inferior to Christian virtue, but, nonetheless, create a universal foundation for the world's morality.⁴⁵⁵ The virtues that cause individuals, families, villages, cities, cultures, countries, and the world to flourish are universal enough throughout all these realms that these "successful" virtues will emerge as superior with any people, or those people will simply be miserable or even dead. For example, murder is not only morally wrong, but obviously detrimental to any human society and therefore laws against it are universally enforced. As we have written elsewhere:

History itself has revealed to humanity certain virtues that prosper society, therefore, there is a continual preservation and pursuit of these morals in all human cultures. Some refer to these as *natural laws*, which are the moral laws that all humans gain from both moral reasoning (conscience) and logical reasoning (utilitarianism).⁴⁵⁶

Dr. Pojman suggests that the following moral rules would be among these *natural laws* of human morality:

- Do not kill innocent people.
- Do not cause unnecessary pain or suffering.
- Do not steal or cheat.
- Keep your promises and honor your contracts.
- Do not deprive another person of his or her freedom.
- Do justice, treating equals equally and unequals unequally.
- Reciprocate: Show gratitude for services rendered.
- Tell the truth or, at least, do not lie.
- Help other people, at least when the cost to oneself is minimal.
- Obey just laws.⁴⁵⁷

Dr. Pojman adds:

These ten principles are examples of the core morality, principles necessary for the good life. They are not arbitrary, for we can give reasons that explain why they are necessary

⁴⁵⁵ For further discussion of the place of *moral utilitarianism* in forming human ethics see section 2.5.C.2.a.

⁴⁵⁶ Excerpt from section 2.6.C.2.a

⁴⁵⁷ Pojman, 52.

to social cohesion and human flourishing. Principles like the Golden Rule, not killing innocent people, treating equals equally, truth-telling, promise-keeping, and the like are central to the fluid progression of social interaction and the resolution of conflicts that ethics bears on. . . . These values are not good because we desire them; rather, we desire them because they are good—they are absolutely necessary for human flourishing.⁴⁵⁸

Dr. Pojmans's application of these morals to relationships reminds us of Thomas Aquinas' suggestion that, "the leading purpose of human law is to bring about friendship of men among themselves."⁴⁵⁹ All properly functioning humans greatly desire fulfilling relationships with others, and virtue, even if it is the *utilitarian* type, is necessary to fulfilling those desires. We only have satisfying relationships with those who are good to us and who we are good to as well.

Accordingly, Dr. Pojman concludes his analysis of the question regarding *moral relativism* when he writes:

Are moral principles absolute, or are they simply relative to social groups or individual decision? It would seem that moral principles have universal and objective validity, since similar rules are needed in any culture to promote human flourishing. So moral rules are not justified by cultural acceptance and are not relative.⁴⁶⁰

Dr. Pojman suggests that the case for moral *universalism* can be made in the following way:

- Human nature is relatively similar in essential respects, having a common set of needs and interests.
- Moral principles are functions of human needs and interests, instituted by reason in order to promote the most significant needs and interests of rational beings (and perhaps of others).
- Some moral principles will meet human needs and promote human interests better than other principles will.
- Principles that will meet essential human needs and promote the most significant human interests in optimal ways can be said to be objectively valid moral principles.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Timothy McDermott ed. (Christian Classics, 1989), 2a2ae.99, 2.

⁴⁶⁰ Pojman, 47.

- Therefore, since there is a common human nature, there is an objectively valid set of moral principles, applicable to all humanity.⁴⁶¹

Finally, anyone wanting to significantly diminish the God-ordained value of *virtue apologetics* because of a belief in *moral relativism* has to completely ignore the God-ordained purpose of the human conscience. In Romans 1 the Apostle says humanity is without excuse for their disbelief in God because of Creation (1:18-20). Likewise, in Romans 2 he says humanity is without excuse for their immorality because of conscience:

[W]hen Gentiles, who do not have the [biblical] law, do by [universal human] nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them. (Rom 2:14-15)

Obviously it is the human conscience that helps to produce the universal morality we have been describing. While moral relativist may claim to deny any universal morals, they themselves are quite consistent in condemning certain behaviors. Along these lines we read of two founders of postmodern philosophy and recognize how silly they are:

Leading postmodern philosopher Jacques Derrida . . . doesn't believe that there is any "transcendent signifier" or infinite reference point (as Sartre called it) or any sense to the world coming from outside the world (as Wittgenstein called it). For Derrida, there is no fixed point by which we can judge what is right or wrong, just or unjust. Yet-inconsistently-he maintains that the reason for deconstructing texts is that "deconstruction is justice." But we can know what is just only if we have a fixed and transcendent standard to identify it. Derrida is committed to uncovering injustice, but he has no basis in his philosophy to define justice. . . .

Another postmodern philosopher, Richard Rorty, gives up on belief in God and comes to the conclusion that there is "no neutral ground" by which we can judge that the Holocaust was evil. He maintains that the basis for ethics is "sentiment." But what makes one person's sentiment-say, that of a Nazi or

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 53-4.

a terrorist-better than another person's sentiment? In Rorty's system, there is no objective way to make that judgment.⁴⁶²

Dr. Pojman speaks at length concerning both the absurdity and the horrific consequences of *moral relativism*. For example, he notes:

If we can establish or show that it is reasonable to believe that there is, in some ideal sense, at least one objective moral principle that is binding on all people everywhere, then we shall have shown that relativism probably is false and that a limited objectivism is true. Actually, I believe that many qualified general ethical principles are binding on all rational beings, but one principle will suffice to refute relativism: It is morally wrong to torture people for the fun of it.⁴⁶³

Any sane human would agree with this, and as noted above, it is only morally sane people we are concerned with. And, as Dr. Pojman puts it, it is the morally insane who would claim "Adolf Hitler and the serial murderer Ted Bundy could be considered as moral as Gandhi, so long as each lived by his own standards, whatever those might be."⁴⁶⁴

Unfortunately in our day of making toleration a fundamental moral law itself, many people are not honest about their own lack of toleration. For example, Dr. Pojman writes:

In the opening days of my philosophy classes, I often find students vehemently defending subjective relativism-"Who are you to judge?" they ask. I then give them their first test. In the next class period, I return all the tests, marked "F," even though my comments show that most of them are a very high caliber. When the students express outrage at this (some have never before seen that letter on their papers and inquire about its meaning), I answer that I have accepted subjectivism for marking the exams. "But that's unjust" they typically insist-and then they realize that they are no longer being merely subjectivist about ethics.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶² Arthur Lindsey, *Love the Ultimate Apologetic: The Heart of Christian Witness* (Intervarsity, 2008), 36.

⁴⁶³ Pojman, 51.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 32.

Dr. Pojman goes on to demonstrate the universal repulsion that the human conscience produces by sharing a tape-recorded conversation that Ted Bundy had with one of his victims as he attempts to justify his cruelty to them just before he raped and murdered her. Mr. Bundy tells his innocent, helpless victim:

I learned that all moral judgments are "value judgments," that all value judgments are subjective, and that none can be proved to be either 'right' or 'wrong.' . . . Nor is there any 'reason' to obey the law for anyone, like myself, who has the boldness and daring, the strength of character, to throw off its shackles. . . .

I discovered that to become truly free, truly unfettered, I had to become truly uninhibited. And I quickly discovered that the greatest obstacle to my freedom, the greatest block and limitation to it, consists in the insupportable 'value judgment' that I was bound to respect the rights of others. . . .

Surely, you [the victim] would not, in this age of scientific enlightenment, declare that God or nature has marked some pleasures as 'moral' or 'good' and others as 'immoral' or 'bad'? In any case, let me assure you, my dear young lady, that there is absolutely no comparison between the pleasure I might take in eating ham and the pleasure I anticipate in raping and murdering you. That is the honest conclusion to which my education has led me-after the most conscientious examination of my spontaneous and uninhibited self.

If you can read that and still claim that morality is relative to the individual than you are just as morally insane as Bundy, and according to the mass of your own species, disqualified to offer any opinions about moral issues at all. However, if it is true that such a testimony will morally offend all but morally dysfunctional humans, then we have evidence for a universal morality, and the value of *virtue apologetics*. In spite of how fashionable it is to claim that morals are relative and therefore *virtue apologetics* is worthless, it becomes clear that God has actually created humanity and its environment so that *virtue* works as the ultimate and universal apologetic.

B) The Challenge of Moral Insanity Among Non-Christians

B.1) Moral Depravity Perverts Moral Reasoning

Obviously, God's desire to prove that Christianity is the only way to gain His acceptance, through the superior virtue of His uniquely Holy Spirit-indwelt people, is significantly challenged if the unregenerate have become so depraved that they have lost the ability to recognize true virtue. We have written elsewhere of this moral "insanity of humanity" and noted:

The Apostle writes: **"Since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God [and rejected reason], He gave them over to a depraved mind"** (Rom 1:28), and the result is that humans become for all practical purposes no better than beasts, **"senseless . . . heartless, ruthless"** (Rom 1:31). Or as we read in 2 Peter, **"like unreasoning animals"** (2:12 NASB). All of this because their God-given ability for moral reasoning is not properly functioning. . . .

The Apostle speaks synonymously of the corruption of both logical and moral reasoning when he writes:

To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds [logical reasoning] and consciences [moral reasoning] are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny Him. (Titus 1:15-16)

. . . . [T]he Apostle suggests a downward spiral of immorality resulting from the improper functioning of moral reason. This is specifically a result of not heeding the conscience which results in a person becoming increasingly **"hardened by sin's deceitfulness"** (Heb 3:13).⁴⁶⁶ Eventually, the person's inability to reason, particularly morally, results in a "point of no return" in which God gives **"them over to a depraved mind"** (Rom 1:28). God seems to have this same kind of depraved, dysfunctional moral reasoning in mind when He says through the Prophet Isaiah:

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight. (Isa 5:20-21, 24)

⁴⁶⁶ The context of Hebrews 3:13 makes it clear that its primary application applies to unbelievers, not believers.

At such a point, just as depicted in Romans 1, God is ready to **"give them over to a depraved mind"** (v. 28), and He therefore says again through Isaiah:

Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed. (Isa 6:10).

People who have reached such a "point of no return" are both destined and prepared for God's judgment.⁴⁶⁷

Accordingly, God is not even interested in proving anything to such people and God's intentions for *virtue apologetics* do not include people whose **"consciences are corrupted"** (Tit 1:16) such that their minds are morally depraved.

B.2) The Vice of "Toleration" Distorts the Virtue of Moral Standards

Such inability to distinguish right from wrong is additionally illustrated by the Apostle when he writes of those who **"have become filled with every kind of wickedness"** that **"they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them"** (Rom 1:29, 32). It is understandable, of course, that those who are wicked themselves, would be quite tolerant of the wickedness of others, in order not to condemn themselves. Unfortunately, such a wicked view of "tolerance" radically alters what such a person would consider to be virtuous.

Take, for example, the Christians' biblical denouncement of sexual immorality, including homosexuality. God's word condemns such things, and so should anyone professing to be a real Christian (cf. Lev 18:22; Rom 1:18, 22, 24, 26-27; 1 Cor 6:9-11). But because a growing portion of the unregenerated world does not view sexual immorality or homosexuality as wicked behavior, it views Christianity's righteous condemnation of such things as "intolerant" and lacking virtue. Accordingly, when the tolerance of wickedness becomes a virtue in a culture, and the condemnation of wickedness is seen as a vice, Christians will not appear to be virtuous. But again, it hardly matters, because God has most likely

⁴⁶⁷ Excerpt from section 4.13.C.1. See fuller discussion of the moral "insanity of humanity" in section 4.13.C.

given such people **"over to a depraved mind"** (Rom 1:28) and they have reached a moral "point of no return."⁴⁶⁸

Nonetheless, when "toleration" gets redefined in a wicked way, the perceived virtue of Christians is severely affected. Along these lines, William Watkins writes:

Such new cultural "virtues" [of tolerance] pervade nearly every aspect of our society, just as the old virtues did. And just as the virtue of self-sacrificial love bound together the older Christian virtues, so the "virtue" of tolerance is wed to the new secular "virtues" in an unholy alliance.

The tolerant person, so we're told, is broad-minded — open to other beliefs, truth claims, moral convictions, and lifestyles. He or she makes room for others to do as they wish, even if their behavior contradicts or even mocks his own. He believes in "live and let live."

During the '50s and '60s, being tolerant meant putting up with a slow salesclerk, restraining the desire to laugh at someone's bizarre dress, or holding one's tongue when a person made a harmless but erroneous comment. Being tolerant never meant condoning immoral behavior, letting harmful beliefs go unchallenged, or permitting a person's dangerous lifestyle to influence, much less be taught, to others. . . . We believed then that some beliefs and lifestyles promoted the common good while others undermined it.

Those of us who still believe these things are considered bigots, judgmental prudes, or moral fundamentalists by the new "tolerant" regime. Never mind that the new tolerance has led to the destruction of more than 30 million babies in America's abortuaries. Never mind that the new broad-mindedness concerning promiscuous and homosexual sex is perhaps the leading cause of the spread of HIV — one of the most deadly and elusive viruses yet known to humankind. Never mind that the new openness to "alternative lifestyles" is bringing about legislation that gives civil-rights status to immorality.

We must stop this insanity. The new tolerance is not a virtue but a vice. We must expose it for what it is and replace it with the truth.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁸ For further discussion regarding a moral "point of no return" see section 4.13.C

⁴⁶⁹ William Watkins, "Is Tolerance a Virtue" online at <http://www.equip.org/articles/is-tolerance-a-virtue>.

As G. K. Chesterton put it even decades ago: "Tolerance is the virtue of the man without convictions," especially moral ones. And as far as *virtue apologetics* is concerned, we are not concerned with people who don't have moral convictions, because as the Apostle points out in Romans 1, God is probably not interested in them either- except for judgment.

The propensity to value the opinion of those with depraved consciences regarding the morality of Christianity is a major flaw of the book, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity . . . and Why It Matters*, authored by David Kinnaman, President of the well-known Barna Research Group. Mr. Kinnaman

states the obvious: "Christianity has an image problem."⁴⁷⁰ But he then attempts to prove that this is because real Christians are not virtuous. He barely mentions, if not devalues other more likely reasons that sinful people would have a negative view of Christianity, including how they are slandered in the media, the

⁴⁷⁰ Kinnaman, 11. William Muehlenberg, theological lecturer and prolific Amazon.com reviewer responds to Kinnaman's statement that Christianity has an image problem:

Imagine if one could be free of all these negative traits, and present the good news of God in a totally loving and gracious manner. Would that mean everyone would flock to Christianity?

Well, we don't have to imagine very hard - it has already happened. Jesus came and lived among us, representing God perfectly, full of grace, love and beauty. And guess what? While many people flocked to Christ, many people rejected Christ. The most perfect example of Christlike behaviour was met with mixed results.

That message almost never comes through in this book. It is all about how we fail to measure up in the eyes of non-Christians. . . . Jesus said, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first" (John 15:18). . . .

[T]o speak the truth about a holy, just and righteous God who demands repentance and a changed life (with the help of Christ) will always cause an image problem, and will always lead many to want nothing to do with biblical Christianity.

I find the chapter on judgmentalism to also be problematic. Consider how the term is defined: "To be judgmental is to point out something that is wrong in someone else's life, making the person feel put down, excluded, and marginalized".

Is that bad? Is it unbiblical? To be honest, it seems to be a perfect description of just what we find in Scripture. Consider the story of Jesus and the rich man as found in Matt. 19:16-30. This seems to portray the very thing that Kinnaman is condemning.

In this pericope Jesus pointed "out something that is wrong in someone else's life" (the rich man), and what was the result? The rich man went away sad we are told, because Jesus was judging his love of riches. That sounds a lot like making the rich man "feel put down, excluded, and marginalized".

The truth is, whenever we proclaim that a person is alienated from God because of his sin and selfishness, and that he needs to repent and ask for forgiveness, that is going to result in such feelings. It cuts right across human pride to point out such things, and the first reaction many will have is, "you are being so judgmental; you are putting me down!"

(Online at:
http://www.amazon.com/unChristian-Generation-Really-ChristianityMatters/productreviews/0801013003/ref=cm_cr_dp_hist_2?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=0&filterBy=addTwoStar)

immorality of fakes, and perhaps most importantly, a true Christian's stand *for morality*. In fact, Mr. Kinnaman admits the latter when he writes:

[T]hose outside of Christianity, especially younger adults . . . reject Jesus because they feel rejected by Christians. . . . One crucial insight kept popping up in our exploration. In studying thousands of outsiders' impressions, it is clear that Christians are primarily perceived for what they stand against. We have become famous for what we oppose, rather than who we are for. . . . In our national surveys we found the [two] most common perceptions of present-day Christianity are "antihomosexual" (an image held by 91 percent of young outsiders), [and] "judgmental" (87 percent).⁴⁷¹

There is no doubt that the vast majority of such perceptions is the *virtuous* stand that Christians take against evils that people are practicing and even promoting. Of course sinful people are going to feel "rejected" because we reject their sin. And Mr. Kinnaman is off base to imply that people "reject Jesus because they feel rejected by Christians" as if their refusal to repent is our fault. Finally, why are we to assume that all of the 91% of those who said Christians were "antihomosexual" thought that was a bad thing?

Other results of Mr. Kinnaman's research that he thinks reveals "unchristian" behavior also merely reflect our *virtuous* stand against evil. These include his report that over 70% of unbelievers consider Christians as "out of touch with reality," (72%), "old-fashioned," (78%), and "insensitive to others" (70%).⁴⁷² Only 20% of professed unbelievers "describe Christian churches to be loving environments, places where people are unconditionally loved and accepted regardless of how they look or what they do."⁴⁷³ 64% criticize Christians for being "not accepting of other faiths."⁴⁷⁴

Good. The same people would have thought all the same things about Jesus. Of course, neither He nor we "unconditionally" accept people "regardless of . . . what they do." And if unbelievers do not perceive such a stance as virtuous it is not because Christians are not virtuous but because the unregenerate are morally insane. And Mr. Kinnaman contributes to the distortion in his research when he himself defines love in this same perverted way that unbelievers do.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 11, 26-27.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., 185.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 27.

Not even **"God"** Who **"is love"** (1 John 4:8) "unconditionally" accepts people "regardless of . . . what they do."

Unfortunately, Mr. Kinnaman is so eager to disparage the morality of real Christians that he says, "Scripture never condones judgment and criticism aimed at those outside the church."⁴⁷⁵ Has he read what Jesus said to the unbelieving Pharisees? He told them they were unforgivable, **"evil,"** unable to **"say anything good"** and **"condemned"** **"for every careless word they have spoken"** (Matt 12:31-37), **"hypocrites,"** **"blind guides,"** **"full of greed and self-indulgence,"** **"whitewashed tombs,"** **"full of dead men's bones and everything unclean,"** **"full of hypocrisy and wickedness."** And then He adds, **"You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?"** (Matt 23:13, 16, 25, 27-28, 33). Few Christians have ever spoken words so harsh and condemning.

Does Mr. Kinnaman recall that the Apostle Peter told a crowd of unbelievers, **"you, with the help of wicked men, put Him [the Lord] to death by nailing Him to the cross"** (Acts 2:23). That sounds pretty critical and judgmental. And the crowd thought so too. Accordingly, they were afraid of God's judgment and 3000 of them repented. Likewise, the Apostle Paul could even be considered demeaning when he publicly told the Athenians that their religion was based on **"ignorance"** and God **"commands all people everywhere to repent"** of such ignorance. (Acts 17:30).

Mr. Kinnaman has unfortunately bought into the unbiblical culture or moral "toleration" in our day. Accordingly, he repeatedly describes being judgmental as an immoral thing, and then defines it as "to point out something that is wrong in someone else's life, making the person feel put down, excluded, and marginalized." Wouldn't it at times be our Christian duty "to point out something that is wrong in someone else's life"? And if they were offended by that would it always be our fault? Offending sinners is part of being the salt and light of the world (cf. Matt 5:13-16).

The Apostle John reminds us:

This is the verdict: . . . men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. (John 3:19-20)

Accordingly, the fact that **"Everyone who does evil hates the light"** is not the slur on Christians that Mr. Kinnaman would like to make it.

Even Mr. Kinnaman is willing to admit:

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 255 endnote.

Keep in mind that part of the reason Christians possess a bad reputation is because our faith perspectives grate against a morally relativistic culture. Mosaics and Busters find that Christian perspectives run counter to their anything-goes mindset.⁴⁷⁶

The all-important question is how big a “part” does the offense and guilt experienced by the unregenerate play in their negative attitude toward Christians who stand for biblical morality? Admittedly, it is difficult to know, as unbelievers certainly would not want to admit to such a thing. Nonetheless, we believe the warranted guilt and offense of unbelievers toward Christian moral standards *is the biggest reason* for any negative attitudes toward Christianity. At the least, if such self-centered bias plays any significant part in such attitudes, Mr. Kinnaman’s research and conclusions are severely compromised.

Nonetheless, perhaps the greatest problem with trusting Mr. Kinnaman’s research is the woefully inadequate way in which he identifies “Christians.” This is hinted at in his allusion above to a supposed “enormous number of Christians in this country.” As discussed in the next chapter, better research suggests otherwise, and the approach that “Christian” pollsters like Mr. Kinnaman take to identify real Christians is so flawed that it suggests it is intentional on their part in order to give statistical support to their apparent agenda of slandering the morality of real Christians. This is particularly disturbing when such good men as Chuck Colson, John Stott, Andy Stanley, and Rick Warren contribute to his book *Unchristian*.

Finally, whatever genuinely arrogant and unkind condemnation that unbelievers may be able to legitimately accuse supposed Christians of, is most likely to come from modern unregenerate “Pharisees” who claim to be Christians but are not. Such people believe they are saved by their good works, and the way they evaluate their standing before God is to compare themselves with “sinners.” Accordingly, their assurance of salvation and a clear conscience *depend* on putting others down, and highly motivates them to do so. Real Christians have no such motivation. Which is why it is important to distinguish between regenerated Christians and unregenerated *Christendom*, a topic which we also take up in the next chapter.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 34.

Extras & Endnotes

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) What is *moral relativism* and how might it negate *virtue apologetics* if it were true?
- 2) What are some reasons that we claim humanity possesses a sufficiently universal & objective sense of morality for *virtue apologetics* to be effective? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 3) Why do we claim that, especially in statistical studies, the moral failures of real born again Christians are exaggerated? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 4) How would the modern emphasis on “toleration” inhibit *virtue apologetics*?

Publications & Particulars

Chapter 5.16

Immorality Among Christians and Morality Among Non-Christians

Table of Topics

A) Immorality in Modern Christendom

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B) Morality Among Non-Christians

B.1) Can Unregenerate People be Virtuous?

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Immorality of the Unregenerate

Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- Moral failures of real born again Christians are exaggerated.
- Christian pollsters fail to define real Christians well enough in their research and end up slandering the people of God by accusing them of things that fakes do and believe, but not born again Christians.
- If we studied God's handiwork in His "new creations" of Christians as much as we do His "old creation," the Universe, it would produce similarly convincing apologetic evidence.
- The lack of biblical Church discipline inhibits *virtue apologetics*.
- If observations of the entire Christian sub-culture do not impress someone, their personal experience with a Spirit-filled Christian can.
- Christians are not perfect, but when compared with the millions murdered by Humanists, Marxists, and Muslims, its spiritual superiority is obvious.

A) Immorality in Modern *Christendom*

A.1) The Exaggeration of Christian Immorality

In our defense of *virtue apologetics* for the Christian faith, there has been no intention of suggesting that believers are sinless. All we are claiming is that real regenerated Christians are significantly and noticeably more virtuous and moral than unregenerated humanity. Nonetheless, it needs to be admitted that while the stars in Heaven always faithfully fulfill their apologetic mission and proclaim the glory of God (cf. Ps 19:1-3), Christians do not.

Nonetheless, many Christian leaders greatly exaggerate this failure. For example, the popular Southern Baptist author Henry Blackaby recently told an audience:

The problem of America is not the unbelieving world. The problem of America is the people of God. You see, right now there are just as many divorces in the church as outside the church. There are just as many abortions inside the church [i.e. born again believers] as outside the church [i.e. unregenerate humanity]. There's only 1 percent difference in gambling inside the church as outside the church. George Barna did a survey of 152 separate items comparing the lost world and the church, and he said there is virtually no difference between the two.⁴⁷⁷

Likewise, Gary L. W. Johnson notes:

The research efforts of Gallup, Barna, and Hunter all indicate that evangelicals are, for the most part, as secular in their orientation as non-Christians. . . . The data reveals, among other things . . . 77 percent believe that human beings are basically good and that good people go to heaven regardless of their relationship to Christ, while more than half of those surveyed affirmed self-fulfillment as their first priority. An equal number had a difficult time accepting the concept of absolute truth. I fear that this may be only the tip of a massive iceberg.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁷ Quoted by Woodrow Kroll in *Back to the Bible: Turning Your Life Around with God's Word* (Multnomah, 2000), 131.

⁴⁷⁸ Gary L. W. Johnson, "Does Theology Still Matter?" in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis* John H. Armstrong, ed. (Moody, 1996), 61.

What can be said in response to such descriptions? Do they obliterate the legitimacy of *virtue apologetics*? We do not think so. First of all, we must deal with the difference between real born again Christians and *Christendom*. *Christendom* is the multitude of people and institutions throughout history and today who have professed to be Christian, but are not regenerated, and therefore, not really Christian. Jesus described the worst element of *Christendom* when He warned:

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶ By their [moral] fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

²¹ "Not everyone who [claims to be a Christian and who] says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father Who is in Heaven. ²² Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!' (Matt 7:15-23)

There are a number of things here that "Christian" pollsters do not heed. First, by instructing us that we must **"watch out"** for fakes, Jesus indicated that they will be hard to detect. Secondly, while pollsters claim there are no real differences between regenerated **"good trees"** and unregenerated **"bad trees"**, Jesus indicated otherwise by describing the great difference between the **"fruit"** of their life, one being **"good"** and one being **"bad."** Finally, Jesus warns that **"many"** will be fake professors of Christianity, a fact that modern pollsters certainly do not consider carefully enough.

The fact that in 2008 over 75 percent of Americans claimed to be Christian, ⁴⁷⁹ while far fewer than that actually believe the doctrines of Christianity or obey its commands, reveals the

⁴⁷⁹ "American Religious Identification Survey 2008," online at <http://www.americanreligionsurvey-aris.org/reports/highlights.html>. The 75% professing Christianity in America is a significant decline from the report 18 years earlier in 1990 that stated the percentage at 86%.

magnitude of *Christendom* in our country. What the above statistics actually reveal is the large number of professing Christians in America, not the moral state of real born again Christians.

This condition is nothing new, as B. B. Warfield wrote many years ago: "Nowadays men cheerfully abandon the whole substance of Christianity, but they will hardly be persuaded to surrender the name."⁴⁸⁰ Likewise, Francis Schaeffer wrote some years ago:

From the scriptural viewpoint, not all who call themselves Christians are Christians, and that is especially true in our generation. The meaning of the word Christian has been reduced to practically nothing. Surely, there is no word that has been so devalued unless it is the word "God" itself.⁴⁸¹

Accordingly, if one will read the quotes above carefully, it would seem fairly obvious that the majority of the immorality described does not apply to real Christians. Dr. Blackaby's comparison between Americans and "the church" is somewhat obscure as there are all kinds of unregenerate people going to church today. Therefore, it is misleading for him to equate "the people of God" with "the church." Accordingly, Dr. Blackaby's claim that real born again Christians are gambling and having abortions as often as non-Christians amounts to the kind of slander and false accusations that the devil practices against Christians as well (cf. Rev 12:10).

Likewise, Dr. Blackaby's claim that those indwelt with the Holy Spirit (i.e. all Christians) have as many divorces as those spiritually dead (i.e. all unbelievers) has been an oft quoted "statistic" that the Church has been barraged with for many years now. It's simply not true. The general rate of divorce in America has been put at about 50%. However, contrary to Dr. Blackaby and many others, not even close to 50% of those in whom Christ lives are getting divorces.

For example, the association of churches this writer belongs to conducted an informal survey of the rate of divorce among church members in the last ten years. It was estimated to be 2.5%. That is not because the Christians in these churches are so much more spiritual than other Christians. Rather, it is because these churches simply have a very high percentage of actual born again Christians.

Such a rate of divorce would be what we would expect. Christians are not perfect. Some of them do not live up to the spiritual and virtuous power they have. But they are supernaturally and significantly superior to their unbelieving peers when it comes

⁴⁸⁰ *Selected Shorter Writings* of Benjamin B. Warfield John E. Meeter ed. (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970), 1:48.

⁴⁸¹ Francis Schaeffer, *The Mark of a Christian* (Intervarsity, 1970), 11.

to love and morality. Accordingly, real Christians, all of whom are new human creations through the fact that God lives in them, honestly have significantly stronger and happier marriages than those who only have a sinful, selfish nature, which is true of all non-Christians.

Perhaps one of the most egregious examples of immorality in modern *Christendom* is the number of Roman Catholic priests who have molested children. None of them have any rightful claim to be a Christian, and we could wish the world could understand that, so that such horrific sins would not be attributed to real Christianity. Another significant example of unregenerated *Christendom* is mainline denominations such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. which have approved of ordaining practicing homosexuals to be Pastors. No one can violate God's word so arrogantly and still have a believable claim to be a Christian.

A.2) The Problem With "Christian" Pollsters

As for Mr. Johnson's statistics from George Barna and others, we find it difficult to believe, for example, that "77 percent" of truly born again Christians "believe that . . . good people go to heaven regardless of their relationship to Christ" or that "more than half of" Christians "affirmed self-fulfillment as their first priority."

George Barna, known as "the most quoted man in Christianity" is, of course, famous for pointing out how sinful Christians supposedly are, compared to their unbelieving neighbors. However, Mr. Barna's research primarily serves to demonstrate how difficult it is to obtain good data on real Christians. In fact, studies have shown that Americans significantly exaggerate their spirituality when asked about it in the kinds of surveys the Barna Research Group conducts.⁴⁸²

⁴⁸² Andy Rowell writes in his article "Weekly U.S.A. Church Attendance: The Sociologists Weigh In":

As you will see below, most sociologists stress that (a) self-reporting of church attendance has been relatively stable (around 35%?); (b) that the actual attendance is probably lower than what is reported. (http://www.andyrowell.net/andy_rowell/2008/11/weekly-usa-church-attendance-the-sociologists-weigh-in.html)

In fact, in a rather well know 1993 study, C. K. Hadaway, P. L. Marler, and Mark Chaves demonstrated that actual church attendance is only about half of what people claim. In other words, people are about twice as likely to *claim* they attend church, than they are to actually attend.

Nonetheless, Mr. Barna attempts to get meaningful statistics by trying to identify “born again Christians” for his surveys. Unfortunately, what follows is his definition of such a person:

“Born again Christians” are defined as people who said they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today and who also indicated they believe that when they die they will go to Heaven because they had confessed their sins and had accepted Jesus Christ as their savior. Respondents were not asked to describe themselves as “born again.”⁴⁸³

The value of any study based on such a definition is severely limited by the probability that most, if not all, of the over 75 percent of Americans who claim to be Christians would accept such a definition of themselves. However, who really believes that all of those who would identify themselves with Mr. Barna’s description really are born again Christians? Even his claim that 40 percent of

(“What the Polls Don't Show: A Closer Look at U.S. Church Attendance,” *American Sociological Review* 58 (1993): 741-752).

The researchers specifically illustrated this in the Episcopal denomination. The authors point out that according to self-reporting surveys, there was a 13% increase in the number of people claiming to be members of the Episcopalian denomination between 1967 and 1990. “Instead, the Episcopalian church declined 28%.” (742).

Likewise, according to Gallup polls and other surveys, about 35% of Episcopalians claimed to have attended church in the last seven days. In reality it was about 16% (743).

After sharing specifics about their research method and data collection of actual church attendance, the researchers concluded: “Our research suggests that Protestants and Catholic church attendance is roughly one half the levels reported by Gallup.” (748)

In followup research in 2005, the authors found the same. They write: Opinion polls indicate that over 40 percent of Americans attend worship services each week. However, attendance counts in several North American counties and Roman Catholic dioceses suggest that worship attendance may be much lower. . . . The resulting totals suggest that fewer than 22 percent of Americans attend worship services each week. This lower level of attendance provides further evidence that Americans tend to overreport worship participation and are less religiously active than the polls show. (C. Kirk Hadaway, and Penny Long Marler, “How Many Americans Attend Worship Each Week? An Alternative Approach to Measurement,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44 (2005): 307-322).

⁴⁸³ George Barna, online at <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdateNarrow&BarnaUpdateID=232>.

Americans are “born again” is unconvincing.⁴⁸⁴ Especially when he claims that almost half of them believe that satan is merely a “symbol of evil” and “not a living being,” one-third of them believe “that if a person is good enough they can earn a place in Heaven,” 15 percent claim Christ’s resurrection never happened, and 26 percent of Mr. Barna’s “born again” Christian believe, “it doesn’t matter what faith you follow because they all teach the same lessons.”⁴⁸⁵ These are not real Christians Mr. Barna, no matter what kind of “personal commitment to Jesus Christ” they claim to have made.⁴⁸⁶

The current President of the Barna Research Group, David Kinnaman, has perpetuated the same flawed approach to researching Christian behavior as the founder. In his book *UnChristian*, Mr. Kinnaman writes: “Eighty-five percent of young outsiders [unbelievers] have had sufficient exposure to Christians and churches that they conclude present-day Christianity is hypocritical.”⁴⁸⁷ How does Mr. Kinnaman know the “exposure” was “sufficient” for the conclusion he draws? And when the author defines “born again Christian” in the same way as described above, it is obvious his results cannot be trusted.

Likewise, the author bases a great deal of his research on a survey group of “young” unbelievers, “84 percent” of whom “say they personally know at least one committed Christian.”⁴⁸⁸ Do we want to trust how an unbeliever would define a “committed Christian”? Perhaps someone who periodically goes to a liberal, spiritually dead church and merely professes to be a Christian would seem “committed” to a young unbeliever.

Because of this flawed approach to research we are not impressed with Mr. Kinnaman’s conclusions on the immorality of Christians. He writes:

In virtually every study we conduct [Barna Research Group], representing thousands of interviews every year, born-again Christians [given the unbiblical definition above] fail to display much attitudinal or behavioral evidence of transformed lives.

⁴⁸⁴ George Barna, online at <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=Topic&TopicID=8>.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ For an example that demonstrates significant errors in some of Barna’s past research see http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3835/is_200007/ai_n8923977.

⁴⁸⁷ Kinnaman, 42.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., 48.

For instance, based on a study released in 2007, we found that most of the lifestyle activities of born-again Christians were statistically equivalent to those of nonborn-again. When asked to identify their activities over the last thirty days, born-again believers were just as likely to bet or gamble, to visit a pornographic website, to take something that did not belong to them, to consult a medium or psychic, to physically fight or abuse someone, to have consumed enough alcohol to be considered legally drunk, to have used an illegal, nonprescription drug, to have said something to someone that was not true, to have gotten back at someone for something he or she did, and to have said mean things behind another person's back.⁴⁸⁹

And Mr. Kinnaman really thinks these are "born-again believers"? In addition, among his definition of "born again believers" ages 23-41, the following percentages believe the following are "morally acceptable": A man and woman living together before marriage, 59%; sex outside of marriage, 44%; using profanity, 37%; getting drunk, 35%; looking at pictures of nudity or explicit sexual behavior, 33%; having an abortion, 32%.⁴⁹⁰ Any truly Christian researcher should know how dubious it would be to confidently call such people born again Christians in the biblical sense of the term. And it is simply slanderous and irresponsible to print such conclusions claiming they are either professional or Christian.

Accordingly, Dr. MacArthur writes:

I have absolutely no confidence in contemporary Christian pollsters, starting with their incorrigible unwillingness to make any kind of meaningful distinction between a heathen who makes a religious profession in the name of Christ, and people who truly seem to believe God's Word, love the Lord, and give credible professions of faith. (That is, of course, the very distinction Christ instructed us to make in Matthew 7:15-20.) .

. . .

For example, a survey released by the Barna Research group in February 1994 suggested that half of all people who describe themselves as "born-again" had no clue what John 3:16 refers to. Large percentages of professing Christians were also at a loss to explain terms such as "the Great

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 53.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 50.

Commission" or "the gospel." A number defined "gospel" simply as "a style of music."⁴⁹¹

Does the Barna Research Group understand the seriousness of the distortions of their famous but flawed research? Scripture tells us that the devil slanders Christians (cf. Rev 12:10). Accordingly, erroneous, widely published research that claims to prove Christians are just as immoral as unbelievers is likewise demonic slander.

Nonetheless, it may be possible to get something useful out of the Barna Research Group if we use some of its data correctly. For example, George Barna defines an "evangelical Christian" as:

In addition to meeting the born again criteria [described above] evangelicals also meet seven other conditions. Those include saying their faith is very important in their life today; contending that they have a personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs about Christ with non-Christians; stating that Satan exists; maintaining that eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not by being good or doing good deeds; asserting that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth; saying that the Bible is totally accurate in all it teaches; and describing God as the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect deity who created the universe and still rules it today.⁴⁹²

Now we're getting somewhere to actually identifying real born again Christians. In fact, biblically speaking, you would have to believe, "that eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not by being good or doing good deeds" even to be a Christian. Which is why it is foolish to leave this out of a definition of any kind of Christian, which Mr. Barna habitually does.

The likelihood that Mr. Barna's more narrow definition of an "evangelical" is more accurately reflecting real Christians is made all the more probable by the fact that his surveys indicate, "evangelicals remain just 7% of the adult population."⁴⁹³ That seems about right when we consider that Jesus said that "**many enter**" the "**wide . . . gate and broad . . . road that leads to [eternal] destruction**" but "**only a few find**" the "**small . . . gate and narrow . . . road that leads to [eternal] life**" (Matt 7:13-14).

⁴⁹¹ John MacArthur, *The Truth War* (Nelson, 2007), 211.

⁴⁹² "Annual Barna Group Survey Describes Changes in America's Religious Beliefs and Practices," The Barna Group, 2005-APR-11, at: <http://www.barna.org/>

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

Accordingly, the relatively few times Mr. Barna has separated out “evangelicals” in his morality studies, they have indeed demonstrated an objective, significant difference in behavior. For example, in a 2008 study, Mr. Barna reports:

Examining people’s faith perspectives revealed that evangelicals were the group most likely to follow traditional morality while atheists and agnostics were the faith segment most likely to reject those ways.

Among evangelicals, profanity (16%) and [exposure to] pornography (12%) were the most common transgressions. Fewer than 5% of evangelicals had engaged in gossip (4%), inappropriate sex (3%), gambling (2%), lying (1%) or drunkenness (less than .5 percent).

In contrast, among skeptics (atheists and agnostics) participation in the eight behaviors ranged from a low of 11% (retaliating) up to a high of 60% (using profanity). While evangelicals averaged 6% participation in each of the eight behaviors mentioned, skeptics averaged five times that level (29%). Other common acts among skeptics included exposure to pornography (50%), gossip (34%) and drunkenness (33%).

People associated with faiths other than Christianity were twice as likely as evangelicals to engage in the [immoral] behaviors explored. They were most likely to use profanity (33%), view pornography (32%) and lie (18%).⁴⁹⁴

It is both [intentionally?] misleading and irresponsible that Mr. Kinnaman does not report these results in a book in which he is trying to prove the immorality of Christians. Nonetheless, he does write:

At Barna we employ dozens of tools to assess the depth of a person’s faith [unfortunately, the quantity of their “tools” apparently has nothing to do with their quality]. Let me suggest one for our discussion: a biblical worldview. . . .

A person with a biblical worldview believes that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life, God is the all-powerful and all-knowing Creator of the universe and he stills rules it today, salvation is a gift from God and cannot be earned, Satan is real, a Christian has a responsibility to share his or her faith in Christ with other people, the Bible is accurate in all of the principles it teaches, unchanging moral truth exists, and such moral truth is defined by the Bible. . . .

⁴⁹⁴ George Barna, “Young Adults and Liberals Struggle with Morality” <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/16-teensnext-gen/25-young-adults-and-liberals-struggle-with-morality>

In our research, we have found that people who embrace these eight components live a substantially different faith from other Americans, indeed, from other believers.⁴⁹⁵

Again, we must sift through the researcher's flawed approach to obtain what may be closer to the truth. From a biblical perspective, people without these "components" could hardly claim to be Christian. Nonetheless, in spite of Mr. Kinnaman's opposition to biblical teaching regarding the qualities of real born again Christians, perhaps such research can be seen to actually prove the claim of *virtue apologetics*.

In fact, while Mr. Kinnaman desires to use his research to prove that *virtue apologetics* is a massive failure, some of it actually indicates otherwise. Even he admits: "[M]ost outsiders indicate that present-day Christianity is 'friendly.'" ⁴⁹⁶ Even among the most skeptical group of Americans (age 16 to 29), 71% of them thought Christians were "friendly." In addition, among this group that is the most antagonistic towards Christianity, over half of them believed Christianity was "a faith you respect" (55%), "consistently shows love for other people" (55%), "offers hope for the future" (54%), and that Christians are "people you trust" (52%). The percentages of those who were favorable toward Christianity in older demographics were even significantly higher.

While Mr. Kinnaman claims his research reveals that real Christians in America are generally immoral, we think these statistics are a remarkable testimony of their virtue, especially when we consider the fact that American youth are constantly bombarded with anti-Christian propaganda. Accordingly, the author exaggerates and contradicts his own research when he states:

Mosaics [born 1984-2002] and Busters [born 1965-1976] rarely see Christians who embody service, compassion, humility, forgiveness, patience, kindness, peace, joy, goodness, and love.⁴⁹⁷

On the contrary, a majority of them claimed in Kinnaman's own research to view Christians with these very kinds of attributes. In fact, it is interesting to note that evidently, a large number of the approximately 90% who thought Christians were "antihomosexual" and "judgmental" also thought they were "friendly" "a faith you respect," and "people you trust."

⁴⁹⁵ Kinnaman, 74-75.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 27.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 35.

Again, none of this is to suggest that Christians are morally perfect. Still, we would claim that if a sampling of truly born again Christians could be morally compared with the spiritually unregenerate, that the evidence of the working of the Holy Spirit would be more significant and objective than many are willing to admit.

Humans have invested an enormous amount of resources for studying the “old” Creation, and the more they discover, the more they are convinced that it is the handiwork of the one true God. If we were to apply the same effort somehow in researching the phenomena of the “new creations” God is making through the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, it would have the same apologetic effect. And we think God would want Christian pollsters like the Barna Research Group to do more of this very thing.

A.3) The Church’s Hindrance of *Virtue Apologetics*

Unfortunately, the Church itself has diminished the potential of *virtue apologetics* in several ways. First, the fact that over 75 percent of Americans claim to be Christians is evidence that we have neglected to sufficiently denounce the popular, but unbiblical teaching that someone can claim to be a Christian without living like it. Related to this is the widespread neglect of biblical Church discipline (cf. 1 Cor 5:1-13). God wants to make the difference between His people and mere professors evident for apologetic reasons, but Church leaders are often unwilling to do their part in the name of tolerance or because of fear.

Unfortunately, a lack of biblical Church discipline blurs the important line between Christianity and Christendom. As we discuss more thoroughly in the next chapter, so much of the immorality charged to the Church occurs in unregenerate, and therefore evil, Christendom, rather than among real born again Christians. Whole eras, nations, and denominations that have claimed to be Christian, are not. Admittedly, this very understandable confusion is perhaps the greatest hindrance to the effect of *virtue apologetics*.

For example, Mahatma Ghandi rather famously said:

I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ. The materialism of affluent Christian countries appears to contradict the claims of

Jesus Christ that says it's not possible to worship both Mammon and God at the same time.⁴⁹⁸

Ghandi was both right and wrong. He is right that a person or country devoted to "materialism" or that would "worship Mammon" would thereby "contradict the claims of Jesus Christ." But accordingly, such a country or person would not be able to biblically claim Christ at all. **"If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him"** (1 John 2:15). You cannot be greedy, materialistic, or worldly and be a Christian. Accordingly, Ghandi and others who wish to judge Christianity would be better to limit such judgments to those who are actually following the teachings of Jesus. Wouldn't this be fair in evaluating any religion?

It should also be mentioned that, while hypocritical "sinners" should be expelled from the communion of Christians, we have a mandate to include "seeking" sinners among us in our desire to reach out to them. Such people can be equated with Christians and therefore bring the claim of superior morality into question. Nonetheless, we are willing to be subject to the same criticism as Christ Who was also known to fellowship with "sinners" (Matt 9:10-13). But they were the seeking kind, not the proud, hypocritical, pharisaical kind, whom He publicly denounced. No doubt, the people observed these very virtues in Christ, and it was an important part of drawing them to Him. The same would be true today.

A.4) Personal Relationships are the Key

Even if we admit that some legitimate accusations can be made against the virtue of Christians today *in general*, this need not inhibit *virtue apologetics* in particular. This is again because its real power occurs in the personal relationships that Christians have with the unregenerate. If observations of the entire Christian sub-culture do not impress someone, their personal experience with a Spirit-filled Christian can. So much so that experiences with hypocrisy can be negated, and even the unbeliever recognizes mere professors for what they are.

While many still wish to claim that the hypocrites of the world negate the use of *virtue apologetics* in a universal sense, it is still our love and holiness that will be the most powerful and effective way to earn a hearing of the Gospel in our own personal worlds. Lost friends and family may know of fallen "Christians" in the

⁴⁹⁸ Quoted by William Rees-Mogg in *The Times* [London] (4 April 2005).

media, but more importantly they know us, and our virtue will speak louder than anything else.

Admittedly, a problem with *virtue apologetics* is that it is conditional on the choices and actions of Christians. As we wrote elsewhere:

[W]e notice in Christ's prescription for Christian apologetics that it is conditional on our obedience. He says, "**By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another**" (John 13:35). Therefore, disobedience, and a failure to live in the fruits of the Spirit, not only disqualify us to be good ambassadors for Christ, but the world around us is cheated and deprived of the most powerful evidence available for the salvific exclusivity of Christianity.⁴⁹⁹

Nonetheless, we maintain that in our own personal real world, one consistently virtuous Christian can make up for the failures of others.

A.5) A Noticeable Difference, Not Perfection, is Needed

While it must be admitted that Christians have not been perfect, it is again important to note that they do not have to be in order for *virtue apologetics* to work effectively. The Bible teaches that even spiritually regenerated humans with Jesus Christ Himself living in them, will still sin (cf. Rom 7:14-25; 1 John 1:8-9). However, we still maintain that the moral *lifestyle* of the truly born again will significantly and supernaturally exceed that of anyone else. And that is all that is really needed in order for *virtue apologetics* to be both legitimate and effective. It is not perfect Christians that are needed, but simply people who exhibit a noticeably higher level of morality than non-Christians.

Even a noticeable difference in love and holiness will have a significant impact on unbelievers around us. They still expect us to be human, and it is in fact sometimes how we handle our failures that also draws people to Christ. Even our sorrow and regret over our sin is a virtue that unbelievers do not consistently have. Certainly not to the extent of Spirit-indwelt believers. "**We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose**" (Rom 8:28) including our failures.

⁴⁹⁹ 5.3.B.

Pastoral Practices

- Many of the inaccurate statistics of pollsters such as George Barna have unnecessarily discouraged Christians and made them feel defensive and even embarrassed about their faith. Unfortunately, it would appear that Mr. Barna has an agenda as he is now encouraging the abandonment of the local church in his book *Revolution* which may also be based on faulty statistics on what is happening with authentic Christians (see below at section D.5).

If such faulty polling has had a negative effect on your congregation, you might expose some of the probable inaccuracies of them concerning real Christians, and encourage them to live up to their God-given potential for virtue, and not be discouraged by the fakes or the false statistics.

B) The Challenge of Morality Among Non-Christians

B.1) Can Unregenerate People be Virtuous?

Some would argue that the fact that unregenerated humans can perform virtuous deeds negates the value of *virtue apologetics*. First, as noted above, even if they can, all that is necessary for *virtue apologetics* to be effective is that Christians are significantly superior in virtue compared to the unregenerate, not that Christian virtue is exclusive. This can occur, and does so, even if unbelievers appear at times to be virtuous.

However, the question of whether or not those with only a sinful nature, as is true of all unregenerated humanity (cf. Rom 8:3-11), really can produce virtue, is clearer than some would think. It would seem the Apostle did not believe unregenerated people could do anything God would deem good when he wrote of them: **“the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature [which is all of unregenerated humanity ⁵⁰⁰] cannot please God [ever]”** (Rom 8:7-8). And if they **“cannot please God”** it suggests

⁵⁰⁰ For arguments regarding our claim that Romans 8:7-8 is referring to unbelievers and not Christians see section 4.14.B.3.

they cannot do anything truly good, as God alone knows their heart and is the final judge of what is good.

While many argue that the unregenerate can exercise real virtue, there are several arguments against this. Biblical evidence would include Paul's description of them in Romans 8 as discussed thoroughly elsewhere.⁵⁰¹ They have one nature and it is sinful. One thinks as well of God's own description of them in Genesis 6:5 where we read, **"The Lord saw how great man's wickedness had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time"** (Gen 6:5). There is no room in such a statement for any virtue and one is on shaky ground to suggest unregenerate humans have ever been any different.⁵⁰² Furthermore, it can be suggested that any actions that appear moral on the part of the unregenerate are actually performed for some self-serving reason.

More than that, as Jonathan Edwards demonstrated in his *Nature of True Virtue*, love for God must be at the core of any real virtue. It is a mistake to judge virtue by how we treat men, instead of how we treat God. Edwards writes:

Natural men have no higher principle in their hearts than self-love. And herein they do not excel the devils. The devils love themselves. . . . And as there is no good principle in the hearts of natural men, so there are never any good exercises of heart, never one good thought, or motion of heart in them. Particularly, there is no love to God in them. . . .

The reason why men are so ready to take these private affections for true virtue is the narrowness of their views; and above all, that they are so ready to leave the Divine Being out of their view, and to neglect him in their consideration

Reason testifies that Divine love is so essential in religion that all religion is but hypocrisy and a "vain show" without it. What is religion but the exercise and expressions of regard to the Divine Being? But certainly if there be no love to Him, there is no sincere regard to Him; and all pretences and show of respect to Him, whether it be in word or deed, must be hypocrisy, and of no value in the eyes of Him who sees the heart. . . .

⁵⁰¹ For a moral description of unregenerated humanity see chapter 4.13.C.

⁵⁰² We would suggest that the reason why Noah alone was righteous in God's site was not only because God uniquely chose to look on him with grace ("**favor**" Gen 6:8), but that the Holy Spirit was uniquely operating in his life. For further discussion regarding this point see sections 4.16.E and 6.7.C.

The fear of God without love is no other than the fear of devils; and all that outward respect and obedience, all that resignation, that repentance and sorrow for sin, that form in religion, that outward devotion that is performed merely from such a fear without love, is all of it a practical lie . . . There is never a devil in hell but what would perform all that many a man [has] performed in religion.⁵⁰³

Along these lines, the Reformed theologian Louis Berkhof writes: When the Pelagians pointed to the virtues of the heathen who "merely through the power of innate freedom" were often merciful, discreet, chaste, and temperate, he [St. Augustine] answered that these so-called virtues were sins, because they did not spring from faith [cf. Rom 14:23]. He admits that the heathen can perform certain acts which are in themselves good and from a lower point of view even praiseworthy, but yet considers these deeds, as the deeds of unregenerate persons, to be sin, because they do not spring from the motive of love to God or of faith, and do not answer to the right purpose, the glory of God. He denies that such deeds are the fruit of any natural goodness in man.⁵⁰⁴

And the King made it clear when He said:

[E]very good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. (Matt 7:17-20)

⁵⁰³ Quoted by John Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 3 vols. (Powhatan, VA: Berea, 1991), II. 249, 266, 267-8.

⁵⁰⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958, repr. 1998), 433. However, Berkhof makes the unfortunate statement that, "The Bible repeatedly speaks of works of the unregenerate as good and right, 2 Kings 10:29-30; 12:2; 14:3, 14-16, 20,27; Luke 6:33; Rom. 2:14-15." (443). A study of these passages reveal no such thing. To suggest that the good deeds of some of the God-fearing Jewish kings demonstrates real virtue in unregenerate pagans is misplaced. Luke 6:33 describes the very selfish kind of morality we are discussing (cf. Matt 5:44-7). Rom 2:14-15 states that all people can live by a moral code, but that does not refute the fact that their motives are essentially selfish.

The context of this statement was discerning Christian Prophets from false, unregenerated ones based on their morality. But Christ's words apply to all humanity. You can also tell who is a Christian and who is not by their morality. In essence then, Jesus is dividing all people into two groups: A **"good tree"** symbolizing born again Christians, or a **"bad tree,"** symbolizing the unregenerate. Notice then how black and white He is regarding the morality of the unregenerate: **"a bad tree cannot bear good [moral] fruit [and will be] . . . cut down and thrown into the fire"** which clearly refers to Hell.

Certainly from God's perspective, no unregenerate people do good:

The LORD looks down from Heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one. (Ps 14:2-3; cf. Rom 3:10-12)

Several times in Scripture, humanity is divided into only two groups, the good and the bad, and these are synonymous with the regenerated and unregenerated. For example, Jesus said:

[A] time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. (John 5:28-29)

Christ does not mean to teach here that humans are saved by good works. Neither are the **"good"** and **"evil"** spoken of here, merely so from God's perspective with no distinguishable difference that can be observed by humans. Rather, the saved and regenerate are described as those who have **"done good"** because *goodness will be their general nature and lifestyle* with the Holy Spirit living in them. Likewise, those who have **"done evil"** are all unregenerate who only have a sinful nature, and will, therefore, only have a sinful lifestyle.

The Apostle Paul says the same when he writes:

God "will give to each person according to what he has done." ⁷ To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, He will give eternal life. ⁸ But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. ⁹ There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; ¹⁰ but glory, honor and peace for everyone who

does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. (Rom 2:6-11)

Here, actually, the Apostle describes those who do “**good**” in such a way that clearly distinguishes them from those who do “**evil**.” Only regenerate people will “**by persistence in doing good seek glory** [from God], **honor** [from God] **and immortality**.” Unbelievers will not be “**persistent in doing good**” and probably care more about gaining “glory” and “honor” from humans on Earth, than God in Heaven. Likewise, no regenerate person could be described as “**those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil**.” Again, all of humanity can be divided into those having a moral nature and those having a selfish nature, and those natures will exhibit themselves.

Accordingly, John MacArthur writes:

Jesus said, “If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same [good]” (Luke 6:33). On another occasion He said, “You then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children” (Luke 11:13). A person apart from God can do humanly good things. But as the Lord points out in both of those statements, the person is still a sinner, still evil by nature, and still operating on a motive less than that of glorifying God.

When Paul and the others were shipwrecked on the island of Malta, Luke reports that “the natives showed us extraordinary kindness” (Acts 28:2); yet those natives remained superstitious pagans (v. 6).⁵⁰⁵

It has been the historic belief of the Church that unregenerate people can do no real good, and this is because their ultimate, driving motive is always and in everything selfishness, the essence of sin. St. Augustine’s memorable dictum comes to mind here: the unregenerate are *non posse non peccare*, “not able not to sin”; and the regenerate are *posse non peccare*, “able not to sin.”⁵⁰⁶

Thomas Aquinas wrote:

No one can without [divine saving] grace have charity, through which God is loved above all things, as it says in Rom (5:5):

⁵⁰⁵ John MacArthur, *MacArthur’s New Testament Commentary*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Parsons Technology, 1997), Eph 2:1.

⁵⁰⁶ Ref. unknown.

"God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us."⁵⁰⁷

Martin Luther also wrote:

It is therefore true that [unregenerate] man, being a bad tree, can only will and do evil [Cf. Matt. 7:17-18]. . . . As a matter of fact, without the grace of God the will produces an act that is perverse and evil. . . . Man by nature has neither correct precept nor good will. . . . Every deed of the law without the grace of God appears good outwardly, but inwardly it is sin. This in opposition to the scholastics. . . .

The will which is inclined toward the law without the grace of God is inclined [this way because] of its own advantage. . . . The grace of God is given for the purpose of directing the Will, lest it err even in loving God. . . . It [the grace of God] is not given so that good deeds might be induced more frequently and readily, but because without it no act of love is performed.

⁵⁰⁸

Likewise, John Calvin commented:

The love which the children of the world have for each other is not a true love, but is mercenary [conditional on reward] love because every one of them has regard to his own advantage.

⁵⁰⁹

Jonathan Edwards in his *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* clearly refuted the idea that at least *God* sees any real virtue in the unregenerate, because He also sees their motives and hidden inclinations (cf. Gen 6:5). More recently, John Stott speaks to this as well when he writes:

Fallen man is not incapable of loving. The doctrine of total depravity does not mean (and has never meant) that original sin has rendered men incapable of doing anything good at all, but rather that every good they do is tainted to some degree by evil.

⁵⁰⁷ Thomas Aquinas, "Commentary On The First Epistle to the Corinthians", para. 714; online at <http://www.aquinas.avemaria.edu/Aquinas-Corinthians.pdf>

⁵⁰⁸ Martin Luther, "Disputation Against Scholastic Theology," in Timothy Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 35-8.

⁵⁰⁹ John Calvin in *Calvin's Bible Commentaries* in *The Comprehensive John Calvin Collection*, CD-ROM, (Ages Software, 1998) at Matt 22:39.

Unredeemed sinners can love. Parental love, filial love, conjugal love, the love of friends—all these as we know very well, are the regular experience of men and women outside Christ. Even the tax collectors love those who love them. Even the Gentiles, even they salute each other. None of this is in dispute.

But all human love, even the highest, the noblest and the best, is contaminated to some degree by the impurities of self-interest. We Christians are specifically called to love our enemies (in which love there is no self-interest), and this is impossible without the supernatural grace of God.⁵¹⁰

Accordingly, Arthur Lindsey writes:

In his classic study *Habits of the Heart*, sociologist Robert Bellah of the University of California at Berkeley had his team interview people throughout the United States concerning their commitment to friendship, marriage, community life and political life. Bellah's striking conclusion was that although many people in our North American society considered themselves committed to other people and community and political life, they had great difficulty articulating why they were committed, except for their own selfish benefit.⁵¹¹

Some supposed acts of virtue may be explained by mere instinct. For example, some people will suggest the following scenario as proof that unbelievers can do altruistic good. Suppose someone sees another person who cannot swim fall into the water. The person watching dives in to save them at the risk of their own life. Isn't this being unselfish? Maybe, but many times such people will admit they did such a thing *without thinking*, as if by some merely instinctive reaction rather than a moral decision.

While our point here is probably true in a theological sense, it must be admitted that the difficulty in *humans* distinguishing mere human "love" from the divine love exhibited by Christians could hinder the affect of *virtue apologetics* at times. However, we believe that the selfish nature of the unregenerate will expose itself consistently and obviously over time, demonstrating the superior virtue of those regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

⁵¹⁰ John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Intervarsity, 1978), 120.

⁵¹¹ Lindsey, 35.

B.2) Do Not Forget the Appalling Immorality of the Unregenerate

In the above discussion we have addressed the worst moral accusations that can be made against Christianity and have found that even those do not sufficiently support the claims of critics. Even beyond that, as we demonstrated in section 5.7.B, when the two thousand year moral record of Christianity is compared to the record of any other religion or movement in human history, the Christian faith shines like the sun at midnight.

Nothing in the history of even unregenerated *Christendom* comes close to the millions murdered by the abortions of the Humanists, the millions killed and oppressed by the revolutions of the Marxists, and the millions slaughtered and raped by the persecutions of the Muslims.⁵¹² Historically and culturally speaking, we are inclined to agree with the Baptist theologian Augustus H. Strong when he wrote: "Wherever Mohammedanism has gone, it has either found a desert or made one."⁵¹³

And what has Buddhism, Shintoism or Confucianism done for the morality and the spiritual and personal prosperity of the hundreds of millions who languish under them? The history of morality in the Christian Church may not be perfect, but when compared to any other belief system in the history of humanity, is there still any doubt that God has ordained *virtue apologetics* to be the universal and ultimate proof of the superiority of the Christian faith? God will, in fact, hold the unbelieving world accountable for not recognizing the "**children of God**" who have morally shined "**like stars in the universe**" in the "**crooked and depraved generation[s]**" they have lived in, as they have held out, "**the word of life**" (Phil 2:15-16).

⁵¹² If one doubts this, they could do some research on what has occurred in Sudan at the hands of Muslims in the last several years.

⁵¹³ Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Judson, 1907, 1953), 186.

Extras & Endnotes

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) Why has the Church historically believed that unregenerate people can do no real good? What Scriptures can this be based on? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 2) Why do we believe the moral failures of real born again Christians are exaggerated by Christian pollsters. Do you agree or disagree?
- 3) Why does the lack of biblical Church discipline inhibit *virtue apologetics*?
- 4) Why can personal experience with a good godly Christian overcome the impression a person may get from how "Christianity" is perceived in public media?
- 5) Why does a lack of biblical Church discipline inhibit *virtue apologetics*?
- 6) How can a lost person's experience with a Spirit-filled Christian friend overcome public criticisms of Christian morality in general?
- 7) What are some reasons that Christians need not be perfect in order for *virtue apologetics* to work?
- 8) In terms of moral virtue, how does Christianity compare with other belief systems including Humanism, Marxism, and even an "ethical" religion like Islam?

Publications & Particulars

Chapter 5.17

Historical Challenges to *Virtue Apologetics*

The History of Immorality in Christendom

Primary Points

- *Christendom* is individuals and institutions that claim Christ, but reject His teaching and are not regenerated believers or true Christians.
- Noting that the Roman Catholic Inquisition burned Bibles and murdered real Christians, obviously exposes it as a part of demonic *Christendom*.
- The Crusades were led by wicked Popes, and fought by the moral scum of Europe, attacking even Christians, and therefore, was not Christian.
- Fortunately, what matters most to the lost is not how some immoral Pope lived in the Middle Ages, but how they see us living now.
- The influence of Christian leaders stopped the Salem Witch Trials.
- Half of the entire population of the Roman Empire was slaves. To expect a small Jewish sect to overturn such an institution would be unrealistic.
- First century slavery was more humane than often thought. They were normally set free by the age of thirty and many after seven years of service. There was not life long slavery unless the person chose it.
- The goal of Christianity was the more important *conversion* of slaves and slave masters, not the secondary goal of *eliminating* them.
- "Although the gospel does not approve of removing slavery by social revolution, the gospel throughout history has brought the freedom of more slaves than any human philosophy, movement, or political system."
- While we may lament that slavery lasted too long in the Christian West, what religion has come even close to doing as much for slaves? None.

A) Distinguishing *Christendom* from Christianity

There are several immoral events in human history that are blamed on Christians, and therefore become an objection to *virtue apologetics*. Some of these can be immediately eliminated. For example, the claims of Klu Klux Klan members in America, and Roman Catholic and Protestant terrorists in Ireland, to be authentic Christians, are simply unbelievable. The One they claim as Lord commanded the very opposite of the arrogant prejudice and murder they practice, and will, in fact, condemn them all if they do not repent and really become Christians.

Nonetheless, it is important to be honest (an important virtue) and admit that some real born again Christians have committed or condoned some deplorable acts in our two thousand year history. One of the more appalling examples is the inexplicable and inexcusable approval by John Calvin of the execution of Michael Servetus for heresy.⁵¹⁴ It would not be moral to brush such immoralities aside.

However, there are other historical incidents that many would claim against *virtue apologetics* for Christianity, and yet upon further inquiry, turn out to be unwarranted accusations. For example, John Mark Reynolds in the book, *UnChristian* writes:

If you are embarrassed by your heritage or worry that it is corrupt, this can destroy your confidence to act based on that history. One way bigots and tyrants try to oppress a people is to destroy their knowledge and pride in their heritage. This is the tactic of the so-called New Atheists. Obviously this patrimony is complicated and contains both shameful and honorable deeds. We are the people of great cathedrals but also of the tortures of the inquisition.⁵¹⁵

No we are not, and we will demonstrate this below.

Likewise, Dr. Stuart Hackett, Professor of the Philosophy of Religion at Trinity denies the God-ordained and biblical place of *virtue apologetics* and gives the typically secular description of such events when he writes:

⁵¹⁴ For additional discussion concerning the execution of Michael Servetus see Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Electronic Edition STEP Files (Findex.com, 1999), Vol. 7, ch. XVI.

⁵¹⁵ John Mark Reynolds, "Christianity and Culture: Defending Our Fathers and Mothers" in *Apologetics for a New Generation*, Sean McDowell ed. (Harvest House, 2009), 71.

[I]f I expand the horizon of my vision to include the whole of history and civilization since the time of Jesus, I see even more disorienting sights. I see all the useless and morally indefensible battles and wars that have been fought in the name of Christianity, all the outright murders that have been justified on Christian religious grounds—not only Bruno at the hands of the Inquisition, but also Servetus at the hands of Calvin and the Christian city government over which he presided, plus unnumbered others from all the quarters of Christendom.⁵¹⁶

Christendom is the key word here, as it will become evident below that many things done in the name of Christ, were not performed by Christians at all, but by the political and religious institution of *Christendom*. As we noted in the previous chapter, *Christendom* is made up of those individuals and institutions that claim the name of Christ, but reject His teaching and commands and are not regenerated believers or true Christians.

Far from being Christian, *Christendom* has in fact often been the greatest, cruelest foe of Authentic Christianity. Precursors to *Christendom* include King Saul and how his illegitimate kingdom treated the real King David, and the “**whitewashed tombs**” (Matt 23:27) of the Pharisees and how they treated the real King Jesus. Regarding *Christendom* D. James Kennedy wrote:

Christianity is comprised of those who have repented of their sins and truly believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior and their Lord. In times past Christendom was comprised of those people living in “Christian” territories.

Today, Christendom is comprised of true Christians and those professing Christians who have never experienced the saving grace of Christ. Many members of Christendom have lived lives that were totally unworthy of the name Christian.

When people are unregenerate—that is, if their hearts are not changed by Christ—they are prone to do all sorts of ungodly and inhuman things. It doesn't matter whether they're atheistic Communists or clerics in the Church. And in the case of unregenerate Church leaders, their evil actions have brought the blame of history upon Christianity.⁵¹⁷

⁵¹⁶ Stuart Hackett, *The Reconstruction of the Christian Revelation Claim* (Baker, 1984), 337.

⁵¹⁷ D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe, *What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?: The Positive Impact of Christianity in History* (Thomas Nelson, 1997), 209.

Jesus predicted a particularly deceptive kind of *Christendom* when He warned of **"false prophets . . . in sheep's clothing"** who are actually **"ferocious wolves"** (Matt 7:15) to real Christians. Christ spoke of **"many"** others who will **"prophecy . . . drive out demons and perform many miracles"** even in His name, but will be damned **"evildoers"** (vs. 22-23).

But He also said, **"a [morally] bad tree cannot bear good [moral] fruit. . . . Thus, by their [bad moral] fruit you will recognize them"** (v. 18). And even unbelievers can too as real Christians demonstrate what real Christians do as opposed to the fakes.

The absence of real Christians in *Christendom* was especially apparent in Europe leading up to the Protestant Reformation. Accordingly, Dr. Latourette writes:

In the latter part of the twelfth and in the thirteenth century the Catholic Church in that area was weak and was represented by a body of clergy who were predominantly ignorant and corrupt. . . . Among high and low, in city, village, and country, among clergy, laity, and even monks, there were flagrant brutality, gross sensuality, and unrelieved arrogance and self seeking. To be sure, nominal assent was almost universally given to the Christian faith. There was little overt denial of what was ostensibly the community religion.

In practice, however, Christian ethical standards were widely denied, and the most sacred rites of the Church were repeatedly and even habitually performed carelessly. . . . Church offices were bought and sold and their incomes diverted to purely selfish luxury, and to gratify their lust for power ambitious men strove for place and position in the Church. . . . Notorious scoffers were found in high places.

By 1500 it seemed that Western Europe, partially Christianized by the advances of the previous centuries, was being de-Christianized. The hardly won gains appeared to be in process of dissipation. Within the inner circle of the Church ill-concealed paganism was raising its head and in practice if not in word the Christian faith was denied by many of its official representatives. . . .

We scarcely need to say that in practice Western Europe had never been Christian. Yet it paid lip service to that faith, canonized some of its monarchs for what it deemed their approximation to the Christian ideal, and read with approval Augustine's City of God. Now it seemed to be throwing off

even the pretense of honoring what great Christians had endeavored to embody.⁵¹⁸

The distinction between regenerated authentic Christians and unregenerated immoral *Christendom* is real and significant. Accordingly, C. S. Lewis wrote:

If ever the book which I am not going to write is written it must be the full confession by Christendom of Christendom's specific contribution to the sum of human cruelty and treachery. Large areas of "the World" will not hear us till we have publicly disowned much of our past. Why should they? We have shouted the name of Christ and enacted the service of Moloch.⁵¹⁹

Admittedly, it may be difficult for some in the unbelieving world to make a distinction between unregenerated *Christendom* and regenerated Christianity, and such immoral deeds done in the name of Christ will surely, and understandably, weaken the effect of *virtue apologetics* for them. However, at least we can point out that such actions do not reflect the teachings of our Founder, nor can those who practice such atrocities claim that they are a follower of Christ. Such would not necessarily be the case of warring Muslims, for example.

We have discussed in the previous chapter that the Scriptures include a great deal of discussion on the need and method for distinguishing between Hell-bound religious *Christendom* and Heaven-bound reborn Christians. Christ pointed out long ago that just because something is done in His name, it does not make it Christian (cf. Matt 7:21-23). The fact that fakes can profess many things, is one more reason that God has ordained that supernatural virtue, which fakes cannot produce, be the ultimate and universal argument for the salvific exclusivity of the Gospel of the King.

While the historical immoralities of unregenerate *Christendom* may dilute the power of this approach for some, it will not for most. God knows that what matters most to our spiritually dead friends, coworkers, and neighbors is not how some immoral Pope lived in the Middle Ages, but how they see us living now. The fact is, despite the immoralities of unregenerated historical *Christendom*, the potential effectiveness of *virtue apologetics* by contemporary regenerated Christians remains essentially unaffected. Just even a few acts of supernatural kindness by a real born again Christian will

⁵¹⁸ Latourette, 437, 550, 641-2.

⁵¹⁹ C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (Harper Collins, 1960), 32.

usually and easily outweigh any perceived negative moral evidence against Christianity that can be garnered from events occurring centuries ago.

Nonetheless, many of the infamous historical events often ascribed to Christianity can be exposed as acts of unregenerated *Christendom*. While we cannot claim that there were absolutely no real born again Christians involved in some of the horrible episodes Dr. Hackett mentions, a better understanding of some of them helps to significantly nullify their negative evidential value on *virtue apologetic* for the Christian faith.

B) The Inquisition

One of the first events that come to people's mind is the Inquisition. This was a centuries old institution of the Roman Catholic Church starting with the "Medieval Inquisition" (1184–1230s), including the "Spanish Inquisition" (1478-1834) and ending with the "Roman Inquisition" (1542 – c. 1860). Throughout these centuries, the Inquisition was an effort by the Roman Catholic Church to expose and punish what they considered to be religious heretics. Unfortunately torture was used in gaining confessions and burning at the stake was used for punishment. Historians estimate that between 12,000 and 32,000 people were killed in the Spanish Inquisition alone.⁵²⁰

However, to attribute its atrocities to born again Christians would be a complete distortion of the facts. Accordingly, D. James Kennedy wrote:

The Spanish Inquisition in particular was a monstrous epic of brutality and barbarity. It was diabolical in its nature. Was it Christians persecuting non-Christians? It was the very opposite. I am quite convinced that the members of the Inquisition Party were not Christians. They lived in the Dark Ages when the gospel of Jesus Christ had been all but forgotten, and the faith was so perverted that it bore little resemblance to that which had been given by Christ.

In many cases the victims of the Inquisition were evangelical Protestant Christians who had come to realize what the historic gospel of Christ was and who began to reject the papal superstitions of that time. These were the people who were often exposed to these tremendous tortures.

⁵²⁰ Kennedy, 216.

The authorities at the time of the Inquisition were banning the Bible. The powers who sanctioned and participated in the Inquisition were the same powers who forbade their people to read Scripture! They also forbade Scripture to be translated into the vernacular. They burned at the stake people who believed in, translated, or taught the Scriptures, contemptuously tossing each one's Bible into the fire to be burned with the martyr.⁵²¹

Even non-Christians can recognize that people who would burn Bibles would not be Christians. In addition, the cruelty of the punishments meted out by the Inquisitors would be blatant violations of Christ's command for His followers to **"love your enemies . . . [so] that you may be sons of your Father in Heaven"** (Matt 5:44-45). Christ clearly implies here that if you do not love your enemies, you are not a child of God, nor a Christian.

The guilt and eventual divine damnation of the Roman Catholic Inquisitors is not relieved in the least by the fact that, while they ordered tortures, they left the actual torturing to state officials. One historian notes:

Every one guilty of concealing a heretic forfeited thereby his land possessions or offices; the house in which a heretic was found was to be torn down. In case of sickness, however severe, no heretic or unbeliever was to be allowed the aid of a physician; penitents were to leave their home, to wear a peculiar dress, and could hold no office except by a special dispensation from the pope. . . .

As if these horrible treatments of fellow-beings were not bad enough, Pope Innocent IV [ironic name for a moral monster] in a bull (*De extirpanda*) in the year 1252, ordained that accused persons should be *tortured*, not merely to induce them to confess their own heresy, but also to compel them to accuse others.⁵²²

The Inquisition in many parts of Europe was primarily carried out by a special sect of Roman Catholics called the Dominicans. While having a "whitewashed" reputation for their spirituality, these monks revealed their spiritual depravity. "So much eagerness did they display in hunting up and prosecuting heretics, that a popular

⁵²¹ Ibid., 216-17.

⁵²² John McClintock and James Strong, *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, CD-ROM (Ages Software, 2000), IV:176, 178.

pun changed the name of Dominicans into *Domini canes* (the dogs of the Lord).”⁵²³ Such a label was consistent with their practice:

They sought in every way to ensnare their victims, and by means of false statements, delusory promises, and a tortuous course of examination, to betray them into confessions which proved fatal to their lives and fortunes. To this mental torture was soon after added the use of bodily tortures, together with the concealment of the names of witnesses. . . .

If the accused still persisted in asserting his innocence, he was now tortured by the whip, the water, and fire, under the direction of the inquisitors and the bishop of the diocese. If the prisoner then confessed, he was tortured a second time, to make him declare his motives, and afterwards a third time, to make him name his accomplices; and when the inquisitors had obtained from him all they wanted, they left him to his sufferings, without allowing a physician to assist him. . . . After that he was generally condemned to imprisonment for life, or sent to the galleys [to be executed], his possessions sequestered, and his family dishonored.⁵²⁴

The target of the Inquisitors also exposes their practices to be demonic, rather than Christian. As Dr. Kennedy pointed out above, many of those tortured were real Christians who were protesting the moral abuses that were rampant in the Roman Catholic Church throughout the Middle Ages. The Inquisitors, “had a particular interest in the suppression of heretics [so called] who were incessantly declaiming against them, and who spared no pains to discredit them in the minds of the people.”⁵²⁵

For example, one “heretical” group that was mercilessly persecuted in the Inquisition was the Waldensees which the Yale Church historian Dr. Latourette describes as follows:

In their tenets and practices the followers of [Peter] Waldo continued to seek to conform to the New Testament. They memorized large portions of its vernacular translations. Following what they believed it commanded them, they went about two and two, preaching, simply clad, barefoot or wearing sandals, and subsisting on what was given them by those who listened to them.

They refused to heed Pope or bishop and taught that the Church of Rome was not the head of the Catholic Church but

⁵²³ Ibid., IV:177.

⁵²⁴ Ibid., IV:184, 189.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., IV:177.

was corrupt. They held that women and laymen could preach, that masses and prayers for the dead were without warrant, that purgatory is the troubles which come to us in this life, and that to be efficacious prayer need not be confined to churches.

. . .

They observed the Eucharist together and held that, if necessary, any layman might administer it. . . . Many continued to think of themselves as members of the Catholic Church. . . .

For the most part the Waldensees were humble folk. Even their enemies described them as dressing simply, industrious, labouring with their hands, chaste, temperate in eating and drinking, refusing to frequent taverns and dances, sober and truthful in speech, avoiding anger, and regarding the accumulation of wealth as evil. Yet, branding them as heretics, the Catholic Church and the civil authorities sought to eliminate them, by persuasion if possible and if not by force.

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No real Christians would persecute and torture such people who were so obviously following the Lord.

Such were the types of people who came under the wrath of the Inquisition, demonstrating Dr. Kennedy's point above that it was a case of non-Christians persecuting Christians. Even godly Roman Catholic reformers such as Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556) and the Franciscan monk Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135-1202) came under the persecution of the Inquisition.⁵²⁷

In reality, the Inquisition is a very morally dark period of history for a spiritually unregenerated Roman Catholic Church, or *Christendom*, not real regenerated Christians. As Dr. Kennedy puts it, "There are so many who do not even know enough about history to be aware that evangelical Christians were receiving the tortures of the Inquisition and not giving them."⁵²⁸ In defense of the Roman Catholic Church, Dr. Latourette notes that:

It may be significant that none of those who were most outstanding in the fifteenth century reform [Inquisition] in Spain--Isabella, Ximenes, and Torquemada--was ever canonized. In spite of their devotion and labours, in the

⁵²⁶ Kenneth Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (Hendricksen, 1975), 452-4.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, 435, 845.

⁵²⁸ Kennedy, 205.

judgment of the Roman Catholic Church they were not assuredly exemplars of the Christian ideal.⁵²⁹

Which is rather an understatement to say the least.

C) The Crusades

Another event that is commonly held to discredit the moral superiority of Christianity is the Crusades, which also occurred in the Middle Ages and were led by the Roman Catholic Church. The Crusades is the name given for several invasions carried out from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries by European monarchs against Muslims who had invaded Palestine, including Jerusalem. Understandably, such a condition would cause great concern for the Church. Even greater alarm was aroused when eye witness reports from Palestine informed Europe that inhabitants there were being treated very cruelly by the Muslim invaders.

Like the Inquisition, the apostate Roman Catholic Popes saw this as an opportunity for political gain:

The popes encouraged this movement to the best of their ability. They saw in it an opportunity to extend the Church, to re-enforce their power, and to turn the warlike ardor of the Western [European] princes, which so often led to conflicts between Church and State, against the infidels.⁵³⁰

With these designs in mind, Pope Urban II called the Council of Clermont in 1095. Remembering that such a man was thought to be the personal present representative of Christ on Earth, we are appalled at a speech he gave to the Council in which he proclaimed:

A horrible tale has gone forth . . . an accursed race utterly alienated from God . . . has invaded the lands of Christians and depopulated them by the sword, plundering, and fire. . . . Tear that land from the wicked race and subject it to yourselves.⁵³¹

While such a perspective may have been appropriate under the Old Covenant, no one truly belonging to the New Covenant would have demanded such a thing. The same is true of those who heard

⁵²⁹ Latourette, 658.

⁵³⁰ McClintock and Strong, II:96.

⁵³¹ Kenneth A. Curtis, Stephen Lang and Randy Petersen, *The 100 Most Important Events in Christian History* (Baker, 1998), 73.

the Pope and cried in response, "*Deus vult! Deus vult!* [God wills it!]," which became the battle cry of the Crusades. Accordingly, the participants had the audacity to wear a cross, by which the Crusades gained their name from the French word for cross, *croisade*. Demonstrating the unChristian and unbiblical nature of the whole enterprise, one historian notes:

To encourage the crusades, Urban and the popes who followed him emphasized the spiritual "benefits" of war against the Muslims. Taking a page from the Koran, Urban assured the warriors that by doing this penance they would enter heaven directly-or at least reduce their time in purgatory.⁵³²

In addition, Dr. Kennedy writes:

It is helpful to get an idea of exactly who these Crusaders were, as evaluated by a [contemporary] man:

In that countless multitude you will find few except the utterly wicked and impious, the sacrilegious, murderers, and perjurers, whose departure is a double gain. Europe rejoices to lose them and Palestine to gain them; they are useful in both ways, in their absence from here and their presence there.

Thus he recognized them as essentially unregenerate reprobates, and everyone could rejoice that they were gone! This indicates the general caliber of the Crusaders and the fact that they were Christians in name only.⁵³³

Along the same lines, Dr. Latourette describes the Crusaders as: throngs poorly organized, set forth, some of them attacking the Jews or pillaging fellow Christians as they went. . . . The Crusaders were far from being ideal exemplars of the faith which they professed and few if any willing conversions from Islam were made by them. . . . Crusades were not confined to expeditions to retake or protect the Holy Places in Palestine. They were waged against . . . Christians, whom the Popes adjudged enemies of the faith.⁵³⁴

D) Salem Witch Trials

⁵³² Ibid., 74.

⁵³³ Kennedy, 208. This quote comes from St. Bernard of Clairveaux, who, because he had a reputation for being a sincere Christian, it is disappointing that he apparently supported the Crusades.

⁵³⁴ Latourette, 410, 411, 413.

The execution of witches in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries was a practice carried out by those claiming to be Christians, in both Europe and America. It took its American form primarily under some of the early Puritans of New England. We would only point out again that the teachings of Christ and the Apostles would not give any authority to the Church or a Christian to kill people even as evil as witches, and would, in fact, condemn it to be a great sin to do so. Accordingly, anyone intimately involved in such sin would have no biblical warrant to claim to be a real Christian.

Nonetheless, while such actions were certainly unfair and horrific, they are often exaggerated by secular historians. For example, it may be important to note that relative to the claims that are often made, no witches were burned in America, and while several hundred were tried, only twenty were hanged.⁵³⁵ In addition, Dr. Kennedy notes:

It is little known that it was the Church that actually helped to stop this hysteria. Both Increase Mather and his son, Cotton, leading Puritan ministers of the day, spoke openly against it. When Increase wrote a pamphlet, "Cases of Conscience," calling for the implementation of the biblical pattern of two witnesses, the killings stopped. As literary scholar Perry Miller concluded, "Increase Mather-and he alone-brought the murders to an end."⁵³⁶

E) Slavery

Slavery is, of course, one of the most despicable sins of the human race. In relation to Christianity, Dr. Kennedy writes:

Critics of Christianity like to point out that the lack of direct challenge of the institution of slavery from Paul or other leaders in the early Church constitutes a Christian complicity of sorts with slavery. In *Asimov's Guide to the Bible: The New Testament*, the late secularist Isaac Asimov [1920-1992] wrote:

[W]hile Paul urges kindness to the slave Onesimus, who is now Philemon's brother in Christianity, there is no hint anywhere in Paul that slavery might be wrong and immoral as an institution. Indeed, Paul even admonishes slaves to

⁵³⁵ Kennedy, 219.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

obey their masters, so that Christianity, however novel some of its tenets, was by no means a doctrine of social revolution.⁵³⁷

Several responses are in order. First, Dr. Asimov undoubtedly interprets the fact that there are no commands in Scripture for the abolition of slavery as an acceptance of it. This ignores the cultural and political environment in which Christianity began, and has at times existed since then. Slavery has been a widespread and ancient institution all over the world. OT scholar Gleason Archer notes:

As to the moral status of slavery in ancient times, it must be recognized that it was practiced by every ancient people of which we have any historical record: Egyptians, Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Phoenicians, Syrians, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Greeks, Romans, and all the rest. Slavery was as integral a part of ancient culture as commerce, taxation, or temple service.⁵³⁸

Indeed, in the first century, slavery was an enormous and entrenched institution. Especially in large cities such as Rome or Athens, as much as three fourths of the population is thought to have been in the servant class. Overall, half of the entire population of the Roman Empire was slaves.⁵³⁹ Many of these slaves had come from nations and cities that had been conquered through war. The only alternative was death. Many others were simply poor and could not provide for themselves, or were in debt. Again, bankruptcy, government welfare, etc. were not options, and slavery was the only alternative. Accordingly, it was simply a way of life.

To expect what began as a small Jewish sect to overturn such an ingrained and foundational aspect of society would be unrealistic. Christianity has simply not always been in a position to impose its will on the world. Accordingly, NT scholar N. T. Wright remarks:

[Early Christians] always struggled to humanize an institution it could not expect to eradicate; by privileging the Exodus narrative, it constantly appealed to a controlling story of the

⁵³⁷ Ibid., 20.

⁵³⁸ Gleason Archer, *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties* (Zondervan, 1982), 86

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

God who set slaves free; at some points, e.g., Philemon, it set a time-bomb beside the whole system.⁵⁴⁰

In addition, Dr. Latourette writes:

Christians carried on no organized campaign against slavery. That was to wait until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Yet here, also, although by no means so markedly as in the case of amusements [e.g. gladiatorial battles in the Coliseum], the trend of the Christian conscience and of Christian practice was against a basic, generally accepted institution of the Greco-Roman world and mitigated its harshness. . . .

Christianity undercut slavery by giving dignity to work, no matter how seemingly menial that might be. Traditionally, labour which might be performed by slaves was despised as degrading to the freeman. Christian teachers said that all should work and that labour should be done as to Christ as master and as to God and in the sight of God. Work became a Christian duty.⁵⁴¹

However, in addition to first century slavery being an entrenched institution, it was not as inhumane as is often thought. Slaves were normally set free from servanthood status by the age of thirty. The Roman politician and philosopher Cicero (106 B.C.-43 B.C.) wrote that many slaves could even expect their freedom after seven years of service. Many women obtained their freedom even earlier because their masters married them, giving them full rights as wives under Roman law. There was not life long slavery unless the person chose it. Many people chose slavery as a way to learn a trade, then, were freed from it at the age of adulthood. There were strict laws against cruelty to servants, and socially it was honorable to treat slaves respectfully. Kidnapping people to sell them as slaves was illegal under Roman law. Therefore, the vast majority of slaves became such either by birth or voluntarily.

While a large proportion of the population were slaves, you would not have been able to clearly identify them by where they lived, what work they did, how they dressed, or how poor they were. The social status of the slave depended on the social status of their owner, and was not determined by their clothing or race. There was often very little difference between the work they did and the work of free people. Slaves and former slaves were teachers,

⁵⁴⁰ N. T. Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture* (Harper Collins, 2005), 107.

⁵⁴¹ Latourette, 245-6.

managers, administrators, artists, politicians, and doctors. Even those in more menial occupations usually received a modest wage, and were permitted to save, to make purchases, to enter into contracts, and own property. Often the relationship between a slave and an owner was much more like modern day relationships between employers and employees.⁵⁴² We do not intend to diminish the cruel and demeaning nature of much of first century slavery, but a full knowledge of the facts allows us to properly interpret history.

While the above reasons for a perceived lack of influence on slavery by Christianity could be labeled cultural, there were also theological reasons that we will only briefly note here. For example, NT scholar David Clowney writes concerning the Apostle's advice to Corinthian slaves to remain in their calling:

For a modern person there are certainly puzzles here. But the theme of 1 Corinthians 7, "abide in the calling in which you were called" (v. 20), may provide the most helpful key. The gospel works gradually, like leaven. It appears that the apostles were interested in the transformation of life within existing social structures by the love and power of Christ, rather than in focusing on the structural social changes which the application of Christian principle would eventually bring. . .

It is not a far-fetched rationalization, then, to say that the leaven of freedom was set to work in the New Testament by the apostles and that the full expression of it, when the dough had risen, was the abolition of slavery. Abolition was a consistent outworking of New Testament principle in a society in which the gospel had been at work.⁵⁴³

In other words, the goal of Christianity was the more fundamental and enduring *conversion* of slaves and slave masters, not the secondary goal of *eliminating* them. Any Christian slave would agree that freedom from the penalty and power of sin was infinitely more valuable than any other freedom. Accordingly, Dr. Kennedy explains:

⁵⁴² Our sources regarding first century slavery include: S. S. Bartchy, "Slavery" in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE)*, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., 4 vols., (Eerdmans, 1988), IV:539-46; Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans, 2000), 562-5. (See several scholarly books on the topic of first century slavery listed here).

⁵⁴³ David Clowney, "The Use of the Bible in Ethics" in *Inerrancy & Hermeneutic*, Harvey Conn ed. (Baker, 1988), 228-9.

If Christianity totally disallowed slavery, the gospel could not have spread as it did in the early Church. Once the gospel did spread, the seeds were sown for the eventual dissolution of slavery. Thus by reforming the heart, Christianity, in time, reformed the social order! ⁵⁴⁴

In addition, Dr. Asimov is wrong to suggest, "There is no hint anywhere in Paul that slavery might be wrong and immoral as an institution." Quite the contrary, the Apostle wrote:

We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers--and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God. (1 Tim 1:9-11)

The Apostle would obviously even deny that a true Christian could be a slave trader. The Apostle Peter likewise, referred to "harsh" slavery as "**unjust suffering**" (1 Pet 2:18-19).

Also, Dr. Asimov is wrong to suggest that there were no socially revolutionary doctrines in early Christianity in regards to slavery. The Apostle Paul's letter to Philemon is considerably more revolutionary than he and other critics of Christianity will admit. As Dr. Kennedy notes:

Paul had led both men [Philemon and Onesimus] to Christ and in his letter tells Philemon, "Receive him (Onesimus) not as a slave, but as a brother beloved." Millions of people in modern America have read that statement and have not been touched at all. Yet that was among the most revolutionary concepts the world had ever heard--a slave, an "animated tool," was a brother, beloved! Absolutely unthinkable and incredible! ⁵⁴⁵

Likewise, Dr. Clowney comments on the letter of Philemon:

[T]he principles which the apostles laid down for life in the church are fundamentally incompatible with a system of slavery. . . . This incompatibility, together with the way Paul deals with it, is already evident in the case of Onesimus. Not only does Paul refrain from sending him back to Philemon until Onesimus is ready to go [which was against the Roman law], but he pleads with Philemon to recognize the way in which the

⁵⁴⁴ Kennedy, 19-20.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., 19.

old wineskins of the slaveholding economy will not hold the new wine of the demands of kingdom service.⁵⁴⁶

The Apostles also repeatedly commanded slave owners to respect their servants as real people, instead of animals. The Apostle Paul told Ephesian masters not even to “**threaten**” a slave, reminding them that *their* Master in Heaven is watching (Eph 6:9). In a similar context, he tells masters to “**provide your slaves with what is right and fair**” (Col 4:1). The Apostle’s instruction to slaves in Corinth is equally revolutionary when he writes:

Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him. Were you a slave when you were called? Don’t let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so.⁵⁴⁷ For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord’s freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ’s slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. (1 Cor 7:20-23)

One immediately notices that Paul encouraged a slave to gain their freedom, if and when they could do so. However, he says something else that a non-Christian will have great difficulty in understanding: The fact that a Christian might be a slave is not a cause for great concern. Why? Because as we have said, it is much more important to be free from sin on the inside than slavery on the outside. Regardless of whether a man owns you, ultimately you

⁵⁴⁶ Clowney, 228-9.

⁵⁴⁷ There is some debate on the meaning of the Greek text at 1 Corinthians 7:21. Leon Morris agrees with most modern translations and writes:

The second part of the verse is something like ‘But if also you can become free, rather use (it)’, and the pundits are divided as to what this means. Some, impressed by the evidence throughout the paragraph on remaining in one’s state, think Paul is saying, ‘Even if you can gain your freedom, make the most of your present condition instead.’ [i.e. and don’t seek freedom]. This is a possible understanding of the Greek, but against it is the aorist imperative, which more naturally signifies the beginning of a new ‘use’ than the continuance of an old one.

It is also difficult to think that Paul, who held that marriage introduced difficulties in the way of Christian service, could have thought otherwise about slavery, which introduced much more serious difficulties. Paul seems to be saying: ‘Your state is not of first importance. If you are a slave do not worry. If you can be made free, then make use of your new status. It is your relationship to the Lord that matters most.’ (1 Corinthians [Eerdmans, 1985], 110).

belong to the Lord! And the slave could serve society and their earthly master in such a way as to bring glory to their real Master (cf. 1 Tim 5:14; 6:1; Tit 2:10).⁵⁴⁸ In addition, as already noted, Christianity actually gave considerable dignity to slave work, equating it with serving God Himself (cf. Col 3:23-24). So much for Isaac Asimov's claim that, "Christianity . . . was by no means a doctrine of social revolution" in regards to slavery.

Even more so, Christians have been the foremost opponents of slavery throughout its history. Even the Oxford scholar Robin Lane Fox, who is somewhat critical of Christianity's influence on slavery in the first century, is willing to admit that the early "Christians were most numerous in the setting of urban households where the freeing of slaves was most frequent."⁵⁴⁹

Christians have not only been the most outspoken voice against slavery throughout its history, but it has been the foremost force behind its abolition. Accordingly, John MacArthur writes:

Although the gospel does not approve of removing slavery by social revolution, the gospel throughout history has brought the freedom of more slaves than any human philosophy, movement, or political system. In past times, some Christians, unfortunately, have supported and tried to justify slavery. But the Bible does not; and where Christians are faithful to Scripture, slavery cannot flourish.⁵⁵⁰

It was the work of Christians, such as William Wilberforce (1759-1833), which eventually led to its abolition in the British Empire. Dr. Kennedy writes:

A strong evangelical, William Wilberforce . . . was a member of the British Parliament for decades . . . Wilberforce gathered other like-minded evangelicals to help him in the fight . . . The model Christian statesman in the history of the world, William Wilberforce worked tirelessly to halt the slave trade from Africa to the West Indies. After he spent twenty years

⁵⁴⁸ Accordingly, Gordon Fee comments concerning 1 Corinthians 7:

His point right along, therefore, has not been simply, "Stay where you are," but precisely as in this case [of slavery], "Do not let your social condition be a concern to you." Your calling in Christ eclipses such conditions, but thereby also transforms them into situations where you may live out your Christian "calling." (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT) (Eerdmans, 1987), 316).

⁵⁴⁹ Kennedy, 20.

⁵⁵⁰ John MacArthur, *MacArthur's New Testament Commentary*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Parsons Technology, 1997), 1 Cor 7:20 ff.

diligently crusading against it, Parliament finally passed his bill to halt the slave trade. Then he worked indefatigably to free the slaves in the British territories; this battle was to last twenty-five years! Despite constant opposition and derision, he pursued his course as a service to Jesus Christ.

Wilberforce had undergone a dramatic conversion as a young man which changed his life from one of trivial pursuit to one of freeing the slaves. On his deathbed he received word that Parliament had acted and twenty million pounds had been delegated to release the remaining slaves of England. And on that day in 1833, 700,000 British slaves were freed. Wilberforce was greatly moved to know that a whole lifetime of effort on his part had finally seen fruition, and he thanked God for bringing it to pass.⁵⁵¹

Much of what has been said above regarding the practice of slavery in the first century and its abolition in Britain, could be said of slavery in America. Christians like General Robert E. Lee willingly set them free. And Christians like Abraham Lincoln were willing to go to war to set them free. Accordingly, Dr. Kennedy writes:

We know that two-thirds of the members of the abolition society in 1835 were ministers of the gospel. It is well-known that many of the leading practitioners of the Underground Railroad were Quakers. Abraham Lincoln's Christianity is well-documented; his writings are filled with Bible quotes. Ultimately, Christianity and slavery are incompatible. Robert E. Lee, who freed the slaves he had inherited by marriage, once wrote that the War between the States was needless bloodshed in terms of ending slavery, for he believed the evil institution would have eventually withered away because of Christianity.⁵⁵²

Again, while we could wish that changes would have occurred more rapidly, it is a historical fact that Christians have been at the forefront, almost exclusively, in working to rid humanity of the sinful scourge of slavery. Accordingly, Dr. Archer comments: "No equivalent movement toward abolition is discernible in any non-Christian civilization of which we have any knowledge."⁵⁵³ So while we may not be completely pleased with how long slavery

⁵⁵¹ Kennedy, 21.

⁵⁵² Ibid., 20.

⁵⁵³ Archer, 86

existed in Christian America, what nation or religion has come even close to doing as much for slaves? None. Dr. Kennedy writes:

Over the centuries, Christianity abolished slavery, first in the ancient world and then later in the nineteenth century, largely through the efforts of the strong evangelical William Wilberforce. It didn't happen overnight, and certainly there have been dedicated Christians who were slaveowners. Nonetheless, the end of slavery, which has plagued mankind for thousands of years, has come primarily through the efforts of Christians.⁵⁵⁴

Unfortunately, while slavery is not acceptable in any country of the world that could call itself Christian, this evil has continued to prosper especially in Buddhist and Muslim dominated countries, which proves *virtue apologetics* for Christianity once again.⁵⁵⁵

F) Denominational Divisions

A legitimate critique of Christian virtue is the apparent divisions within its ranks. As Dr. Latourette notes:

No other religion has so high an ideal of an inclusive community of love. Yet, as we are to see again and again in the course of our story [of Christian history], no other religion has had as many divisions and as many bitter controversies between its adherents.⁵⁵⁶

It should be admitted that a great deal of dissension within Christianity has been caused by a lack of virtue such as pride and selfishness. However, much of the division has occurred for virtuous reasons. Such is the case with the most well known division which occurred in the Protestant Reformation. Here again, it is important to distinguish between real Christianity and *Christendom*. In fact, this is what the Reformation was all about.

Christendom had fallen into several doctrinal and moral errors including the corruption of the Gospel itself, the cornerstone of authentic Christianity. In restoring the truth to God's people, an unfortunate but necessary division between the Roman Catholics and the Protestants occurred. It was indeed virtue that propelled

⁵⁵⁴ Kennedy, 18.

⁵⁵⁵ See the article, "Modern Slavery" in the web-based Infoplease Almanac at <http://www.infoplease.com/spot/slavery1.html>.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., 119

the Protestant Christians to restore the Bible to the people, reestablish the true Gospel of salvation by grace through faith, and condemn a greedy pagan Pope who sold forgiveness for sins in order to build a monument to himself.⁵⁵⁷

Far from being a stain on the morality of true Christianity, the Protestant Reformation is yet another demonstration of the true Christian's commitment to do the right thing. What the world often doesn't understand is that it is moral to stand up for biblical truth, and such a stand may require the rejection of those who are perverting it (cf. 2 Thess 3:14-15; 1 Tim 6:3-5; Titus 1:9). Contrary to worldly wisdom, toleration is not always moral, especially when false teachings and immoral practices are hurting innocent people.

Even if separating Christians have been wrong in their view of the truth, many times they have separated just because of this commitment to preserve what they feel is the truth, for the sake of others. While such divisions admittedly may not look moral, nor at times may not be moral, there is often an authentic moral element to them.

The fact that Christianity displays several denominations is not automatically a strike against virtue. Again, what the world may deem as disunity, is often actually virtuous diversity. Many differences in Christian fellowships merely reflect different cultures, demographics, and backgrounds. The differences are not so much in *what* the Bible commands us, which is nonnegotiable, but in *how* it is to be obeyed, which is something for which God grants freedom of preference. Accordingly, such areas as the method of worship or liturgy, the Bible does not prescribe, and all such differences are legitimate and even praiseworthy.

In addition, the most obvious difference between Christians in a given community is the mere fact that they meet in different buildings, which need not reflect badly at all on their virtue. In fact, the relational differences between different branches of Christianity are relatively minimal, and this is apparent to anyone who would truly get to know them. Accordingly, the influential Reformed theologian John Gerstner wrote:

Most churches freely commune with one another, join together in common enterprises for the total welfare of the community, associate with one another in unions of churches, make common testimonies to the world, and engage in common charities for the world. All in all, there is far more co-operation among churches than unwholesome rivalry.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁷ We are referring to St. Peter's basilica in Rome

⁵⁵⁸ John Gerstner, *Reasons for Faith* (Harper & Row, n.d.), 222.

Accordingly, the majority of differences between most Christian churches is not doctrinal, but practical in terms of forms of worship or other secondary issues that the Bible does not prescribe, allowing freedom for various expressions. What some might interpret as schism in Christianity is nothing more than a biblically sanctioned variety and diversity in how we worship God and govern our churches. Likewise, the reasons for many of the practical differences between Christian churches are not doctrinal in nature either, but normally derive from differences in geography, culture, demographics, and historical background.

In fact, *virtue apologetics* can be enhanced, rather than destroyed by denominational divisions. Even the world can recognize that real love does not begin until you don't like someone. Our doctrinal divisions may certainly reflect the fact we don't like some things about the church down the street. But such a situation can make the supernatural character of our love for one another all the more evident. People who agree on everything don't even need to love each other. And the world doesn't view mere intellectual unity as a virtue, but with suspicion. *Virtue apologetics* will still work in spite of our differences, and even more powerfully so. Francis Schaeffer profoundly pointed this out several years ago when he wrote:

Before a watching world an observable love in the midst of difference will show a difference between Christians' differences and other men's differences. The world may not understand what the Christians are disagreeing about, but they will very quickly understand the difference of our differences from the world's differences if they see us having our differences in an open and observable love on a practical level.

That is different. Can you see why Jesus said this was the thing that would arrest the attention of the world [cf. John 13:34-35]? You cannot expect the world to understand doctrinal differences, especially in our day when the existence of true truth and absolutes are considered unthinkable even as concepts. We cannot expect the world to understand that on the basis of the holiness of God we are having a different kind of difference because we are dealing with God's absolutes. But when they see differences among true Christians who also show an observable unity, this will open the way for them to consider the truth of Christianity and Christ's claim that the Father did send the Son. . . .

Our sharp tongues, the lack of love between us-not the necessary statements of differences that may exist between true Christians, these are what properly trouble the world. ⁵⁵⁹

If anyone would still doubt the general unity that underlies Christianity, just subject one or more Christians to unjust persecution for their faith. The real family that real Christians are, will immediately become apparent, and the persecutor will quickly find that they are now at odds with a multitude.

Extras & Endnotes

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) How do we define *Christendom*? How does it differ from Christianity?
- 2) What are several characteristics of the "Inquisitions" that clearly expose them as not Christian?
- 3) What are several characteristics of the "Crusades" that clearly expose them as not Christian?
- 4) How can *virtue apologetics* still overcome the moral criticisms directed toward historical Christianity (wrongly or rightly) in the lives of the people we know?

⁵⁵⁹ Francis Schaeffer, *The Mark of a Christian* (Intervarsity, 1970), 30-31, 23. Dr. Schaeffer added some convicting words as well:

If, when we feel we must disagree as true Christians, we could simply guard our tongues and speak in love, in five or ten years the bitterness could be gone. Instead of that, we leave scars-a curse for generations. Not just a curse in the church, but a curse in the world. Newspaper headlines bear it in our Christian press, and it boils over into the secular press at times-Christians saying such bitter things about other Christians.

The world looks, shrugs its shoulders and turns away. It has not seen even the beginning of a living church in the midst of a dying culture. It has not seen the beginning of what Jesus indicates is the final apologetic-observable oneness among true Christians who are truly brothers in Christ. (23)

- 5) What are aspects of first century slavery that reasonably explain why Christianity did not immediately abolish it?
- 6) What are aspects of Christianity that biblically explain why Christianity did not immediately abolish it?
- 7) What are aspects of first century slavery that made it more humane than is often thought?
- 8) What value is there in the fact that no religion comes even close to Christianity in terms of abolishing slavery, and that while it no longer exists in countries influenced by Christianity, it continues to flourish in Buddhist and Muslim dominated areas?
- 9) What are some virtuous reasons for the differences between Christians?
- 10) Do you agree with the statement, "All in all, there is far more co-operation among churches than unwholesome rivalry"? Why or why not?
- 11) How can Christians make the most of *virtue apologetics* even in the context of differences?

Recommended Reading

- See the excellent work on correcting misunderstandings about the history of the Church in Jeffrey B. Russell's *Exposing Myths About Christianity: A Guide to Answering 145 Viral Lies and Legends* (IVP, 2012)

Publications & Particulars

Book 5

Biblical Apologetics

Part V

***Testimonies to Virtue
Apologetics***

◆ **5.18:** Testimonies of *Virtue Apologetics* 379



Chapter 5.18

Ancient & Modern Testimonies of *Virtue Apologetics*

Because of our belief in how biblical and powerful *virtue apologetics* is for the Christian faith, we wanted to collect some additional testimonies of this very thing here.

Ancient Roman culture

It may be well for us to remember the background against which these transformations took place. To get an insight into Christianity's contribution to Roman moral culture generally we need only remember what that culture was at the time Christianity reached it.

The Colosseum was called the "most characteristic relic of Pagan Rome." In each of twelve spectacles given by Aediles, from one hundred to five hundred pairs of gladiators appeared, to fight to the death with net, dagger, lances and trident, or with straight or curved blades, ground to the finest edge and point. At the triumph of Aurelian, later, eight hundred pairs of gladiators fought ten thousand men during the games of Trajan. Sometimes female gladiators fought, sometimes dwarfs, as under Domitian.

And the condemned were sometimes burned in shirts of pitch to illuminate the gardens, or were hung on crosses and left to be torn by famished bears before the populace.

The combats of animals, with each other or with men, was always refreshing to this horrid thirst for cruel excitement. Criminals, dressed in the skins of wild beasts, were exposed to tortured and maddened bulls. Under Nero, four hundred tigers fought with elephants and bulls. At the dedication of the Colosseum, by Titus, five thousand animals were killed. The rhinoceros, the hippo, the stag, the giraffe, even the crocodile and the serpent were introduced in what Tertullian fitly called "this Devil's pomp" and there is scarcely one element of horror, which can be conceived in man's wildest dreams, which was not presented as a matter of luxury to make complete the "Roman holiday" at the time when

Christianity entered the capital. (John Gerstner, *Reasons for Faith* [Harper & Row, n.d.], 155-6)

Roman Historian Edward Gibbon on the Early Church and Virtue

Edward Gibbon, in his classic work, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, once wrote: "The primitive Christian demonstrated his faith by his virtues..." and as a result, won the heart of the culture. Gibbon wrote that that single factor helped bring cultural influence and victory to the Church of Christ against the Roman Empire in the 4th Century AD.

1) Christian history and the obedience of Christians: Such obedience rendered to the Lord is designed to actively portray principle and way of life higher and wiser than anything known to mankind naturally. Its values outshine all other systems of "morality" put together.

As a result, Scripture tells us that each Christian is to be a distinct "sign" and a "wonder" of Christ to society round about them. In other words, our Christian life credentials our Christian message, despite our sinful nature. This credentialing has moved our Christian history among the nations for the last 2000 years.

One example: the Christian history of the church records the fact that Afra of Augsburg, a former prostitute, repented of her sinful way of life and embraced Christ, she set up an orphanage for abandoned children of prisoners, smugglers, slaves, and thieves. Later, she became even more efficient in her love for these children by setting up a network through the churches for finding and putting them out for adoption.

The Roman state resented her work, especially since the "perception" was created by the propaganda of state agencies persecuting her saying that she was aiding and abetting "enemies of society" by helping these children and saving children whom the state could only wish would "better" serve it as "productive" slaves.

So, the reality was that her activities put anything else to shame, including Roman "morality". More to the point, she was caring for children who, in the eyes of slave masters and Roman rulers, could be put to work in places such as the Roman sulfur mines. That was money out of their pockets as far as they were concerned.

Afra was murdered by the Roman police state in the infamous persecution of Diocletian which began in the year 303 A.D. and extended over the next 10 years, the worst persecution to that date in the Christian history of the church.

2) Christian history and cultural institutions: Gibbon's principle described far more than individual heroics throughout Christian history. Christians, he noted, are invariably moved to build institutions which makes their work more efficient and powerful.

Several such institutions, such as marriage and the family, are second nature to the creative impulse of Christian people. Christians have built schools, businesses, clinics, media, hospitals, charities, ministries of all types.

For example, the great 4th Century minister, Basil of Byzantium, built leper's colonies for the humane medical treatment of lepers. His work drew the ire of many Roman aristocrats but such health care works undertaken by Christian people and churches glorified the Name of Christ.

In other words, Christianity is a new kind of civilization, not just a way to heaven. But, also, the way to heaven is credentialed by the quality of life and testimony we have shown throughout the Christian history of the church.

3) Christian history and Christian virtue: Barlaam of Antioch, a humble shoe maker, represents yet another valuable lesson. As an infant boy, he had been rescued by Christians from the horrid Roman practice of placing unwanted children at a place just outside along the wall of the city designated by Roman law. There roving packs of dogs would find an easy meal. The historian puts it this way:

Barlaam of Antioch was a cobbler for the imperial forces who devoted all his free time to the care of orphans and widows in his church. Because he himself had been saved from the infanticide wall outside the city, he was especially concerned for exposed children. Even though he was not a pastor or church leader, his good deeds were so widely known that the enemies of the faith sought to have his witness silenced. During the calamitous persecution in 304, they succeeded in having him martyred.

These virtuous lives – and many like them – won the culture. Such a faith represented a wise and upright view of life in a corrupt world, which even the agnostic Edward Gibbon could see and admire. (Chris Ostom at <http://divorcedchristian.com/?p=13>)

NT scholar Albert Barnes (1798–1870) commenting on Colossians 4:5-6:

(1) People of the world judge of religion, not from the profession, but from the life of its friends.

(2) They judge of religion, not from preaching, or from books, or from the conduct of its founder and his apostles, but from what

they see in the daily walk and conversation of the members of the church.

(3) They understand the nature of religion so well as to know when its friends are or are not consistent with their profession.

(4) They set a much higher value on honesty and integrity than they do on the doctrines and duties of religion; and if the professed friends of religion are destitute of the principles of truth and honesty, they think they have nothing of any value. They may be very devout on the sabbath; very regular at prayer-meetings; very strict in the observance of rites and ceremonies—but all these are of little worth in the estimation of the world, unless attended with an upright life.

(5) No professing christian can possibly do good to others who does not live an upright life. If you have cheated a man out of never so small a sum, it is vain that you talk to him about the salvation of his soul; if you have failed to pay him a debt when it was due, or to finish a piece of work when you promised it, or to tell him the exact truth in conversation, it is vain for you to endeavor to induce him to be a christian. He will feel, if he does not say—and he might very properly say—that he wants no religion which will not make a man honest.

(6) No person will attempt to do much good to others whose own life is not upright. He will be sensible of the inconsistency, and will feel that he cannot do it with any sense of propriety; and the honor of religion, therefore, and the salvation of our fellow-men, demand that in all our intercourse with others, we should lead lives of the strictest integrity.⁵⁶⁰

Augustus H. Strong (1836–1921), Baptist theologian

When the microscopic search of scepticism, which has hunted the heavens and sounded the seas to disprove the existence of a Creator, has turned its attention to human society and has found on this planet a place ten miles square where decent man can live in decency, comfort, and security, supporting and educating his children, unspoiled and unpolluted; a place where age is revered, infancy protected, manhood respected, womanhood honored, and human life held in due regard—when sceptics can find such a place ten miles square on this globe, where the gospel of Christ has not gone and cleared the way and laid the foundations

⁵⁶⁰ Albert Barnes, *Commentary on the New Testament*, Col 4:5-6; online at www.ccel.org.

and made decency and security possible, it will then be in order for the sceptical literati to move thither and to venerate their views.

But so long as these very men are dependent upon the very religion they discard for every privilege they enjoy, they may well hesitate before they rob the Christian of his hope and humanity of its faith in that Savior who alone has given that hope of eternal life which makes life tolerable and society possible, and robs death of its terrors and the grave of its gloom.

(*Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. [Judson, 1907, 1953], I:195)

Harry Ironside (1876-1951)

[T]he words of God are converting. They change lives as no other power on earth can. Harry Ironside, a great preacher and evangelist from an earlier generation, was in San Francisco once taking part in a Salvation Army sidewalk meeting when he was challenged to debate the subject "Agnosticism versus Christianity" by a well-known socialist of that era. He replied like this:

"I will be glad to agree to this debate on the following conditions: namely, that in order to prove that Mr. _____ has something worth debating about, he will promise to bring with him to the Hall of Science next Sunday [the place and time of the proposed debate] two people whose qualifications I will give in a moment, as proof that agnosticism is of real value in changing human lives and building true character.

"First, he must promise to bring with him one man who was for years what we commonly call a 'down-and-outer'. . . a man who for years was under the power of evil habits from which he could not deliver himself, but who on some occasion entered one of Mr. _____'s meetings and heard his glorification of agnosticism and his denunciations of the Bible and Christianity, and whose heart and mind as he listened to such an address were so deeply stirred that he went away from that meeting saying, 'Henceforth, I too am an agnostic!' and as a result of imbibing that particular philosophy found that a new power had come into his life. The sins he once loved he now hates, and righteousness and goodness are now the ideals of his life. He is now an entirely new man, a credit to himself and an asset to society-all because he is an agnostic.

"Secondly, I would like Mr. _____ to promise to bring with him one woman . . . once a poor, wrecked, characterless outcast, the slave of evil passions, and the victim of man's corrupt living [but who also] entered a hall where Mr. _____ was loudly proclaiming his agnosticism and ridiculing the message of the Holy Scriptures.

As she listened, hope was born in her heart and she said, 'This is just what I need to deliver me from the slavery of sin!' She followed the teaching and became an intelligent agnostic or infidel. As a result, her whole being revolted against the degradation of the life she had been living. She fled from the den of iniquity where she had been held captive so long; and today, rehabilitated, she has won her way back to an honored position in society and is living a clean, virtuous, happy life, all because she is an agnostic.

"Now," he said, addressing the gentleman who had presented him with his card and the challenge, "if you will promise to bring these two people with you as examples of what agnosticism can do, I will promise to meet you at the Hall of Science at four o'clock next Sunday, and I will bring with me at the very least one hundred men and women who for years lived in just such sinful degradation as I have tried to depict, but who have been gloriously saved through believing the gospel which you ridicule. I will have these men and women with me on the platform as witnesses to the miraculous saving power of Jesus Christ and as present-day proof of the truth of the Bible." The debate never took place.

(James M. Boice, *Ephesians: An Expositional Commentary* [Baker, 1998], 255-6)

Okinawa

Many years ago the report by a war correspondent who followed the United States Forces as they stormed and occupied Okinawa was filed and released. Thirty years before this invasion, a missionary came through Okinawa on his way to Japan. He had but a little while to stay, but in that brief period of time, in a little Okinawan village called Shimmabuke, he preached the gospel. He won two young men to Christ and left them with a Bible.

One of those men was named Shosei Kina. He later became the head man, the mayor, of the village. The other man was Mojon, and he became the headmaster of the school in the village. In those thirty years, with only the witness of the Bible, they built that school. Mojon was the teacher. They had one text; it was the Book. They taught and learned the Bible in that school. They prayed to the Lord Jesus. They found through the Word of God the will of the Lord for their lives. Shosei Kina, the mayor of the little town, led the people into the ways of the Lord. Those two men won everyone in the village to faith in Christ, and they built the government of their village around the Word of God.

When America stormed Okinawa, this village, Shimmabuke, was in the path of the advance of the American forces. And this war

correspondent was with those GI's storming that island. When the forces of America came to Shimmabuke, they came with artillery, machine guns, and rifles. They were met by these two old men, Shosei Kina and Mojon. They welcomed the GI's because they had heard that they were Americans. They had known only one American, and he had led them to the Lord. They said that these Americans were somewhat different from the one they had seen before, but they were welcoming the Americans anyway! They welcomed them in the name of the Lord and in the name of the Holy Book around which they had centered their lives and constructed their city government.

Those GI's were overwhelmed. They did not know what to think. They called the chaplain. The chaplain called the commanding officers. Those two godly old men accompanied the officers through the streets of their little village. The other villages of Okinawa were filled with filth and dirt, and the people were ignorant and untaught, but this little town was spotless. Its streets were perfectly kept. Its homes were clean. The people were genteel and gracious. The officers expressed amazement at what they were seeing. Those two elderly Christian men thought the Americans were disappointed and they bowed saying: "You must pardon us. We are a backward people and all we know is the Bible. We have done nothing else but follow the teachings of Jesus. You must forgive us!"

Then the correspondent closed that report with this. He said: "I was walking through the streets of Shimmabuke with a tough old American sergeant, and he said to me, 'Look at this. I am beginning to wonder if we are not using the wrong weapons to change the world!'"

(W. A. Criswell, vol. 1: *Bibliology in Great Doctrines of the Bible*, 8 vol [Zondervan, 1982), 80-1)

Africa

From The London Times, Matthew Parris, December 27, 2008

As an atheist, I truly believe Africa needs God. Missionaries, not aid money, are the solution to Africa's biggest problem - the crushing passivity of the people's mindset

Before Christmas I returned, after 45 years, to the country that as a boy I knew as Nyasaland. Today it's Malawi . . . [T]ravelling in Malawi refreshed another belief, too: one I've been trying to banish all my life, but an observation I've been unable to avoid since my African childhood. It confounds my ideological beliefs, stubbornly

refuses to fit my world view, and has embarrassed my growing belief that there is no God.

Now a confirmed atheist, I've become convinced of the enormous contribution that Christian evangelism makes in Africa: sharply distinct from the work of secular NGOs, government projects and international aid efforts. These alone will not do. Education and training alone will not do. In Africa Christianity changes people's hearts. It brings a spiritual transformation. The rebirth is real. The change is good.

I used to avoid this truth by applauding - as you can - the practical work of mission churches in Africa. It's a pity, I would say, that salvation is part of the package, but Christians black and white, working in Africa . . . do teach people to read and write; and only the severest kind of secularist could see a mission hospital or school and say the world would be better without it. . . .

Bottom of Form

We had friends who were missionaries, and as a child I stayed often with them; I also stayed, alone with my little brother, in a traditional rural African village. In the city we had working for us Africans who had converted and were strong believers. The Christians were always different. Far from having cowed or confined its converts, their faith appeared to have liberated and relaxed them. There was a liveliness, a curiosity, an engagement with the world - a directness in their dealings with others - that seemed to be missing in traditional African life. They stood tall.

At 24, travelling by land across the continent reinforced this impression. From Algiers to Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon and the Central African Republic, then right through the Congo to Rwanda, Tanzania and Kenya, four student friends and I drove our old Land Rover to Nairobi. . . .

Whenever we entered a territory worked by missionaries, we had to acknowledge that something changed in the faces of the people we passed and spoke to: something in their eyes, the way they approached you direct, man-to-man, without looking down or away. They had not become more deferential towards strangers - in some ways less so - but more open.

This time in Malawi it was the same. I met no missionaries. You do not encounter missionaries in the lobbies of expensive hotels discussing development strategy documents, as you do with the big NGOs. But instead I noticed that a handful of the most impressive African members of the Pump Aid team (largely from Zimbabwe) were, privately, strong Christians. "Privately" because the charity is entirely secular and I never heard any of its team so much as mention religion while working in the villages. But I picked up the Christian references in our conversations. One, I saw, was studying

a devotional textbook in the car. One, on Sunday, went off to church at dawn for a two-hour service. . . .

I observe that tribal belief . . . suppresses individuality. People think collectively; first in terms of the community, extended family and tribe. This rural-traditional mindset feeds into the "big man" and gangster politics of the African city: the exaggerated respect for a swaggering leader, and the (literal) inability to understand the whole idea of loyal opposition.

Anxiety - fear of evil spirits, of ancestors, of nature and the wild, of a tribal hierarchy, of quite everyday things - strikes deep into the whole structure of rural African thought. Every man has his place and, call it fear or respect, a great weight grinds down the individual spirit, stunting curiosity. People won't take the initiative, won't take things into their own hands or on their own shoulders. . . .

Christianity, post-Reformation and post-Luther, with its teaching of a direct, personal, two-way link between the individual and God, unmediated by the collective, and unsubordinate to any other human being, smashes straight through the philosophical/spiritual framework I've just described. It offers something to hold on to to those anxious to cast off a crushing tribal groupthink. That is why and how it liberates.

Those who want Africa to walk tall amid 21st-century global competition must not kid themselves that providing the material means or even the knowhow that accompanies what we call development will make the change. A whole belief system must first be supplanted.

And I'm afraid it has to be supplanted by another. Removing Christian evangelism from the African equation may leave the continent at the mercy of a malign fusion of Nike, the witch doctor, the mobile phone and the machete.

Nigeria

Sometimes it is a silent love. I recently heard of a tribe in Nigeria that approached a missionary who didn't know them. The chief said, "We all want to believe in Jesus. What do we do?" The missionary was confused and asked if someone had preached to them. They said no but again stated that the whole tribe wanted to follow Jesus. When the missionary asked why, the chief explained.

Apparently some Christian believers had been coming to their village regularly over a number of years and had built a school, some wells, a hospital and other things to help them. The villagers

said that no one else had done anything for them. They were attracted to the loving attitudes and actions of these believers. (Arthur Lindsey, *Love the Ultimate Apologetic: The Heart of Christian Witness*. [Intervarsity, 2008, 28])

New Age guru

During a long dinner conversation I had with a senior researcher from a large New Age think tank, we discussed the idea of this impersonal force. For fifteen years this man had been deeply immersed in Eastern philosophy. He had been researching, writing and advising on radio and television specials about New Age topics. He had been brought up in a Christian church, and he came to me because he was considering returning to his roots. One reason he gave for his desire was that he couldn't find a home in any of the Eastern philosophies. He had tried them all and found that they didn't fit what he had discovered about the universe. Above all, he had met the top Eastern gurus and New Age advocates and was profoundly disappointed. He described them as narcissistic. (Arthur Lindsey, *Love the Ultimate Apologetic: The Heart of Christian Witness*. [Intervarsity, 2008, 22])

Sai Baba

Tal Brooke, president of the Spiritual Counterfeits Project based in Berkeley, California, spent years in India being groomed as a Western spokesman for Sai Baba, the guru of gurus in India. Sai Baba is the guru most respected by adherents to New Age spirituality. He is the one whom many other gurus visit to be blessed. Thousands go to catch even a distant glimpse of him, for there are many stories of his miracle-working powers. Tal Brooke had numerous private audiences with Sai Baba.

During his time in India, Tal also met a Christian missionary couple. He tried to use his brilliant mind and his skills in logic to convert them to Hinduism, but they put some dents in his arguments. What he noticed about them over time was that they seemed to care more for him than they did for themselves. Later he described their attitude as other-centered, or agape love. Though other Hindu disciples were gentle, Tal noticed that they lacked the quality of genuine other-centered love. Above all, after numerous private audiences with Sai Baba, Tal realized that the guru himself utterly lacked this other-centered love. Tal Brooke

began to understand what Jesus meant when he said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35 NRSV).

(Arthur Lindsey, *Love the Ultimate Apologetic: The Heart of Christian Witness*. [Intervarsity, 2008, 24])

Richard Wine, a murderer forgiven

I met Richard Wine when I visited a prison in southern Florida. His story is unique. He came to believe in Christ because of the mother of the man he murdered!

You can imagine Judy Lawson's anger and bitterness toward this man who murdered her son. Judy was a Christian and even involved in prison ministry, but she was consumed by her anger toward Richard. Finally one day she knelt down and gave her anger to God. She prayed that Richard, the killer of her son, would come to believe in Jesus. That was a major victory.

But Judy didn't stop there. She decided to write to Richard in the maximum-security prison where he was serving a life sentence. She wrote something to the effect that she was praying for him and that if he asked for forgiveness for his sins, including the murder of her son, Christ would forgive him.

When Richard got Judy's first letter, he threw it away, thinking she was crazy. But Judy persisted. Over the next five years she wrote occasional letters to the same effect. It started to get under Richard's skin and really bother him. While he spent two weeks in solitary confinement, he decided to read through the Bible. When he got to the book of Isaiah, something started to happen in his heart. By the time he had finished the New Testament, he had committed his life to Christ.

The first thing Richard did when he got out of the "hole" was write to Judy and tell her that he had made the commitment to follow Christ. He wanted her to be the first to know.

Judy decided to visit him in that prison. You can imagine their first meeting, when Richard asked Judy for forgiveness for the murder of her son, and she granted it!

Richard knew that he needed to grow in Christ, so he enrolled in a Bible correspondence course. He didn't know how to type, so Judy would occasionally type his papers. Their relationship developed to the point where she would regularly worship at her church and then drive down to worship with Richard in the prison chapel. As I spoke in the chapel one Sunday morning, the two were sitting together, a visible witness to the power of Christ to reconcile even the worst bitterness.

Just before I arrived at the prison, Judy Lawson had presented a Bible to Richard Wine. Inside the front cover she had inscribed, "To Richard, my beloved adopted son, from your adopted mother." (Arthur Lindsey, *Love the Ultimate Apologetic: The Heart of Christian Witness*. [Intervarsity, 2008, 108-9])

Bill Moyers

World Magazine, 3/14/09, p. 25

[During] the 1960s served as White House press secretary in the Johnson administration. He hosted the PBS news program *Bill Moyers Journal* during the 1970s and was a CBS editor and analyst from 1976 through 1986. Over the past two decades Moyers has produced and hosted several PBS series. He has received over 30 Emmys.

"Someone recently asked me what the moment was when I became a Christian. And I told them, I never did become a Christian. I can't turn the other cheek. I can't sell all my possessions and give them away. I can't love my enemy. I am not a Christian because I can't do what Jesus asks. But, I care deeply about that figure. He has instructed my faith; He looms large in my life. But I can't do what He asks me to do, so I can't legitimately claim to be a Christian."

Founder of Atheist Church

Article in College Campus newspaper April 2010

"Cover-ups show contradictions" by Marc Perkel, the founder of the Church of Reality

I have a message for my believing friends, and it's something that believers should really listen to and think about. As a realist who doesn't believe in God, I am often challenged to open my heart and let Jesus in.

I am reluctant to do so without any evidence God exists.

I am told that when one becomes a believer, they have a personal relationship with God and then God transforms you and finally you become one with the Lord.

So from my point of view, I should be able to see the difference in the behavior of those who believe as compared to those who don't believe. But I'm not seeing it.

Especially in the latest news coming out about the sexual abuse of children in the Catholic Church.

So let me be clear and direct about this, so you Catholics listen up. If there is an omnipotent God and a person or a religious group has a personal relationship with God then you wouldn't be raping children—period.

The Catholic Church would not be covering up for those priests who are raping children. Admittedly, this doesn't prove that God doesn't exist, but it does prove that the Catholic Church does not have a personal relationship with an omnipotent God, because if they did this sort of thing simply would not occur.

As a member of the reality-based community I am dedicated to believing in anything that is real. If God is real then I will believe.

But how am I to determine if God is actually and truly real and which of the thousands of religions is the true one to follow?

Turning to your Bible, the standard is, "You will know them by their fruits." Clearly the Catholics have failed the "fruit test" because of the pervasive raping of children and the cover-up by the Vatican.

As to the rest of religions and independent Christians, Muslims or other believers, you aren't going to convert atheists unless you can show us God actually has transformed your life in a way that is observable to the reality-based world.

Even if God can't be observed directly, if you claim God has changed your life, then those changes should be observable in your life and in your religious group as a whole.

And if these changes aren't observable, then we in the reality-based community aren't going to listen to what you have to say.

If you are going to convert atheists, you are going to have to pass your "fruit test" to get our attention.

Testimony of Atheist Penn Jillette

For a remarkable example of the effect of *virtue apologetics* on an atheist see the rather famous video of the magician Penn Jillette at http://www.crackle.com/c/ComicCon/A_Gift_of_a_Bible/2415037.

Penn is a rather renowned and aggressive atheist. It is instructive to imagine what would have happened if the Christian who spoke with Penn would have come to him with intellectual arguments about Christianity like so many no doubt have. Instead, this brother bypassed all of Penn's intellectual defenses with virtue that was supernatural enough that not even this hardened atheist could deny or ignore it.

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