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# FRONTLINE

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME



## Ready to Answer

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# FRONTLINE

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Our sincere thanks to Mark Herbster for coordinating this issue of *FrontLine* magazine.



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# Ready to Answer

**T**he Christian faith is defensible, and learning to defend it is an act of obedience for believers. First Peter 3:15 instructs Christians to "be ready always to give an answer to every man." The term "apologetics" has historically been used for this careful defense of the Christian faith. But *are* believers ready to defend their faith? Christians who feel unprepared or, worse, are not fully convinced in their own minds will probably avoid conversations about faith with unbelievers, losing valuable opportunities to share Christ. The unfortunate result is a stagnant Church.

Believers should be prepared to defend the faith for two primary reasons. First, they need stability in a hostile culture. In fact, the need for stability is the primary context of the command given in 1 Peter. The recipients of Peter's letter were scattered, mocked, ridiculed, and persecuted. They were struggling to live as people of God. Peter's admonition reveals how essential it is for Christians to become grounded in what they believe and why they believe it.

Second, the believer needs the tool of apologetics to be a proper witness in the world. Questions, confusion, and objections abound among unbelievers. False religions and worldly philosophies dominate the culture, making Christianity seem irrelevant and outdated. Many Christians are intimidated or even distracted and therefore fail

to "[speak] the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). Studying apologetics can renew a believer's confidence and spark a fresh intensity to witness for Christ. Of course, apologetics has its limits. Only God can draw unbelievers to faith, but a Christian who is skillfully defending the faith can be used by God in the process.

We are glad to present this edition of *FrontLine* to provide some apologetic tools to Christians. The series of articles is organized to give a good summary of the nature of and the need for apologetics. Dr. Jon Johnson begins with an article describing the biblical basis for apologetics. Dr. David Saxon follows with a review of the history of apologetics.

Next, lest anyone be tempted to mistakenly put more confidence in apologetics than in the faith being defended, Dr. Michael Riley warns about the inherent risks and even dangers of apologetics. The final two articles by Dr. Andrew Goodwill and Dr. Bryan Brock give practical helps in communicating and taking advantage of all the opportunities God gives us to dialog with unbelievers.

It is the goal of these authors to motivate believers to grow in their ability to defend their faith, thus becoming more confident in their ministry to unbelievers. It is their prayer that those who read this issue will be "ready to answer" for the glory of God.

Mark Herbster



”

**That's a  
Good Question**

**“T**hat's a good question.” Countless opportunities to share the gospel, provide counsel, and engage in useful conversations have started with those four words. But, really, these opportunities began with a question and continued with an answer. This simple practice—answering questions—is not just a conversation starter: it lies at the heart of what apologetics is and ought to be.

Christian apologetics at its most basic and most profound levels is the study and practice of answering questions about the Christian faith. The believer has a biblical commission to be prepared to answer questions about his belief. Although apologetics as a branch of theology has grown up into a large canopy of ideas and approaches, the root of the practice is the call to explain and defend the gospel. In the next few paragraphs I will briefly note what apologetics is by definition and scriptural use. A foundational understanding of apologetics in its simplest, biblical sense will help keep the Christian grounded in the simplicity and necessity of answering for Christ.

#### OPPORTUNITIES IN CHINA

My own interest in apologetics grew first through personal and later vocational interests. As a student I was insatiably curious about the whats, whys, and hows of Christian belief and practice, and I am thankful for Christian parents and professors who endured my eager questions. As I was preparing for ministry while studying the arts, history, and the Bible, the Lord graciously allowed me to also face questions in outreach and evangelism. Along the way I discovered there was a field of Christian study focused on answering and explaining the faith—apologetics—and I eagerly sought chances to not only study but also share the resources I was learning. But the greatest opportunities to answer questions about the gospel arrived when my wife and I departed the United States to begin ministering overseas in greater China.

The joy and challenge of ministering in a nonnative culture has emphasized the essential need of being prepared to give an answer to the many questions



posed about our faith. Along the way our family moved from the frigid rustbelt of Manchuria to the humid metropolis of Hong Kong, where professors in the city encouraged me to finish my studies with a Doctor of Philosophy from a local Chinese university. Through my years of ministry as a missionary, pastor, and Christian philosopher, the Lord has provided me countless opportunities to engage in apologetics with atheists and agnostics and followers of world religions and cults. Divine appointments have led to counselling the head of our city's atheist society; Bible studies with Confucianist professors; engagements with Muslim imams, Daoist adherents, and a host of inquisitive university students. The Lord has also provided opportunities to teach apologetics in several countries as well as here in our ministry home of Hong Kong.

These experiences reinforced my conviction of the usefulness of being prepared to do “apologetic” work—not in apologizing (although sometimes there is a need for that as well)—but in the simple call to carefully answer people's questions about our Lord, His Word, and the gospel hope that we are called to share. In the face of earnest questions or antagonistic opposition, there is a need for every believer to be ready to practice apologetics.

**THESE EXPERIENCES REINFORCED MY CONVICTION OF THE USEFULNESS OF BEING PREPARED TO DO “APOLOGETIC” WORK—NOT IN APOLOGIZING (ALTHOUGH SOMETIMES THERE IS A NEED FOR THAT AS WELL)—BUT IN THE SIMPLE CALL TO CAREFULLY ANSWER PEOPLE’S QUESTIONS ABOUT OUR LORD, HIS WORD, AND THE GOSPEL HOPE THAT WE ARE CALLED TO SHARE. IN THE FACE OF EARNEST QUESTIONS OR ANTAGONISTIC OPPOSITION, THERE IS A NEED FOR EVERY BELIEVER TO BE READY TO PRACTICE APOLOGETICS.**

## **APOLOGETICS DEFINED**

Having said all of this, what is apologetics, biblically speaking? It is not some arrogant and aggressive branch of theology (or at least it ought not be) but rather a scriptural and often simple practice of answering people's questions. When I teach Introduction to Apologetics, our first lesson always begins with simple definitions: etymological (word history), dictionary, and scriptural use.<sup>1</sup>

First, the origin of the term “apologetic” as it occurs in our New Testament is given to us through the Greek language. It occurs there just under twenty times in a handful of forms.<sup>2</sup> The Greek *apologia* (ἀπολογία) has been passed on in our English “apology,” and is a combination of *apo* (ἀπό) + *logos* (λόγος).<sup>3</sup> The meaning and use of the full term in the Greek, and in our Bibles, is *a word or speech given in answer, for oneself or one's position—in legal terms, to give a defense or excuse*.<sup>4</sup> Keep in mind that it can be either a defense which answers an accusation, or an explanation which answers a question.

Secondly, the dictionary definition of apologetics reminds us that the word has now come to refer to the polemical, or argumentative field of Christian theology which contends for the faith and responds

to arguments against the faith. According to one dictionary, “apologetics” is defined as a “systematic argumentative discourse in defence (as of a doctrine),” or more specifically as “a branch of theology devoted to the defence of the divine origin and authority of Christianity.”<sup>5</sup> It is easy enough to see the connection between the original use of the word and its current association with the defense of our faith. But it also raises a question: is apologetics a task given to all Christians? Is it a biblical task for the believer?

Most readers know of the large and growing practice of apologetics, including writings, arguments, and systems involving men and women called “apologists” dedicated to the task. We also know that Paul and other biblical figures made defenses for their beliefs and behavior as Christians.<sup>6</sup> But is the practice of apologetics needed for every believer? Is there a general call for all to do the work of an apologist? In its most narrow, technical sense (definition #2 above), the answer is “no.” It is unnecessary for every Christian to devote himself to studying the “branch of theology” called apologetics. But in its simpler sense of a “defense” or explanation, yes, it is necessary. Even in its more specific sense, of “systematically” or carefully defending and explaining, yes, it is needed. To see this clearly, let's now look at our third defining use—that of Scripture.

Our third definition is taken from the passage which is likely to have already been on many Bible-readers' minds: 1 Peter 3, verses 15–16. Here it is in full:

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to **give an answer** to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

These well-known verses are found in the context of an encouragement from Peter to believers facing conflict and persecution in relation to their faith, and

## SCRIPTURAL APOLOGETICS IS ADORNED BY A LIFE WHICH ECHOES OUR LIPS, WITH WORKS THAT AGREE WITH OUR WORDS, AND WITH HABITS THAT ACCORD WITH OUR HOPE IN CHRIST.

hopefully not for their wrongdoings.<sup>7</sup> Though these are not the only verses challenging the Christian to be ready to share the faith amidst opposition, they are perhaps the clearest call to readiness “to give an answer” in the apologetic sense. In fact, the phrase “to give an answer” is a translation of the word *apologia* itself. We are also told that the “answer” we are to give is in reference to those who “ask” us “a reason of the hope that is in [us].” This then is a call for Christians, when the opportunity arises and the occasion demands, to give an answer—a defense—for the Christian hope in Christ.

### “SANCTIFY THE LORD GOD IN YOUR HEARTS”

Notice that the first step for the Christian apologist is to “sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.” All that is done in the defense and explanation of the gospel must arise from the solid foundation of a heart and mind devoted to the Lord. At first glance it may seem strange to “sanctify” God, for how can a thrice-holy God be any more sanctified than He already is? The sense is for us to *set God apart as Lord in our lives* or *set Christ apart as Lord*—to exalt and honor Him as He ought to be.<sup>8</sup> Before we give an answer with our life and our lips to a watching world, our minds and hearts must know and honor the Lord. If we do not set Him apart as the ultimate object of our attention and affection, we will not know Him as we should nor reverence Him as we ought. Without the former, our answers will be uninformed and lacking in truth.<sup>9</sup> Without the latter, our answers will be uninspired and lacking in conviction. Scriptural apologetics begins, not with speaking ability or theological prowess, but with a passionate devotion to our Saviour and His Word.

Notice too how the phrase ends, with a focus on a “good conscience” springing from a blameless “conversation,” or manner of living. It is a universal truth that a pic-

ture speaks a thousand words and that our walk talks louder than our talk talks. Our lives as Christians can, through Christlike behavior, provide a defense that silences those who would accuse us and an explanation of the transforming power of the gospel to those who would enquire after it. Scriptural apologetics is adorned by a life which echoes our lips, with works that agree with our words, and with habits that accord with our hope in Christ.

Between these two bookends of preparation and confirmation, dedication to God and demonstration by lifestyle, the Christian is told to be ready to defend and explain our hope, reasonably and humbly. Reasonably, or sensibly, because the verse says people demand or desire to hear a “reason” (*logos*) for our hope. Whether asked skeptically or in sincerity, we are to be ready to provide a sensible answer to the questions asked of us.<sup>10</sup> Humbly, as we see the verse says to speak with an attitude of meekness and cautious carefulness. Your attitude in answering often speaks louder than your words.<sup>11</sup>

All of these exhortations—a heart of devotion, an answer that is reasonable, an attitude of humility, and a life that is blameless—are woven together to help us be “ready,” or prepared, for when the questions come. If you pause to consider this list, many of us would agree that most items are simply the outgrowth of spiritual disciplines we already should be pursuing. But there is at least one command which remains as a challenge to many people, and which brings us into the realm of apologetics as a proper field of study and practice. A “reasonable answer” is a challenge for thoughtful Christians because thoughtful Christians understand how difficult questions can be. Every pastor, every Sunday school teacher, every witnessing Christian has likely faced questions that were hard to answer. This is where the study of apologetics can be useful. The resources in this branch of theology, drawn from apologetic

experience and scriptural knowledge, can be a help as we learn how to answer. You may be helped by referring to the materials mentioned in this volume (see pages 22-24).<sup>12</sup> But they must be used carefully and with biblical discernment, tested against both the Word of God and wise application.

In conclusion, when we understand that apologetics is, at its simplest, answering questions about the Christian faith, then we also understand it is a task to which all believers are called. This understanding is reinforced by the reminder from the Scriptures that we are to be prepared to give a careful answer for the Christian hope. However much we may draw on the wealth of experience and insight in apologetics as a field of study, we should not lose sight of apologetics as a field of service. Bearing in mind the Bible’s call for us to answer questions, I recommend the reader turn again to the Scriptures, especially the Book of Proverbs and the Wisdom Books. Study the Spirit-breathed, practical advice for listening and speaking in wisdom. Far from being too simplistic for apologetics, these profound truths, wedded to growth in knowledge of our Lord, are the proper starting point for the biblical apologist.<sup>13</sup> And finally, *do the work* of an evangelist, of outreach, of witnessing. It is only through active sharing, rather than secluded study, that we will fulfill our biblical call to answer questions about our glorious hope.<sup>14</sup>

Jonathan Johnson is a third-generation pastor residing in Hong Kong, China. In addition to working both at Hong Kong University and Hong Kong Baptist University, Jonathan teaches courses for the Chinese Fundamental Baptist Institute and Maranatha Baptist University. Jonathan and his wife, Catherine, along with their three children serve at Island Baptist Church in Sheung Wan, Hong Kong.



<sup>1</sup> Those who have read or studied in apologetics will notice that I have not given any specification as to which form of apologetics is to be favored. This is not an oversight but rather a conviction that the simplest and barest scriptural approach provides the best grounding, and not any favored system. As noted by the historian Avery





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# A History of Contending

**C**hristians have always contended for the faith. As explained elsewhere in this issue, apologetics can be defensive—responding to attacks on Christian belief—or offensive—seeking to explain Christian belief as a launching point for evangelistic witness. Christians have done both with a wide variety of sophistication and with various presuppositions. The history of apologetics is remarkably diverse and complex. Acknowledging that oversimplification is unavoidable in a short summary, this article will survey the subject by focusing on the dialectic that has always been evident between those who stress the necessity of finding common ground with unbelievers and those who emphasize the absolute distinction between Christian truth and all other worldviews.

## THE LOGOS METAPHOR

Justin Martyr, who wrote an early and influential apology<sup>1</sup> for the Christian faith, sought common ground with the Greco-Roman thought of his day by employing

the logos metaphor, believed by philosophers to be the universal reason embedded in creation and human rationality. One could legitimately question whether the use of Logos in John 1:1–18 has sufficient overlap with the philosophical use of the term in Greco-Roman thought for Justin to employ this apologetic approach. Justin was seeking to launch a conversation in which he could theoretically lead his philosopher friends from their false view of the logos to the true Logos, the Son of God. The cost, however, to seeking common ground in this way is the possible distortion of the biblical message. After all, the Son of God came as a particular person to a particular people with a message set within a historic covenant context—this is strikingly different from the universal reason of the Greek philosophers.

This illustrates an age-old tension. If we simply deliver the biblical message without defense or contextualization of any kind, will anyone listen? If we contextualize it, shaping it to the thought forms of the audience, they may listen, but is it still the accu-

rate biblical message? To put it in terms of a metaphor, as an apologist constructs a bridge from the biblical text to the culture he is trying to reach, to what extent should he employ materials from the cultural side of the bridge?

## PLATONISM

The Alexandrians Clement and Origen somewhat later utilized so much Platonist thinking in their defenses of Christianity that one can legitimately challenge their theology as being more Platonist than biblical. Tertullian, their contemporary in the West, famously challenged the idea that Athens (human philosophy) should be used to interpret Jerusalem (biblical faith). Although quite conversant himself with the thought world of his day, Tertullian insisted that the conversation must begin with an authority claim, that the Rule of Faith<sup>2</sup> must establish the boundaries for our conversations with unbelievers.

Nevertheless, Tertullian wrote two apologies for the Christian faith himself, arguing from the exemplary lives of Christians



(among other arguments) for the legitimacy of their beliefs and their right to live in peace in the empire. Notice that his argument implicitly appeals to the Roman idea that people should be good neighbors.<sup>3</sup> Roman law viewed Christians, who refused to worship the emperor, engaged in mysterious rites, and were judgmental about the morals of non-Christians, as poor neighbors and unworthy of toleration. Tertullian could not deny these aspects of Christian practice but rather argued that such teachings led to Christians being excellent neighbors and loyal citizens. It seems that apologetics cannot occur without some appeal to common ground. If we are only quoting or explaining Scripture, we are evangelizing, but we are not defending the faith.

### THE MIDDLE AGES

During the Middle Ages, the two factors that dominated apologetics were the interactions between Christians and adherents of Judaism and Islam and the continuing struggle to determine the proper use of

Greco-Roman philosophy in the formulation of the Christian faith. The latter factor is especially apparent in a work such as *Summa Contra Gentiles*, in which Thomas Aquinas uses Aristotelian categories to find common ground with his Muslim target audience. The extent to which this Aristotelianism distorted Thomas's message is difficult to gauge for a Protestant, since I find much of Thomas's theology—especially his soteriology—already marred by Medieval sacramentalism. Relative to evangelism of Jews and Muslims, Aquinas and the Dominicans tended to establish certain foundational truths—such as the existence of God—via a common-ground appeal to reason. For the doctrines necessary for salvation, such as the Trinity and the deity of Christ, they declared reason inadequate and demanded faith.

Ramon Lull, by contrast, a man who devoted his entire life and ministry to evangelism of Jews and Muslims, declared that the Christian system could be established for unbelievers “by necessary reasons” and developed an extensive and, by

modern standards, arcane apologetic that sought to prove that Christianity is superior to Judaism and Islam on strictly rational grounds. Of course, his system eventually led Jews and Muslims to the Scriptures (or, at least, to the scholastic theology that Lull believed reflected the Scriptures), but it was common-ground appeal to reason that launched his apologetics. Lull criticized a Dominican who proved to a Muslim ruler that Islam was false using logic but then refused to use logic to prove Christianity true, saying that Christian truth transcends reason and must simply be believed.<sup>4</sup> Lull insisted that one must show the religious unbeliever *why* Christianity ought to be believed. Since all truth flows from God and is coherent, one ought to be able to show rationally that Christianity is superior without direct appeal to theological matters that the target audience is not likely to accept.

### THE REFORMATION

The Reformers spent most of their energy in establishing the absolute authority and sole sufficiency of Scripture against the Roman Catholic Church that buttressed many of its erroneous teachings on tradition, whether embodied in patristic writings, papal decrees, or conciliar decisions. No sixteenth-century Reformer appears in *The History of Apologetics*, a recent wide-ranging biographical approach to the subject. The Protestant Reformers defended the faith, but they did so primarily in polemical contests with Roman Catholic theologians. Had Calvin, however, engaged non-Christians apologetically, we can get some idea of his approach from the following statement in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*:

Enlightened by him, we no longer believe, either on our own judgment or that of others, that the Scriptures are from God; but, in a way superior to human judgment, feel perfectly assured—as much so as if we beheld the divine image visibly impressed on it—that it came to us, by the instrumentality of men, from the very mouth of God. We ask not for proofs or probabilities on which to rest our judgment, but we subject our intellect and judgment to it as too transcendent for us to estimate.<sup>5</sup>



It does not appear that he would have been interested in trying to establish the credibility of Scripture by means of extra-biblical or rational evidence. Indeed, he goes on to say, “It is foolish to attempt to prove to infidels that the Scripture is the Word of God. This it cannot be known to be, except by faith.”<sup>6</sup>

When apologetics again began to emerge as a major discipline in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the dominance of reason in this era was reflected in the apologetic work of key thinkers Hugo Grotius, Joseph Butler, and William Paley. Grotius, while imprisoned for his Arminian beliefs, wrote *De Veritate*, which directly addresses pagans, Jews, and Muslims. He argued that historical evidence best supports the major doctrines of Christianity and demands the assent of an unbiased person. Unfortunately, in order to ground Christian beliefs in historical evidence accessible to any reasonable person, he avoided doctrines such as the Trinity and substitutionary atonement. In short, his common-ground approach truncated Christianity severely.

## SCIENTIFIC DATA

Some will also find problematic his frank appeal to undamaged free will. Bishop Butler’s *Analogy of Religion* is a classic case of using reason to drive one’s opponent from his own position to recog-

nition of Christianity’s truth. McNaughton writes of Butler,

He accepts the deists’ premises and their claim that we must justify Christian belief using ordinary methods of reasoning that we would employ in everyday life. He argues that those methods will take us much further than deists supposed: they can be used to show that many of the fundamental claims of theism can be thus established and that traditional Christian orthodoxy, as revealed in Scripture, is in line with what we know of the world.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, Paley appealed to “impartial reason” in his famous works *Evidences of Christianity* and *Natural Theology* to show the reasonableness of Christian faith. He exhaustively gathered scientific data to show that God is the great Designer and believed that impartial minds would be forced to recognize the strength of his case. For each of these apologists, Scripture had a role, and they did not consider their apologetic work complete until they had arrived in Scripture to affirm the distinctive truths of Christianity. But their starting point (and the lion’s share of their argumentation) was the common ground of impartial reason, the ability of all persons to recognize and assess evidence, and the fact that all truth—natural and revealed—is God’s truth.

In the nineteenth century, evidential apologetics continued to dominate, culminating in the work of the Lion of Princeton, B. B. Warfield. Warfield fully understood that man’s reason is fallen and that conviction of the truth occurs only through the Spirit’s enlightenment; nevertheless, he believed the apologist’s role is to marshal truth claims on behalf of Christianity. In particular, he argued that one must prove that the Scriptures are divine before appealing to them as divine authority. Warfield clarified,

Of course, mere reasoning cannot make a Christian; but that is not because faith is not the result of evidence, but because a dead soul cannot respond to evidence. The action of the Holy Spirit in giving faith is not apart from the evidence, but along with the evidence; and in the first stage consists in preparing the soul for the reception of the evidence.<sup>8</sup>

This approach was ably continued in the apologetic works of J. Gresham Machen, also of Princeton, who produced a powerful historical argument for the virgin birth of Christ. Other significant twentieth-century evidentialists include John Warwick Montgomery, who argues for Christianity on the basis of legal evidence, showing that Christian truth claims can be shown to be true beyond reasonable doubt, and Gary Habermas, who has written numerous books that employ a Minimal Facts Approach. Assuming minimal historical facts that even secular historians agree to, Habermas builds powerful cases for key Christian beliefs such as the resurrection of Christ and Christ’s deity.

The most notable popular apologist of the twentieth century was C. S. Lewis, who argued that morals, reason, and other transcendental aspects of humanity are explainable only in terms of a transcendent God. Naturalism, Lewis claimed, cannot explain any of these realities. Lewis uses this line of reasoning to take unbelievers to the Scriptures, where he finds anchors for transcendent truths.

## DUTCH REFORMED THEOLOGY

A significant challenge to evidential approaches to defending the faith arose in the twentieth century, largely rooted in the

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THE MOST NOTABLE POPULAR APOLOGIST OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY WAS C. S. LEWIS, WHO ARGUED THAT MORALS, REASON, AND OTHER TRANSCENDENTAL ASPECTS OF HUMANITY ARE EXPLAINABLE ONLY IN TERMS OF A TRANSCENDENT GOD. NATURALISM, LEWIS CLAIMED, CANNOT EXPLAIN ANY OF THESE REALITIES. LEWIS USES THIS LINE OF REASONING TO TAKE UNBELIEVERS TO THE SCRIPTURES, WHERE HE FINDS ANCHORS FOR TRANSCENDENT TRUTHS.



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Michael Riley

# The Dangers of

**A**pologists must be cautious in their discipline in order to help the church!

I write this as someone who is convinced of the value of the defense of the faith. We are called to “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.” The Christian faith is reasonable and rational. It is defensible. But for all its value, apologetics is dangerous. To illustrate this danger, I want us to consider Friedrich Schleiermacher. This might seem an odd choice for several reasons. Schleiermacher is often given the title “the father of liberal theology.” His thought is complex; in places, I must confess I do not even find it wholly intelligible. But his goal is clear, and that is important for us.

Schleiermacher’s most important work is *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*. Schleiermacher is writing to those who believe religion unworthy of their attention. The Enlightenment had made belief in the supernatural untenable for the educated class. Schleiermacher, addressing this audience, asks them not to dismiss religion so heedlessly. True religion, he contends, has virtually nothing to do with affirming the supernatural intervention of God in history, the unique deity of Jesus, or His atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. The particulars of Schleiermacher’s proposed replacement need not detain us, but he seems to say that true religion is primarily a feeling of profound connection to the Infinite.

As conservative Christians, we see Schleiermacher as one who is carrying out a program of destruction on the Christian faith—and to be sure, he *is* doing that. But we must realize that, from his own perspective, he is not destroying Christianity

but *saving* it. He has gone on a mission to make the Christian faith plausible to a generation that no longer finds it so. Schleiermacher, then, is not simply a theologian: Schleiermacher is an apologist.

And if you understand this, you understand why apologetics is such a danger to the church.

This ought not drive us to irrationalism or to be against apologetics. As Spurgeon is often cited:

I was addressing a number of students, the other day, upon the apologies for the gospel which are so numerous just now. A great many learned men are defending the gospel; no doubt it is a very proper and right thing to do, yet I always notice that, when there are most books of that kind, it is because the gospel itself is not being preached. Suppose a number of persons were to take it into their heads that they had to defend a lion, a full-grown king of beasts! There he is in the cage, and here come all the soldiers of the army to fight for him. Well, I should suggest to them, if they would not object, and feel that it was humbling to them, that they should kindly stand back, and open the door, and let the lion out! I believe that would be the best way of defending him, for he would take care of himself; and the best “apology” for the gospel is to let the gospel out.

I think we can concede the Prince of Preachers’ chief point here (“And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified,” 1 Cor. 2:1–2) without neglecting our *biblical* obligation to offer a rational defense of the faith when the need arises.

## WHY DANGEROUS?

What is it about the task of apologetics that makes it so dangerous? The answer is found in 1 Corinthians chapters 1 and 2, where Paul describes the contrast between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of man. His key point is that these two wisdoms—though the wisdom of man is really foolishness—are ultimately at odds with each other. Because they are at odds with each other, it is not possible to make God’s wisdom *seem* like wisdom according to the wisdom of man. It is at precisely this point, when apologists seek to make Christianity plausible according to the wisdom of this age, that they must modify the Christian message—at least in emphasis, if not also in substance.

Paul illustrates this principle in two ways. He tells us that the “Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom” (1 Cor. 1:22). Paul’s comment about the Jews is clearly seen in the Gospels, where the religious leaders repeatedly come to Jesus and say, “Master, we would see a sign from thee” (Matt. 12:38). They want to see an irrefutable demonstration of the Messianic power and authority of Jesus, proof that He is the conqueror who will liberate Israel and establish the Kingdom. The Greeks, on the other hand, seek wisdom. This is straightforward enough: the home of the philosophers will receive Jesus only if He can demonstrate that He can stand among—or over—Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.

Here is the vital question: is Jesus the mighty conquering Messiah whom the Jews seek? And is Jesus wisdom? The answer to both questions is unambiguously *yes*. What we would expect, therefore, is that Paul would then know the best way to preach Christ to both groups. Preaching to the

# Apologetics

Jews, he would show them that Christ is the conquering King that they have long been awaiting. Preaching to the Greeks, he would elaborate on the truth that Jesus Christ is Wisdom Incarnate.

But this is not what Paul does—he does exactly the opposite: “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:23). He knows that, in their unbelieving state, both the Jews and the Greeks are idolaters. They have gods other than the true God. And Paul adamantly refuses to preach Christ in such a way that Christ would become the servant to the idols of unbelief.

It is worth noting that Paul’s philosophy of ministry here extends not merely to the content of his message but also to his medium. Bookending this passage are two verses that make this point: “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect” (1 Cor. 1:17). Also: “And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (1 Cor. 2:4–5). Paul refused to engage in a *style* of rhetoric that would, in his words, make the cross of Christ of “none effect.” That is to say, if the results of our ministry have a perfectly natural explanation, they have robbed Christ of the supernatural glory due Him when a blind man is given eyes to see.

In this passage we read what the Jews and Greeks seek. What do the Americans—or those in the context in which you minister—seek? Material comfort? Family peace? Purpose in life? Intellectual satisfaction? These things, like

the Jews’ desire for the Kingdom and the Greeks’ for wisdom, are not in themselves wrong. But how often do we consider the idols of our culture, and having found them, make Jesus a servant of those idols! The unbeliever is not called to repentance, but to add Jesus as the means by which he can continue to pursue that which drew his heart from God in the first place.

## IT’S NOT ABOUT THE APOLOGIST

Those who value apologetics (and that should be all Christians, at least at some level) must constantly reaffirm that it is not God’s purpose in salvation to glorify the apologist. Our approach to the defense of the faith must be governed by God’s own intention: “in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God” (1 Cor. 1:21). Paul explicitly tells us that God designed this world in such a way that unbelieving people would not come to salvation by means of earthly wisdom. We cannot possibly be faithful to God while subverting His purpose, which is that He alone be the hero of salvation—that neither the evangelist nor the one being saved received glory in salvation, but the Triune God alone.

Practically, then, what does this mean? On the one hand are those who dismiss—or even vilify—apologetics altogether. Our mission, they would say, is mere proclamation of the truth. Any attempt at a defense of the faith necessarily runs afoul of Paul’s argument here. On the other are those who seem to reduce Christianity to nothing but propositions and syllogisms, the necessary and inevitable conclusion to generally obvious first principles.

The reality is that the wisdom of this age is rooted in rebellion and the depravity of fallen man. The unbeliever’s ultimate objection to the gospel is never merely

intellectual; it is a moral objection. He refuses to acknowledge the rightful rule of “the LORD, and . . . his anointed” (Ps. 2:2). For that reason, our use of apologetics should regularly bring us back to that central issue. It is good and right for us to proclaim the *rational* glories of our God (even as we joyfully acknowledge that He transcends our finite minds). And in the task of apologetics, this is precisely what we are doing. We are seeking to vindicate God against charges that He is false and irrational. We should pursue this task with all confidence.

But let us do so with due caution, in no way cedes the unbeliever his delusion that he is right to sit in judgment of God. As C. S. Lewis wrote,

The ancient man approached God (or even the gods) as the accused person approaches his judge. For the modern man, the roles are quite reversed. He is the judge: God is in the dock. He is quite a kindly judge; if God should have a reasonable defense for being the god who permits war, poverty, and disease, he is ready to listen to it. The trial may even end in God’s acquittal. But the important thing is that man is on the bench and God is in the dock.

We must continue to walk this knife edge, giving reasons without giving in to the wisdom of this age. In this way, we remain both apologists vigilant about the dangers posed from apologetics.

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# Answering with Wisdom

**H**ave you ever come up with the perfect response to a question or situation three days after you needed it? I recently watch brief footage from a trial in which the prosecuting attorney raised multiple objections while listening to the defense question a witness. How can some people digest information quickly and respond accordingly underneath such pressure? If I had that skill as a child, I would have won many more debates with my friends.

Apologetics, though, is not a criminal trial. It is a faith-building and redemptive-focused service to God that God expects of every believer. First Peter 3:15 commands us to “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.” This command comes easier to those skilled in apologetics and may even be a joy for them to keep. But my mind does not think like theirs. My words do not flow like theirs. I do not have the training, have not taken the classes nor read the books.

Perhaps you are like me. If you are, take heart. There is more to answering questions about our faith than quick thinking and advanced learning. Answering requires wisdom that comes only from a relationship with God. Proverbs contains many passages about our use of words and the role of wisdom in answering questions. When we engage a believer or unbeliever in the area of apologetics, we might not know all the answers or be able to form quick responses, but we can embrace God’s instructions for how to wisely answer. By embracing these truths, we can be ready always to give an answer.

## A CAREFUL, CONSIDERED RESPONSE

First, we must consider our response carefully: “The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things” (Prov.

15:28). Wisdom teaches us to consider our response carefully because it is harmful to respond thoughtlessly. Consider the contrasting picture in 15:28. On the one hand, the wise ponder or mull over their responses in their mind so that they can speak profitably. On the other hand, words sent out like a bubbling fountain have calamitous (“evil”) results and are characteristic of the wicked. A quick response is not inherently harmful, but a thoughtless response has the potential to harm. What constitutes a thoughtless response? One, we answer thoughtlessly when we do not understand the question raised. As a result, we may provide a biblical answer to a question that was not asked.

Politicians can be frustrating. When asked a direct question, they often respond with a statement that has little or nothing to do with the question. Assuming their adequate intelligence, I wonder if they dodge the question because they have no satisfactory answer to the question. In the same way, what should a questioner think when we answer correctly the wrong question? A thoughtless answer may imply that we have no answer (when we do!).

## AN ACCURATE EVALUATION

Two, we can answer thoughtlessly when we do not understand our hearer, so we must evaluate our hearer(s) wisely. Proverbs 26:4–5, “Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.” Wisdom teaches us to evaluate our hearer wisely and respond accordingly. At face value, Proverbs 26:4–5 teaches us contradictory truths. How can we both not answer a fool and answer a fool? The solution to this contradiction can be summarized by one of the “effective speaker” truths that were drilled into me during a freshman speech course: The effective speaker knows his audience. For example,

Paul understood audience analysis when skillfully adapted to the philosophical and pagan bent of his Athenian audience (Acts 17:22–32). In Jerusalem, he raised the topic of resurrection knowing that it would divide his Sadducees and Pharisee audience. We can evaluate our hearer(s) wisely by asking ourselves questions.

One, are they seeking truth or trouble? I recall a time when my dad was teaching our youth group about obedience. One teenager raised his hand and asked sarcastically, “But what if they tell us to murder someone?” (insert chuckles from immature teens here). There is a biblical answer to this ethical dilemma, but the teen had no desire to hear it. He was seeking trouble, not truth. In that situation, my dad would have joined the fool’s folly by answering the question. We must be wise in discerning the heart of the questioner.

Two, would my silence cause the fool’s ego to grow? Proverbs 26:5 ends “lest he be wise in his own conceit.” There comes



“sweetness of the lips.” A wise answer will be a sweet answer even if it contains hard truths. How different are the following true statements? “You (insert type of sinner here) are going to burn in hell.” Or, “You face eternal punishment for your sin as do all of us who are sinners.” Both are true, but one attacks while the other invites.

Tone is important. Ephesians 4:15 instructs us to “[speak] the truth in love.” Our goal is to persuade, not to beat down. In fact, “increaseth learning” (Prov. 16:21) means to increase persuasiveness. To illustrate this, consider how the noun for “learning” in 16:21 is used in Proverbs 7:21: “With her much fair speech [“learning” from 16:21]. . . she forced [seduced or compelled] him.” God’s truth is confrontational, but God’s truth is invitational. He desires that men turn to Him (cf. 2 Peter 3:9).

When we are tempted to answer harshly, remember these truths. One, don’t take the exchange personally. We can sometimes feel like our worth is wrapped up in our answers. It’s not about us. We seek God’s will in the questioner’s life. Two, don’t take the exchange competitively. Our goal is not to win the argument. Again, we seek God’s will in the questioner’s life. If we refuse to take things personally or competitively, we are more likely to “use our nice words” and more likely to persuade with our words. How we say something is much more important than what we say. Tone speaks louder than words.

### **A GODLY WISDOM**

Fourth, we must seek God’s wisdom diligently: “If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God” (Prov. 2:4–5). Wisdom teaches us that true wisdom comes from God.

I like to be prepared. In college, I would over-study some courses in pursuit of what I thought was the ideal grade. In life, I rehearse conversations in my head before making hard phone calls or attending important meetings. I want to be focused and ready for whatever might happen. I memorize bullet points, statistics, and my introductory and concluding remarks. Preparation in apologetics is important, but it is not primary. We can learn, rehearse, memorize, and sharpen our presentation to no avail because we do

not seek God’s wisdom personally. How can I better answer those who question my faith? Fear God and know God. When I fear God, I allow my knowledge of God to align continuously my thoughts, feelings, words, and actions with God’s character. This knowledge of God flows only from a personal relationship with Him. Proverbs 9:10 says that both the fear and knowledge of God are the beginning point of wisdom. How can I answer those who question God’s wisdom if I do not seek Him and His wisdom? Folger’s coffee may be the best way to start your day, but a personal relationship with God is the best way to start your preparation to answer.

### **A TRUSTING FAITH**

Fifth, we must trust God’s way and work faithfully. To see this truth, let’s go outside Proverbs. First Corinthians 1:23–24 says, “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” Wisdom teaches us that sometimes we will appear foolish to unbelievers.

Apologetics has internal and external components. Internally, it builds our faith by giving us reasonable answers to questions about the truth we have already accepted. Externally, it invites questioners to place their faith in the God that we have believed. Not every unbeliever will listen, and even fewer will believe no matter how carefully we consider our responses, how wisely we evaluate our hearers, how sweetly we use our words, or how diligently we seek God’s wisdom. Apologetics is a spiritual exercise that engages the mind and heart. “We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:23). We must trust God to do His work in His way. It is not up to us to convince questioners of the truth. We must proclaim the truth and leave the results to God.

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a point when we should put a fool in his place lest he becomes rooted in his foolishness. As Proverbs 26:12 says, “there is more hope for a fool” than for one who thinks himself wise. Although my dad did not answer the teen’s question, he did respond for the benefit of the teen: “Talk to me if that happens. For now, obey your parents.” This type of answer to a fool might keep the hearer open to further instruction rather than hardening him in his foolishness through silence.

### **A SWEET FLAVOR**

Third, we must flavor our words sweetly: “The wise in heart shall be called prudent: and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning” (Prov. 16:21). Wisdom teaches us to “use our nice words.” I am dismayed when leaders (Christian or unbelievers) speak the truth harshly. Unfortunately, I am sometimes guilty of the same error at home and work. Proverbs 16:21 parallels the “wise in heart” with the

Bryan Brock

# Apologetics in Action

I have coached basketball for several years, and I once had a young man sign up for tryouts who had never played basketball before. When I asked him about his basketball ability, he told me he believed he was ready because he had played many hours of an NBA video game. While I admired the young man's confidence, the live-action tryout told the truth that he was not yet ready to join the team.

Regrettably, a similar scenario plays out repeatedly in the much more significant arena of Christian apologetics. Aware that we live in an increasingly hostile culture, believers are eager to learn how to defend their faith and prove the validity of Christianity. So they take classes, read books, watch YouTube debates, etc. The sources of information are abundant, but after many hours of learning, one of the most abiding questions is, are they ready for live action?

Teaching apologetics is one of my passions, and having taught on the church, university, and seminary level for several years, I've grown increasingly burdened by what I see as a failure of modern apologetics. That is, it can often lead to a lot of head knowledge and theory but rarely translates into real-life interactions. I strongly believe apologetics is meant to be practiced. All Christians should be ready to give an answer for the glory of God and salvation of souls. I've begun training students to utilize the tools of apologetics in their rela-

tionships and routine interactions with the lost.

Before we can ever be in a position to put apologetics into practice, however, we must create apologetic opportunities. Interestingly, Peter's apologetic mandate instructs us to "be ready always to give an answer" (1 Pet. 3:15). This seems to indicate that we are the reactor and not the instigator of this kind of encounter. Yet, upon closer examination, we can see that it is the unbeliever who is reacting to the believer's obvious hope. This implies that believers should be living and speaking in such ways that unbelievers feel compelled to ask challenging questions. Consider the times when Jesus, Peter, or Paul was questioned or challenged—it was always in the context of preaching the gospel or doing countercultural works of God. So, if you want more opportunities to give an answer, then be more vocally active as an ambassador for Christ. Also, don't view verbal challenges to your faith as opposition, but rather view them as an opportunity. The following is a summary of the "Apologetics in Action" approach, followed by a practical case study:

## STEP #1—LISTEN WITH GRACE

Paul exhorts us in Colossians 4:6, "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." Before an answer can be given, we need to listen to the objection, determined only to

speak from a heart of grace, that is, with gentleness and divine power. But true listening comes first because, as Proverbs 18:13 says, "He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him." This kind of listening has three tasks: understand, simplify, and verify. To *understand* is to attempt to discern the true concern or objection the objector has with Christianity. To *simplify* is to attempt to summarize any complex or narrative elements the objector has into an accurate, simple statement. To *verify* is to check your simplified restatement with the individual to make sure you've fairly and accurately reflected his objection. The goal is not simply to win the argument but rather to know how "to answer every man" trusting "that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ" (Col. 4:3).

## STEP #2—ANSWER WITH APOLOGETICS

This is the point in the conversation when the tools of apologetics should be employed. The unbeliever has asked a challenging question or stated an objection that, to their mind, makes Christianity improbable. Apologetics has been divided in various ways, but I find it helpful to view it as three tasks: defensive, offensive, and proving.

The *defensive task* of apologetics is where we give an answer in defense of the Christian faith. As Christians, our presup-







position is that Christianity is objectively true. Therefore, any objection to Christian theism or God's revelation in Scripture must be answered from a biblical perspective. We cannot argue in a hypothetical secular universe, but instead we must show them how their objection can be answered within the Christian worldview. You can defend the Christian faith with the following common clarifications: point out logical fallacies in their objection which make it invalid; correct their misunderstanding of biblical doctrine which make their objection invalid; or demonstrate that their non-Christian presuppositions have led them to interpret the same data differently.

The *offensive task* of apologetics is where we turn their objection around to show the inadequacy of others' non-Christian worldview.<sup>1</sup> The goal is not to be offensive, but rather to graciously challenge them to answer their own objection. Many unbelievers have never considered the insufficiency of their worldview to answer the questions they use to attempt to discredit Christianity. Our task is to divide the objection into its respective worldviews, answer it within the Christian worldview (defensive), and show how their objection becomes a problem for them in their own worldview (offensive).

The *proving task* of apologetics simply combines the results of the defensive and offensive tasks and seeks to prove Christianity from the impossibility of the contrary.<sup>2</sup> The tendency at this point

is to get overly philosophical, so at the risk of sounding trite, I believe Sherlock Holmes stated this point quite well when he declared, "Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth." Or framed as a logical syllogism the proof would follow:

- The unbeliever assumes certain things in his question/claim.
- What he assumes makes his position (worldview) impossible and leaves Christian Theism as the only possibility.
- Therefore, Christian Theism is true.

### **STEP #3—REASON WITH THE GOSPEL**

Remember, we are looking at this encounter as an opportunity to proclaim

the truth of Christ. An unbeliever has asked for a reason of our hope, and we've answered with apologetics, but it is not enough that he acknowledge our point about the validity of Christian Theism. Our hope can become his hope, but he must turn to God in repentant faith (Acts 17:30). Chances are his original objection can lead to a timely transition to the gospel. Paul was in such a situation. In Acts 24:24–25 we read, "And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come Felix trembled." The word "reasoned" indicates a discussion that often includes exchange of ideas to inform.<sup>3</sup> Felix's examination became an opportunity for Paul to reason along three lines. To reason of righteousness is to reveal

**CONSIDER THE TIMES WHEN JESUS, PETER, OR PAUL WAS QUESTIONED OR CHALLENGED—IT WAS ALWAYS IN THE CONTEXT OF PREACHING THE GOSPEL OR DOING COUNTERCULTURAL WORKS OF GOD. SO, IF YOU WANT MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO GIVE AN ANSWER, THEN BE MORE VOCALLY ACTIVE AS AN AMBASSADOR FOR CHRIST. ALSO, DON'T VIEW VERBAL CHALLENGES TO YOUR FAITH AS OPPOSITION, BUT RATHER VIEW THEM AS AN OPPORTUNITY.**

God as the perfect standard of holiness (see Luke 18:19). To reason of temperance is to demonstrate human failure to maintain God's holy standard (see Luke 5:31–32). And to reason of judgment to come is to present the certainty of divine justice for all unreconciled humans (see Matt. 16:26). Felix entered this conversation believing that he was the examiner, and left trembling at the soul-piercing examination of the gospel. Paul's apologetic goal was not to come out smelling like roses, but rather to be the "sweet savour of Christ . . . unto life" (2 Cor. 2:15–16).

Perhaps it would be helpful to give a case study of this approach. For the sake of clarity, the exchange will be between Sara, who has a naturalist/atheist worldview, and Christian. The following is a sample conversation based upon an actual objection that was presented to me a few years back.

**Sara:** "So, let me get this straight. Someone like Hitler could murder six million innocent people, then on his deathbed he could ask Jesus into his heart and be in heaven five minutes later? Child molesters, and human traffickers could 'find Jesus' and get

off with no justice from God? That's insane."

**Christian:** (Step #1—Listen with Grace) "It sounds like what you're saying is that God can't be just if the most evil humans can simply be forgiven without suffering for what they've done. Is this what you're saying?"

**Sara:** "Yes. Christians say God is just, but I don't see how that can be true."

**Christian:** (Step #2—Answer with Apologetics: Defensive) "According to Scripture, divine justice doesn't actually begin at death. When a person crosses lines of evil, God can allow his heart to be set. Theologians call this "judicial hardening" (Rom. 1:28; 9:18; 11:7). This is in essence God's prejudgment of human wickedness. Furthermore, according to Scripture, God will judge everyone, fully, for everything they've done (1 Pet. 4:5)."

**Sara:** "Ok. I have never heard that before. I guess that helps."

**Christian:** (Offensive) "Can I ask you a question? According to your view of reality, what kind of justice *did* Hitler

face after death? What about the child molester who never gets caught?"

**Sara:** "Hitler died, and I'm glad. That's what he deserved."

**Christian:** "Yes, but Florence Nightingale also died. How is it just that both good and bad people die? So in your view, Hitler escaped justice; in your view there is no justice."

**Sara:** "I want to disagree with your portrayal of my view, but honestly, you're right. I was only thinking about how this scenario seemed to disprove God."

**Christian:** (Proving) "You believe that there is a genuine category of evil (and therefore good) and that justice is important, but in your view ultimate justice is impossible. Christianity is the only system that defines, demands, and delivers absolute justice for human evil."

**Sara:** "Wow, you've given me a lot to think about. This is the opposite of how I thought this conversation was going to go."

**Christian:** "Well Sara, I don't want to sound like an infomercial, but there's more. . . ."

## GFA Welcomes its New Executive Director



**Jon Crocker, missionary to Mexico, was appointed by the Board in May 2022.**

*"Jon possesses infectious compassion for the lost and preaches with an authority that stirs hearts. He is GFA: deeply committed to its fundamentalist heritage, its philosophy of missions, its missionaries, and its faithful, loyal supporters."*

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The Crockers plan to transition to Greenville, SC, by the end of 2022.

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Sara: "Oh?"

**Christian:** (Step #3—Reason with the Gospel) "Did you know that not just mass murderers deserve ultimate justice? Revelation 21:8 says, 'But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.' Everyone must face God's justice beyond this world."

"We've just seen the bad news of eternal judgment, but there's good news! Have you ever wondered why Jesus died on the cross? Because He loves you, He faced your justice! The Bible says that Jesus 'was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed' (Isa. 53:5)."

So in conclusion, this is apologetics in action. It requires us to be ready mentally and spiritually, but it is this kind of encounter that we should be seeking, praying for, and practicing. Apologetics is not a virtual game for us to theorize about; it is our real-life mission from Christ, for the salvations of souls, and for the glory of God!

Dr. Bryan Brock is professor of Bible and Church Ministries at Maranatha Baptist University with a focus on Homiletics, Apologetics, and Doctrine. His wife, Rebecca, serves with him at Maranatha and in their local church. They have four children.



<sup>1</sup> Some apologists frame the offensive task as giving a positive case for Christianity, but that is the task I detail in the proving stage.

<sup>2</sup> This relates to what Cornelius Van Til referred to as the Transcendental Argument for God. In his own words, "It is this that we ought to mean when we say that we reason from the impossibility of the contrary. The contrary is impossible only if it is self-contradictory when operating on the basis of its own assumptions" (*A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, 205).

<sup>3</sup> William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 232.



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## Mailbag

I found Layton Talbert's article (*FrontLine* March/April 2022) on "Embarrassing Prayer Promises" very helpful and timely for my junior high girls Sunday school class. I adapted some of his thoughts into my lesson. I also appreciated the articles on CRT [Critical Race Theory] and especially Pastor Gordon Dickson's excellent article on "Systemic Self-Deception."

Annetta Small  
Lynden, WA

Reading while waiting in the Emergency room . . . at Parkland Hospital in Dallas. Ken Rathbun's article [May/June 2022] was a blessing. Not only is it inspirational, but also challenging. Honestly, I'm not sure if it applies, but the "takeaway" for me is to not "fail" what God has for me by failing Him along the way.

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# SOUND WORDS

HOLD FAST THE FORM OF SOUND WORDS—2 TIMOTHY 1:13

## FIRST PARTAKER

*“The husbandman that laboreth must be first partaker of the fruits” (2 Tim. 2:6)*

### John Newton's Counsel to a Ministerial Student

John Newton will always be known best for his hymn “Amazing Grace.” But in his own time he was esteemed equally, if not even more so, for his wise counsel. It stemmed not only from his profound knowledge of human nature, gained excruciatingly in the school of hard knocks during his almost two decades at sea, but primarily from his sensitive pastoring of all sorts of believers in two very different church settings: one quaintly rural, the other overrun by the frenetic masses of one of the largest and busiest cities in eighteenth-century Europe.

Both clergy and laity, close friends and complete strangers sought Newton's counsel on a great number of practical and theological questions. Most often they appealed through the post office, rather than in person. Consequently, a considerable amount of Newton's time was consumed with letter writing. *The Works of John Newton* in six volumes (reprinted by Banner of Truth), includes well over three hundred of these pastoral letters, most of them running to many pages. And these are only about a third of his original correspondence. During his lifetime or just after, some five hundred of his letters were published for public readership. Another five hundred or so were collected and published by others after his homegoing.<sup>1</sup> So highly valued were these that one ministerial correspondent wrote in 1774, *’Tis pity Mr. Newton should do anything but write letters.*<sup>2</sup>

A small, valuable manual on pastoral theology could be easily compiled from Newton's many letters to fellow ministers. I keep a small leather journal of especially insightful passages from the journals and letters of

ministers of the past. Quotations of Newton's counsel to other pastors frequent its pages. But it's interesting that Newton's first published letter concerning the ministry was a reply to a “Student in Divinity,” suggesting that the recipient had not yet assumed a pastoral charge. For this reason it is especially interesting, in that Newton was obviously attempting to shape a younger man before he had acquired bad habits of study and sermon preparation. I've read it four or five times through the years, I'm sure. I find that in my copy that over the course of those readings I've highlighted over forty lines. There are many more equally deserving.

With the exception of, I think, two or three short phrases, I've included the entirety of it here, with just a few word alterations here and there. I trust that you'll find something inspirational or instructive in it. Though over two and half centuries old, its counsel stands the test of time.

Dear Sir,

The subject of your last [letter] is important. I can sympathize with your anxiety, having known much of it myself, and therefore willingly devote my first leisure to your service. But shall I indeed condole with you? Or shall I rather congratulate you on the perplexity you complain of? I know it is not pleasing, but I hope it will be sanctified and profitable to you.

Though I am no enemy to the acquisition of useful knowledge, I have seen many instances of young men who have been much hurt by what they expected to reap advantage from. They have gone to the academy humble, peaceable, spiritual and lively; but have come out self-wise, dogmatic, censorious, and full of a prudence founded upon the false maxims of the world.

I do not mention this as the necessary fault of the institution, but as the frequent effect of notions too hastily

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picked up, when not sanctified by grace, nor balanced by a proportionable depth of spiritual experience. I am therefore glad to hear that, notwithstanding the advantages you have had in the pursuit of your studies, you feel an inward conviction that you need something which you cannot receive from men or books in order to complete the fitness for the ministry. So that you may be *a workman that needs not to be ashamed*, and enabled rightly *to divide* (to distinguish and distribute) *the word of truth*.

***Observe how their spirits work, what they say, and how they reason in their various cases. Note what methods and arguments you find most successful in comforting the feeble-minded, raising up those who are cast down, and the like; and what answers they return. Compare these with the Word of God and your own heart. What you observe in ten persons in those different situations may be applied to ten thousand. For though some circumstances vary, the heart of man, the aids of grace, and the artifices of Satan are in general, universally the same.***

It seems to me a point of more curiosity than use to inquire too nicely into the *mode* of the Holy Spirit's assistance in the composure and delivery of sermons. If we cannot exactly state the boundaries between what we may deem the result of our own thoughts, and the needful influence of the Holy Spirit, it seems safe to give Him the honor of the whole, and to attribute nothing to ourselves but our infirmities. If we have a capacity, means for improvement, diligence to make use of those means, and if that diligence is attended with any degree of success—may we not acknowledge that the former links of this chain are the effect of His goodness and favor no less than the latter?

To the question, *How far is it lawful to expect this assistance?* I answer, *It is lawful very far. Even to lay the whole stress upon it so as to be firmly persuaded that we can neither meditate nor speak to purpose without it—that if we have not this assistance, whatever else we have, or may think we have, we shall but “darken counsel by words without knowledge.”* For this, I think I have warrant in John 15:5.

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

If any person supposes he has so far mastered a system of divinity, that though he can indeed *do better* with the Spirit's assistance, yet he can make a tolerable shift without it, I envy him not this attainment.

But if the question intends, *How far a dependence upon the Holy Spirit may lawfully supersede the use of means?* I answer, *Not in the least*. The blessing and the means are so closely united that they cannot be separated. The blessing may be surely expected if diligently sought in the use of proper means. We have no just reason to expect it without them. But to clear up the whole, let us consider, (1) *What may deserve the name of diligence in this matter*, and (2) *what are the proper means?*

(1) By diligence, I understand *spiritual diligence*. Such an active, improving, industrious habit as is peculiar to a heart impressed with some real abiding sense of the love of God, the worth of souls, the shortness of time and the importance of eternity. Without this turn of mind, though a man should spend sixteen hours every day in his study, he may be a mere trifler. The greatest part of his application will be spent on what is least necessary, and his knowledge will chiefly prove of that sort which puffeth up, without communicating any real benefit; Genesis 41:21,

And when they had eaten them up, it could not be known that they had eaten them; but they were still ill favoured, as at the beginning.

(2) The chief means for attaining wisdom and suitable gifts for the ministry are the holy Scriptures and prayer. The one is the fountain of living water, the other the bucket with which we are to draw. And I believe you will find, by observation, that the man who is most frequent and fervent in prayer, and most devoted to the Word of God, will shine and flourish above his fellows. Next to these, and derived from them, is meditation.

By *meditation* I do not mean a stated exercise upon some one particular subject. I mean a disposition of mind to observe carefully what passes within us and around us—what we see, hear and feel—and to employ all of this for the illustration and confirmation of the written Word to us. In the use of these means, and an humble dependence upon the Lord in all the changing dispensations we pass through, our spiritual experience will enlarge. It is this experience that is the proper fund of our ministerial capacity in so far as it may be considered to be inherent in us.

The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips (Proverbs 16:23).

Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe, which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and



old (Matthew 13:52).

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3).

These means are of universal importance. The wisest can do nothing without them. The weakest shall not use them in vain. There are likewise subordinate means which may be healthful and should in general be attended to. Yet they ought not, I apprehend, to be considered as a *sine qua non* in a minister's call and fitness. The first preachers had them not, and some in the present day are enabled to do well without them. Under this head I principally intend all that comes under the usual category of literature. A competent acquaintance with the learned languages, history, natural philosophy, etc., is very desirable. If these things are held in a proper subserviency, and if they do not engross too much of our time nor add fuel to the fire of that self-importance which is our great snare, they may contribute to increase and enlarge our ideas, and facilitate our expressing ourselves with propriety. But these attainments (like riches) are attended with their peculiar temptations; and unless they are under the regulation of a sound judgment and a spiritual frame of mind, they will prove (like Saul's armor to David) more cumbersome than useful in preaching. The sermons of preachers thus qualified are often more ingenious than edifying, and rather display the man than commend the Gospel of Christ.

**Now, as you desire my advice with respect to your future studies,** I shall comply without hesitation or ceremony.

(1) The original Scriptures well deserve your pains, and will richly repay them. There is doubtless a beauty, fulness and spirit in the originals which the best translations do not always express. When a word or phrase admits of various senses, the translators can only preserve *one*. And it is not to be supposed, unless they were perfectly under the influence of the same infallible Spirit, that they should always prefer the best. Only be on your guard lest you should be tempted to think that because you are master of the grammatical construction and can tell the several preferences of the words in the best of authors, you are therefore and thereby master of the spiritual sense likewise. This you must derive from your experiential knowledge and the influence and teaching of the Spirit of God.

(2) Another thing which will much assist you in composing and speaking properly and acceptably, is logic. This will teach you what properly belongs to your subject, and what may be best suppressed. It will likewise teach you to explain, divide, enumerate and range your ideas to advantage. A lax, immethodical, disproportionate manner is to be avoided. Yet beware of the contrary

extreme. An affected starchiness and over-accuracy will fetter you, make your discourses lean and dry, preclude useful variety, and savor more of the school lamp than of that Heavenly fire which alone can make our meditations efficacious and profitable either to ourselves or our hearers. The proper medium can hardly be taught by rule. Experience, observation and prayer are the best guides.

(3) As your inquiry seems chiefly to be how to fill up your outlines, I would advise you to study the living as well as the dead, or even more.

Converse much with experienced Christians and exercised souls. You will find advantage in this respect, not only from the wise, but from the weak of the flock. In the course of your acquaintance you will meet with some in a backsliding state, some under temptations, some walking in darkness, others walking in the light, etc.

Observe how their spirits work, what they say, and how they reason in their various cases. Note what methods and arguments you find most successful in comforting the feeble-minded, raising up those who are cast down, and the like; and what answers they return. Compare these with the Word of God and your own heart. What you observe in ten persons in those different situations may be applied to ten thousand. For though some circumstances vary, the heart of man, the aids of grace, and the artifices of Satan are in general, universally the same. And whenever you are to preach, remember that some of all these sorts will probably be before you. Each should have something said to their own peculiar case.

The tempted and distressed will be most probably relieved by opening the various states and exercises of the heart, and by showing from scriptural and other examples that no new thing has befallen them. The careless and backsliders who have made a profession should be reminded of that blessedness they once spoke of, and warned about their danger. Those who are now upon the mount should be cautioned to expect a change, and to guard against security and spiritual pride. To the dead in trespasses and sins (some such will be always present), it is needful to preach the spirituality and sanction of the law so that they may be stirred up to seek Jesus. Of *Him* all *awakened* souls love to hear much. Let him therefore be your capital subject.

If you discuss some less essential topic, or bend your strength to clear up some dark text, even though you display much learning and ingenuity, you will probably fall short of your main design, which ought to be, I dare say, to promote the glory of God and the good of souls.

You will likewise find advantage by attending as much as you can on those preachers whom God has blessed with much power, life and success in the ministry. And

in this you will do well not to confine yourself to any denomination or party, for the Spirit of the Lord is not confined. Different men have different gifts and talents.

I would not wish you to be a slavish admirer of any man. Christ alone is our Master and Teacher. But study the excellencies of each. If you observe a fault in any (for no human models are perfect), you will see what you are yourself to avoid.

***By meditation I do not mean a stated exercise upon some one particular subject. I mean a disposition of mind to observe carefully what passes within us and around us—what we see, hear and feel—and to employ all of this for the illustration and confirmation of the written Word to us. In the use of these means, and an humble dependence upon the Lord in all the changing dispensations we pass through, our spiritual experience will enlarge. It is this experience that is the proper fund of our ministerial capacity in so far as it may be considered to be inherent in us.***

Your inquiries respecting my own experience on this subject must be answered very briefly. I have long since learned that if I was ever to be a minister, faith and prayer must make me one. I desire to seek the Lord's direction, both in the choice and management of subjects. But I do not expect it in a way of extraordinary impulse, but in endeavoring to avail myself, to the best of my judgment, of present circumstances. The converse I have with my people usually suggests what I am to preach to them. At first my chief solicitude used to be to discover what I should say. I hope now that it is that I may not speak in vain. For the Lord has sent me here, not to acquire the character of a ready speaker, but to win souls to Christ and edify His people.

As to preparation, I make little use of books, except for the Bible and Concordance. Though I preach without notes I most frequently write more or less upon the subject. Often when I begin I am at a loss how I shall proceed. But one thing insensibly offers another, and in general I believe the best and most useful parts of my sermon occur while I am preaching. When I can find my heart in frame and liberty for prayer, everything else is comparatively easy.

I should be glad if anything I have offered may afford

you satisfaction. The sum of my advice is this—examine your heart and your views. Can you appeal to Him who knows all things, concerning the sincerity of your aim, that you devote yourself to the work of the ministry, not for worldly regards, but with an humble desire to promote the Redeemer's kingdom? If so, and His providence has thus far concurred with you, trust Him for your sufficiency of every kind, and He will not disappoint you. He will be near to strengthen you according to your day.

Depend not upon any cisterns you can hew out for yourself. Rejoice that you have liberty to come to the fountain that is always full and always flowing. But you must not expect a mechanical [automatic] sufficiency such as artificers acquire by habit and exercise in their business. When you have preached well nineteen times this will be no guarantee for the twentieth. Yea, when you have been upheld for twenty years, should the Lord withhold His hand you would be as much at a loss as at the first.

If you lean upon books or men or upon your own faculties and attainments you will be in fear and in danger of falling continually. But if you will stay yourself upon the Lord, He will not only make good your expectations, but in time will give you a becoming confidence in His goodness, and free you from your present anxiety.

One more thing I must mention as belonging to the subject—a comfortable freedom for public service depends much upon the spirituality of our walk before God and man. Wisdom will not dwell with a trifling, an assuming, a censorious, or a worldly spirit. But if it is our business and our pleasure to contemplate Jesus and to walk in His steps, He will bless us. We shall be like trees planted by a constant stream, and He will prosper the work of our hands.

John Newton once explained to William Jay that he came to believe that he could do more good by his letters than by any of his other printed works: *The Lord said, "You shall be most useful by them," and I learned to say, "Thy will be done! Use me as Thou pleasest, only make me useful."* Undoubtedly, through the reading of this column, his prayer has been answered once again!

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Reinke's *Newton on the Christian Life* (Crossway, 2015) includes a brief but substantive introduction to Newton's ministry of letter writing and then draws heavily upon that correspondence for its insights into fourteen areas of Christian living.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition* (Eerdmans: 2001). Hindmarsh has inspirational, highly informative sections on Newton's letter writing. See especially pp. 31–34 and 243–56.

## *Hudson Taylor in Early Years: The Growth of a Soul*

This five-hundred-page volume is the first of two covering the life of James Hudson Taylor (1832–1905). Volume one covers the first twenty-eight years of Taylor’s life, up through his first term as a missionary. The second volume extends through his remaining forty-five years of ministry life (1860–1905). Both volumes are co-authored by Hudson and Maria’s son, Howard (d. 1946), and his wife, Mary (d. 1949).

Few biographies offer so many timeless scriptural insights or more helpful illustrations. My personal notes stretch to more than a dozen typed pages, and close to fifty different events have become illustrations for various Bible passages. How did the young man whom some considered “called by no one, connected to no one, and recognized by no one as a minister of the Gospel” and “totally worthless” (437) become the missionary whose name is nearly synonymous with faith and faithfulness? This volume recounts God’s making of Hudson Taylor, and the extended focus into the formative season of his life helps us comprehend God’s use of him thereafter.

Paul’s almost parenthetical observation that “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7) forms the underlying watermark of nearly every page. From the earliest chapters when Taylor’s great-grandfather hosts an eighty-three-year-old John Wesley in his Barnsley home (16) to the first furlough necessary to save the life of this wearied twenty-eight-year-old visionary (500), the story captures the surprising work of God’s grace begun in a single home and blossoming through the Taylor family over eight decades until it touches the interior of China. Relying heavily on Taylor’s prodigious correspondence, the volume portrays his inner life as an open book of learning to walk by faith.

His walk of faith progresses through hardships, illnesses, delays, frustrations, the impediments of war, threats on his life, daily uncertainties, youthful ambitions, misapplications, disappointed relationships, coworker criticisms, missionary journeys, intense language learning and immersion, and so much more. Through it all, we get glimpses of his prayer life detailing his own weaknesses, his yearnings for the fruit of the Spirit in his life, and his irrepressible burden for the millions of unreached Chinese. The trajectory of his spiritual life follows the contours of his prayers. The following passage was written during his first year in China, when he was only twenty-two years of age.

How gracious of God thus to keep us from being deluded into supposing that we are free from the evils that belong to fallen nature, and to make us long the more earnestly for the time when we shall see our blessed Master and be perfected in His likeness. Thank the Lord, there does remain a rest for us. I am so apt to grow weary and

selfishly wish I were there, instead of desiring only to do His will and wait His time; to follow the footsteps of Jesus and finish all that He will give me to do. Indeed, the work of grace seems only just begun in my heart. I have been an unfruitful branch, and need no small amount of pruning. May these present trials result only in blessing, preparing me for more extensive usefulness here and a crown of rejoicing hereafter (249).

*Few biographies offer so many  
timeless scriptural insights or more  
helpful illustrations.*

One early winter morning in January 1855, still in his first full year in China, Taylor awoke to a symbolic ministry moment. On the second of at least eleven exploratory journeys from the port city of Shanghai, overnight the falling temperatures had turned the river, his means of transport, to ice. To advance, they must break the ice a foot at a time (266). He doggedly pressed forward. His missionary efforts into the interior would not always seem so tedious and slow. He longed for greater progress. Yet he persisted prayerfully, vividly portraying a lifelong lesson: “A little thing is a little thing, but faithfulness in little things is a great thing” (100). “If we are faithful to God in little things, we shall gain experience and strength that will be helpful to us in the more serious trials of life” (135).

Taylor enjoyed an impactful friendship with an older missionary, William Burns (1815–68). Burns, greatly used of God to assist Robert Murray M’Cheyne, was an instrument of revival in Scotland and later traversed the interior of China as an itinerant evangelist. Their meeting in 1855 blessed them both, and they enjoyed seven months of close ministry fellowship before the Lord directed them to different spheres. Burns proved a godly, sharpening friend.

If a man have Christ in his heart, heaven before his eyes, and only as much of temporal blessing as is just needful to carry him safely through life, then pain and sorrow have little to shoot at. . . . To be in union with Him Who is the Shepherd of Israel, to walk very near Him Who is both sun and shield, comprehends all a poor sinner requires to make him happy between this and heaven (William Burns, quoted on 347).

*The Growth of a Soul* will contribute to the growth of *your* soul. It is a real-life tutorial in walking by faith.

Robert Vincent pastors Grace Bible Church in Milford, Ohio.



## Christ’s Descent to the “Lower Parts of the Earth”

Ephesians 4:9 contains a phrase that has puzzled nearly all careful readers. For the sake of adequate context I present verses 8–9, with the phrase at issue emphasized.

Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into *the lower parts of the earth?* . . .).

The general drift is clear. A prophecy that Christ would ascend implies that He must first descend from His position of heavenly glory; a higher position to ascend to from there, without descending somewhere first, doesn’t exist! Where exactly, though, are these “lower parts of the earth” to which Christ descended?

Many interpreters have understood the phrase to refer to the realm of the wicked dead, believing that during the days of His entombment Jesus visited the underworld either to complete the sufferings by which He provided our atonement or to announce His victory over Satan and his angels. Support for this view comes from Psalm 63:9 and Ezekiel 26:20, where “the low/lower parts of the earth” are said to be the destiny of wicked people in view in those passages.

On closer inspection, though, the context of Psalm 63:9 does not demand a reference to post-death torment like Ezekiel 26:10 does. When the psalmist goes on to say, “They shall fall by the sword: they shall be the portion for foxes,” it is natural to interpret his words “the lower parts of the earth” as referring simply to earthly death and the grave. Since Jesus did descend to the grave, it is no surprise that many interpreters understand these words in that sense. Some suggest further that at that time He freed the Old Testament saints, whom they assume had been captive to the bonds of physical death. Since Scripture provides little clear information on Jesus’ activity during the days of His entombment, this article will not explore that question.

On these views, the genitive case use of the Greek word for “earth” is understood to be partitive or comparative: Jesus descended to the *regions lower than* the earth (comparative) or to the *lowest portions of* the earth (partitive), with “earth” understood as the earth-bound realm inhabited by mortal humanity.

Another possibility, though, has attracted many interpreters: the genitive could be taken as appositional. On this understanding, the phrase “of the earth” specifies the identity of the lower regions to which Jesus descended. This interpretation is consistent with usage elsewhere of the Greek word for “parts”: it is sometimes followed by a geographic identification, such as

Galilee or Tyre and Sidon. These geographic designations name the specific regions referred to. On this latter understanding of the grammar, the phrase “the lower parts of the earth” indicates no lower level of descent than the surface of the earth where Jesus spent the years of His first coming. A particularly attractive aspect of this view is its removal of any idea that Jesus’ atoning sufferings extended beyond the cross into the torments of hell, an idea that seems quite flatly to contradict Jesus’ cry on the cross, “It is finished!” This view, however, suffers a significant weakness by failing to align with the OT passages cited above, which clearly refer to hell or the grave.

An attractive interpretation emerges, though, upon considering another OT passage containing language practically equivalent to “the lower parts of the earth.” Psalm 139:15 reads, “My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in *the lowest parts of the earth.*” Here David refers unambiguously to his mother’s womb. The womb and the tomb bear striking correspondences. Both are places where a human body is present but is not visible, accessible, or communicative. Both appear at a terminal point of earthly existence, one at the beginning and the other at the end. And both are places of utter human helplessness.

A declaration that Jesus descended all the way to both the womb and the tomb is highly significant theologically. Among the early Christological errors were some that located the moment of the Son’s incarnation at the time of Jesus’ baptism. The Son’s condescension, though, extended much further, including the lowliness of gestation, childbirth, infancy, childhood, and adolescence. On the other end, 1 Corinthians 15:4 lists Jesus’ burial as one of the core elements of the gospel: Jesus did not ascend to heaven from the cross, thereby escaping the unpleasantness of entombment and disembodied existence.

The interpretation, then, that I commend to your consideration is that Paul means “the lower parts of the earth” to refer to the whole first-coming phase of Jesus’ incarnation, with particular emphasis on His condescension to the full range of earthly human experience, from the first moment of fetal existence right on into the grave. He spared Himself none of it, in order to become our faithful and fully sympathetic Redeemer. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

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## The Heavens Declare the Glory of God

The Bible encourages us to look at God’s created world (what theologians call “natural revelation”) to learn about Him. Psalm 19:1 is perhaps the most familiar expression of this idea: “The heavens declare the glory of God.” God’s power and glory are seen throughout all of creation, but this text turns our attention in particular to astronomy.

When we think of the glories of astronomy, we often think of the dramatic photographs taken by the world’s large telescopes, such as the Hubble telescope. Scientists recently launched the James Webb space telescope, which was intended to supplement Hubble and give us even better views. But when David wrote Psalm 19, the telescope had not yet been invented. His knowledge of the universe was limited to what we call “naked eye” astronomy—things you can see with your unaided eyes. What was David able to see?

### STARS AND THE MILKY WAY

David saw stars, of course. *Sky and Telescope* estimates that there are less than 10,000 stars visible to the naked eye. If you were to try to count the stars on a particular night from your house in the suburbs, you might struggle to count five hundred of them. Watching year-round from a dark site, you could gradually count a few thousand. That’s a lot, but it would be doable. The best pre-telescope star catalog, Johann Bayer’s 1603 *Uranometria*, included a little over 1200 stars. How then does Jeremiah say that the stars are countless (Jer. 33:22)? Why does God challenge Abraham to try to count them (Gen. 15:5)?

In 1938 Fredrick Leonard, a famous American astronomer, wrote in the *Publications of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific*, “In the writer’s opinion, the false impression of innumerable-ness conveyed by the naked eye stars is due mainly to the Milky Way.” He quotes the poet Milton who described the Milky way as “powdered with stars.” He explains, “the Milky Way is constituted of many billions of stars, all but an infinitesimal fraction of which . . . are separately indistinguishable by the naked eye. However, these stars send their light to the observer.”

Milton lived around the time of the invention of the telescope and may have had some insight into what makes up the Milky Way. But the suspicion that the Milky Way is composed of a cloud of tiny stars is an ancient one that predates the telescope. Leonard quotes the first-century Roman poet Manilius, who in his famous poem *Astronomicon* describes the Milky Way as a light which forms the spacious band serenely bright from little stars, which there their beams unite, and make one solid and continuous light.

Leonard oddly calls this a “false impression,” but this impression is not false; the stars are innumerable, even the ones we can see with the naked eye.

### GALAXIES

The Milky Way communicates the innumerability of the stars. But the naked-eye sky is far more than just stars. We have planets, and comets, and meteorites, and nebulae, and other galaxies, such as Andromeda, which are visible without a telescope. To the naked eye, Andromeda looks like a tiny fuzzy patch of light. It is obviously not a star. Ancient observers suspected some type of cloud in space. There are clouds in space, called nebulae. The Orion Nebula, for one, can be seen with the naked eye. But Andromeda is no cloud. It is a galaxy, like the Milky Way, composed of an estimated trillion individual stars, so far away and so close together that the stars blur into a fuzzy patch of light. So many stars are crowded so close together that we cannot distinguish individual stars in the middle. The stars are literally uncountable.

And how many galaxies are there? Mario Livio, astrophysicist at the Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore, says the current estimate is between 100 and 200 billion. Can you imagine a million stars? A billion? A trillion? The very idea magnifies God and reveals His creative power. But how do you even begin to understand, not a billion stars, but a billion *galaxies*? Each one containing a billion stars? The psalmist knows nothing about this, but he can see Andromeda, and recognize it is not a star. The Milky Way and Andromeda hint, even to your naked eyes, that there are many more stars that you cannot clearly see.

We have barely scratched the surface of all the things that can be seen in the night sky. Jude 13 refers to “wandering stars,” likely a reference to the planets, or to comets. The Greek word here, *planetai*, is the word from which we get our English word “planet.” The moon is referenced many times in the Bible. It rules the night (Ps. 136:9) and marks the seasons (Ps. 104:19). The demon-possessed son in Matthew 17:15 is sometimes called a “lunatic” (or “lunatick” in the KJV), a word derived from the Latin word for moon (*luna*). The moon was believed by ancient people to have power over people’s minds, causing them to be “moonstruck.” This thinking is not biblical; the son’s problem was spiritual, not physical. But it reveals how important the moon was to ancient people.



## ECLIPSES

One of the most dramatic naked-eye events is a total solar eclipse, when the midday sun is hidden by the moon. Many of us witnessed the “Great American Eclipse” over the United States in August of 2017, and those who didn’t will get another chance in 2024. A solar eclipse is so dramatic because the sun, which is 400 times bigger than the moon, is also 400 times farther away, making the moon appear to be the same size as the sun in our sky. This is no accident. A smaller moon would not cover the sun and cause a total eclipse. A larger moon would hide the corona, that glowing ring of gas that surrounds the sun and can be seen in its shimmering beauty only during an eclipse. *Time* magazine wrote on August 18, 2017, “Even for scientists, there can be a temptation to see the eclipse as something intended to thrill, a sky show put on for the only species in the solar system able to appreciate it.” These things are indeed a show, put on for us by God to manifest His glory in His creation.

Lunar eclipses are more common, when the full moon moves into the earth’s shadow and goes dark in the middle of the night, often taking on a red, orange, or yellow hue. This reminds us of the end-time prophecies of the moon’s turning to blood (Joel 2:31; Acts 2:20; Rev. 6:12). Lunar eclipses are one of the more dramatic things that happen in the sky, visible to anyone without a telescope.

Speaking of solar eclipses, there was a day in the Bible when the sun went dark. On the day of Christ’s crucifixion, the sky went dark for three hours (Luke 23:44–45). This was no ordinary solar eclipse. We know this for two reasons. First, because the darkness was too long. The 2017 eclipse lasted about two minutes. The longest theoretically possible eclipse is only seven minutes long. A solar eclipse cannot explain a darkness that lasts three hours.

More importantly, the moon was in the wrong phase. This is a complicated argument, but important. A solar eclipse can happen only during a “new” moon; the moon must be between the earth and the sun, so that during an eclipse we are seeing the moon’s dark side. A solar eclipse during a full moon is impossible; and on the day Christ died, the moon was full. How do

we know this? There is no mention of the moon in the Gospel accounts. But we know this because the Jews used a lunar calendar. They don’t simply count days as we do. They watched the moon, and a new month began on each new moon. So the first day of every month is always a new moon, and the 14<sup>th</sup>, halfway through the month, is always a full moon.

This is important because Jesus died on Passover day as “our Passover” (1 Cor. 5:7). As the Passover lambs were being killed in the temple, the Lamb of God was dying on a cross outside the city. Jesus died on Passover day to fulfill the typology. Passover is on the 14<sup>th</sup> of the month Nisan in the Jewish religious calendar. The moon is full, so there cannot be a solar eclipse. God worked a miracle to make the sky go dark.

You can see the lunar calendar at work in Psalm 81:3, which reads in literal translation “blow at the new moon the trumpet, and at the full moon on the day of the solemn feast.” Translators struggle to make this intelligible to modern readers, because of our unfamiliarity with the lunar calendar. But Old Testament Jews would be very familiar with the new moon that accompanied start-of-the-month celebrations (Num. 10:10) and the full moon which always accompanied the mid-month feasts like Passover (Num. 9:11). Some commentators take this psalm to refer to the month Tishri and the Feast of Tabernacles, which makes the same point. The Feast of Tabernacles always happens on a full moon as well.

Our modern understanding of the universe paints a dramatic and awe-inspiring picture of the power and glory of God. Hubble photographs can be stunning. But the naked-eye sky communicates the same message to a shepherd boy on the hills of Judah who has no telescope and knows nothing of modern astronomy. He has not only the stars, but the planets and the Milky Way and galaxies and meteors and comets and eclipses to declare God’s glory. That’s why he could say, “The heavens declare the glory of God.”

Dr. Bill Lovegrove is head of the Department of Engineering at Bob Jones University and a long-time member and teacher at Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina.

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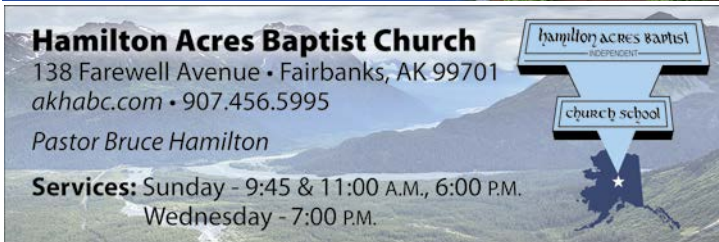
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# TRIAGE

## PROCESSING APOLOGETIC ENCOUNTERS

### THREE PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN PERSONAL APOLOGETICS



#### Consider the Time: **Read Proverbs 29:20.**

Considering the amount of time you have with a person, and whether or not it is the best time to speak, will help you answer properly.

☐ **How much time do you have with the person?**

Is this the only chance you will have to answer and share, or will you be able to meet again?

☐ **Is this the best time for the person?**

What is the attitude of the individual? Is he genuinely interested? Is this the best time for you? Are you prepared? Do you need to study and respond at a later time?



#### Consider the Trauma: **Read Proverbs 18:13 and 26:4–5.**

It is essential to consider whether or not a person is seeking to attack you or your faith, or if instead he himself has been affected (hurt) by genuine attacks on the faith.

☐ **Is he seeking to injure, or is there an injury?**

You should find out (through listening and asking your own questions) if the person is simply attacking the Faith, or if he has been the victim of attacks against the Faith. Why is he asking?

☐ **If he is seeking to injure (attack):**

Listen carefully while praying for wisdom, respond to the question with reason and confidence; follow up later if necessary. If others are listening, also clarify for the listeners.

☐ **If he has been injured (wounded), note the following:**

☐ **For a “Head” Injury:**

Address the intellectual concern in a rational and cohesive way (be reasonable, and explain), instead of only emotionally.

☐ **For a “Heart” Injury:**

Address the emotional concern sensitively and sympathetically (be empathetic, and give hope), instead of only intellectually.

☐ **Don’t treat a “Head” injury like a “Heart” injury, and vice-versa!**



#### Consider the Topic: **Read Proverbs 15:28 and 16:23–24.**

The above two consideration (time and trauma) are largely made in the moment of questioning. Consideration of topics, and preparations to answer, can be pursued in advance as well.

☐ **In the moment, *listen and respond to the question that was asked.***

Be sure to address the specific topic raised by the questioner, as well as adding biblical, reasonable additions. Don’t be dismissive!

☐ **When able, learn about topics you are likely to be asked—prepare ahead!**

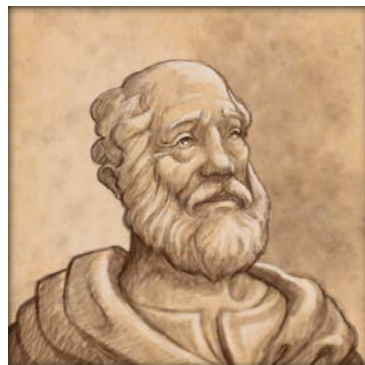
Make use of good apologetic resources and learn commonly asked questions.





# Historical Apologists

**C**hurch history is full of men and women who defended and explained the Christian hope to an unbelieving world. Whether to political rulers, religious opponents, or thoughtful inquirers, these apologists spoke and wrote defences and explanations of the faith. None were perfect, and many had serious mistakes in belief or behavior, but they are important in the history of Christian answers. Below are a few examples, taken from four periods of Church history. These cameos are not an endorsement of everything they wrote or said, but rather a highlighting of their impact on apologetics.



## **JUSTIN MARTYR (CA. 100–165)—THE EARLY CHURCH**

Born in what is now the West Bank of Israel, Justin was from a Hellenistic or Greek family, and was educated in the Greco-Roman philosophies of his era. Having encountered the teachings of the Stoics, Pythagoreans, and Platonists,

Justin eventually met an elderly Christian man whose reasoning and witness led him to faith in Christ. Justin recounts this story in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, but he is equally well known for his *First and Second Apology and Address*, the first of which was written

to the emperor, and the latter two to the Romans and the Greeks. These writings explained and defended the Christian faith in response to accusations and slanders against it by rumor and false report, and they also made appeal for thoughtful readers to believe in Christ. Living in Rome as a Christian philosopher and teacher, Justin earned his place in history and the martyr's crown, dying for the faith during the reign of Emperor Antoninus Pius.

Other apologetic figures of this era: Irenaeus, Tertullian, Athanasius, Augustine, *et al.*



## **THOMAS AQUINAS (1225–74)—THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH**

Despite his Medieval Catholicism, the Italian theologian Thomas Aquinas's writings have played a major role in apologetic thinking among all Christians since the time they were written. A priest and monk in the Dominican order of the

Catholic Church, Aquinas is a representative of the Scholastic movement, identified by its engagement with the writings of Aristotelian philosophy. Where many thinkers (e.g., Justin Martyr) in the Early Church referred to the idealistic writings of Plato, the Scholastics imitated the systematic and logical style of Aristotle.



Aquinas's most important contribution to the history of apologetics, besides his defense and attacks against unbelief (*Summa contra Gentiles*), are what are known as his "Five Ways." These are five forms of proof of the existence of God, which continue to be used and debated. Arguments from existence (Ontological Argument), from origins (Cosmological Argument), and design (Teleological Argument) are all influenced by Aquinas's writings.

Other apologetic figures of this era: Anselm, Abelard, Scotus, Peter the Venerable, *et al.*



**PHILIP  
MELANCHTHON  
(1497-1560)—THE  
REFORMATION  
CHURCH**

When considering the tremendous task of reforming the church which so many faithful Christians undertook in the sixteenth century (or earlier, in the cases of Huss and Wycliffe), we find

many figures who engaged in apologetic tasks. Some wrote to explain the true Christian faith in contrast to the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church, and some to defend that the needed reforms were based on Scripture alone. A relatively neglected figure in this era is Philip Melanchthon, the contemporary and reforming partner of Martin Luther. Not only did Melanchthon largely compose the *Augsburg Confession*, he wrote an *Apology* for it which can be read as a defense of its reformation doctrines as well. More peace-loving than Luther, Melanchthon wrote to attempt to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. Melanchthon wrote the first systematic theology *Loci Communes* (*Common Places in Theology*) a decade before Calvin's *Institutes*, and his later editions would become gradually more apologetic and evangelistic than his first edition.

Other apologetic figures of this era: John Calvin, Hugo Grotius, Menno Simons, Blaise Pascal, *et al.*



**C. S. LEWIS (1898-  
1963)—THE MODERN  
ERA**

Between the Reformation and our own time, perhaps the most impactful event in Christianity was not even a Christian event at all: the Enlightenment would deeply affect the world with some good results, such as religious liberty and sci-

entific inquiry, but it would also yield many evils, such as the erosion of morality and dismissal of religious belief. In a world which became disillusioned with humanistic enlightenment through the World Wars, the literary scholar C. S. Lewis made appeals to hearts and minds searching for meaning and reason. Well known for his Narnia book series, Lewis also wrote numerous works such as *Mere Christianity* and *The Problem of Pain* to explain and defend the Christian faith. Lewis became a Christian relatively late in his life and was influenced by writers such as G. K. Chesterton, George MacDonald, and especially the conversation and evangelism of J.R.R. Tolkien, the author of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. While versed in philosophy, Lewis's apologetics speaks to the enduring appeal of the narrative of salvation in a secular world bereft of meaning.

Other apologetic figures of this era include Jonathan Edwards, B. B. Warfield, Cornelius Van Til, Francis Schaeffer, G. K. Chesterton, Dorothy Sayers, Alvin Plantinga, Richard Swinburne, William Lane Craig, *et al.*

Compiled by Dr. Jonathan Johnson.

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## A History of Contending

Continued from page 10

Dutch Reformed theology associated with Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck. The key developers of this presuppositional approach to apologetics were Cornelius Van Til and Gordon H. Clark. While Van Til and Clark had serious differences with one another, they argued that there is little (Clark) or no (Van Til) common ground between believers and unbelievers. They saw evidentialism as leading in two wrong directions. First, it assumed that unbelievers have the right to sit in judgment on divine revelation rather than submitting to it. Second, it works only if unbelievers have the capacity to understand transcendental truth claims. Unbelievers, they argued, can grasp facts, but they will never believe truth apart from the Spirit's illumination, and the Spirit has promised to work only through the Word. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Reformed apologists remained deeply divided between presuppositionalists, such as Greg Bahnsen and John Frame, and evidentialists, such as John Gerstner and R. C. Sproul.

It seems evident in this brief survey that most apologists have sought common ground with unbelievers so that they would have a basis for meaningful conversation. The danger in seeking common ground is that apologists can affirm or imply things—such as the ability of unbelievers to grasp truth without the aid of the Holy Spirit—that the Scriptures say are not true. On the other hand, presuppositionalism, especially when lacking nuance or philosophical sophistication, can suggest that no common ground of any sort exists between believers and unbelievers. But, as Clark pointed out, if we do not even share belief in the Law of Noncontradiction,<sup>9</sup> how could we even have a conversation? The wisest apologists throughout history have understood that only the gospel has the power to save, that sinners will see truth only as the Spirit enlightens it to them, and that Scripture should always have priority over other forms of evidence. With these understandings in place, however, they will also see that all truth belongs to God and may be useful in our pre-evangelism task.

David Saxon is a professor in the College of Bible and Church Ministries at Maranatha Baptist University.



<sup>1</sup> “Apologety,” from Greek *apologia*, in this context means “defense.” It is Peter’s way of describing this task in 1 Peter 3:15.

<sup>2</sup> The canon was in process of formation in Tertullian’s day. The Rule of Faith was the core of orthodoxy to which appeal was often made by the early Church Fathers.

<sup>3</sup> This, of course, is also a biblical truth.

<sup>4</sup> Forrest, Benjamin K., Joshua D. Chatraw, and Alister E. McGrath, eds., *The History of Apologetics: A Biographical and Methodological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 255.

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.7.4–5.

<sup>6</sup> ICR, 1.8.13.

<sup>7</sup> Forrest, Chatraw, McGrath, eds., 359–60.

<sup>8</sup> B. B. Warfield, “Apologetics,” *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. S. M. Jackson (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1908), I, 236, cited in Forrest, Chatraw, McGrath, 455.

<sup>9</sup> The Law of Noncontradiction says that a proposition cannot be A and not A at the same time and in the same sense. It is fundamental to all logic. Clark calls it the Law of Contradiction, but he means the same thing.

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## That's a Good Question

Continued from page 6

Dulles, the modern division of apologetics into five partisan camps (Evidentialist, Presuppositionalist, Reformed, Classical, Pragmatic) is a recent phenomenon (cf. Dulles, *A History of Apologetics* [Ignatius Press, 2005], 353), and one that has distracted many Christians from pursuing a simple practice of answering questions from a biblically wise position (cf. Prov. 26:4–5).

<sup>2</sup> From ἀπολογία (*Strong's* G627) or (*Strong's* 626). Appearing at Luke 12:11; 21:14; Acts 19:33; 22:1; 24:10; 25:8, 16; 26:2, 24; Rom. 1:20; 2:1, 15; 1 Cor. 9:3; 2 Cor. 7:11; 12:19; Phil. 1:7, 17 (or 16, depending on GNT eds.); 2 Tim. 4:16; 1 Pet. 3:15. The only possible uses in the LXX (Greek OT) are Jeremiah 12:1; 20:12; 38:6 (31:6 in Hebrew and English), with 20:12 being the clearest use. The LXX also contains a use akin to the NT at Wisdom of Solomon 6:10: "For they that keep holiness holly shall be judged holy; and they that have learned such things shall find what to answer."

<sup>3</sup> The first is a preposition that has many meanings: "from," "out of," "with," "because of," et al., and the second relates to "word," and can be used in expressing reasoning, preaching, proclamation, etc. The latter has its most famous appearance as the divine Word in John's writings.

For Asian Christian thinkers (or Christian thinkers in Asia), there is a thought-provoking connection here to bear in mind the connection of Word *logos* (λόγος) with Way, or *dao* (道), as seen in John's Gospel, 1:1 ("太初有道, 道與神同在, 道就是神"). It is worth considering how apologetics may address Asian understandings of truth, both of coherence and correspondence, in light of a philosophical (not religious) context of the 道 (cf. Eccles. 3). This affects the worldview of residents of Greater China, Japan, Korea, and many peoples within Southeast Asia.

<sup>4</sup> For the above, see Gingrich, F. W., *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed.

<sup>5</sup> Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, accessed June 2, 2022 ([https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/apologetics?utm\\_campaign=sd&utm\\_medium=serp&utm\\_source=jsonld](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/apologetics?utm_campaign=sd&utm_medium=serp&utm_source=jsonld)).

<sup>6</sup> Note that most of the uses of "apology" by New Testament book are by Paul, in the Book of Acts, and then in his other writings.

<sup>7</sup> For the full context, read 1 Peter 3:8–4:19. In this extensive section Peter is careful to guide the early Christians along the cataracts of conflict, as they navigated the Scylla and Charybdis of internal temptation to sin on the one hand, and external persecution and suffering on the other.

<sup>8</sup> Peter here seems to be drawing on Isaiah 8:13, and the context of conflict in Isaiah 8. In that

passage as well as here, the fear of the Lord prevents fear of man. The old root-sense of "holy" as "set-apart" is also at work here: holiness can mean set apart from sin, but it can also mean set apart as special. In this interesting phrase we are to set apart God, and Christ specifically, as special—as Lord in our lives—not anything or anyone else. Various translations have either "Christ" or "God."

<sup>9</sup> It is impossible to know every form of false teaching in the world and impossible to anticipate every question about the faith that the Christian will encounter. General preparations can be made, and that is wise. But the safest and surest way to be prepared to answer about our Lord is to know our Lord so well as to be ready to present Him and His work in *any* context. To know what He is like, and what He *is not* like, both so well that we are not deceived, and so that we make accurately describe Him to others.

<sup>10</sup> Space does not allow for a full discussion here, but one missing element in the general approach to practical apologetics is an emphasis on *listening*. If our answers are to make sense, and be reasonable, they must be in reference to what the questioner is *actually* saying—not just what you want to say. See the feature in this issue on "Apologetic Triage."

<sup>11</sup> After a public debate on the historicity of Daniel, held by the Hong Kong Sceptic Society, an atheist attendee told a professor friend that while he still didn't like the Christian position, compared to the other speaker the Christian was the much more likeable and believable person. Many people listen to the *way* we say what we say as much or more than *what* we say.

<sup>12</sup> Apologetics Triage, page 22, and Historical Apologetics, pages 23–24.

<sup>13</sup> Meditate on the meaning and use—especially in apologetics—of all the instructions given to us about listening and speaking in Proverbs. For example: Proverbs 18:13 on the wisdom of careful listening; 15:1 on the wisdom of gracious words; 15:23 on the wisdom of appropriate words; 15:28 on the wisdom of well-thought words; 26:4–5 on the wisdom of discernment in choosing words.

<sup>14</sup> Outside of the Bible's teaching and the Holy Spirit's guidance, there is no better instruction in apologetics than actively pursuing opportunities to share the gospel and answer peoples' questions in real life. No system of apologetics or rubric of response can equip the growing apologist as well as actual experience hearing and answering questions. I still marvel at having read a well-known and well-written apologist who admitted, at the end of his book on apologetics, that he really didn't engage with people very often in real life! Put God's wisdom into practice by *doing* in the harvest fields, not merely *discussing* in the household.

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# Wandering in the Wilderness

I enjoy our drives through the desert. I relax in the passenger seat watching vast expanses of nothingness roll by. There's iced tea in the cooler. Our Toyota hums smoothly, and the vents blow cool air. The sky is clear and the road is straight. We know where we are and when this wilderness will end. It's nice.

But I wouldn't want to travel through the desert for forty years, especially on foot without a GPS, as the children of Israel did.

It must have been awful. Day after day after day on a vague, convoluted path with sand in their sandals, pebbles in their pots, and the same menu every meal—those wilderness years were hard. The people complained, and I'm not surprised.

I complain, too, when I find myself in a severe trial, a wilderness of the soul. I stagger along a rough and rocky trail, wondering when it will end and if I'll be alive when it does.

There are comforts along the road. Manna from heaven and water from the rock. New mercies every morning. Strength for today and hope for tomorrow. Pillars of cloud and fire to lead the way. These are comforts, but my strongest encouragement comes from remembering what Moses reminded the children of Israel: "He knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness" (Deut. 2:7).

## HE

Nothing about my wilderness journey is random. Jehovah Elohim, the eternal, self-existent One, the great, mighty, sovereign God who rules the universe and everything in it, is in control. He can

change my circumstances in a moment, and will, when His work in me is done.

## KNOWETH

He knows because He sees. He sees because He cares. He cares because He's been here and knows how hard it is. He is *acquainted with all my ways*—when I sit, stand, and lie down. Even in this wilderness, even when I feel most alone, He is behind and before me. In the dark of the night and heat of the day, His hand covers me (Ps. 139).

## THY

Jehovah Elohim sees *me*. Though I share this planet with a huge mass of humanity, I am never lost in the crowd. He directs my journey as though I were the only person alive.

## WALKING

During a wilderness wandering, there are days when flying like an eagle (Isa. 40:31) is impossible and running the race (Heb. 12:1) is too much for me. Too weary to pick up my feet, I trudge through the deep sand, doing the best I can, knowing that He understands my weakness.

## THROUGH

Even when I want to, I don't give up, lie down, and bury myself in dirt. I keep moving forward because I know I'm not going to be stranded in this dreary place forever. "I press [slowly] toward the mark for the prize" (Phil. 3:14), knowing that even the hardest road has an end. I want to get there no matter how long it takes.

## THIS

The trail I am on is unlike anyone else's and different from any I have traveled before. It has been specially laid out for me for this specific moment and is exactly what I need right now.

## GREAT

Some trials are short-mileage detours, easily done and quickly over. But forty-year deserts are—in my own strength—impossible and impassable. They stretch me past my breaking point. They crush my pride and self-sufficiency. At the end of the journey, I look in the mirror expecting to see a broken-down ruin of a person, but instead I see someone who has "come forth as gold" (Job 23:10), for the real treasure of a wilderness is not what I have learned there, but who I have become.

## WILDERNESS

A forty-year-wilderness trial is not a relaxing road trip. It's stressful and scary, dry, and daunting, frightening and forbidding. Though it is lonely, it's not solitary, for I am never alone. There is a God who knows my trudging through this great wilderness.

Claudia Barba grew up in a ministry home and now serves the Lord with her husband, Dave, through Press On! Ministries, planting and assisting churches in the USA and abroad ([www.ipresson.com](http://www.ipresson.com)). She also writes women's Bible-study books and speaks to women's groups. Claudia states that this article is "in memory of Beneth Peters Jones, who taught me to love this Scripture."







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## Matthew 18: “If Two

**T**his miniseries has focused on “prayer predicaments.” What do we do when our experience in prayer does not seem to square with certain passages of Scripture? Such incongruities between text and experience can be resolved in one of two ways. Perhaps our personal experience in prayer simply fails to measure up to the demands or promises of the text, in which case we need to examine our experience. On the other hand, perhaps we have misconstrued the text itself and assumed that it is saying something that, in fact, it is not. In that case, we need to examine the context more closely to insure we are understanding and applying the text correctly.

We’ve explored the Bible’s imprecatory prayers, seemingly unqualified prayer promises, and even praying for the fulfillment of infallible prophecies. This column returns to another of those “seemingly unqualified prayer promises” for a closer contextual look at what Jesus said.

Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

These statements are two of the most universally decontextualized passages in the New Testament. The final court of appeal for how a passage should be interpreted and applied is not popular usage but a careful and contextualized reading of the text. If you use a Bible with dedicated versification—where every verse begins its own new line—you may be inclined to think of either or both of these verses as stand-alone universal statements. But the word “for” in verse 20 clearly connects it back to verse 19. More importantly, the word “again” in verse 19 clearly signals a connection with what Jesus had just said in 18:15–18. And most importantly, if you erase the verse divisions and step back from the whole discourse, you discover that the topic of conversation in which 18:19–20 are embedded actually extends from 18:15 (at least) all the way to the end of the chapter (18:35). What is the context in which Jesus made these statements?

This entire pericope (18:15–35) is unique to Matthew; none of it is found in any of the other Gospels. Besides Matthew 16, it includes the only other reference to the “church” in all of the Gospels. What signals that this is a unit, a contextual package? I have flagged the recurring ideas that dominate the passage.

<sup>15</sup> Moreover **if thy brother shall trespass against thee**, go and tell him **his fault** between thee and him alone: *if he shall hear thee*, thou hast gained thy brother. <sup>16</sup> But *if he will not hear thee*, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be

established. <sup>17</sup> And *if he shall neglect to hear them*, tell it unto the church: but *if he neglect to hear the church*, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. <sup>18</sup> Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. <sup>19</sup> Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

<sup>21</sup> Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall **my brother sin against me**, and I **forgive** him? till seven times? <sup>22</sup> Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. <sup>23</sup> Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. <sup>24</sup> And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. <sup>25</sup> But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. <sup>26</sup> The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. <sup>27</sup> Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and **forgave** him the debt. <sup>28</sup> But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. <sup>29</sup> And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. <sup>30</sup> And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. <sup>32</sup> Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I **forgave** thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: <sup>33</sup> Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? <sup>34</sup> And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. <sup>35</sup> So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts **forgive** not every one **his brother their trespasses**.

First, notice that the topic of discussion is **what to do if your brother sins against you**; it opens and closes this section of Jesus’ discourse (18:15 and 35) and surfaces in the middle as well (18:21). Second, hopefully your brother will *hear you* (18:15) so that you can **forgive** him (18:15, 21, 35). But *if he will not hear* (18:16–17) then you will have to bring it before the church (18:17) as a matter of communal discipline. Jesus affirms that the decision of the church to take necessary righteous disciplinary action on earth

# of You Shall Agree on Earth”

only echoes the decision already made in heaven (18:18–19). The discourse focuses on dealing with a sinning brother (18:15, 21, 35) and divides naturally into two sections: (1) instruction on how to deal with an unrepentant brother (18:15–20), and (2) a parabolic illustration, prompted by Peter’s question, of how to deal with a repentant brother (18:21–25).

This is one of several New Testament passages on the necessity and procedure of church discipline. Jesus lays out the progression of the confrontational discipline required in dealing with a sinning brother: (1) Private—“between thee and him alone” (18:15); if that fails, then proceed to (2) Representative—“take one or two more” as witnesses (18:16); if that fails, then proceed to (3) Ecclesiastical—“tell it unto the church” (18:17); and finally, if that fails, then (4) Excommunicational—“let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican” (18:17).

Do not miss the irony of who records this discourse—Matthew, *the publican*. To see this final step as a public indictment calling for scorn or disdain of the offender is misguided; that is how the Pharisees reacted to Gentiles and tax collectors, but not how Jesus did. It simply means that you relate to one who refuses to repent as though he is an unbeliever who still needs the working of God’s grace in his heart.

This is the context that governs 18:19–20. As noted above, 18:15–35 is punctuated by three unambiguous references to the same subject—dealing with a **sinning brother** (18:15–17, 21–22, 23–35). The language of 18:19 echoes what Jesus said in 18:18 which, in turn, duplicates the language in 16:19. In 16:19 Jesus’ assurance pertains to extending recognition of who has access to heaven. It is on the basis of one’s confession about Christ that we are authorized to pronounce with authority who is and is not admitted into the kingdom of heaven. In 18:18 Jesus’ assurance pertains to extending fellowship based on one’s response to their accountability to the community of God’s people. In both cases, the actions of the church on earth reflect and ratify the previous determination in heaven, what is already a reality in heaven—not *vice versa*.

The language of 18:19–20, then, continues 18:15–18. “If two of you agree [literally, “symphonize”] on earth about any thing that they may ask [“thing,” *pragma* in Greek, often connotes a judicial matter, a legal issue], it shall be done by my Father in heaven.” Again, the language clearly ties back to the “on earth . . . in heaven” language in 18:18, which expands on the issue addressed in 18:15–17 regarding the Church’s dealing with a sinning “brother.” In 18:19–20, Jesus is affirming the authority of the Church “to deal with the erring disciple. That we have not left the topic of how to deal with sin is indicated by the following passage . . . so that this unit is sandwiched contextually by this one topic (Darrell Bock, *Jesus According to the Scriptures*, 244–45).

Likewise, William Hendrickson notes, “In line with the preceding context the symphonious asking to which verse 19 refers . . . relates especially to prayer for wisdom in dealing with matters of discipline” (*The Gospel of Matthew*, 702). D. A. Carson concurs:

These two verses [19–20] should not in this setting be taken as a promise regarding any prayer on which two or three believers agree. Scripture is rich in prayer promises, but if this passage deals with prayer at all, it is restricted by the context and by the phrase *peri pantos pragmatos*, which should here be rendered “about any judicial matter”: the word *pragma* often has that sense, a sense nicely fitting the argument in Matthew 18 (“Matthew,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 403).

The Church, on the authority of Christ, retains the right to extend or withhold Christian recognition and fellowship in the case of sinning “brethren” based on how they respond to necessary church discipline. That’s why

when Christians use this verse to console themselves because not very many people have shown up for some service or activity, they have lost sight of the context. Originally Jesus made this declaration in the context of promising that God would ratify decisions made by local churches when they exercise church discipline according to the regulations prescribed in vv. 15–17. The “two or three” who are gathered together in verse 20 are the “one or two witnesses” of verse 16 plus the aggrieved party, making two or three people to meet with the offending party, in hopes of helping them to repent (Klein, Blomberg, Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 609).

## CONCLUSION

Matthew 18:19 is not a blanket promise that if I can just get one other Christian to pray with me for something, it will infallibly be granted. This promise has to do with agreement in prayer specifically in an *ecclesiastical, disciplinary* matter. Likewise, the point of Matthew 18:20 is not merely to encourage those in tiny churches. The primary application of Matthew 18:20 is this: when even two or three of you gather to confront a sinning brother, Christ assures you of His personal, approving, corroborating presence (cf. 1 Cor. 5:4). That doesn’t mean it’s not true when we’re gathered for church; but that is only a secondary application of Jesus’ statement. Somehow, we’ve come to isolate these two verses from their context, make a secondary application the primary application, and completely ignore the original primary point. When you extract Matthew 18:19 or 20 from the context in which Jesus Himself embedded it, you may be saying something Jesus did not say.

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# Godliness is More Important than Giftedness

**A**nother school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, with twenty-one innocent lives lost. Twenty-one families that will never be the same. Immediately there began to be a call by politicians and news outlets for gun control. Is that the answer? Or perhaps is there a deeper problem?

The fact that murder and evil were taking place long before guns were invented would indicate that there is a deeper problem. What do you say to your coworker or neighbor when he asks, “Why did such a tragedy take place? What should be done about it?” This is where believers need to have an answer. It is often through a discussion of current events that someone who is ready to answer can steer the conversation to the gospel.

First Peter 3:15–16 tells us to “sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.”

We see several important things in this passage. We should be able to give an answer and hope to those who are hurting. I would assume for most of those reading this article, we like to help people. Like Christ, we are moved with compassion for the believers in Ukraine, families who have lost a loved one, the friend or family member who has been devastated by someone else’s poor choices, the person dealing with a crippling disease or life-threatening illness, or the person walking through

the consequences of his own sin. All these people need hope, which, according to this text, every Christian should be able to point them to.

However, I am sure most, if not all, of us have run across the believer who would give aspirin a headache and make coffee nervous. The first thing we need to do to be used by God to help hurting people is to sanctify the Lord in our hearts. Early in my ministry, there was a creation evangelist who did an amazing job with creation apologetics. He published many of his sessions, and I purchased his entire series and put it in our church library. I had found it very useful when witnessing to an intellectual who would question whether there was a Creator or not.

One day I gave a session to someone I was working with to get him saved. He brought it back the next day and said he was not interested. When I asked why not, he said he looked the writer up on the Internet and saw that he had been put in prison for tax evasion. After he left my office, I looked it up, and sure enough, that was true. Here was a man who had great answers, but because he did not sanctify the Lord in his heart, people no longer wanted to hear what he had to say.

God cares more about your godliness than your giftedness. No one is going to be asking us any questions if we are not evidencing the fruit of the Spirit. I never ask help from the meanest, angriest, most critical, most bitter, most immoral person I know. We need to live our Christian lives in such a way that when unsaved people have a question about life, they want to ask us

how we do it. How do we display a peace that passes understanding? Why would we bring children into such a crazy world? Why do we “talk up” our spouse instead of putting her down when she is not around? Why won’t we go to the bar after work? Why do we go to church on Sunday? And why do we pray before we eat? These and a host of other questions will be asked of the godly Christian over time.

Our text is clear that not only are we to live a life that invites questions, but we are also to have an answer when questioned. This will require us to be students of the Bible. Second Timothy 2:15 challenges us to “study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” It is okay to not know an answer as long as we then research and find the answer. Lazy, undisciplined Christianity is hurting our evangelism effectiveness.

First Peter 3:15 is clear we are to be ready to give an answer. We need to have Bible answers that point people to Christ. People do not need to hear what we think; they need to know what God says. Not only are we to be a godly example and have an answer, we are also to give that answer with gentleness and a reverence for God. We are to speak the truth in love.

May God give us the grace and wisdom to have an answer for every man or woman who asks for the reason we have so much hope!

Jim Tillotson serves as president of Faith Baptist Bible College in Ankeny, Iowa.



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# ON THE HOME FRONT

## 2022

### September 22-23, 2022 New Mexico Regional Fellowship

Manzano Baptist Church  
12411 Linn Ave. NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87123  
Host pastor: Mark Zahn

### October 15, 2022 New England Regional Fellowship

(Meeting with the New England Foundations Conference)  
Heritage Baptist Church  
186 Dover Point Rd.  
Dover, NH 03820  
Coordinator: Taigen Joos

### October 17-18, 2022 Central Regional Fellowship

Wheatland Baptist Church  
1139 McKinley  
McPherson, KS 67460  
Coordinator: David Byford

## 2023

### January 31, 2023 Rocky Mountain Regional Fellowship

Westside Baptist Church  
6260 West 4th St.  
Greeley, CO 80634  
970.346.8610  
Coordinator: Dan Unruh

### February 6-7, 2023 FBFI Winter Board Meeting

Colonial Hills Baptist Church  
8140 Union Chapel Rd.  
Indianapolis, IN 46240

### March 6-8, 2023 South Regional Fellowship

Keystone Baptist Church  
15 Keystone Lane  
Berryville, VA 22611  
Coordinator: Tony Facenda

### April 23-24, 2023 Northwest Regional Fellowship

Monroe Baptist Church  
1405 West Main St.  
Monroe, WA 98272  
Coordinator: Greg Kaminski

### April 24-25, 2023 Wyoming Regional Fellowship

First Baptist Church  
646 North Tyler Avenue  
Pinedale, WY 82924

### May 9-11, 2023 Philippines Regional Fellowship

Bob Jones Memorial Bible College  
125 Matahimik St.  
Quezon City  
Philippines 1101

### June 12-14, 2023 FBFI Annual Fellowship

Faith Baptist Bible College  
900 Northwest 4th St.  
Ankeny, IA 50023

## 2024

### March 11-12, 2024 Northwest Regional Fellowship

Westside Baptist Church  
1375 Irving Rd.  
Eugene, OR 97404  
Coordinator: Greg Kaminski

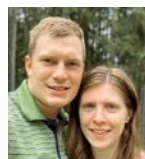
### April 15-17, 2024 South Regional FBFI Fellowship

Catawba Springs Baptist Church  
6801 Ten Ten Road  
Apex, NC 27539

### June 10-12, 2024 FBFI Annual Fellowship

Tri-City Baptist Church  
6953 West 92nd Lane  
Westminster, CO 80021

## News From All Over

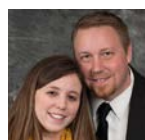


**Aaron and Rachel Houtz** and their three children are currently on deputation

to raise support to be missionaries in Iliamna, Alaska, among the Yupik Alaskan natives. They will be joining a missionary couple who has been serving there for fifteen years. While Aaron attended Bob Jones University as a married town student, he and Rachel attended their sending church, Mount Calvary Baptist in Greenville, South Carolina. Their website is [houtzestoalaska.com](http://houtzestoalaska.com).

### Dr. Larry Karsies

recently retired as the senior pastor of Harvest Hills Baptist Church in Oklahoma City, where he served for nearly thirty-three years. He and his wife, Bonnie, plan to stay in the church and serve when and where needed—unless the Lord should choose to open a door of ministry or service in another location.



**Jason Shirk** was saved in 1994 in Misawa, Japan, where

his parents were stationed. His family attended Faith Baptist Church under BIMl missionary pastor Mike Harrell. In 1997 they moved to Oklahoma and attended Harvest Hills Baptist Church in Yukon under Pastor Larry Karsies. Jason graduated from Ambassador Baptist College in Lattimore, North Carolina, and began deputation as a missionary to the Bhutanese in northeast

India. He and his wife, Katy, met on deputation, and both studied linguistics and Bible translation at Baptist Bible Translators Institute in Bowie, Texas. They served in India until they were forced to return to the States, and they attended Harvest Hills upon their return. Jason became the pastor on July 1, 2022, when Pastor Karsies retired.

**Albert Watkins**, a long-time FBFI member and founder and president of Faith Literature Ministries, Inc., passed away on June 16. He served his country in the US Navy from 1956 to 1959 and worked and retired from North Carolina State Government after thirty years of service. His daughter (Ivey) and son-in-law, Brian Palmer, are one of our FBFI chaplain families.



After over forty-one years pastoring Community Bible Church in Norfolk,

Nebraska, **Arin Hess** has assumed the position of chaplain with Capitol Studies, a ministry whose purpose is to "Serve Civil Servants with Scripture." Arin writes and leads Wednesday Bible studies offered at the breakfast hour for Nebraska senators and at the lunch hour for capitol staff. His wife, Anne Marie, coordinates the meals. Both Arin and Anne Marie offer biblical counsel, support, and prayer for these government leaders and their aides. They also initiate individual Bible studies, primarily focusing on salvation and the sufficiency of Scripture.

## FrontLine Magazine

"Bringing the Truth Home"

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## Not What I Expected

**A**s a candidate for chaplaincy, I never thought I would have the following experience, especially since I hadn't been through Chaplain Basic Officer Leadership Course (CHBOLC). God proved Himself mighty and gracious and gave me confidence that this ministry is indeed where He wants me. Experiences at the National Training Center (NTC) as an Army Chaplain Candidate proved this to me.

NTC is designed to push soldiers mentally, physically, and emotionally to their limit, providing a deployment experience in a "safe" environment. For two weeks several units will go to "the Box" and do their job as individuals and as a team while living the worst-case scenario a war might offer. It's like a huge laser tag war game with no showers, no comforts, MREs (meals ready-to-eat), and peers and leaders

making life as miserable as possible for two weeks. At no point can you take off any of the gear you might need at a moment's notice unless you are in a tent. Other than a tent, the only shade found was under a parked LMTV or Humvee. But none of them could stop the sandstorms that just added to the misery.

It's probably because I'm young, inexperienced, and completely crazy, but the more miserable I was, the more I loved it!

I was only out there for five days of the two weeks. The leaders in my unit realized months in advance that the Unit Ministry Team (UMT) would not be out there, so they pushed for me to come with them for the full month. Everything seemed to be running smoothly in allowing a candidate to come, but that changed when I men-

tioned I was pre-CHBOLC. To my disappointment, my unit ended up going out there without a Chaplain of any sort. On top of that, they would be under the command of a new battalion commander (BC). I found myself in rear detachment, and our AT (annual training) for the year would be cleaning and turning in all their equipment after they came out of the Box. While a small part of me was upset with the turn of events, another part of me was still excited. I was going to NTC!

My first night was at "RUBA" (Rotational Unit Bivouac Area), which is the slightly civilized part of the fort for units transitioning in or out of the Box. I was with two PFCs, my Religious Affairs Specialist (RAS), and another soldier (I will call him NG). Due to miscommunication, we had boots on the ground a day before



the rest of rear detachment (RD). After the first, very eventful night, arrangements were made, and we unexpectedly found ourselves in a Humvee headed out to the Box.

## **THERE IS A GREAT NEED FOR CHAPLAINS**

At 0545 hours the three of us RD gathered our gear together, split the one MRE I had for breakfast, and waited and waited for the convoy coming to pick us up.

Neither of the PFCs was prepped to go to the Box because of the change in plans. Fortunately, I had overpacked and had extra gear. After we redistributed my gear, three Humvees rolled up, and the RAS and NG were taken to the rest of the unit. I ended up with the Company Commander. Conversing as best we could in the loud, bouncing Humvee, I tried to learn as much as I could about the downtrace units and the new BC and XO, etc.

As soon as we arrived, I was handed a vest cover and helmet piece known as MILES gear, which was designed to detect laser hits and scream at me to “Drop Dead!” if I got hit. When a soldier handed me a weapon and sidepiece, the Commander loudly told everyone, “This is our Chaplain. Don’t give him a weapon!” (Chaplains by law can’t carry weapons unless they’ve received an official waiver to do so.) Word got around, and I spent the rest of the time out there

listening to soldiers of various ranks talk about many different things. Almost as soon as one soldier walked away another would sheepishly walk over and say: “Hey, Chaplain. You got a few minutes?” Soldiers who were new to the unit whom I had never met wanted to talk. Soldiers who had known me for over a year and never wanted to talk before suddenly had more to say than ever. It made me sad to think that they had been out there all that time without a Chaplain present. It also helped me to understand just how vital a good, godly Chaplain is to a soldier’s spiritual and mental wellbeing.

## **EARN AND MAINTAIN YOUR POSITION**

Shortly upon arriving in the Box, I found myself on my way to the cooks’ tent to grab a small portion of cold protein and starch because I hadn’t eaten all day. The Commander found me just as I was stuffing a sandy spoonful of chili mac in my mouth and told me that the BC was coming in and they were getting together to do the Battle Update Briefing (BUB). I followed him back to the BC’s tent and was introduced to him. He glanced at me and said,

“LT, aren’t most Chaplains Captains?”

“Yes, sir. I am a Chaplain Candidate.”

He looked me over for a moment then said, “What purpose do you serve? We’ve made it this far without a Chaplain.”

A bit taken aback and slightly confused, I responded, “Umm, Sir, if I may ask, what do you mean by that?”

He looked at me longer. So, I took a deep breath and said, “I am in rear detachment for this unit, and we are all here to assist in getting you all out of the Box, back to RUBA, and back home. As a Chaplain my purpose would be to provide moral and religious support for you, the staff, and the soldiers. But I’m technically not a Chaplain yet.”

He grunted and walked out. As we followed him to the BUB. I was silently kicking myself for sounding like a robot. I did not want him to think that a Chaplain was a disposable member on his staff. As I sat in the BUB, I remembered the things I learned at our February FBFI Chaplains’ training. *Commander’s intent*. As I listened, I quickly learned that my commander’s intents were to get everybody out, get them out alive, and boost moral of the soldiers. Near the end of BUB, he introduced me then asked what I planned on doing the next day. I wanted to meet, not just HHC, but all the downtrace units as well and let them know that there was a Chaplain available to talk to. He nodded his approval, and we were dismissed. Then he asked me to follow him back to his tent, and I asked him if he would allow me to present a “Word of the Day” in the morning or evening meetings. I got the approval and was dismissed. That first meeting was such a reminder that I would have to earn my spot at the table. People don’t just give them to you nor let you keep them if they believe that you are a vestigial member of the team. At that moment, the BC wanted someone who was genuine and purposeful. He allowed me to sit at the table for now, but the things I would continue to do would determine whether I would keep that seat.

## **BEING PHYSICALLY PRESENT GOES A LONG WAY**

The next four days were filled with vehicle Pre-Maintenance Checks/Services (PMCS-ing), weapons qualification (in which I could not participate, but I was there anyway), fire watch, and sandstorms. Because I would talk to the fire watch and radio soldiers who had to stay up all night, I didn’t get a lot of sleep. We finally left the Box, which was an all-day ordeal. I ended







up in the one vehicle that had to make four trips back and forth between RUBA and the Box. We all slept on cots in an 80'x40' tent. It was nice to be out of the elements.

The Dining Facility (DFAC) didn't open until three days after we got out, but everyone was able to use the shower and laundry facilities. Every morning there was, of course, formation, during which the BC asked me to continue giving a Word of the Day. I spent my time wherever the soldiers were, at the washracks washing Humvees and LMTVs, changing out broken parts and changing fluids in the vehicles. Often I was pulled aside as soldiers wanted to talk about anything and everything. Often soldiers wanted to talk about the Word of the Day. This was a great opportunity to share the gospel with them. NG shared what he as an enlisted soldier had seen: "When you, an officer, let two enlisted guys borrow your gear, I didn't know if you were just generous, or had no clue the value of your equipment. Either way, that was awesome. I felt like I belonged here. I think this is why the guys listen to you, you actually care. We can

tell because you are the only officer we see working alongside the rest of us."

The officers noticed as well. Because of the buildings, sandstorms were not as prevalent, but there were still high winds. One night the wind caught a loose flap and snapped it against one of the support beams. I had been sitting on the edge of my cot unable to sleep. When the wind popped the flap, the XO, who was about eight feet away, launched out of his cot. PTSD—another thing we discussed in the FBFI training. He looked around and saw me sitting watching him. This led to a long conversation until the wind died down and he was able to sleep again.

I purposefully talked to the BC to ask how I could help him that day and if I could share the Word of the Day with him and the CSM before giving it to the rest of the unit during formation. This soon turned into a twenty-minute conversation. He had had bad experiences with Chaplains before and expected even less from a 2LT. Remembering my first conversation with him, it was only by God's grace that he still talked to me. Before they

left, both the BC and CSM pulled me aside to tell me how much they appreciated the personal time I spent with them and that they were confident that I'd be praying for them when they deployed. I really wanted to be going with them but was encouraged that they knew that there were Chaplains out there who took their job seriously and did what they could to make sure their soldiers were cared for spiritually.

### **YOU DON'T ALWAYS HAVE THE ANSWER, BUT YOU DON'T NEED TO ALWAYS HAVE THE ANSWER**

Being at Fort Irwin over the Memorial Day weekend was much different than how I had celebrated growing up. The day before Memorial Day I got to talk with a fellow Lieutenant who had been in mortuary affairs before transferring to my unit. This led to a three-hour discussion about the purpose of life and war and all the soldiers he had taken care of. For many soldiers, Memorial Day was a day of silent, solemn contemplation, not a day of celebration. I spent that night in prayer and tears, wondering how I was going to





give a Word of the Day the next morning. The solemn day came, and I felt lead to read Hebrews 12:1–2. It wasn't an ideal or direct application, but it combined the aspect of sacrifice, moving forward while still remembering, and focusing on Christ. I remember walking back to my platoon feeling untrained and lacking. However, God used His Word to open hearts, and I spent the rest of the day listening to soldiers.

### **GOD WILL BE GLORIFIED, EVEN IN MY WEAKNESSES**

The last six days in the Box were the most challenging. There were just the nine of us in RD. The previous Sunday there had been many boots on the ground. I met up with the new unit Chaplains, and we held religious services together. This last Sunday there was just me. No one showed. All but one vehicle was turned in, so the enlisted guys hung out at the gym. There were only two of us officers, and the other LT was busy trying to get that last Humvee turned in. Missing my wife, sick of MREs, discouraged by no one coming to see the Chaplain nor going to services, I had a pity party for myself. I spent more time with the Lord.

By the end of that week, I was just enjoying being with God. I also got sleep. I don't know if it's a psychological issue or just my personality, but I cannot fall asleep until I know that the people around me are sleeping. I guess I feel a need to protect those "in my care." When there were seventy-five soldiers around me, I didn't get a lot of sleep. Now sleep came easier. And I needed it. I learned to stop complaining to God about wanting more "action" and just letting God take care of things as He saw fit. The final

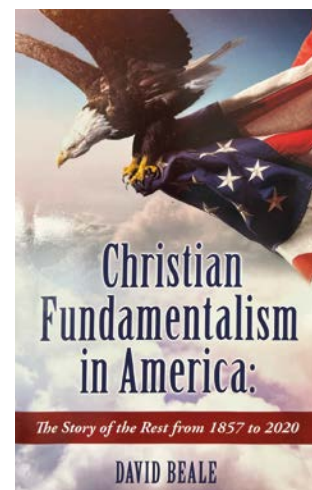
night there, I was sitting on the edge of my cot awake. NG sat at the end of my cot and asked if I was still awake. He asked me why I was there. My simple answer was, "Because God wants me here." He was surprised that I didn't say it was for the money.

Chaplaincy for me is more than just a job. Being with this unit was not just a steppingstone to get to another place. I was there because God placed me there, and I was going to do everything I could to bring glory to Him. He nodded and said flatly that he did not believe God cared and added that he believed that I did and that it was evident in how I lived my life. He expressed gratitude for my help in getting him out there and encouraging him throughout the AT. He was former infantry, and I had encouraged him to teach a refresher class on weapon handling, cleaning, and tactics. It had gone well, and he had received a challenge coin from the BC at the end of the training. That night I simply listened to him. Close to morning he said, "You've given me a lot to think about. Maybe God does care. I've been thinking about going to church again. I want to make a difference in people around me, kind of how you did these couple of weeks."

God does care. It was evident in my own life, in areas NG didn't even know about. His conversation with me helped put my training in perspective. It helped adjust my attitude that last week back. I was both encouraged and humbled how God was still working despite my self-centered thinking.

I would not trade the lessons I learned at NTC for anything. I gained a refreshed outlook on life and God's call in my life as a Chaplain Candidate. There is still so much I want to learn and experience, but now I was content to take it at God's pace. To take the hard lessons with the easy ones. Maybe one day God's call will lead me to Active Duty, or maybe it'll be in the Reserves. Either way, there was no doubt in my mind that God calls Chaplains to military ministry and that He will do awesome things through the Chaplain whose heart and mind is focused on Him. I want to be that Chaplain.

2LT KC Hansen is a Chaplain Candidate with the US Army Reserves. His long-term goal is to be a Chaplain in the Army Special Forces. He and his wife, Stephanie, are currently serving at Crossroad Baptist Church in Buckeye, Arizona.



### **BOOK REVIEW:**

### ***Christian Fundamentalism in America***

**Dr. David Beale**

*Christian Fundamentalism in America* (2021) by Dr. David Beale should be read by every believer who desires a well-documented review of the theological heritage of Fundamentalism as well as the current trends shaping the future of the movement. The volume is a combination of church history and Fundamentalist apologetic, giving insight into the lives of those who have been faithful to the cause of Christ as well as those who have dipped the banner. I am confident that you will be blessed and challenged by it. It is available online through venues such as Amazon, Barnes & Noble, etc.

Dr. Bud Steadman serves as executive director of Baptist World Mission.

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# The Disappointment and Delight in Serving the Lord

Just recently began to meditate on the subjects of this article: disappointment and delight. These two aspects of serving the Lord will happen regardless of whether one is in full-time ministry or serves as a layman. Serving the Lord is not all tears, nor is it all smiles. It is not all gloom and clouds, nor is it all sunshine and blue skies. It is not all negative nor is it all positive. But both of these things will be present in serving the Lord.

The apostle Paul faced this in his own ministry. We read in 2 Timothy 4:10, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." This no doubt was a great sorrow to Paul. He had poured his life into Demas, and Demas ended up abandoning Paul because of his love for this world. In Matthew Henry's commentary, he states of Demas,

He quitted Paul and his interest, either for fear of suffering (because Paul was now a prisoner, and he was afraid of coming into trouble upon his account) or being called off from his ministry by secular affairs, in which he entangled himself; his first love to Christ and his gospel was forsaken and forgotten, and he fell in love with the world. Note, love to this present world is often the cause of apostasy from the truths and ways of Jesus Christ. He has gone off, has departed to Thessalonica, called thither, perhaps by trade, or by some other worldly business. (Vol. 6, p. 850)

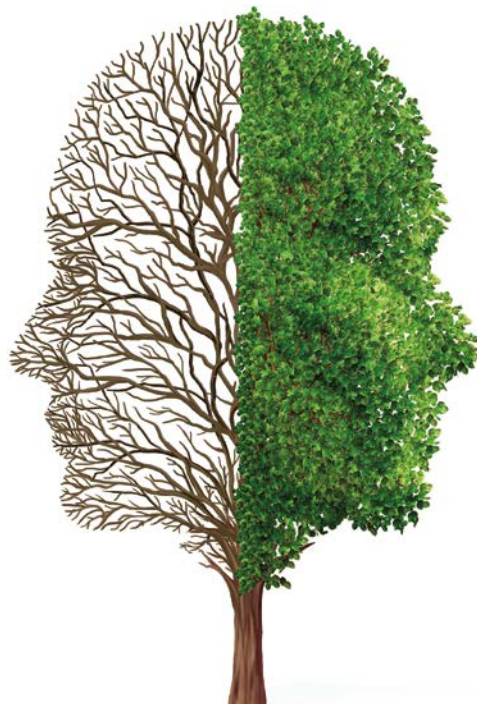
Many faithful servants of the Lord experience the heartbreak of Paul in their service to Christ. There are many people we know who had great potential in being used by the Lord; sadly, they have turned from their love for the Lord to the love of the world. They have rejected God's command in 1 John 2:15: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." Many have rejected the same admonition that the Lord gave to the children of Israel in 2 Kings 17:15: "And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the LORD had charged them, that they should not do like them." And what is the end of those who turn from God to grasp the sand of pleasure and the wings of finances? One day they will realize the truth of Proverbs 14:13: "Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness." Proverbs 23:5 declares, "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven." What a devastating end for many.

But now we turn our attention to the delight in serving the Lord. The psalmist voiced in Psalm 37:4, "Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." When a person

delights in the Lord, He will give him the desires of his heart. For example, the apostle Paul declared in Romans 10:1, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." The Lord answered Paul's prayer, and many Jews and Gentiles were truly born again. Paul knew only God could save the lost. That is why he said in 1 Corinthians 3:7, "So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." When God gives the increase, the results are lasting. In John 15:16 Jesus said, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain."

Recently I had revival meetings in the state of North Carolina. At the close of one service, a lady walked up to me and said she was saved under my ministry in 1971—fifty-one years ago! I was so thrilled as she shared her testimony with me. That is what I desire in the ministry, fruit that will remain. Our Lord Jesus said in John 12:26, "If any man serve me, him will my Father honour." Let us serve our Savior out of a heart of devotion and love. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 8:3, "But if any man love God, the same is known of him." May we never lose the delight of serving our heavenly Father.

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