# STRENGTHENING PERSONAL EVANGELISM THROUGH APOLOGETICS AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF ROGERSVILLE, TENNESSEE

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by

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**APPROVAL SHEET**

STRENGTHENING PERSONAL EVANGELISM THROUGH APOLOGETICS AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF ROGERSVILLE, TENNESSEE

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Dedicated to my wife, Amanda Meek,

and my children, Emma, Levi, and Carter

—reminders of the Lord’s kindness.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| AB | Anchor Bible |
| *AYBD* | *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* |
| BFM | The Baptist Faith and Message |
| BECNT | Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament |
| *CAPP* | *Christian Apologetics Past and Present: A Primary Source Reader* |
| FET | Foundations of Evangelical Theology |
| *FVA* | *Five Views on Apologetics* |
| LBS | Logos Bible Software |
| NAC | New American Commentary |
| NICNT | New International Commentary on the New Testament |
| *NTC* | *New Testament Commentary* |
| *PFCW* | *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* |

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# PREFACE

*As we go, we grow*. Concerning evangelism, this phrase rings true to my experience. Years ago, as a sophomore at the University of Tennessee, God began to burden me for the lost and challenge me to do what I had never done before—share the gospel. To this day, I still look back at those days as my most prolonged spiritual growth-spurt. Encountering the challenges of religious diversity, postmodern spirituality, and hard-nosed secularism prevalent on the college campus, I was driven to a greater dependence upon God and his Word. As it turns out, sharing Christ taught me more about Christ, pushing me to delve into the Scriptures with a greater fervor for the truth.

Could it be that one of the keys to seeing spiritual growth among the church today is for a renewed focus upon evangelism? I believe so. My hope is that God would use this project to encourage and equip the members of First Baptist Church to have regular gospel conversations, and I fully expect that as we go, we will continue to grow!

Trey Meek

Rogersville, Tennessee

May 2022

# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

Every Christian should regularly engage non-believers with the gospel—thus obeying the Great Commission (Matt 28:16–20). The Constitution of First Baptist Church of Rogersville, Tennessee (FBCR) recognizes the responsibility to witness to the lost and disciple believers for the "advancement of the kingdom of Jesus Christ."[1] This convictional statement, assigning the evangelistic task to the church body as a whole, implies that a key component of discipling believers at FBCR must be to help average believers to personally share the gospel. Unfortunately, everyday Christians are often unprepared to engage the individuals around them, especially in an increasingly secular culture. The need is great for the church to raise up believers who are well-equipped with the conceptual tools for sharing the gospel in a world of abundant challenges. An evangelistic method for applying apologetics may be one such tool that—practiced properly—can support the Great Commission. Equipped with a distinctly evangelistic approach to apologetics, the believer may do more than merely win arguments, but may be used of God as a gospel witness—with the desire that the lost would be won to Christ.

## Context

The context of FBCR calls for a renewed emphasis upon personal evangelism. Though the church is very much alive and active, attendance has decreased in recent years even while the area population has tended to hold steady.[2] This is concerning to a

[1] Constitution of First Baptist Church, 2003, papers of FBCR.

[2] Weekly Bulletins of First Baptist Church, 1955–2021, papers of FBCR History Ministry (hereafter referred to as Bulletins, FBCR); Areavibes, "Rogersville, TN Demographics," accessed December 5, 2019, https://www.areavibes.com/rogersville-tn/demographics/.

church that, from its inception, has demonstrated a long-standing commitment to spread the gospel. The church formed in the late nineteenth century with the encouragement of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, as believers united together to "blow their horns and break their pitchers and rush upon Rogersville and take it for Jesus."[3] Since then, the church has been a "mother of churches," playing a formative role in the emergence of at least ten other churches in the Rogersville area.[4] Though the church has experienced numerical decline in recent years, I can attest that there are many committed members who share in the godly ambition of those who have paved the way—a concern for the lost is still apparent at FBCR. A brief description of the Rogersville area followed by a further consideration of the challenges and opportunities faced by FBCR will highlight the impact that apologetics may have in a renewed evangelistic concentration.

The FBCR campus is situated in the heart of Rogersville, Tennessee, a rural city of around 4,500 residents.[5] While a few larger cities are located within an hour's drive, Rogersville is attractive to individuals and families who desire to live away from the congestion of more densely populated areas. The people take great pride in their community, including their schools. Rogersville City School, located within walking distance from FBCR, has been recognized by the Tennessee Board of Education in recent years as an "exemplary district and a reward school" for its distinctive high academic achievements.[6] Even so, beyond a high school education, most students face a significant commute to attend college, leading many to choose to live away from home.

Demographically, Rogersville is not characterized by much cultural and ethnic

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[3] Glenn Alfred Toomey, *Centennial History of the Holston Valley Baptist Association: 1884–1983* (Rogersville, TN: Glenn A. Toomey, 1983), 259.

[4] Toomey, *Centennial History*, 260.

[5] Areavibes, "Rogersville, TN Demographics."

[6] Jeff Bobo, "Rogersville City School Earns Reward School, Exemplary District," *TimesNews*, August 16, 2019, https://www.timesnews.net/Education/2019/08/16/Rogersville-City-School-earns-both-Reward-School-and-Exemplary-District.html.

diversity. Almost ninety-five percent of the population is white, less than three percent African American, and there are few Hispanics, Latinos, or Asian residents.[7] This demographic uniformity with regards to culture and ethnicity, along with its geographic detachment from larger metropolitan areas, certainly limits the exposure that some residents have with other belief systems and worldviews. On the surface, these characteristics of FBCR's ministry context may seem to diminish the relevance and potential benefit of apologetics in evangelism; this may explain why a personal interview with long-time staff member, Louise Price, revealed no recollection of any training in apologetics or worldview offered at FBCR in the past fifteen years.[8] However, a deeper look at the composition of FBCR and generational characteristics of modern culture may lead to a different assessment.

FBCR is notably multi-generational—involving individuals from one to one-hundred years of age—and has a fair representation of all age-groups. The church is not only made up of many families and individuals, but is truly a family of God's people—a characteristic that is beautiful even as it presents many challenges. One challenge is that there is generational disparity in the level of exposure to diverse worldviews and belief systems. While the rural setting and the relative cultural and ethnic uniformity seems to limit this exposure, age groups that use the internet regularly are much more likely to be aware of and challenged by other viewpoints. Pew Research Center indicates that, in the United States generally, nearly one-hundred percent of individuals between the ages of eighteen to twenty-nine regularly go online, compared to seventy-five percent of those over the age of sixty-five.[9] While this disparity may not seem practically significant, it is

[7] Areavibes, "Rogersville, TN Demographics."

[8] Louise Price, Administrative Assistant at FBCR, interview by author, Rogersville, TN, December 5, 2019.

[9] *Pew Research Center*, "Internet/Broadband Factsheet," last modified April 7, 2021, https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/internet-broadband/.

also noteworthy that rural adults also tend to use the internet less often than non-rural adults.[10] This implies that, in terms of ideological challenges to the Christian faith, rural areas may experience greater generational disparity; while more potent forms of secularism may not reach older Rogersville residents as strongly, challenging ideologies readily overcome Rogersville's geographic detachment, increasingly exposing the younger generations who tend to utilize the internet more frequently.

An additional reality is that families are increasingly exposed to diverse worldviews and challenges to Christianity as students enter their college years. FBCR has recognized approximately twenty college graduates in the last five years.[11] This means that the secularizing impact of the surrounding colleges and universities upon a rural town like Rogersville may be less obvious due to geographic distance, but it is nevertheless real. When this college factor is considered alongside the generational differences addressed above, one implication is that younger rural generations may have greater exposure to ideas that challenge Christianity than older rural generations. In FBCR's ministry context, these realities can create a significant challenge to sharing the gospel across generational lines. Training in apologetics, however, may help bridge this generational gap. For some, an exposure to apologetics may help them to evangelize a child or grandchild.

## Rationale

With this context in mind, this ministry project sought to strengthen the practice of personal evangelism at FBCR through apologetics. Mindful of the evangelistic need, the church must equip everyday believers of all ages to engage people who are held captive by secular ideologies; ordinary Christians—common clay vessels of God's

[10] Andrew Perrin, "Digital Gap between Rural and Non-rural America Persists," *Pew Research Center*, May 31, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/31/digital-gap-between-rural-and-nonrural-america-persists/.

[11] Bulletins, 2016–2021, FBCR.

choosing—are to proclaim his praises and share his gospel (1 Pet 3:15; 2 Cor 4:7). Through the development and implementation of an evangelistic apologetics curriculum, this project sought to increase the frequency and effectiveness of conversational evangelism.

The apologetics curriculum was envisioned to focus intentionally on evangelism. In Acts 17, the Apostle Paul employs apologetics to highlight the idolatrous worship of the Athenians and confirm gospel truths. His appeal to reason and general revelation points the Athenians toward the one true God, while his appeal to Jesus's resurrection emphasizes the present opportunity to repent in light of who Christ is. Paul was disinterested in winning intellectual arguments or in merely persuading the minds of unbelievers; rather, his use of apologetics supported his greater commitment to share the gospel—calling the Athenians to a faith response (Acts 17:22–34). Chapter 2 examines Paul's example as a model for evangelistic apologetics.

Theologically, an unbeliever's ultimate issue is not ignorance of theological truth; rather, the unbeliever suppresses the truth due to a deep-seated disdain for God—an issue of the unregenerate heart (Rom 1:18). Referencing Romans 1:18, Louis Berkhof emphasizes that "the natural man does not love the truth," and therefore, attempts at persuasion alone are insufficient.[12] For this reason, FBCR must equip believers with an evangelistic approach to apologetics that is comprised of more than merely persuasive arguments; otherwise, believers may argue a point, while failing to evangelize a person. Chapter 3 lays the theological groundwork to develop a practical framework for this distinctively evangelistic application of apologetics. Following Paul's example, an evangelistic use of apologetics must lovingly confront sin—including the sin of intellectual rebellion—and call for repentance and faith in the gospel. This conviction guided the development and implementation of this project's curriculum.

[12] Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938), 473, LBS.

To strengthen the practice of personal evangelism, the apologetics curriculum was aimed to equip believers for evangelism that is intentionally conversational in nature; gospel *conversation* is preferred to gospel *presentation*. Personal evangelism is most effective in a relational and dialogical context where questions and personal stories are welcomed. This type of interaction helps the Christian to humbly empathize with the unbeliever, encouraging a caring approach as objections are addressed. The three circles tool (3CT), a popular conversational guide for evangelism, was used as a paradigm for this project to keep the focus upon sharing the gospel.[13] This conversational guide centers evangelistic conversation around three key biblical themes—God's design, brokenness, and the gospel.[14] It was determined that course participants were to be trained with evangelistic apologetic arguments and strategies that are anchored in these gospel themes. In this way, believers in FBCR's ministry context were to be equipped for loving gospel conversations rather than a formulaic gospel presentation.

The apologetic curriculum was envisioned to provide participants with opportunities for instruction, prayer, reflection, and role-play evangelistic application. The intention was that believers would be more confident and equipped to evangelize others in Rogersville, Tennessee, leading to increased frequency and clarity in gospel conversations.

## Purpose

The purpose of this project was to strengthen personal evangelism through apologetics at First Baptist Church of Rogersville, Tennessee.

## Goals

This project was guided by four goals. Each of these goals focused upon

[13] Jimmy Scroggins, Steve Wright, and Leslee Bennett, *Turning Everyday Conversations into Gospel Conversations* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 73–88.

[14] Scroggins, Wright, and Bennett, *Everyday Conversations*, 73-88.

utilizing apologetics for the purpose of conversational evangelism.

1. The first goal was to assess FBCR members' knowledge of apologetic arguments.
2. The second goal was to develop a ten-session curriculum introducing apologetics and demonstrating its role in evangelism.
3. The third goal was to implement the curriculum and equip course participants to apply apologetics in evangelism.
4. The fourth goal was to increase the number of gospel conversations that all course participants collectively engage in a fourteen-day period by one-hundred percent.

Each goal was to be measured utilizing the research methodology delineated below under research methodology.

## Research Methodology[15]

The evaluation of four goals according to the research methodology specified below determined the success level of the project.

The first goal was to assess FBCR members' knowledge of apologetic arguments and orthodox Christian doctrine. Apologetic and doctrinal knowledge dealing with atheism, the character of God, human dignity, morality, and the truth of the gospel would be assessed. This goal was to be measured by administering a pre-project survey to twenty-five members.[16] It was determined that this goal would be successfully met when a minimum of twenty-five members completed a pre-project survey and they were analyzed, yielding a clearer picture of the knowledge level of apologetic arguments among the general FBCR membership.

The second goal was to develop a ten-session curriculum introducing apologetics and demonstrating its role in evangelism. The curriculum would be developed as a supplement to the conversational 3CT. This goal was to be measured by

[15] All of the research instruments used in this project will be performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

[16] See appendix 1.

an expert panel consisting of the Holston Valley Baptist Association director, two other local Pastors, and a FBCR deacon, each utilizing a curriculum evaluation rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, scope, teaching methodology, and applicability of the curriculum.[17] It was determined that this goal would be considered successfully met when a minimum of ninety percent of the evaluation criterion had met or exceeded the sufficient level. If the ninety percent benchmark had not been initially met, the curriculum was to be revised until it met the standard.

The third goal was to implement the curriculum and equip course participants to apply apologetics in evangelism. This goal involved two aspects: (1) the content aspect aimed to provide a deeper knowledge and a humble confidence regarding a core set of apologetic and doctrinal issues and (2) the competency aspect aimed to equip course participants to apply those arguments for the specific purpose of evangelism.

The content aspect of goal 3 was to be measured by administering an identical pre and post-course survey, demonstrating the change in knowledge and confidence level relating to apologetic issues.[18] To encourage honest responses, the surveys were to remain anonymous; respondents were to follow the formula specified on the survey to generate a personal identifying number (PIN). Any participants who did not complete the pre-project survey at the earlier knowledge assessment phase, corresponding to goal 1, were to have the pre-course survey administered to them prior to the beginning of the course. Participants who attended a minimum of seventy-five percent of course sessions were to complete the post- course survey within two weeks after the course is finished. It was determined that the content aspect of this goal would be considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre and post-survey scores.

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[17] See appendix 2.

[18] See appendix 1.

The competency aspect of goal 3 was to be measured by observing participants applying apologetic arguments in role-play evangelism. The course instructor was to measure the skill of each participant using a participant evaluation rubric.[19] It was determined that the competency aspect of this goal would be successfully met when seventy-five percent of participants had met or exceeded the sufficient or above level in all skill areas.

The fourth goal was to increase the number of gospel conversations that all course participants collectively engaged in during a fourteen-day period by one-hundred percent. This goal was to be measured by administering an identical pre and post-course questionnaire.[20] The pre-course questionnaire was to be administered in the course introduction time at the first session prior to delivering course content. Participants who had attended a minimum of seventy-five percent of course sessions were to be asked to complete the post-course questionnaire within fourteen days after the final course session. The aggregate number of gospel conversations initiated by all participants during the preceding fourteen days prior to the first session would then be utilized as the base number to which the increase was to be compared. To encourage honest responses, the surveys were to remain anonymous; respondents were to follow the formula specified on the survey to generate a PIN. It was determined that this goal would be considered successfully met if the collective number of weekly gospel conversations increased by a minimum of one-hundred percent.

## Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms will be used in the ministry project:

*Gospel conversation.* For this project, a gospel conversation includes any evangelistically significant interaction where at least part of the gospel is presented or

[19] See appendix 3.

[20] See appendix 4.

defended conversationally.

*Noetic effects of sin.* In line with John Frame's description in *FVA,* this project will consider the noetic effects of sin as the universal distortion of the fallen human mind, characterized by a rebellious thought life in "defiance of God."[21]

*Common grace*. This project will adopt the definition from the *Lexham Glossary of Theology*, which defines common grace as "the love and favor God shows toward all his creation, regardless of whether they acknowledge him or have faith in Christ.[22] Pertinent to this project, common grace would include the gift of human reason, God's general revelation, and his care for creation.

Two limitations applied to this project. First, the accuracy of the pre and post-series surveys were dependent upon the honesty of the participants about their knowledge of apologetics and consistency in the discipline of evangelism. To mitigate this limitation, the respondents were assured that their answers would remain anonymous. Second, the effectiveness of the training was limited by the constancy of attendance. To mitigate this limitation, those who express interest in the course were informally asked what days and meeting times would work best for them; a day and time was chosen that enabled greater levels of involvement and served the aims of the project.

## Conclusion

An apologetics course was planned in order to strengthen the practice of personal evangelism of FBCR. The following chapters show, both biblically and theologically, that the proper apologetic approach can support the evangelistic task of the church. To inform such an apologetic approach, chapter 2 examines in detail the apostle Paul's application of apologetics in Athens. Chapter 3 then addresses the practical

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[21] John M. Frame, "Presuppositional Apologetics," in *FVA*, ed. Steven. B. Cowan, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 210, LBS.

[22] Douglas Mangum, *The Lexham Glossary of Theology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), s. v. "Common Grace," LBS.

evangelistic implications of a theologically-informed apologetic. The remaining chapters detail the projects implementation and evaluation.

CHAPTER 2

# PAUL'S AREOPAGUS ADDRESS AS A MODEL FOR EVANGELISTIC APOLOGETICS

## Introduction

Acts 17:22–34 records the apostle Paul's famous speech in Athens, an intellectual center that had been home to many notable philosophers in antiquity. In this context, Paul offered what has long been recognized as a model defense of the Christian faith.[1] The apostle to the gentiles, however, aimed for more than an intellectual defense of Christianity; rather, he aimed to convert his pagan audience to Jesus Christ, thereby leaving a blueprint for evangelistic apologetics. An exegesis of Acts 17:22–34 will demonstrate this chapter's thesis—that an evangelistic application of apologetics connects on common ground, confronts sin, calls for a faith response, and confirms gospel truths.

## An Evangelistic Application of Apologetics Connects on Common Ground

In both content and structure, Paul makes great efforts in his speech to connect with the Athenians on common ground. Craig Keener notes that the majority of the speech "selects motifs intelligible and potentially praiseworthy in a Greek intellectual context."[2] Indeed, soteriological concepts such as repentance and the work of Jesus Christ

[1] John Chrysostom, *The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Acts of the Apostles* 38, trans. J. Walker, J. Sheppard, H. Browne, and George B. Stevens, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff, Series 1, vol. 11, *The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1889), 232–34, LBS.

[2] Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012–2015), 3:2640, LBS.

are absent until the final two verses of Luke's ten-verse report. Moreover, it is noteworthy that Paul's only explicit quotation comes from Greek poets known to his Athenian audience.[3] Even the structure of Paul's speech is presented along the lines of Greco-Roman rhetoric in ways that may resemble Socrates' defense before the Areopagus centuries earlier.[4]

Central to the thesis of this chapter is that Paul intentionally and successfully appeals to common ground in Athens for the purpose of converting the pagan to Christ. After establishing the evangelistic relevance of Paul's approach, an exegesis of Acts 17:22–29a will support the thesis by demonstrating that the apostle connects to the Athenians as worshippers, who were created by God and benefit from his common grace.

**The Relevance of "Common Ground"**

In order for Paul's approach in Acts 17:22–29 to serve as a model for an evangelistic application of apologetics, his use of common ground must be driven by evangelistic intent. In light of Paul's circumstances before the Areopagus, however, one might suggest that the apostle had other dominant motives in his speech, thereby calling its relevance as a model for evangelism into question. As Bruce Winter notes, the Areopagus council held authority on religious matters, even granting "approved" gods into the Athenian Pantheon.[5] While the apostle Paul had no interest in Jesus joining the ranks of the idols, Keener notes that the council also carried responsibility to accredit those who could publicly teach in the marketplace.[6] This "accreditation," it could be

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[3] F. F. Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 239.

[4] Hans Dieter Betz, "Socrates," in *AYBD*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:99, LBS; Ruth Majercik, "Rhetoric and Oratory in the Greco-Roman World," in Freedman, *AYBD*, 5:711.

[5] Bruce W. Winter, "Introducing the Athenians to God: Paul's Failed Apologetic in Acts 17?," *Themelios* 31, no. 1 (October 2005): 41, http://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-documents/journal-issues/31.1_Winter.pdf.

[6] Keener, *Acts*, 3:2580.

argued, would be desirable to further Paul's ministry aims, providing him the authorization to spread his message freely. If this was Paul's intent, even if he had an evangelistic goal for the city as a whole, the accommodating "common ground" tone of his speech in particular would be driven by a political objective—to gain a greater ministry platform as an Athenian public speaker.

Another possible non-evangelistic motive to consider behind the accommodating tone of Paul's speech is that of self-preservation. Joshua Jipp, in his article entitled "Paul's Areopagus Speech of Acts 17:16–34 as Both Critique and Propaganda," emphasizes the expectation and escalation of conflict as Paul ministered in Athens.[7] Indeed, not only was Paul previously "provoked" by the idolatry of the city, but his teaching in the marketplace had drawn the attention of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers who then "took him and brought him to the Areopagus" (Acts 17:16, 18–19).[8] Jipp observes that ἐπιλαμβάνομαι, translated as "took," is often used in Acts to refer to "the forceful seizure of the apostles" and is therefore justifiably translated "arrested."[9] Moreover, the expectation of conflict is heightened when one considers the parallels between the apostle Paul and Socrates, whom, as Josephus records, had been previously sentenced to death in Athens.[10] Centuries earlier Socrates had faced trial before the Areopagus court for proclaiming "new divinities"; highlighting the parallels with Socrates, Luke informs us that Paul now faces the same governing body with a similar accusation—proclaiming "foreign divinities" (Acts 17:18).[11] With these

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[7] Joshua W. Jipp, "Paul's Areopagus Speech of Acts 17:16–34 as Both Critique and Propaganda," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 131, no. 3 (2012): 573, http://www.jstor.com/stable/23488255.

[8] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the HCSB.

[9] Jipp, "Paul's Areopagus Speech," 573–77.

[10] Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.263, in *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 810, LBS.

[11] Robert McQueen Grant, *Gods and the One God*, Library of Early Christianity 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 50.

considerations in mind, it might be argued that Paul's vulnerable circumstances could account for his accommodating tone before the court, especially since the Areopagus of Paul's day still carried considerable authority pertaining to such issues as "homicide, wounding of others, arson, and religious matters."[12] These possible alternative motives, being self-preservatory or political in nature, would call into question the relevance of Paul's use of "common ground" as a model for evangelistic engagement.

In addition to these concerns, some scholars would consider the Areopagus address as irrelevant as a model for evangelism because the accommodating nature of the discourse is perceived as being contradictory to Paul's theology elsewhere in the New Testament. In other words, the apostle himself would reject the speech as a model for evangelism. For example, early twentieth-century form critic, Martin Dibelius, argued that the speech's Hellenistic character is "completely foreign to the new testament" and that its optimistic view of mankind's natural knowledge of God contradicts Paul's teachings in Romans 1. For Dibelius, this supposed contradiction signified that the speech as represented in Acts is non-pauline.[13] Others propose that Paul did give the speech but afterward regarded it as a failure, radically altering his approach when he proceeded to the city of Corinth. Citing 1 Corinthians 2:2 in *The Expositor's Bible*, nineteenth-century Scottish scholar Marcus Dods states:

> Paul, as he left Athens, where he had met with so little success . . . . [Paul] had tried to meet the Athenians on their own ground, showing his familiarity with their writers; but he seems to think that at Corinth another method may be more successful, and, as he tells them, "I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified."[14]

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[12] Lee Martin McDonald, *Acts*, in vol. 2 of *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary*, ed. Craig A. Evans (Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 2004), 119, LBS.

[13] Martin Dibelius, *The Book of Acts: Form, Style, and Theology*, ed. K. C. Hanson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 115–16, LBS.

[14] Marcus Dods, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, in *The Expositor's Bible*, vol. 5, *Luke to Galatians*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 631.

Similarly, William Barclay portrays the sentiment of Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 2:2 as "Never Again! From henceforth I will tell the story of Jesus in all its utter simplicity."[15] In contrast to Dibelius, these scholars attribute the discourse to Paul; however, like Dibelius, they drive a wedge between the accommodating approach of the Areopagus discourse and Paul's theology elsewhere, effectively removing his apostolic endorsement of the speech. Similar to the suggestion that Paul was carried by non-evangelistic motives, these theological appraisals of the speech, if accurate, would preclude Acts 17:22–29a from being considered a model for evangelistic apologetics.

Notwithstanding these viewpoints, the evidence supports the proposition that Paul's common ground approach contributes to a legitimate model for evangelistic apologetics. It is incorrect to assume that the Areopagus speech contradicts Paul's theological commitments elsewhere. Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 should not be interpreted as a rejection of evangelistic persuasion and cultural accommodation, for Luke records that, after leaving Athens, Paul continued to "reason" and "persuade" both Jews and Greeks in Corinth (Acts 18:4, 13). Indeed, Paul Copan notes that in the same letter that the apostle speaks of his exclusive commitment to "know nothing among" the Corinthians "except Jesus Christ and him crucified," he also cites the Greek dramatist Menander, resembling the manner in which the apostle previously appealed to pagan thought in Athens (1 Cor 2:2; 15:33).[16] Consequently, Paul's point of emphasis in 1 Corinthians 2:2 is best understood in light of the Corinthians' need to refocus upon Christ. To Corinth, he was writing to professing *believers* who had become distracted from Christ by boasting in their own wisdom (1 Cor 1:24). In contrast, at Athens Paul speaks to *unbelievers*, appealing to philosophical concepts in order to introduce them to

[15] William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, *The Daily Study Bible*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 26.

[16] Paul Copan, *The Gospel in the Marketplace of Ideas: Paul's Mars Hill Experience for Our Pluralistic World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 23.

Christ. Though the contexts are very different, Paul directed both audiences to the gospel—the power of his proclamation.

By the same token, the difference in Paul's audiences in Romans 1 and Acts 17:22–34 also accounts for the unique points of emphasis with regard to natural law. Romans is a theological treatise written to believers, while Paul's Athens discourse is an evangelistic encounter, appealing to his hearers' ignorance concerning an "unknown god" to point them to the one true God. In contrast to the viewpoint of Dibelius, F. F. Bruce asserts:

> If the author of Romans 1–3 had been invited to address an Athenian audience on the knowledge of God, it is difficult to see how the general purport of his words could have been much different from what Luke here reports Paul as saying. The tone of the *Areopagitica* is different from that of Romans 1–3, but Paul knew the wisdom of adapting his tone and general approach to the particular audience or readership being addressed at the time.[17]

While Dibelius views the Areopagus discourse as incompatibly optimistic concerning natural law, Paul's appeal to the Stoic notion of God's nearness actually emphasizes his hearers' accountability and need for repentance before the Creator; as Keener notes, this is analogous to Romans 1 where people are said to have natural knowledge of God that renders them "without excuse" before the Creator to which they are accountable.[18] There is nothing theologically amiss in Paul's appeal to common ground in Athens that would diminish its contributive value toward a model for evangelistic apologetics.

Furthermore, the suggestion that Paul's motives were non-evangelistic is doubtful. It is very unlikely that he sought "accreditation" as a teacher in Athens, as he was only there in Athens to wait on Timothy and Silas (Acts 17:15–16). He apparently had no plans to stay in Athens for, even after some of the Athenian court expressed the desire to hear more about Paul's message, Luke indicates that he moved on to Corinth

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[17] F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 334, LBS.

[18] Keener, *Acts*, 3:2624.

(Acts 17:32; 18:1). Just as political aspirations cannot account for the tone of the speech, neither can fear or an instinct for self-preservation. One the one hand, the parallels with the trial of Socrates do portray Paul's situation before the Areopagus as serious, even if not an official trial.[19] On the other hand, the similarities with his earlier speech at Lystra indicate that Paul sometimes adopted a similar accommodating "common ground" approach while in very different circumstances; instead of a threatening situation, his hearers in Lystra attempted to worship him, as the people began to call Paul "Hermes" and Barnabas "Zeus" (Acts 14:15–17). In light of the unconvincing evidence for alternative motives, the best explanation for Paul's appeal to common ground before the Areopagus counsel is his desire to evangelize his pagan audience—fitting with the overall missional theme of the book of Acts.

**Points of "Common Ground" Connection**

An exegesis of Acts 17:22–29a reveals that Paul connects to the Athenians as worshippers who were created by God and benefit from his common grace.

**The Athenians as worshippers.** First, Paul connects with his listeners as worshippers, addressing them as "very religious" (Acts 17:22). The word δεισιδαίμων could be translated in either a positive sense as "religious" or a negative sense as "superstitious," with scholars being divided on Paul's intended meaning in 17:22. On the one hand, Jipp, observing that Paul was previously "provoked" by the many idols in Athens, interprets it negatively as a criticism of polytheism. Labeling the Athenians as "superstitious" could have established a point of agreement with the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, who also often criticized pagan religion.[20] Simon Kistemaker, however, interprets the word in line with common Greco-Roman rhetorical practice, with the

[19] Keener, *Acts*, 3:2602.

[20] Jipp, "Paul's Areopagus Speech," 577.

beginning of the speech striking a positive note, as the Athenians are praised for their "ostentatious religiosity."[21] Keener notes that there are two audiences for Luke's account of the speech: Paul's hearers and Luke's readers; he proposes that Paul's hearers would likely interpret δεισιδαίμων in a positive sense, while Luke's readers would interpret it in a negative sense.[22] While Luke may have been intentionally ambiguous, the important fact to observe is that the Athenians' propensity to worship provided a connecting point for the apostle Paul. Generally speaking, Paul knew that he did not have to persuade his hearers to worship—the "city was full of idols" (Acts 17:16).

Paul particularly connects to his hearers as worshippers by appealing to an altar "to an unknown God" (Acts 17:23). Paul uses this altar to launch further into his proclamation saying, "What you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you" (Acts 17:23). Contrary to Dibelius, the phrase "what you worship" does not indicate that the true God was being legitimately worshipped in spite of the Athenians not knowing the deity's name; rather, as Kistemaker observes, the relative pronoun ὅ is neuter and appropriately translated "what" instead of "who," thereby expressing the "impersonal nature of pagan religion."[23] Summarizing the intended meaning of this verse, C. K. Barrett states, "Paul declares: You are religious, but your religion is uninstructed."[24] Though the Athenians are worshippers, they worship idols in ignorance. Paul does not connect to his hearers by approving or legitimizing any worship that they offer to the gods.

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[21] Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, *NTC* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2007), 630.

[22] Keener, *Acts*, 3:2626–29.

[23] Dibelius, *The Book of Acts*, 116–17; Kistemaker, *Acts of the Apostles*, 632.

[24] C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2004), 2:839, LBS.

Consequently, Paul connects to the Athenians as worshipers in two ways. He first recognized their propensity for worship as evidenced from their intense religiosity. Secondly, the presence of an altar to an unknown god indicated that the Athenians intuitively knew that a deity existed beyond their idolatrous worship. In other words, if their "known" gods provided sufficient metaphysical significance, then why would the existence of an "unknown god" be assumed? This is similar to when someone experiences an existential "dissatisfaction" in life and feels as though there must be "something more." Even modern idols, being insufficient for life and unworthy of worship, leave mankind reaching for the unknown. Since the Athenians constructed an altar specifically to deities that were "unknown," Paul uses their admitted ignorance as a launching point for his proclamation. Ironically, Athenian ignorance testifies to something they *know*—at some level, they know that their known "gods" are insufficient.

**The Athenians as created by God.** Second, Paul connects with his listeners as those who are likewise created by the one true God. Appealing to creation, Paul points them to "The God who made the world and everything in it—He is Lord of heaven and earth" (Acts 17:24). Keener observes that many Greeks, particularly Stoics, would have identified this supreme Creator god with Zeus; Paul, however, is proclaiming the God of which they are "ignorant," ruling Zeus out as the object of Paul's message.[25] It is also significant that Paul portrays God as Creator who is distinct from creation, ruling out the pantheistic tendencies of many Stoic thinkers.[26]

Significantly, Paul's appeal to creation moves from general to specific. The apostle first asserts that God is the creator of everything, a concept that would have connected with some Greeks.[27] He then moves to the particular, focusing on God's

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[25] Keener, *Acts*, 3:2636.

[26] Keener, *Acts*, 3:2638.

[27] Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 2:840.

creation of humanity. Notably, the Athenians prided themselves with their own creation myth, believing themselves to be "autochthonous—sprung from the soil of their native Attica."[28] In contrast, Paul presents humanity as having one common ancestor in Adam, stating, "From one man He has made every nationality to live over the whole earth" (Acts 17:26).[29] Developing his argument even further, Paul moves to the specific, asserting that mankind is created with a unique relationship with God. He connects to his hearers by quoting a familiar poetic line—"For we are also his offspring" (Acts 17:28). Contrary to the Church of Jesus Christ and the Latter Day Saints, Paul is not here indicating any biological connection with God as his "offspring."[30] Neither does Paul agree with the full significance that the poem's author, Greek poet Aratus, assigned to the words; originally, the phrase referred to Zeus and appealed to pantheistic concepts such as the divine living within humanity.[31] However, since Paul has already established that the true God is distinct from creation and "unknown" to his hearers, this rules out the possibility that Paul intends to teach pantheism or to equate Zeus with the deity he proclaims. Rather, Paul utilizes these words of a pagan poet to illustrate that all humanity has an inborn awareness of a distinctive link to God. Darrell Bock's comment is particularly helpful:

> Paul contextualizes the citation and presents it in a fresh light . . . . He takes a Greek idea of the "spark of the divine being" in us as tied to Zeus and speaks of being made as God's children by the Creator, alluding to our being made in God's image.[32]

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[28] Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 337.

[29] Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 2:842.

[30] Darrell L. Bock, *Apologetics Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, in vol. 1 of *The Holman Apologetics Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Jeremy Royal Howard (Nashville: B & H, 2013), 725.

[31] Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 2:848; Keener, *Acts*, 3:2659–60.

[32] Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 568.

Indeed, Bock's perspective finds support in the strong Jewish connections between the concepts of "sonship" and mankind's creation in the "image and likeness" of God.[33] In contrast to the pantheistic idea of a "divine spark" common in Greek thought, Paul appeals to the biblical concept that theologians since John Calvin have called the *sensus divinitatis*—the innate sense of divinity that ultimately prevents people "from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance."[34] As God's image-bearing "offspring," even pagans are created with an innate divine awareness. Though accused of "preaching foreign deities," Paul actually proclaims the one that created them; Indeed, the true God is not "foreign" at all, "for we are also his offspring" (Acts 17:28).

**The Athenians as recipients of Common Grace.** Third, Paul connects to his hearers as recipients of God's common grace. To appreciate the appeal to common grace in the Areopagus speech, truths about both God and mankind need to be recognized respectively. Concerning God, common grace is seen in that He reveals himself through the witness of creation and his providential care over what he has made. Concerning mankind, common grace is evident in that God equips humanity with knowledge and rational capacity to recognize God's general revelation.

Concerning God's general revelation, Paul appeals to creation to point his pagan audience toward the supreme Creator, as mentioned above; however, he goes further to emphasize God's providential preservation and governance over his creation. For Paul, God providentially sustains and preserves the life of all his creatures as "He Himself gives everyone life and breath and all things" (Acts 17:25). The present

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[33] Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 191–202.

[34] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1.3.1, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill, The Library of Christian Classics 20–21 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 43, LBS. Hereafter, all citations will be given as "Calvin, *Institutes* 1 (LCC, 43)."

participle "διδοὺς," indicates that God "continues to give" in his care for creation.[35] Likewise, Paul appeals to the words of Epimenides the Cretan, stating "For in Him we live and move and exist" (Acts 17:28).[36]

Moreover, God providentially governs his creation as He has "determined their [mankind's] appointed times and the boundaries of where they live" (Acts 17:26). Interpretations vary on what is meant by the word καιρός or "times." On the one hand, Paul's use of καιρός in his Acts 14 speech at Lystra leads Bruce to interpret the term here as referring to God's care over creation in providing yearly seasons.[37] On the other hand, Luke, as the editor of the Areopagus speech, also uses καιρός to refer to broad time periods in human history over which God providentially guides the nations (Acts 1:7). Since Paul seems to refer to national "boundaries" and speaks of God's providential governance of human nations as opposed to creation in general, Keener favors the second interpretation. [38] While God is certainly sovereign over the yearly seasons, Paul emphasizes his providential reign over the epochs or periods of national dominance in world history.

Significantly, Paul recognizes a revelatory purpose of creation and providence when he states, "He did this so they might seek God, and perhaps they might reach out and find Him" (Acts 17:27). What specific action of God might encourage seeking on the part of man? Keener helpfully observes:

> The infinitive ζητεῖν, which can be translated "to seek"—that is, "that they should seek"—may depend on the clause about humans' boundaries being established, but it more likely depends on the verb "made": God made humanity to dwell in the earth (17:26) and to seek him (17:27).[39]

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[35] Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 2:841.

[36] Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 338–39.

[37] Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 338.

[38] Keener, *Acts*, 3:2648.

[39] Keener, *Acts*, 3:2651.

God's revelatory witness of creation and his ongoing providential involvement in creation are closely intertwined in Paul's Areopagus discourse; mankind was made to "seek" the one who made and rules over all creation. Though the Epicurean hearers often denied that a god was involved in human affairs, Paul emphasizes that all people see God's witness through both creation and providence.[40] Notably, however, there is a hint that the witness of God's general revelation is not sufficient; while the pagan should "seek" God, the optative mood of the verbs ψηλαφήσειαν and εὕροιεν indicate that the likelihood of "reaching out" and "finding" God, "while perhaps not utterly futile, is in doubt."[41] Therefore, without expressing optimism concerning the pagan's salvation through general revelation, Paul does recognize and appeal to common ground—the heavens and the earth testify to its Creator and caretaker.

God's common grace is also evident in the gift of human rationality—a common ground with the pagan that Paul assumes throughout his speech. While Catholic scholar Joseph Fitzmyer downplays Paul's rational appeal, classifying the Areopagus discourse as a "proclamation, not a reasoned philosophical argument," the context and the content of the speech suggest otherwise.[42] Of course Paul sought to proclaim an evangelistic message; nonetheless, as Bruce notes, Athens was the world's "leading place" philosophically, "being the native city of Socrates and Plato and the adopted home of Aristotle, Epicurus, and Zeno."[43] Accordingly, Paul proclaimed this message in a philosophically appealing manner, fitting with Luke's portrayal of Paul as a "new

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[40] F. W. Walbank, *The Hellenistic World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 180.

[41] Mikeal Carl Parsons, *Acts*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 247.

[42] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB, vol. 31 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 607.

[43] Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, 237.

Socrates."[44] Indeed, Kenneth Boa and Robert Bowman state, "Luke sees Paul's speech here as a Christian counterpart to the Socratic apology. . . . Paul set his message in a rational context in which it would make sense to his philosophically minded audience."[45] Reasoned argumentation fits his intellectual context.

According to Walbank, Stoics and Epicureans "were firmly convinced that by reason man could detect and choose the true path to follow."[46] Though a Christian perspective is less optimistic, Paul does legitimize human reason to a point by affirming some of the beliefs of his pagan audience. As mentioned above, Paul alludes to and even quotes sources familiar to his listeners, thereby affirming their recognition of some truth even while confronting their false beliefs. In doing so, Paul affirms the rational belief that we are, in some sense, God's "offspring," even while his address as a whole confronts the underlying pantheistic assumptions of Aratus (Acts 17:28). Additionally, in Paul's appeals to creation and providence, he affirms the Stoic belief in a first cause or "Logos" that designed and is actively involved in the world.[47] Even with Epicureans, who often denied both divine design and providence, Paul's discourse still affirms their rationally held belief that a deity would not live in man-made shrines or temples (Acts 17:24).[48]

Yet the Areopagus discourse does not merely affirm some the audience's already held beliefs; rather Paul presents reasoned argumentation that ran contrary to much of the Athenian religious culture. Paul's rational argumentation against idolatry is especially noteworthy. He rationally insists that the one who created everything cannot live in "shrines made by human hands," (Acts 17:24). Indeed, God made the human

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[44] Keener, *Acts*, 3:2603–05.

[45] Kenneth Boa and Robert M. Bowman Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 10.

[46] Walbank, *The Hellenistic World*, 181.

[47] Keener, *Acts*, 3:2594.

[48] Keener, *Acts*, 3:2581.

hands that constructed the shrines. Similarly, it stands to reason that God is not "served by human hands, as though he needed anything" because He is the One who providentially sustains all of creation (Acts 17:25). In agreement with Fitzmyer, Paul is indeed engaging in an act of proclamation; yet he does so in a reasoned and philosophically informed manner, finding common ground with his listeners. This approach was not without precedent, for Keener observes that "Jewish writers often used Hellenistic language to argue for the rationality of serving the one true God."[49] Though human reason is most often misdirected, rational faculty is still present in humanity by God's common grace.

In summary, as a model for an evangelistic application of apologetics, the Areopagus discourse shows that Paul appealed to common ground with his hearers. The apostle recognized that the Athenian pagans, though given to idolatry, had a propensity to worship, were created by God with an innate divine awareness, and were also recipients of God's general revelation. Moreover, though the unregenerate human mind will reason its way into illegitimate worship, Paul's approach in Athens assumes that the unbeliever is still capable of rational reflection and the recognition of truth.

### An Evangelistic Application of Apologetics Confronts Sin

Thus far in the speech, Paul has corrected many of his audience's false beliefs by proclaiming factual information rationally known through general revelation. Paul, however, is not interested merely in factual argumentation; rather, the Athenians must be gently and personally confronted for having failed to respond rightly to God's revelation. For the Areopagus speech to be evangelistic, the issue of sin must be addressed for an evangelistic application of apologetics confronts sin. An exegesis of Acts 17:29–30a

[49] Keener, *Acts*, 3:2636.

demonstrates the thesis through Paul's gentle confrontation of the Athenians' idolatrous worship.

**A Gentle Confrontation**

The confrontational nature of the Areopagus discourse becomes plain when Paul uses the language of personal obligation for the first time in his speech, proclaiming that "we *shouldn't* (οὐκ ὀφείλομεν) think" of God in terms of man-made images or idols (Acts 17:29).[50] While Paul is calling for a change in his hearers, it is important to note the gentleness of his confrontation. First, instead of continuing to use the second-person plural, Paul switches to a first-person plural precisely at the point where he personally confronts—a tactful shift resulting in "*we* shouldn't think."[51] Second, Paul's gentleness is evident in that he begins his confrontation while he is still in their epistemological territory, appealing merely to the witness of general revelation. The fact that τὸ θεῖον, translated "divine nature," is in the neuter, similar to the reference to the "unknown god" in 17:23, shows that Paul is still accommodating his hearers.[52] Reasoning from their territory, Paul emphasizes that, as "God's offspring," even pagans should rationally know that the divine being is not of a "lower order" than mankind.[53] Instead of abruptly issuing God's command to repent, which will come in the next verse, Paul in effect says, "you should know better than to worship idols and you have failed to worship the true God."

**A Confrontation of Culpability**

Paul's gentle approach is a confrontation nonetheless. It is vital to note that the "ignorance" of the Athenians does not mean that they were innocently mistaken religious

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[50] J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (New York: United Bible Societies. 1996), 1:670. LBS.

[51] Bock, *Acts*, 569.

[52] Kistemaker, *Acts of the Apostles*, 638.

[53] Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 2:849.

adherents; rather, Paul confronts them as culpable before God for their ignorance. The apostle stresses the Athenians' "ignorance" near the beginning and the end of his speech (Acts 17:23, 30). This emphasis leads Dibelius to erroneously assert that the Areopagus speaker's contrast is between ignorance and knowledge rather than sin and grace.[54] On the one hand, the word "sin," is never mentioned and "ignorance" is said to have been previously "overlooked" by God (Acts 17:30). On the other hand, Paul's call "to repent" in 17:30 fits best with the idea that individuals can be morally responsible for their ignorance. Notably, in an article entitled *Forgiving Ignorance,* Edward A. Langerak observes that, "unlike the Greeks," the Hebrews recognized a moral dimension to epistemology by highlighting the role of the human will in the attainment of knowledge.[55] Langerak asserts, "Ignorance involves guilt when comfortable prejudices blind us to what we ought morally to know."[56] One caveat, however, is that some within Paul's Greek audience would probably agree in some measure with what Langerak attributes to a "Hebrew" view of knowledge; for instance, Keener notes that Stoics also recognized a moral dimension to epistemology, regarding religious knowledge to be tied to virtue, while ignorance was regarded as vice.[57]

Contrary to Dibelius, the proposition that the Athenians bear epistemic culpability finds further confirmation in a survey of the theme of ignorance in Luke's writings. For example, earlier in Acts, Peter describes the crucifixion of Jesus as an act of "ignorance" on the part of many Jews (Acts 3:17). Ignorance did not excuse them, however, as Peter still calls them to "repent" that their "sins may be wiped out" (Acts 3:19). Jesus too recognized the ignorance of his persecutors when he prayed from the

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[54] Dibelius, *The Book of Acts*, 117.

[55] Edward A. Langerak, "Forgiving Ignorance," *Reformed Journal* 32, no. 10 (October 1982): 9, http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.sbts.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0001813437.

[56] Langerak, "Forgiving Ignorance," 9.

[57] Keener, *Acts*, 3:2635.

Cross, "Father, forgive them because they do not know what they are doing"—a saying notably found in Luke's gospel alone (Luke 23:34).[58] Peter's Acts 3 proclamation, then, agrees with Jesus's words—forgiveness is still necessary even though they may not have realized the full import of their actions. In addition, Stephen's final words imply the ignorance of his persecutors as he intentionally alludes to Jesus's last sayings; indeed, after Stephen asks Jesus to "receive his spirit" in ways reminiscent of the words Jesus spoke to the Father, he prays, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin" (Acts 7:59–60).[59] The persecutors, however, are morally responsible for their ignorance, as Stephen uses his final breaths to intercede for them in light of their "sin."

By the same token, Paul agrees with the Lukan emphasis upon epistemic culpability before God. Indeed, reflecting on his personal involvement in Stephen's killing and the persecution of the Church, he testifies of his previous "ignorance," yet nonetheless calls himself the "chief of sinners" (1 Tim 1:13–15).[60] Though ignorant, Paul knew he was still culpable. Additionally, at the synagogue in Antioch, Paul speaks to the ignorance of condemning Jesus, even as he proclaimed the "forgiveness of sins" available in his name (Acts 13:27, 38). Accordingly, Jesus, Luke, Peter, Stephen, and notably Paul himself all recognize that ignorance is not to be equated with forensic innocence; the frequent mention of "sin" and "forgiveness" alongside the theme of ignorance implies epistemic culpability.

In light of this brief survey, the theme of "ignorance" in the Areopagus speech should not be viewed in such a way that excuses the Athenians' sin. While Paul's initial

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[58] While the saying of Jesus in Luke 23:34 has an uncertain textual foundation, the likely allusion to it later in the final words of Stephen gives evidence of it being authentic; see Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 160.

[59] Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 160.

[60] Paul's testimony of his ignorance in persecuting the church in 1 Timothy 1:13–15 provides further evidence that Stephen's last words, recorded by Luke in Acts 7:59–60, imply the ignorance of Stephen's persecutors. This, in turn, provides further support for the idea that Stephen alludes to the final sayings of Jesus, thereby supporting the authenticity of Jesus's saying recorded in Luke 23:34.

reference to Athenian ignorance in 17:23 may not seem overtly confrontational in nature, John Polhill notes that to be ignorant was "a cardinal sin" for the Greeks and "to worship an unknown god was to admit one's ignorance."[61] The content of the speech continues to highlight their epistemic failure. In light of God's general revelation, they are not innocent in their worship of idols. Furthermore, God is not really a foreign or "unknown" deity at all; rather "He is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27). Though insufficient for salvation, the knowledge of God surrounds everyone making each person responsible to seek out truth and respond to it rightly. A 1954 article in *Christianity in Crisis* entitled "How Culpable is Ignorance," though written in a discussion of human sexuality, offers fitting words,

> We are here brought hard up against one of the most difficult and yet also most important problems of ethics—responsibility for facts or truths which a person may not at a given moment recognize, but which he has known or should have known and therefore is blameworthy for denying or dis-regarding.[62]

The theme of ignorance explicitly resurfaces in 17:30, thereby framing the bulk of the discourse aimed to expose the Athenian epistemic crisis for what it really is—an ignorance that is culpable before God.[63] The pervasiveness of God's revelation corresponds to inescapable human responsibility, rendering ignorant idolatry as "inexcusable."[64] Similar to Paul's Romans 1 description of those who refuse to acknowledge God, in Athens he confronts them for giving themselves to idolatry in contradiction to the plain revelation of God in creation (Rom 1:28). The reality that God has "overlooked" the times of ignorance, does not indicate God's indifference or that mankind is not guilty; rather, it magnifies God's grace and patience in a similar manner

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[61] John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 372.

[62] Henry Pitney Van Dusen, "How Culpable Is 'Ignorance,'" *Christianity and Crisis* 13, no. 23 (January 11, 1954): 177, http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.sbts.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0000655246.

[63] Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, 242–43.

[64] Keener, *Acts*, 3:2668.

to how God "passed over former sins" in his divine "forbearance" until the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ (Rom 3:25).[65] Paul confronts the Athenians as sinners.

**A Comprehensive Confrontation**

It is important to note that Paul confronts the Athenians' idolatrous lifestyle as a whole. Though Paul explicitly addresses how his audience "thinks," in 17:29 and speaks of "ignorance" in 17:30, Paul is not merely concerned with intellectual rebellion. In Athens, perhaps more than any other city in ancient Greece, religious observance was pervasive. Indeed, Josephus referred to the Athenians as "the most religious, of the Grecians."[66] Since the Athenians do not think rightly about God, they fail in what they apparently consider to be a fundamental obligation—to worship the divine. The human mind and the practice of worship are necessarily linked; Bruce observes that, while all people are responsible to honor God, "this honor is certainly not given if they envisage the divine nature in the form of plastic images."[67] Consequently, Paul was not merely confronting the way the Athenians thought about the "gods"; rather he gently confronted their entire idolatrous culture and lifestyle. For a city that builds altars to the unknown gods, possibly out of fear and anxiety that any gods would neglected of worship, this is a sobering confrontation indeed.[68]

In summary, as a model for an evangelistic application of apologetics, the Areopagus discourse shows that Paul confronted the sin of his hearers. Not content merely to assert blanket truths about God, Paul engaged them personally and gently. The apostle's discourse has revealed the culpability of their ignorance about God and the futility of their misguided worship. Paul's speech is a reminder that apologetics applied

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[65] Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 340.

[66] Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.130, in *The Works of Josephus*, 801.

[67] Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 340.

[68] Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 2:838; Dibelius, *The Book of Acts*, 131–32.

evangelistically is not merely about discussing issues, but must eventually engage the human person—accountable and rebellious before God.

## An Evangelistic Application of Apologetics Calls for a Faith Response

Appealing to God's authority, Paul proclaims, "God now commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). Here Paul goes beyond a mere confrontation of sin and exhorts them to respond in repentance toward God. As opposed to a mere philosophical debate, an evangelistic application of apologetics calls for a faith response. An exegesis of Acts 17:30–31a demonstrates the thesis through Paul's calling for repentance in light of the coming judgment.

### Repentance as a Faith Response

Markedly, Paul's Areopagus address seems to be missing elements that may normally be considered as fundamental to the gospel message. For example, there is no mention of Jesus's death, grace, or forgiveness—merely a firm call to repentance. The word μετανοέω, translated as "repent," fundamentally means to "change one's mind"; in the New Testament, however, it often takes on a fuller sense, communicating the idea both of turning away from sin and turning toward God in faith.[69] For example, concerning the reception of the gospel among Cornelius's household, Peter announces, "God granted repentance resulting in life even to the Gentiles," though they are described as having "believed" in Christ in the previous verse (Acts 11:17–18). Referring to this account, Particular Baptist Benjamin Keach declares that faith and repentance "are twins . . . always born together."[70] The apostle Paul also pairs the concepts of repentance and faith together in Lystra, proclaiming the "good news" as he exhorts his hearers to "turn

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[69] H. Merklein, "μετανοέω," in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 2:415–17, LBS.

[70] Benjamin Keach, *An Exposition of the Parables and Express Similitudes of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (London: Aylott, 1858), 530, LBS.

from these worthless things to the living God" (Acts 14:15). Again, before the elders of the Ephesus church, Paul claims, "I testified to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). For Paul both repentance and faith are most often bound together even when both are not explicitly mentioned. Hermeneutics scholar Robert Stein observes that the word "repentance" in Acts is "an example of a synecdoche in which 'repentance' refers to 'repentance-faith-baptism.'"[71] Consequently, while the concept of repentance sometimes looms large in the gospel presentations of Acts, it is evident that it most often implies other concepts including faith, grace, and forgiveness grounded in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Accordingly, Paul's exhortation of repentance in Athens involves a turning from idolatry but also likely implies turning to God in faith for forgiveness. First, not only is this interpretation in line with the apostolic proclamation throughout the book of Acts, but it also fits the immediate context; Luke describes Paul's marketplace message in Athens as "good news"—implying that it was the same gospel he consistently preached (Acts 17:18). Second, since it is likely that Acts 17:22–34 records a summary of Paul's speech, Paul likely expanded upon the divine command to "repent." The probability that Luke was not with Paul in Athens, of which Barrett seems certain, indicates that he must have received this summary from someone else, possibly Paul himself.[72] Third, the emphasis upon repentance is fitting for the pluralistic context; in Athens, an invitation to believe in Christ without explicit and heavy emphasis upon repentance might result in Jesus merely being added to the pantheon of false gods. It was important for Paul's audience to know that they must turn from their idolatry in order to

[71] Robert H. Stein, "Baptism in Luke-Acts," in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright (Nashville: B & H, 2006), 51–52.

[72] Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 2:824.

trust in Christ. With these considerations, Paul's call for repentance was almost certainly couched in a broader presentation of the good news.

**The Urgency of Repentance**

Paul communicates the urgency of a faith decision, warning the Athenians that, "having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). The word "now" is tied to two related eschatological realities: a salvation-historical shift has occurred through the work of Christ and a future judgment awaits the world.

First, Paul informs his hearers of the serious times in which they live—the era of gentile ignorance is now past. The accomplished work of Christ has ushered in the eschatological age of widespread gentile salvation—for "*all* people *everywhere*" who will repent (Acts 17:30). Evidence of this salvation-historical shift is also found elsewhere in Acts. For example, Graeme Goldsworthy notes the significance of Paul's "watershed" moment before the Jews of Antioch in Pisidia when he proclaims this salvation-historical shift as it relates to the gentiles:

> The climax of Paul's presentation is the resurrection and the significant claim of its central importance. . . . On this premise, Paul goes on to preach the forgiveness of sins to all who believe. It was a watershed proclamation in that the Jews reviled Paul (Acts 13:45) and as a result Paul declared that he would henceforth turn to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46–47).[73]

In a similar manner, Paul's exhortation for his hearers in Athens to repent "*now*" is closely related to Christ's resurrection, which, as Tony Merida notes, functions as a "hinge point in redemptive history."[74] On the one hand, this means that full inclusion into the people of God is open to the gentiles. On the other hand, the "times of ignorance" have passed, resulting in increased worldwide accountability before God. Greater

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[73] Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 73.

[74] Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville: B & H, 2017), 260.

revelation corresponds to greater human responsibility and, as Sydney Greidanus writes, "God's redemptive activity and self-revelation reach a climax in the death and resurrection of Jesus."[75] Paul implies that this salvation historical climax has occurred in the word "now."

Related to this eschatological shift in view, the Athenians have also experienced a sort of existential shift—having now heard the message of Jesus Christ. Earlier Paul appealed to creation, asserting truths they should have already known; now Paul has given them special revelation concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ that they did not previously know. Not only has Christ come, but now, as John Polhill emphasizes, they have heard Paul's gospel proclamation—their existential "times of ignorance" are past.[76] Now especially, persistent idolatry is inexcusable.

Second, repentance is an urgent matter due to another eschatological reality—the anticipation of a future judgment. While Epicureans did not have any expectation, positive or negative, of the afterlife, Paul warns that God "has set a day when he is going to judge the world in righteousness by the Man he has appointed" (Acts 17:31).[77] The "man" who is to judge is clearly implied to be Jesus Christ, with reference being made to God "raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). The Athenians ought to repent, for there will be a day of reckoning. Indeed, now that the age of salvation has arrived, the next eschatological expectation is that of judgment.

In summary, as a model for an evangelistic application of apologetics, the Areopagus discourse shows that Paul call his hearers to faith response. Realizing that Luke likely provides a summary of the speech, Paul's call to repentance certainly implies a broader presentation of gospel truths. Vitally important is that Paul applied apologetics

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[75] Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 183, LBS.

[76] Polhill, *Acts*, 376–77.

[77] Keener, *Acts*, 3:2590.

without overlooking his hearers deepest need—salvation from the judgment of God. Indeed, Paul appeals to the coming time judgment to urge his hearers to respond in the current age of gentile salvation.

## An Evangelistic Application of Apologetics Confirms Gospel Truths

An evangelistic application of apologetics presents evidence to confirm gospel truths. An exegesis of Acts 17:30–34 demonstrates the thesis through Paul's appeal to Christ's resurrection as evidence that personal repentance is a present salvation-historical opportunity and an urgent decision in light of the coming judgment.

### The Reality of Evidential Argumentation in Paul's Evangelism

Notably, Luke records evidential argumentation in the Areopagus discourse. Throughout most of the speech, Paul has stayed primarily on common ground, confronting the logical inconsistencies between the idolatrous Athenian culture and the truths communicated everyday through creation; however, when Paul goes beyond general revelation to proclaim special revelation concerning Christ as the future judge of the world, he notably shifts his apologetic approach—asserting historical evidences to support his truth claims. Paul supports his sober warning of judgment apologetically, asserting that "He [God] has provided proof (παρασχὼν πίστιν) of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). God has provided proof of the coming judgment—the resurrection of Jesus.

Some controversy exists concerning the vocabulary in this verse. Dibielius correctly points out that πίστιν is normally translated as "faith," and never as "proof" in Pauline usage.[78] However, πίστις may also carry the meaning of that which is

[78] Dibelius, *The Book of Acts*, 118.

"completely believable," conveying ideas of "believable evidence" and "proof."[79] Paul's Athenian context is key to understanding his intriguing word choice. Indeed, Keener notes that "Stoics could employ the term for a trust that rests on certain knowledge."[80] Furthermore, renowned Greek scholar A.T. Robertson noted that the Athenian orator Demosthenes often used the adjacent verb παρέχω, translated as "provided" in Acts 17:31, specifically to refer to "bringing forward evidence."[81] In light of these linguistic and contextual observations and contrary to Dibelius, those who believe that Paul has already gone to great lengths to accommodate to his audience throughout his speech will have no problem believing that Paul chose to use these words in a way that relates to his hearers, speaking of the resurrection as a proof for his message.

**The Centrality of the Resurrection**

Before the Areopagus, Paul places unique emphasis upon Jesus's resurrection—the key piece of evidence for the gospel he proclaims. Of course, the resurrection was absolutely essential to Paul's gospel message itself, for "if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation is without foundation, and so is your faith" (1 Cor 15:14). Indeed, the good news that Paul proclaimed in the marketplace explicitly included the message of resurrection (Acts 17:18). Nonetheless, the "raising of Him [Jesus] from the dead" also takes the center stage in Athens for its apologetic appeal (Acts 17:31).

The proposition that Paul utilized the resurrection apologetically is supported by its repeated evidential appeal throughout the book of Acts. For example, Luke also records Peter proclaiming the resurrection as a confirmation of his message in a way

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[79] Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 1:370.

[80] Keener, *Acts*, 3:2674.

[81] A. T. Robertson, *The Acts of the Apostles, Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), 291.

similar to Paul in the Areopagus discourse.[82] While in Acts 2, the resurrection of Jesus is evidence that God has made him "both Lord and Messiah," Acts 10 records Peter warning his hearers that the raised one is "appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead" (Acts 2:32–36; 10:40–42).

For Paul, the resurrection is both central to the gospel and an apologetic for the gospel. In his evangelistic defense before King Agrippa, we see these two facets of Paul's resurrection proclamation come together; the apostle referred to the Old Testament prophetic anticipation "that the Messiah must suffer, and that as the first to rise from the dead, He would proclaim light to our people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:23). As the "first" to rise from the dead, Paul speaks of the salvific gospel implications of the resurrection—ushering in a new resurrection age. Furthermore, the resurrection serves as a proof or indicator of the same salvation-historical shift that Paul appeals to in Athens—now is the time of Gentile repentance and salvation in Christ. Interestingly, Paul appeals to Christ's resurrection before Agrippa as a *public* evidence—"since this was not done in a corner" (Acts 26:26). Indeed, according to Luke's portrayal of Paul's message, the resurrection is a gospel truth that confirms all gospel truth.

Paul also appeals to the resurrection in Athens for apologetic purposes even though much of the Greek culture repudiated the idea.[83] Paul, however, sees the resurrection as the Father's divine stamp upon the person and work of the Son; therefore, he is not ashamed of the resurrection message, even if it is hard for his hearers to accept. Later in Acts, Paul demonstrates his willingness to be judged by earthly authorities due to his proclamation "concerning the resurrection of the dead" (Acts 24:21). The fact that Paul consistently spoke of the resurrection even when it often brought him ridicule and persecution demonstrates its centrality to the gospel and to his evangelistic apologetic.

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[82] Bock, *Acts*, 570.

[83] McDonald, "Acts," 122.

**The Relevance of Evidential Appeal**

At the Areopagus speech, it was at the mention of the resurrection that many began to mock the apostle; Only a relatively small number are said to have "joined Paul" (Acts 17:32). However, it is not as though Paul's evidential appeal should be regarded as a failure or irrelevant in constructing a model for an evangelistic application of apologetics. Keener notes that the Areopagus was only comprised of around one-hundred members, making Paul's seemingly small number of converts much more understandable.[84] Though some scoffed at Paul's apologetic appeal to the resurrection, some were persuaded. Furthermore, Eusebius indicates that "Dionysius the Areopagite," mentioned among Paul's converts in 17:34, eventually became a bishop to a church in Athens.[85] While we cannot know whether Eusebius' information is accurate, his report is an indication that some believed that the gospel witness in fourth-century Athens could be traced back to the apostle's ministry. In addition to Paul's converts, it also seems that some of his audience desired to hear more about Christ (Acts 17:32). Moreover, there is no indication that Paul abandoned his evidential appeal to the resurrection after Athens. Indeed, after Athens, he would proceed to Corinth where he would go even further to present historical evidences to defend the truth of the resurrection—the risen Jesus "appeared to over five-hundred brothers at one time; most of them are still alive" (1 Cor. 15:6). Consequently, it seems that Paul legitimately employed evidential argumentation, especially when confirming key gospel truths.

In Summary, Paul employs apologetic arguments evangelistically in 17:31 to confirm gospel truths. The resurrection is the central "proof" that Jesus is going to judge the world. This apologetic argument for future judgment also reinforces the apostle's

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[84] Keener, *Acts*, 3:2601.

[85] Eusebius of Caesarea. *The Church History* 3.4.11, trans. Arthur Cushman McGiffert, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Series 2, vol. 1, *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine* (New York: Christian Literature, 1890), 137, LBS.

exhortation for urgent repentance, especially as the era of widespread gentile salvation has dawned. Though Paul engages in evangelistic apologetics throughout his speech, his approach shifts slightly as he proclaims gospel truths. By focusing on historical evidences, particularly regarding the resurrection of Jesus Christ, he seeks to confirm the special revelation of the gospel to his hearers.

## Conclusion

The Areopagus discourse provides a model for an evangelistic application of apologetics in an intellectual and pluralistic context. Though some have sought to deny or downplay its evangelistic relevance, the exegesis above reveals that it is for good reason that Paul's speech in Athens is so frequently referred to in evangelism resources.[86] As a model, it guides those with evangelistic aspirations to (1) seek "common ground" connecting points through an appeal to God's general revelation, (2) aim to expose and gently confront sin, especially the willful ignorance of God's general revelation, (3) call for an urgent faith response in light of Christ's first coming and the future judgment of the world, and (4) confirm key gospel truths, citing historical evidences to show the reality of the gospel.

Most noteworthy is that the apostle never forgot his evangelistic aims during his apologetic address. While the apostle could connect with his hearers on common ground and even affirm some of their rationally held beliefs, he never overlooked the reality that they were sinners who needed to respond to God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Therefore, his reasoned proclamation did not aim ultimately at intellectual persuasion, but rather engaged his audience at a moral and personal level. His speech progressively

[86] See Will McRaney, *The Art of Personal Evangelism: Sharing Jesus in a Changing Culture* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 114–15; Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth: The Whole Gospel to the Whole Person by Whole People: A Training Manual on the Message and Method of God-Centered Witnessing to a Grace-Centered Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 56–57; Alvin Reid, *Evangelism Handbook: Biblical, Spiritual, Intentional, Missional* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2009), 409–10.

highlights his hearers' culpability before God, highlighting their ignorance and calling for repentance in light of gospel truths and the coming judgment. Paul's appeal to the resurrection also demonstrates a willingness to employ historical evidences to show the reality of the gospel and emphasize the urgency of conversion.

# CHAPTER 3

# A THEOLOGICALLY GUIDED APPLICATION OF APOLOGETICS IN EVANGELISM

## Introduction

Winning an argument for Christianity is not the same as winning a soul for Christ. This fact should cause the thinking Christian to carefully consider the relationship between apologetics and evangelism. This chapter seeks to lay the theological groundwork for an evangelistic framework for apologetic practice. A proper application of apologetics in evangelism requires a theological understanding of human rationality, the distinction between general and special revelation, and the witness of the Holy Spirit to the gospel.

## Human Rationality

While apologetic arguments may be helpful in gospel conversations, in order to *apply* them properly, the believer must remember that he is not transmitting data into a computer but is engaging with a fellow human being. The complexity of man as a thinking being, however, must be considered carefully because human nature has both been given by God and shaped by sin.[1] A biblical understanding of human rationality is crucial in formulating an evangelistic application of apologetics. An analysis of theological perspectives and apologetic methodologies will support the thesis by showing that apologetics validly appeals to reason while also recognizing the noetic effects of sin.

[1] A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 630. LBS.

## The Human Thinker

In order to lay the theological ground-work for an evangelistic framework for apologetics, an analysis of mankind's original God-given rational capacity will reveal that the mind is designed for true knowledge and for instinctive relational knowledge of God.

**The mind's design for truth.** God has designed the mind with a truth-knowing function. In line with what philosophers call a correspondence theory of truth, the mind is constructed for knowledge that corresponds to what is actual and real.[2] All truth and order are grounded in the person of God; therefore, the order of God's world external to the human thinker *corresponds* to the order of logic and of the mind.[3] Furthermore, the mind's design for truth is implied by the fact that God created mankind with real-world responsibilities; as the image of God, man is made with such a nature as to serve God functionally—exercising dominion over God's creation.[4] Consequently, the human mind is ordered to oversee God's orderly creation in an orderly fashion.

This truth-knowing capacity is especially pronounced when contrasted with a naturalistic Darwinian accounting of the mind. The theory that the mind developed through natural processes inadvertently undermines the mind's truth-knowing function. In this view, human rationality is not designed with a truth-knowing purpose; rather, there is no design at all, as the mind is shaped by mindless processes. Sam Harris, for example, asserts that "nature," has "selected for improvements in the physical structures

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[2] J. P. Moreland and William L. Craig, *PFCW* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 130.

[3] John M Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*, ed. Joseph E. Torres, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2015), 70.

[4] Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 613–14n36.

that gather, store, and process" information.[5] These processes of nature are influenced primarily by two interconnected variables—survival and reproduction.[6] Consequently, the consistent naturalist cannot assume that knowledge corresponds to reality because, as Nancy Pearcey observes, human thought patterns and ideas would have been "selected for their survival value, not for their truth value."[7] Hence, the implications of an evolutionary epistemology effectively remove the truth-knowing function of the human mind.[8] Any real truth that is known would be by cosmic accident rather than divine design.

Although a secular naturalist may *observe* and *describe* the human being as *homo sapiens*—latin for "wise man," only a biblical perspective can *explain* the rational character of human nature—designed by God to know truth.[9] This observation has significant apologetic implications, as the truth-knowing function of the human mind lends a measure of legitimacy to rational argumentation. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Bible records examples of reasoned engagements with both believers and unbelievers. In Athens, for instance, Paul used rational arguments to encourage reasoned reflection and confront the Athenians' idolatrous thought about God (Acts 17:29).

There are qualifications, however, upon the apologist's use of reason because revelation is needed for mankind to know God. Reason should not be embraced as if it were the autonomous arbiter of truth—resulting in an idolatrous rationalism. K. Scott Oliphint rightly asserts that logic itself is created by God and is "by definition, never

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[5] Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: Norton, 2004), 51–52.

[6] Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 52–53.

[7] Nancy Pearcey, *Finding Truth: 5 Principles for Unmasking Atheism, Secularism, and Other God Substitutes* (Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 2015), 192.

[8] Pearcey, *Finding Truth*, 193.

[9] *Concise Oxford English Dictionary,* 11th ed., s.v. "homo-sapiens," LBS.

equal to him" or "above him."[10] Since God created reason, autonomous reason cannot reach him. Moreover, because mankind himself is a creature, it follows that some truths will be outside the reach of human reason due simply to human finitude.[11] The apologist, then, does not assume that divine truth must be proved by reason; rather, he presumes that the use of reason itself testifies to God.

**The mind's design for instinctive knowledge of God.** In addition to a capacity for reasoning, the human mind is designed such that it naturally knows God, thus explaining why religious belief of some sort seems to be a normal human default. Theologians, particularly those of a reformed perspective, have often explained the pervasiveness of religious belief by positing the existence of a God-given "divine sense" that is universal in humanity.[12] The implications of such a divine sense for apologetics and evangelism would be significant; the apologist might focus on answering challenges instead of expending effort to try to prove theism,[13] while the evangelist might find greater confidence recognizing that God has "put a built in receptor inside each person."[14] Against this epistemological viewpoint, however, classical apologist William Lane Craig claims that there is no scriptural evidence that a *sensus divinitatis* exists within mankind.[15] Taking his contention seriously, alternative explanations for mankind's

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[10] K. Scott Oliphint, "Cornelius Van Til and the Reformation of Christian Apologetics," in *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Tipton (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), 284–85.

[11] Due to human finitude, special revelation was necessary even before the fall. In addition to the finitude of man, the noetic effects of sin further qualify the proper appeal to reason.

[12] Kenneth Boa and Robert M. Bowman Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 327.

[13] Steven B. Cowan, introduction to *FVA*, ed. Steven B. Cowan, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 19–20, LBS.

[14] Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth: The Whole Gospel to the Whole Person by Whole People: A Training Manual on the Message and Method of God-Centered Witnessing to a Grace-Centered Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 169–70.

[15] William L. Craig, "A Classical Apologist's Response," in Cowan, *FVA*, 285–86.

theistic default will be considered first before proceeding to a positive argument for mankind's innate sense of divinity.

First, evolutionary epistemology fails to offer a sufficient alternative to a *sensus divinitatis*. Interestingly, some naturalistic thinkers overtly claim that natural selection has resulted in faulty thought patterns precisely at this point—religious belief. For example, according to Darwinian apologist Richard Dawkins, mankind's pervasive religious propensity is an unfortunate "by-product" of natural selection as the human mind was shaped for survival.[16] Naturalist thinkers may recognize the pervasiveness of religious belief, but their explanation of this phenomenon fails due to false naturalistic assumptions that are ultimately self-refuting. As noted above, this evolutionary epistemology, if applied consistently, would destroy the validity of all human thought including the thought processes that produced evolutionary theory; all thought would be a "by-product" of natural selection, not just religious thought.

Second, moving on to theological explanations, general revelation alone cannot account for mankind's universal theistic knowledge. On the one hand, Paul's assertion that all people know God in a non-salvific sense is indeed found in the context of his teaching on God's revelation (Rom 1:21). Additionally, universal religious knowledge is rightly grounded in a God who reveals himself universally. On the other hand, ideas about God cannot be produced in the human mind solely through empirical means. Philosopher Colin McGinn has noted the insufficiency of empiricism in accounting for abstract universals.[17] Notably, *particular* encounters of general revelation elicit theistic ideas that are by nature *universal*—beyond what may be empirically experienced. While

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[16] Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), 200–08; Also, in a 2007 poll, 107 out of 149 evolutionary scientists agreed that religion is "simply a sociobiological result of evolution." See Gregory W. Graffin and William B. Provine, "Macroscope: Evolution, Religion and Free Will," *American Scientist* 95, no. 4 (2007): 294–97, http://www.jstor.org /stable/27858986.

[17] Colin McGinn, *Inborn Knowledge: The Mystery Within* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), 28.

God has revealed himself generally, he must have also equipped humanity for the reception of his revelation. In other words, God gives revelation, but is the mind designed to receive it and to do so *instinctively*? This points to an explanation that is native to man's design.

Third, the capacity for reason is also insufficient to account for mankind's universal theistic knowledge. On the one hand, it is true that reasoned argumentation for God may be formulated from the witness of general revelation. As detailed in chapter 2, much of the apostle Paul's Areopagus address appeals to the Athenians' capacity for reason regarding God's witness in creation. Thus, the reasoned and logical theistic "proofs" found in classical apologetics may be helpful in some ways, so long as they rest upon Christian presuppositions regarding order and rationality.[18] On the other hand, theistic belief, while not irrational, does not initially arise due to reasoned and logical thought or argumentation; regarding the classical proofs, Elmer Towns observes that "the mind intuitively accepts the idea of the existence of God before it faces these proofs."[19] Paul expresses confidence that "all" know the Creator regardless of whether they consciously reflect upon general revelation.[20] Accordingly, the capacity for reason, by which one could deduce a belief in a deity from general revelation, does not account for humanity's theistic default.

Fourth, the illuminating activity of the Holy Spirit does not account for universal religious propensity or inner knowledge of generally revealed truth. This view is proposed in a chapter entitled "Religious Epistemology" where J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig assert that, "any awareness one might experience of God can be plausibly ascribed to the Spirit's work."[21] It is true that the illuminating work of the Holy

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[18] John M. Frame, "A Presuppositionalist's Response," in Cowan, *FVA*, 81.

[19] Elmer L. Towns, *Theology for Today* (Mason, OH: Cengage Learning, 2008), 35.

[20] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 86.

[21] Moreland and Craig, *PFCW*, 168.

Spirit is necessary for the unbeliever to obtain a *saving* knowledge of God. However, it is not clear why Craig and Moreland are so reluctant to attribute any non-salvific knowledge of God to human ontology. Interestingly, in *Reasonable Faith,* Craig rightly recognizes that God has placed a "mechanism" of "moral intuition" within humanity.[22] It seems theologically dubious, however, that the God who created mankind for relationship gives an instinctive awareness of moral law, without giving a similar built-in awareness of himself—the moral law-giver. This type of knowledge is non-salvific and universally known. Though the Holy Spirit's witness is crucial and will be examined in more detail below, it does not account for mankind's universal knowledge of God because his work is *particularly* associated with special revelation—not the *universally* accessible general revelation.

Having found these alternative explanations for the theistic human default to be insufficient, the concept of a universal divine sense in mankind may be considered in more detail and a positive case presented. The most well-known description of this doctrine is found in John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

> There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty. Ever renewing its memory, he repeatedly sheds fresh drops.[23]

According to Calvin, this awareness, or "*divinitatis sensum*," is instinctive—a "doctrine . . . of which each of us is master from his mother's womb."[24] The purpose Calvin ascribed to this sense of divinity, as noted by Timothy Paul Jones, must be considered in light of mankind's moral condition.[25] While the "negative nature of the *sensus*" only leads to

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[22] William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 176.

[23] Calvin, *Institutes* 1.3.1 (LCC, 43–44).

[24] Calvin, *Institutes* 1.3.3 (LCC, 46).

[25] Timothy Paul Jones, "John Calvin and the Problem of Philosophical Apologetics,"

judgment for postlapsarian man, before sin it "would have led humanity into a continuing encounter with God."[26] Despite the fall, Timothy George observes that, for Calvin, the *divinitatis sensum* remains within a person "no matter how far one may drift from God, even to the point of denying God's very existence."[27] All mankind is naturally aware of God as the Creator to whom worship is due and humanity is accountable.

The relationship between Calvin's *sensus divinitatis* and espistemology is such that knowledge of God is recognized instinctively. In light of Calvin, Alvin Plantinga proposes that it is "the *capacity* [emphasis in original] for such knowledge" that is innate in humanity from birth—not the knowledge itself.[28] Therefore, Plantinga asserts that the sense of divinity "requires a certain maturity," which is manifested as this natural knowledge of God arises within the human mind.[29] Plantinga, therefore, defines the *sensus divinitatis*, not in terms of theistic knowledge itself, but in terms of a "disposition or set of dispositions to form theistic beliefs."[30] Similarly, Jones describes Calvin's *sensus* in terms of an innate impression "*through*" which "humanity can recognize . . . (1) the presence of one supreme divinity who (2) created the cosmos and who (3) deserves worship."[31] The source of this knowledge is not in empirical experience, yet it is elicited or continually perceived through experience. Consequently, the existence of God is a doctrine that is not epistemologically dependent upon education because, as Jones asserts,

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*Perspectives in Religious Studies* 23, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 394, http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.sbts.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001028597.

[26] Jones, "John Calvin and the Problem of Philosophical Apologetics," 394.

[27] Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1988), 190.

[28] Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 173.

[29] Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 173.

[30] Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 173.

[31] Jones, "John Calvin and the Problem of Philosophical Apologetics," 388–93.

"the *sensus* is not learned."[32] In Calvin's view, the mind is designed such that the idea of the Creator God arises instinctively—an *a priori* belief—independent of *a posteriori* reasoning.[33]

The theological grounding for an innate sense of divinity lies in the relational implications of the image of God—the image itself being the defining mark of humanity's ontological design.[34] Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum observe that "Genesis 1:26 defines a divine-human relationship" with implications of the image captured in the relational terms of "sonship" and "servant-kingship."[35] Since mankind is given such a nature as to know God relationally, it is fitting that the human mind, by design, would naturally—or even instinctively—perceive true knowledge of God. Furthermore, all knowledge, including that which is innate, testifies to God as "the source of all meaning and rationality."[36] True knowledge of anything, is properly found in its relation to God, for "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov 1:7). It stands to reason that God has constructed the human mind, not only to instinctively know certain truths, but to know truth in the form a person—the Creator God who is the fountainhead of all being, thought, and order. A mother who has fed a newborn baby has witnessed the mystery of instinctive knowledge; however, if any instinctive knowledge is real, then knowledge of God is included, for image bearers are ontologically made with covenantal relatedness to God.

The sense of divinity, however, is more than a theological assumption. The apostle Paul explicitly indicates that all people, regardless of spiritual condition, know

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[32] Jones, "John Calvin and the Problem of Philosophical Apologetics," 392.

[33] Jones, "John Calvin and the Problem of Philosophical Apologetics," 388–89.

[34] Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 200–01.

[35] Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 190–200. This relational emphasis of the image of God is also connected to the idea of function for "sonship" describes humanity's relationship with God while "servant-kingship" describes mankind's *functional* relationship to creation.

[36] John M. Frame, "Presuppositional Apologetics," in Cowan, *FVA*, 220.

God in a manner beyond mere propositional knowledge. Notably, Jones asserts that Calvin never directly equates the "knowledge of God" with the "awareness" of God experienced through the sense of divinity.[37] In contrast, the apostle Paul indicates that this universal awareness is indeed a non-salvific "knowledge of God,"—both propositional and relational; humanity cognitively knows "what can be known *about* God" (Rom 1:19), but also knows God relationally—"for though they *knew* [γνόντες] God, they did not glorify Him" (Rom 1:21).[38] The inner sense of divinity explains why humanity instinctively and inescapably relates to God—either as friend or as enemy.[39] This is why sin is not treated merely as law-breaking, but rather as a personal and relational offense to the law-giver.

In review, several key points pertinent to apologetic application have been made concerning God's good design of humanity. Due to the image of God, common ground can be established between the Christian and non-Christian. Since God has designed the mind with a truth-knowing purpose, it is legitimate for the apologist to engage others as "thinking beings." Additionally, God has given mankind an instinctive awareness of him. The believer can confidently approach others, knowing that God is already known to them in a non-salvific manner. The apologist too, feels less of a burden to prove theistic truths that are instinctively known. Also noteworthy is that, since knowledge is relational, a disruption in relationship with God would also distort how mankind thinks. This distortion is next in consideration.

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[37] Jones, "John Calvin and the Problem of Philosophical Apologetics," 393.

[38] Frame notes that the aorist γνόντες "should not be pressed to indicate past time exclusively," for the suppression of God's truth being addressed is continual action. See Frame, *Apologetics*, 7n14.

[39] John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, A Theology of Lordship 1 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1987), 47.

**The Sinful Thinker**

A proper evangelistic application of apologetics must take the reality of sin into account for it has universally shaped human nature. A holistic view of postlapsarian human persons recognizes that "sin has corrupted every aspect of their being: mind, will, emotions, relationships, and actions."[40] In this depraved state, unredeemed mankind is relationally estranged from God, functionally self-serving, and ontologically distorted in every aspect of constitution. Consequently, the thought-life of humanity is now deeply distorted after the fall, a reality that is profoundly relevant to the evangelistic and apologetic tasks. The noetic effects of sin are both material and immaterial, distorting mankind's rational ability and rational behavior.

**The sinner's rational ability.** Sin has hindered mankind's rational ability—a result of the fall that is often de-emphasized or overlooked entirely. Plantinga overlooks this reality by formulating his argument that Christian belief constitutes true knowledge in such a way that is contingent upon the mind's "proper function . . . according to its design plan."[41] Ironically, the word, "proper," is an improper word to describe the functional ability or capacity of any aspect of God's postlapsarian creation prior to eschatological renewal. Just as sin brought corruption and decay to the physical world as a whole, the physical faculties that correspond to mankind's rational abilities are under the same curse. The fallenness of the world is certainly evident in such phenomenon as natural disasters and human death, but it is also reflected in disorders such as schizophrenia, Alzheimer's, and attention deficit disorder; less noticeably, however, the cosmic curse is reflected in a withering tree or a dried-up creek bed, as well as increased human forgetfulness and clouded thinking. Critiquing Plantinga, K. Scott Oliphant

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[40] Bruce A. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation*, FET (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 75.

[41] Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 153–54.

observes that with regard to cognitive faculties, "Proper function seems to be exactly what was lost at the fall."[42] To some degree, every human being is mentally impaired.

While sin has impacted mankind's rational abilities, the mind still functions well-enough, obtaining true knowledge—even of God. For this reason, Oliphant suggests that the word, "adequate," describes mankind's cognitive functionality better than Plantinga's word, "proper."[43] By God's common grace, sin has distorted but not destroyed the divinely designed human rationality. With this recognition, the apostles are able to connect on common ground, using rational argumentation even when engaging with the unregenerate—*e.g.*, Paul's apologetic appeal in Athens as detailed in chapter 2.

Furthermore, in the words of Calvin, the sense of divinity "thrives and *presently* [emphasis added] burgeons,"—continuing to adequately operate after the fall.[44] According to Jones, mankind's fall into sin meant for Calvin that "The knowledge of God as Creator could no longer flow through the *sensus divinitatis.*"[45] While Jones is correct to recognize an impediment regarding "the knowledge of God," this hindrance, according to Calvin, is not due to weakness in rational faculties but to mankind's rebellious desire to "cast away all knowledge of God."[46] This aligns with Scripture, for Paul expresses great confidence that, even in a postlapsarian existence, divine truth continues to be "*clearly* [emphasis added] seen" to such an extent that all humanity is "without excuse" for rejecting God (Rom 1:20). Thus, it is not merely that the fallen mind is still able to discover truths about God—rather, true knowledge of God continues to be unavoidable; the sense of divinity, even if diminished, still operates along with other rational faculties.

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[42] K. Scott Oliphint, "The Old-New Reformed Epistemology," in Oliphint and Tipton, *Revelation and Reason*, 217.

[43] Oliphint, "The Old-New Reformed Epistemology," 217.

[44] Calvin, *Institutes* 1.3.3 (LCC, 46).

[45] Jones, "John Calvin and the Problem of Philosophical Apologetics," 394.

[46] Calvin, *Institutes* 1.3.3 (LCC, 46).

**The sinner's rational behavior.** As much as the ability of man's rational faculties are inhibited, the most devastating impacts of sin are evident in his rational behavior—perhaps more aptly described as irrational misbehavior. To be expected, the secularly-minded overlook the reality of sin—often assuming that mankind is epistemologically neutral. For instance, the popular idea of "worldview," a conceptual tool used to analyze the "outlook of life, or spirit of the age" of diverse cultures, often assumes this neutrality.[47] In contrast, a Christian perspective recognizes the noetic effects of sin and does not view any area of thought, whether individual or societal, as morally neutral. The apologist recognizes that rational discussion takes place on biased ground for, as Nancy Pearcey asserts, "what we count as knowledge is profoundly shaped by our spiritual condition."[48] The sinner's rational behavior is characterized by a disposition to reject God and a desire to rationally justify that rejection.

First, mankind's disposition toward a rejection of God is shown in a bias against and rejection of divine truth. Paul refers to unbelievers as those who "who by their unrighteousness suppress [κατεχόντων] the truth" (Rom 1:18). In the *New Testament Commentary* on Romans, William Hendriksen argues for the conative force of the present active participle, "κατεχόντων," highlighting the volitional effort required to "suppress" the truth concerning God.[49] The verb tense is an indicator that Paul has continual action in mind; indeed, the suppression must be ongoing because of the persistent functioning of the sense of divinity. Describing the noetic implications of this passage, R. C. Sproul observes that mankind's epistemological issue is not primarily

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[47] Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 32–33.

[48] Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 48.

[49] William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, *NTC* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 68, LBS.

intellectual, but rather is moral in nature.[50] Flowing from a morally perverse nature, the unbeliever does not "glorify Him as God or show gratitude" (Rom 1:21) and does not "think it worthwhile to acknowledge God" (Rom 1:28). Tertullian profoundly captures the irony of mankind's moral and epistemic situation when he asserts, "He [God] is presented to our minds in His transcendent greatness, as at once known and unknown. And this is the crowning guilt of men, that they will not recognize one, of whom they cannot possibly be ignorant."[51] The rational behavior of mankind is actually characterized by willful irrational misbehavior—an anti-God bias that is universal in fallen humanity.

This rejection of God inevitably taints every area of human thought to a greater or lesser degree. In his historical and theological analysis of the noetic effects of sin, Stephen Moroney notes that the models of John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, and Heinrich Emil Brunner all recognize a greater epistemological influence of sin in areas of knowledge that deal most closely to metaphysical realities, and lesser influence in areas of knowledge pertaining to basic observation and logic.[52] And so, the closer the unregenerate mind gets to topics such as the nature of God, humanity, and reality, the more truth is distorted. Nonetheless, every field of knowledge is distorted to some degree because all knowledge ultimately attests to God as "the source of all order in the world and in the human mind, including logical order."[53] Since all of reality is properly viewed in relation to God, the unregenerate mind's reckoning of *everything* is colored by a

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[50] R. C. Sproul, *The Gospel of God: An Exposition of Romans* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 1994), 34, LBS.

[51] Tertullian, "The Apology," in *CAPP*, ed. William Edgar and K. S. Oliphint, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 142, LBS.

[52] Stephen K. Moroney, *The Noetic Effects of Sin: A Historical and Contemporary Exploration of How Sin Affects Our Thinking* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000), 5, 28–33.

[53] Frame, *Apologetics*, 70.

rejection of God; knowledge detached from the objective reality of God is distorted.[54] As human nature is depraved, so is unredeemed human thought—characterized by a willful rejection of God.

Second, extending beyond one's willful rejection of God, the noetic effects of sin are evident in mankind's attempts to justify unbelief. For this reason, some of the apologist's efforts are often spent answering the unbeliever's objections. Human beings, however, seldom formulate objections without influence from the surrounding culture; therefore, it is necessary to consider the "communal" noetic effect of sin.[55] As individuals are sinners, so the collective thought patterns of society and culture are inevitably influenced by sin. With great relevance to evangelism and apologetics, the rise of cultural secularism is an example of the "communal" noetic effects of sin. In his book, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, James K. A. Smith reflects upon the impact of secularity upon religious thought:

> How, in a relatively short period of time, did we go from a world where belief in God was the default assumption to our secular age in which belief in God seems, to many, unbelievable? This brave new world is not just the old world with the God-supplement lopped off; it's not just the world that is left when we subtract the supernatural. A secular world where we have permission, even encouragement, to *not* believe in God is an accomplishment, not merely a remainder. Our secular age is the product of creative new options, an entire reconfiguration of meaning.[56]

In other words, the collective force of secular thought patterns actually encourages a determined anti-theism. Furthermore, the fallen mind is drawn to these alternative "creative new options" which support one's willful unbelief or choice of idolatry. In this way, the individual's rebellious mind feeds off of communal rebellion—finding a myriad

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[54] Pearcey notes that disciplines as fundamental as mathematics have not been immune from the increasingly secular and relativistic mindset in America; See Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 52.

[55] Moroney, *The Noetic Effects of Sin*, 29. Moroney notes that the communal noetic effects of sin are often overlooked due to "an individualistic concept of sin."

[56] James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2014), 47, LBS.

of theories that attempt to justify unbelief and a cultural "voice" that supports that suppression of truth.

Even so, attempts to rationally justify unbelief are ultimately insufficient, and therefore, the apologist should not despair. Even in a secular society that is seemingly saturated with idolatrous alternatives to Christianity, these ideologies cannot account for life as actually experienced. Charles Taylor refers to the "cross-pressures" experienced by modern individuals, whereby many who embrace secularity continue to inadvertently hold many theistic values in order to "avoid the flatness, the emptiness, the fragmentation" that logical consistency would require.[57] The apologist recognizes that the noetic effects of sin do not remove mankind's sense of divinity, therefore, no attempts to justify unbelief provide adequate cover for the unbeliever to hide under.

In review, several key points pertinent to apologetic application have been made concerning the noetic effects of sin. On the one hand, due to one's adequately functioning rational faculties, the unbeliever cannot help but "know" God as Creator; this reality gives confidence to the apologist, releases him from the burden of proof regarding theism, and also legitimizes rational argumentation to a point. On the other hand, the refusal to recognize the one who is "known" is an act of noetic rebellion; this reality emphasizes the need for the apologist to rely on the Holy Spirit, as rational argumentation will not be able to overcome the anti-God bias. Furthermore, the apologist is reoriented to recognize sin as the ultimate problem to be addressed. Further implications will come to light as God's revelation is considered below.

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[57] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 378. Similarly, Francis Schaeffer makes a similar point in *Escape From Reason*, but grounds his assertion in mankind's ontology. Schaeffer asserts, "Man made in the image of God cannot live as though he is nothing." See Francis A. Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason* (Westmont, IL: IVP Books, 2014), 68–73, LBS.

## The Distinction between General and Special Revelation

While an understanding of human rationality is crucial for an evangelistic application of apologetics, the task is pointless without the recognition and conviction that God has spoken. God has revealed himself to humanity through different means which may be theologically categorized as either general or special revelation. These two categories of revelation will be analyzed based on three distinguishing factors: (1) the revelatory mode, (2) the implications for divine-human relationship, and (3) the exposure to humanity. A proper application of apologetics in evangelism requires a theological understanding of the distinction between general and special revelation. An analysis of theological perspectives and apologetic methodologies will support the thesis by showing that the proper apologetic approach often depends on the category of revelation pertaining to the issue.

### General Revelation

General Revelation is distinguished from special revelation because of its modes of communication through nature and history, its witness to the Creator-worshipper relationship between God and mankind, and its universal exposure to mankind.

**Revelatory mode.** General revelation is communicated to mankind through the modes of nature and history. Due to nature's prominent role, however, theologians sometimes use the term "natural revelation."[58] The apostle Paul indicates that this is non-verbal revelation that is simply "understood through what He has made" (Rom 1:20). Moreover, since mankind is part of God's creation, the human conscience also provides an internal witness about God's moral law, so that "Gentiles, who do not have the law, instinctively do what the law demands. . . . they show that the work of the law is written

[58] John M. Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord: An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2006), 51, LBS.

on their hearts" (Rom 2:14–15). The conscience, then, can be considered as a sub-set of nature's witness.

In addition to the mode of nature, theologians have also noted that the progression of history may also generally reveal God. Though Millard Erickson notes that the witness of history is "less impressive than that of nature," he observes that "long-lasting trends of history, such as the preservation of God's special people [Israel]" testify to God's providential purposes of history.[59] In like manner, John Chrysostom referred to the miraculous growth of the church as a historical reality that even the "pagan must admit."[60]

**Implications for divine-human relationship.** As general revelation is primarily delivered through the witness of nature, it testifies to mankind's relationship to God as Creator. Psalm 19:1 indicates that mankind can know something of the "glory of God," from his creation. Likewise, Paul declares that God's "invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, since the creation of the world" (Rom 1:20). Furthermore, the witness through nature is significant enough that even fallen humanity should be aware of the responsibility to worship Him (Rom 1:21–23). For this reason, appeals to general revelation are often found in confrontations of idolatrous worship.[61]

While some truths may be grasped through general revelation, it does not reveal the content of the gospel and therefore is not sufficient for salvation. Moreover, Paul does not indicate that people respond positively to nature's witness; instead, due to

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[59] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 179–80.

[60] John Chrysostom, "A Demonstration against the Pagans that Christ is God," in Edgar and Oliphint, *CAPP*, vol. 1, 193, LBS.

[61] *e.g.,* Paul's engagements in Lystra (Acts 14:14–18) and Athens (Acts 17:22–30) indicate that he assumed that mankind *ought to know better* than to engage in idolatry due to the witness of creation.

the noetic effects of sin, mankind suppresses the truths mediated through creation (Rom 1:18). This fits with the context of the book of Romans as Paul builds his initial case that all "are under sin" (Rom 3:9). For these reasons, the import of general revelation must be considered carefully as to avoid under-estimating or over-estimating its function. On the one hand, Frame rightly observes that general revelation reveals God "with unmistakable clarity"; on the other hand, such a claim does not mean that the fallen creation reveals God *perfectly*, for nature's witness is clouded and distorted to a certain degree by the curse of sin (Gen 3:17–19).[62] Moreover, a person cannot deduce the gospel from studying general revelation; therefore, salvation is not possible without redemptive special revelation. Without the saving and transforming work of Jesus Christ, mediated through the gospel, the unbeliever refuses to worship the Creator.

**Revelatory exposure to humanity.** Lastly, general revelation is universal in reach. The celestial bodies proclaim God's existence, glory, and power; additionally, revelation is given through humanity itself as it bears the image of God. Consequently, a glance through the telescope or into the mirror both testify to God. Indeed, every experience of structure, order, and meaning testify to God as the objective grounding of reality. As God's created world is inescapable for finite mankind, so is his revelation.

The relationship between general revelation and mankind's inner sense of divinity is important as it highlights the persistent effectiveness of God's witness to humanity. The two share a complementary connection—the "*divinitatis sensum*" explaining how the truths of general revelation are instinctively ascertained in a manner resembling an *a priori* belief.[63] Alvin Plantinga considers carefully the relationship between nature's witness and the divine sense:

> this natural knowledge of God is not arrived at by inference or argument (for example, the famous theistic proofs of natural theology) but in a much more

[62] Frame, *Apologetics*, 7–8.

[63] Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 175–76.

> immediate way. . . . It isn't that one beholds the night sky, notes that it is grand, and concludes that there must be such a person as God. . . . It is rather that, upon the perception of the night sky or the mountain vista or the tiny flower, these beliefs just arise within us. They are *occasioned* by the circumstances; they are not conclusions from them.[64]

According to Plantinga, God has designed humanity such that the pervasive nature of general revelation naturally elicits an awareness of God even without reasoned reflection. Similarly, Thomas Schreiner indicates that, while this knowledge is "mediated through observation of the created world," God has "stitched into the fabric of the human mind his existence and power, so that they are instinctively recognized."[65] While general revelation displays the glory of God, the sense of divinity guarantees that each person sees it—continually. To great frustration, the unbeliever seeks to suppress a revelation that is inescapable. By way of analogy, if general revelation is the ground one walks on, the inner sense of divinity is a pebble in the unbeliever's shoe, making him uncomfortably aware of each step—and on whose ground he continually treads.

In review, several key points pertinent to apologetic application have been made concerning general revelation. Although insufficient for salvation, the witness of creation reveals inescapable truths about God as Creator. Significantly, even considering the noetic effects of sin, Paul is profoundly confident that God's revelation continues to reach the minds of all people such that all are "without excuse" (Rom 1:20). The ontological reality of the divine sense continues to function, and therefore, the witness of God's general revelation can never be choked out.

**Special Revelation**

Special revelation is distinguished from general revelation because of its modes of communication through historical deed and word, its witness to mankind's conditional relationship to God as redeemer, and its contingent exposure to mankind.

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[64] Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 174–75.

[65] Schreiner, *Romans*, 86.

**Revelatory mode.** With significant evangelistic and apologetic implications, the modes of special revelation share a close link to historical events. Indeed, God's redemptive deeds or acts within history are rightfully identified as one mode of communication for God's special revelation. While the broad progression of history may reveal general truths about God, particular events of redemptive history are especially revelatory in character. For instance, God performed the redemptive actions surrounding the exodus so that both Israelites and Egyptians "will know" that he is Yahweh (Exod 10:2; 14:4, 18; 16:12; 29:46). Moreover, the very acts of Jesus's birth, death, resurrection, and ascension, along with many of his miracles, reveal the saving character of God to some extent. Frame notes that, while this is "revelation in history, in event," it is distinguished from general revelation with two criteria "because it is not given to everyone and because it contains a special message, the message of salvation."[66] These special events of history are properly called revelation in and of themselves.

Closely related to the revelatory deeds of God, special revelation came to mankind in the λόγος of God. The λόγος, in reference to special revelation, refers both to the incarnate Son as the embodied word and to the Scriptures as the written word.[67] Regarding the incarnation, Erickson notes that Jesus's earthly life and teaching is "the most complete modality of revelation."[68] Since the Son is "the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of His nature," his revelation is not limited to his deeds or the events of his life but encompasses the whole of his incarnational presence on earth (Heb 1:3). Jesus could say to Philip, "the one who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Furthermore, the fact that the incarnation occurred in time further emphasizes the link between special revelation and history, for "*In these last days* [emphasis added], He

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[66] Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord*, 52.

[67] Donald G. Bloesch, *The Christian Witness in a Secular Age: An Evaluation of Nine Contemporary Theologians* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 123–24, LBS.

[68] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 215.

[the Father] has spoken to us by His Son" (Heb 1:2). For this reason, Erickson states that in the incarnation, "revelation as event most fully occurs."[69]

The λόγος as incarnation may be the pinnacle of revelation to man, but mankind may continually access God's special revelation as the written word of Scripture. God has graciously given revelation in divine speech through human language. At times, this speech came orally from God himself or through an intermediary. Moses, for example, received divine speech when "The LORD came down in a cloud, stood with him there, and proclaimed His name Yahweh" (Exod 34:5). If it were not for the testimony of Scripture, however, the many oral divine speech "events" would have been lost in the past, not accessible to anyone except the recipient at that historical moment. This oral revelation, however, is not lost because God has given the written word, which itself is θεόπνευστος or "God-breathed" (2 Tim 3:16, ESV).

As with the incarnation, the written word is also linked to history, and this is evident in at least three ways: (1) it provides divinely inspired historical testimony, (2) it provides divinely inspired explanation of God's acts, and (3) it was given progressively and finally. First, the Scriptures provide authoritative testimony to what actually occurred in history. This is supremely important because the information concerning God's redemptive deeds, such as the exodus or the whole scope of Jesus's earthly ministry, would have largely been lost in the past without the testimony of Scripture. In this sense, while each word of Scripture "is revelation," it is also "a record of God's revelation" in history.[70] Second, the written word also links to history by providing inspired explanation for God's redemptive deeds. With regard to God's actions, George Eldon Ladd observes

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[69] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 215.

[70] BFM 2000 carefully states that the Bible "*is* God's revelation." This was adapted from the wording of BFM 1963 which stated that the Bible "is *the record of* God's revelation." See "BFM Comparison Chart," The Southern Baptist Convention, accessed December 14, 2020, https://bfm.sbc.net/comparison-chart/.

that "the deed was always accompanied by the prophetic word."[71] Warfield likewise observes that, "the entirety of the New Testament is but the explanatory word accompanying and giving its effect to the fact of Christ."[72] Third, the Scripture is linked to history because it was written progressively in time until the closing of the canon. With the closing of the canon near the end of the first century, the inspiration of newly written revelation ceased.[73] With this in mind, special revelation is to be found only within the sixty-six inspired books of the Bible. While God has indeed revealed himself through the modes of his redemptive deeds and Jesus's incarnational life, this revelation is now only found in the written word—a completed and inspired verbal revelation. Although special revelation is not instinctively or universally known, its written form preserves the message so that it may be sought and shared.

**Implications for divine-human relationship.** While general revelation testifies to God as Creator, special revelation gives witness to mankind's conditional relationship to God as redeemer. God's special revelation addresses humanity's deepest need—redemption. On the one hand, it is evident that God was giving a particular revelation even before human sin (Gen 2:17). On the other hand, special revelation from Genesis 3 onward is focused on the unfolding of redemption; mankind's needs are now

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[71] George Eldon Ladd, *I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1975), 144, LBS.

[72] Benjamin B. Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1948), 96. Warfield, however, has understated his case here for Jesus appealed to "all" of the Old Testament Scriptures as well to explain his redemptive acts (Luke 24:27).

[73] Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 412–15.

defined, not only by his finiteness, but also by sinfulness and broken fellowship with God.[74] Special revelation is now oriented toward God's "saving purpose."[75]

In conjunction with its witness to God's saving purpose, special revelation also testifies to the conditions necessary for mankind to be redeemed. While general revelation speaks to an *actual* relationship that every human being has with the Creator, special revelation testifies to a *potential* relationship that every human being may have with their redeemer, given that the conditions of repentance and faith in Christ are met. Though not meriting God's favor, these conditions are the necessary human responses to God's redemptive revelation.

The concepts of faith and repentance are clarified when the nature of special revelation is recognized as both personal and propositional. On the one hand, some theologians have emphasized the personal aspect of special revelation to the neglect of the propositional. For instance, the existentialist Christian philosopher Søren Kierkegaard emphasized the subjective personal encounter of God in Scripture in such a way that the importance of informational doctrine was diminished.[76] For Kierkegaard, anybody who studied the Scripture "in a scholarly way, with a dictionary," without personal "self-examination," has not read God's word at all.[77] At its extremes, this existential emphasis leads into a radical neoorthodoxy where it is asserted that one may encounter God personally in the Bible, but not learn objective doctrinal truths about him.[78] Erickson

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[74] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 201.

[75] Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 76. Recognizing the historical shift brought about by the fall, Warfield observes, "it is not then the supernaturalness of special revelation which is rooted in sin, but . . . the specialness of supernatural revelation" (76). Warfield observed that mankind's broken fellowship with God has removed the commonality of supernatural revelation; now it is "special," as it is given to fallen humanity in order that fellowship with God may be restored.

[76] Søren Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination*, ed. Howard Vincent Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 39–43.

[77] Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination*, 28–29.

[78] L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 335–37. Nettles and Bush document this neoorthodoxy theology in twentieth century Southern Baptist scholar Ralph H. Elliot, who denied the Bible's witness to propositional truth.

notes that if revelation is viewed in this way, the concepts of faith and repentance will be understood in terms of "personal trust or commitment."[79]

On the other hand, it is possible to emphasize propositional revelation to the neglect of the personal. Confronting this imbalance among some of the Jews, Jesus exclaimed, "You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, yet they testify about Me" (John 5:39). While they knew doctrines, they missed Jesus—the person to whom all the Scripture testifies. Erickson notes that if revelation is viewed primarily as propositional, the concepts of faith and repentance will be understood in terms of "response of assent, of believing those truths."[80]

Views that characterize special revelation as *either* personal or propositional present a false dichotomy that, by implication, distorts the nature of saving faith. Recognizing redemptive revelation as both personal and propositional, the biblical view of faith and repentance involves both assent to objective truths along with a trust and commitment to God. As Demarest notes, the cognitive element of repentance recognizes objectively revealed truths about God's character, including his "holiness, righteousness, and displeasure against sin."[81] Similarly, the cognitive element of faith recognizes objectively revealed truths such as "Christ's coming in human flesh, his atoning death, and his resurrection from the grave."[82] However, special revelation is not cold impersonal truth to be embraced as a mere way of life, practical philosophy, or worldview. Ultimately, the Scriptures present objective and unchanging propositional truths in order to reveal Christ—the *person* to whom each individual must personally respond. Special revelation testifies to a redemption that is conditional—appropriated by a faith and a

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[79] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 216.

[80] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 216.

[81] Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 254.

[82] Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 260.

repentance that is both personal and propositional. It is in light of this reality that an evangelistically-aimed apologist must call for faith response, as emphasized in chapter 2.

**Revelatory exposure to humanity.** Special revelation is also distinguished from general revelation in its contingent exposure to mankind. There is a vertical and horizontal dimension in how people are exposed to God's redemptive revelation. The vertical dimension deals with the particular historical occasion when God gives revelation to an original recipient.[83] At this point in the revelatory process, the redemptive word is contingent only upon the divine speaker and, perhaps to some inconsequential extent, the recipient. However, the horizontal dimension recognizes God's desires for his redemptive revelation to extend beyond the original recipient. God inspired his word in written form in order that it may be horizontally shared. Although God's written revelations were immediately complete in terms of content at the time of inspiration, mankind's exposure to them is incomplete and contingent upon human means by God's design. Consequently, while general revelation presses in on all humanity, God's special revelation is only known through the missionary enterprise—evangelism and discipleship.

In review, several key points pertinent to apologetic application have been made concerning special revelation. The locus of special revelation in terms of contemporary accessibility is the written word of God, a mode of communication that must be shared in order to be made known. Moreover, the redemptive nature of this revelation highlights the importance of the evangelistic task. Moreover, since this revelation is not instinctively known and is encountered in the form of propositional truth claims, the apologist may seek to confirm gospel truths by utilizing evidences. The link

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[83] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 201. Erickson's definition focuses on what I have labeled the "vertical" nature of special revelation to "particular persons at definite times and places." Erickson's definition ignores the "horizontal" nature of the written word. He does, however, later speak of revelation as including the "product" of revelation in the Scripture (222).

between history and special revelation indicates that the evidences will primarily be historical in nature. Notably, the personal nature of God's special revelation highlights the necessity of the Holy Spirit's saving ministry, which is next in consideration.

## The Witness of the Holy Spirit

It is only by the working of the Holy Spirit that a human being may have eternal life.[84] Jesus says plainly, "The Spirit is the One who gives life" (John 6:63). A proper application of apologetics in evangelism requires a theological understanding of the witness of the Holy Spirit to the gospel. An analysis of theological perspectives and apologetic methodologies will support the thesis by showing that an effective application of apologetics in evangelism highlights the gospel with reliance upon the Holy Spirit to illuminate the message of Christ.

### The Holy Spirit and Special Revelation

While the Holy Spirit—himself God—is necessarily involved in all manner of God's revelation, his life-giving and redemptive ministry is inextricably tied to special revelation. Some theologians have wrongly emphasized an illuminating witness of the Holy Spirit to the truths of general revelation. "Cumulative case" apologist Paul Feinberg, for example, sees an "external witness" of the Holy Spirit in the "theistic arguments" for God's existence.[85] In light of this view, Frame confidently states, "I know of no passage in which the Spirit's witness has any object other than the Word.[86] Regarding the gospels reception in Corinth, Paul testifies, "my speech and my proclamation were not with persuasive words of wisdom but with a powerful demonstration by the Spirit, so that your faith might not be based on men's wisdom but

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[84] Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 115–16.

[85] Paul D. Feinberg, "Cumulative Case Apologetics," in Cowan, *FVA*, 160. William Lane Craig also holds to a broad view of illumination; See Moreland and Craig, *PFCW*, 168.

[86] Frame, "A Presuppositionalist's Response," 75.

on God's power" (1 Cor 2:4–5). While the Holy Spirit *may* choose to use arguments from general revelation, in the Scripture his *redemptively-aimed* witness is only explicit with regard to his redemptive revelation.

The reception of the gospel in Thessalonica is instructive as a clarifying example of the Spirit's redemptive witness to the word of God and of the content of the proclaimed message. Paul thanked God for the Thessalonians' response to his message because they "welcomed it not as a human message, but as it truly is, the message of God, which also works effectively in you believers" (1 Thess 2:13). What could account for this incredible reception? Paul states that "our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, *in the Holy Spirit,* and with much assurance (1 Thess 1:5). The inner witness of the "Spirit of God" enabled them to embrace "the message of God."

Taking Paul's testimony seriously regarding the powerful evangelistic outpouring in Thessalonica, the evangelist today should desire to share the same Spirit-affirmed word. But what was the "word" of God that the Thessalonians heard? This turns out to be a practical question because the evangelist is not always able to quote Scriptures at length in gospel conversations. Would the Spirit of God also affirm the use of modern evangelism resources that provide an outline of the message of redemption? Graham Cole argues that the Thessalonians heard the early apostolic proclamation, an oral "message of God," rather than the written revelation.[87] On the one hand, the brief survey of special revelation above agrees that it is broader than the written word of God; this would have especially been true in the time of the apostles. On the other hand, a closer look shows that the written Scripture was foundational for Paul's proclamation, for at the inception of the church in Thessalonica, Luke tells us that, "As usual, Paul . . . reasoned with them *from the Scriptures* [emphasis added], explaining and showing that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead" (Acts 17:2–3). Therefore, the written word and the

[87] Graham A. Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, FET (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 262, LBS.

proclaimed word are closely related; the oral message that Paul proclaimed was a firmly biblical message to which the Spirit of God testified and affirmed.

Concerning the use of gospel outlines in evangelism, there is textual evidence that suggests that Paul's Spirit-authenticated proclamation in Thessalonica was an oral tradition summarizing the gospel message. Richard Bauckham notes that παραλαβόντες, translated as "received" in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, denotes a "formal oral transmission," whereby procedures were put in place to guard the faithful handing down of a message.[88] In this light, Paul's gospel proclamation was a faithfully-handed down *oral* word, not written Scripture, but *scriptural* in its message. This view is strengthened by the example of another "gospel summary" that was transmitted orally in the early church. It is likely that the proclamation in Thessalonica was similar to the oral tradition eventually recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:3–8, which also uses παραλαβόντες to refer to the transmission process.[89] Paul states, "For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3–4). Like his spoken message in Thessalonica, Paul's oral message in Corinth was "according to the Scriptures"—based on written revelation. Interestingly, Paul tells the Thessalonians that the Spirit of God testified to this scripturally-based, oral gospel summary as "the message of God" (1 Thess 2:13).

In review, several key points pertinent to apologetic application have been made concerning the Holy Spirit's witness to the redemptive message. The Spirit's redemptive ministry is accomplished with his redemptive special revelation. This indicates that the role of Scripture in evangelism ought not to be de-emphasized—for it reveals the gospel. However, the Holy Spirit also legitimizes the use of scripturally-based

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[88] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2017), 264, LBS.

[89] Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 264.

gospel summaries, which may aid the believer in witnessing. As long as evangelistic outlines and resources are in harmony with the apostolic gospel proclamation, one can trust that Holy Spirit, in his sovereign plan, will use them to draw some people to himself. Lastly, noting the Spirit's particular witness to special revelation, the apologetic approach should be aligned with and directed toward the message of redemption.

**The Holy Spirit and Humanity**

Pertinent to the apologetic task is the recognition of the Holy Spirit's work in regards to both human understanding and volition. First, illumination is wrought upon the understanding of the unbeliever as the Holy Spirit testifies to the truth and contemporary relevance of God's Word. Concerning the truth of God's Word, the Scripture is self-attesting in that it explicitly claims to be true (Ps 119:160). However, the Spirit of God also works an internal witness, as Sproul refers to "the Holy Spirit bearing witness to our spirits that this is the Word of God."[90] The activity of the Holy Spirit enables the believer to discern truth; therefore, the apostle John confidently states, "you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you have knowledge. I have not written to you because you don't know the truth, but because you do know it" (1 John 2:20–21). An illumination occurs at conversion as God shines "in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6).

The Holy Spirit also testifies so that the human person will understand the contemporary and personal relevance of God's Word. Lydia for instance was personally interested in the gospel for "The Lord opened her heart to *pay attention* [emphasis added] to what was spoken by Paul" (Acts 16:14). Still today, the truths of God's word that were written in the distant past are pressed upon the hearts of men with freshness by the Holy Spirit. That being said, it is not as though the Scripture is existentially relevant because it

[90] R. C. Sproul, *Can I Trust the Bible?*, The Crucial Questions Series 2 (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2017), 57–58.

*becomes* the word of God in the reading, as in neoorthodox theology.[91] Rather, the Scripture was fixed in the past but is pertinent for the present because, as Jonathan Griffiths observes, "by his Spirit God speaks today those words he once spoke."[92] The Spirit's illuminating work enables the unbeliever to hear God's present voice in his written revelation.

Second, the Holy Spirit's work regards human volition, overcoming the unbeliever's rebellious disposition to effectually bring about a saving faith in Christ. Sproul notes that God "calls sovereignly and effectively by an inward call which goes beyond the ears into the soul and into the heart . . . he does so by the power of his Spirit through the Word."[93] What is crucial to note is that the will—previously disposed to reject God—now responds to God's revelation. The sobering and universal effects of sin on mankind help us to understand why the evangelist must ultimately rely on the Holy Spirit to do his redemptive work in the hearts of lost individuals. Unfortunately, apologists often only recognize the Holy Spirit's role in regards to intellectual illumination. Feinberg, for instance, refers to the "internal witness of the Holy Spirit," as that of "convincing," without mention of the obstacle of man's rebellious will.[94] The rebellious nature of man's will must be overcome by the power of the Spirit for one to truly receive the gospel.

In review, several key points pertinent to apologetic application have been made concerning the Holy Spirit's saving work in humanity. It is recognized the Holy Spirit uses means to reach the lost, for examples of evangelistic and apologetic engagements occur in the Scripture. However, only by the working of the Holy Spirit is

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[91] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 210.

[92] Jonathan Griffiths, *Preaching in the New Testament: An Exegetical and Biblical-Theological Study*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 42 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 16.

[93] Sproul, *The Gospel of God*, 17–18.

[94] Feinberg, "Cumulative Case Apologetics," 158–60.

someone saved. The believer rightly offers evidence that the gospel is objectively true and lives a redeemed lifestyle as evidence that the gospel existentially matters; however, these realities can only be proved to the heart of the unbeliever by the Holy Spirit's illuminating ministry and effectual calling. The Spirit overcomes the resistance to God, showing the unbeliever that the gospel is true and has personal relevance to him or her.

Recalling chapter 2, Paul's example of evangelistic apologetics—connecting on common ground, confronting sin, calling for a faith response, and confirming gospel truths—is shown to have a firm theological base in this chapter. Connecting on common ground is possible due to the realities of human rationality and general revelation; after all, the same God who designed creation to reveal himself also designed the human mind to know him. These realities also highlight the necessity of confronting sin; the noetic effects of sin are manifested in a willful suppression of the unavoidable truth of God. Sinful mankind, therefore, needs redemption, and this need can only be satisfied through God's special revelation—the gospel. Since special revelation, by the work of the Holy Spirit, engages people at a personal and moral level, unbelievers are called to a faith response characterized by repentance from sin and trusting in God's promises. Moreover, since special revelation, as manifested in Scripture, is propositional in nature, it must be shared in order to be known; therefore, evangelism also involves calling for mental assent to propositional truths, as the Holy Spirit carries out his ministry of illumination. Finally, gospel truths can be confirmed with historical evidence because special revelation is intricately connected to God's historical redemptive acts.

## Redemptive Apologetics: A Proper Partnership Between Evangelism and Apologetics

In light of the above theological observations, what does a proper partnership between evangelism and apologetics look like? It needs to be recognized that a truly evangelistic application of apologetics requires the priority of evangelism. Taking the supportive role, apologetic practice must adjust to the task of sharing the gospel, not the

other way around. Having noted the Holy Spirit's willingness to powerfully witness to scripturally based gospel summaries, a proper apologetic approach should align with the core truths of a gospel presentation. In his *Evangelism Handbook*, Alvin Reid offers a helpful "sin-salvation" gospel summary:

> *Sin* [emphasis in original] is us substituting ourselves for God, putting ourselves where only God deserves to be—in charge of our lives. *Salvation* [emphasis in original] is God substituting himself for us, putting himself where only we deserve to be—dying on the cross . . . To become a Christian is to first admit the problem: that you have been substituting yourself for God.[95]

This gospel summary, emphasizing that a recognition of sin is necessary for one to trust in the Savior, will serve as a framework for a proper application of apologetics in evangelism. In a *redemptive apologetics* framework, apologetic engagements are directed such that the core concepts of sin and salvation are reinforced, thereby aligning apologetic method with the message of redemption. An *apologetic of rebellion* and an *apologetic of redemption* provide the practical and theologically guided approaches for redemptive apologetics.

**An Apologetic of Rebellion**

An apologetic approach that is aligned with God's redemptive message will confront sin, albeit gently. In light of our analysis of human rationality and God's general revelation, it must be recognized that every person is, by nature and practice, a rebel—rejecting what is known about God. The unbeliever's continual refusal to worship according to what (and who) is known to his mind shows the rebellion of the unregenerate heart. Therefore, especially when dealing with generally revealed truths, the apologist should employ an apologetic of rebellion—a loving though confrontational *defense* of the reality of sin, particularly the sin of unbelief. An apologetic of rebellion aims to highlight the reality of sin, thereby providing a natural connection to the good

[95] Alvin L. Reid, *Evangelism Handbook: Biblical, Spiritual, Intentional, Missional* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2009), 262–63. Reid acknowledges that this gospel summary is adapted from a paragraph by John Stott. See John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 159.

news of Jesus Christ. After establishing the need for such an approach, practical methodology for an apologetic of rebellion will be delineated.

**The need for an evangelistic realignment in apologetics.** An apologetic of rebellion is needed due to the common theological and practical disconnect between apologetics and evangelism. An example of this disjointed relationship is found in the book *Apologetics at the Cross: An Introduction for Christian Witness* by Joshua D. Chatraw and Mark D. Allen. It is noteworthy that the subtitle of the book expresses the authors' hearts for evangelistic apologetics; the discipline is described as "a tool to clear the debris of doubt out of people's paths and propel them forward toward the gospel."[96] Thus, on the one hand, the authors insist that the apologist have an evangelistic aim.[97] On the other hand, it is claimed that the evangelistic task is supported primarily by removing "the debris of doubt," rather than a gentle confrontation of sin.[98] Of course, doubt may be an impediment at times—especially regarding the truth claims of special revelation; however, the epistemological implications of human rationality and general revelation point to sin as mankind's primary obstacle—not intellectual doubt. Herein lies the disconnect—apologists often deal primarily with the intellect while evangelists aim for a moral conversion. In other words, the evangelist often seeks to highlight the need for a Savior by addressing the problem of sin;[99] apologists such as Chatraw and Allen, however, imply that diminishing intellectual doubt is the *primary* way to "propel the unbeliever forward toward the gospel."[100]

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[96] Josh Chatraw and Mark D. Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross: An Introduction for Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 136.

[97] Chatraw and Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross*, 146–47.

[98] Chatraw and Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross*, 136.

[99] Will McRaney, *The Art of Personal Evangelism: Sharing Jesus in a Changing Culture* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 86; Metzger, *Tell the Truth*, 169–70.

[100] Chatraw and Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross*, 136.

In contrast, an apologetic of rebellion presumes that a biblical view of sinful human nature characterizes the unbeliever. Due to the universality of God's general revelation, the apologist recognizes that the unbeliever is a rebel—actively suppressing the truth of God that is known. Though Chatraw and Allen address general revelation and the noetic effects of sin, these theological categories play minor or non-existent roles in the shaping of their "apologetics at the cross" methodology.[101] Theologically, one might expect that an "apologetic at the cross" would seek to bring this "suppression" to the surface because it is precisely at this point where apologetics may find its strongest connecting point to evangelism—highlighting sin to emphasize the unbeliever's need for the cross. This gentle confrontational ministry is what an apologetic of rebellion approach is formulated to do.

As a further illustration of this disconnect between evangelism and apologetics, classical theistic arguments are often applied solely to convince the unbeliever intellectually—without any confrontation of sin; yet, it is primarily sin that causes even the strongest of these arguments to be rejected. Craig, for example, expresses surprise at the fact that unbelievers would at times betray rationality and logic to deny the conclusions of the *kalām* cosmological argument.[102]

> I figured that few atheists would deny the first premise [whatever begins to exist has a cause] and assert that the universe sprang into existence uncaused out of nothing, since I believed they would thereby expose themselves as persons interested only in

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[101] Chatraw and Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross*, 30–32, 176–77. Explicit acknowledgement of general revelation is given on pages 30–32, while the noetic effects of sin are only alluded to in passing on pages 176–177. These theological concepts do not seem to influence the "apologetics at the cross" methodology. On pages 214–221, Chatraw and Allen propose an "inside-out" approach whereby the apologist begins by "entering into the other person's own plausibility structures and engaging them within it" before leading them to consider the "plausibility" of Christianity. However, lacking an emphasis on general revelation, they seem to ignore the plausibility structure that all humanity has in common.

[102] William Lane Craig, "Reasonable Faith," in *CAPP*, ed. William Edgar and K. S. Oliphint, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 693, LBS. Craig's argumentation is as follows: (1) "Whatever begins to exist has a cause," (2) "The universe began to exist," and (3) "Therefore, the universe has a cause." The strength of this argument is also noted by John Frame. See Frame, *Apologetics*, 119.

> an academic refutation of the argument and not in really discovering the truth about the universe. To my surprise, however, many atheists have taken this route.[103]

The atheists that Craig refers to are engaged in rebellion—willing to make an irrational intellectual sacrifice to suppress the truth about the Creator; the obstacle to belief is not in their intellects, but regards their wills. Mankind's fundamental issue, as Sproul asserts is "a refusal to acknowledge God," rather than "a lack of knowledge of God."[104] While many classical apologists, Sproul himself included, often attribute evangelistic value to the theistic proofs, attempting to prove a universally-known reality may be counter-productive to the evangelistic task if it does not address mankind's deeper issue—sin. Otherwise, the disconnect between evangelism and apologetics remains.

While rational persuasion is to be used in evangelism (2 Cor 5:11), the mind may be engaged in order confront the "heart," especially regarding the truths of general revelation. Paul's example in Athens demonstrates that the apologist may rationally appeal to general revelation, not primarily to persuade the unbeliever of the truths themselves but to confront the reality of sin. By gently confronting sin, the apologetic of rebellion aligns apologetics with evangelism—placing conversations regarding general revelation in the arena of the Holy Spirit's redemptive witness.

**The method of an apologetic of rebellion.** An apologetic of rebellion highlights the reality of human sin by seeking to lead the unbeliever toward a self-awareness of his or her disdain for God. This type of interaction is best fostered in the context of two-way dialogue, as apologetic issues vary from individual to individual. When conversation centers on truths of general revelation, this approach would engage the unbeliever with rational argumentation but would do so without accepting the burden of proof, which is unnecessary for such inescapable truths; the burden of proof lies with one who seeks to deny the unavoidable. The apologetic of rebellion method has three

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[103] Craig, "Reasonable Faith," 693.

[104] Sproul, *The Gospel of God*, 33.

practical objectives: (1) exposing the irrationality of the unbeliever's competing ideology, (2) confronting the unbeliever's preference for irrationality, and (3) delivering a diagnosis of sin, thereby leading to an emphasis upon the gospel.

First, the believer addresses the inconsistent and unlivable nature of competing beliefs in order to expose the unbeliever's irrationality. Rational arguments for generally revealed truths are willingly offered, expecting that the rebuttal will bring the unbeliever's irrationality to the surface. For example, recognizing that atheism is a suppression of universally-known truth, the use of the cosmological argument may be helpful in *revealing* greater depths of the atheist's irrationality. As stated above, it was in rebuttal to Craig's argument that some of his opponents denied such a self-evident premise that "whatever begins to exist has a cause."[105] This betrayal of reason underlines the importance of asking unbelievers to defend their assertions; Craig's opponents need to feel the weight of the burden of proof, for as Frame observes, "how could reason prove such a negative as 'This event has no cause at all'?"[106]

Moreover, the unbeliever's determination to suppress generally revealed truth leads to inconsistent and unlivable assertions; after all, the unbeliever might deny that God exists, but he or she lives each day in God's ordered world. Without doubt, those who reject Craig's argument in the manner discussed above continue to live each day with the self-evident assumption that events that occur are caused. At some point, the unbeliever's suppression of the truth will lack consistency and betray daily life experience.

Second, the believer guides the unbeliever to a self-awareness of his or her own preference for irrationality over the truth of God. Even when the unbeliever continues to suppress the truth, as Frame asserts, "we expose the true nature of unbelief,

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[105] Craig, "Reasonable Faith," 693.

[106] Frame, *Apologetics*, 117.

not as a neutral or unbiased attempt to account for experience, but as a flight from the God we all know."[107] While it is often asserted that belief in God is wishful thinking, the believer needs to lovingly turn that charge back onto the unbeliever—uncovering the intentional self-deception of denying or distorting truth. Having already dialogued with the unbeliever to highlight the irrational nature of competing beliefs, the believer eventually proceeds to ask questions that increasingly probe the will; for example, the believer may ask the obstinate unbeliever, "Do you think that some people may be *willing* to hold irrational beliefs because they do not *want* to believe in the true God?" After discussing this as a hypothetical possibility for "some people," the believer should respectfully be more direct, asking, "What about you—is it possible that you hold these irrational beliefs because you do not *want* to believe in God? By engaging the will, the apologist emphasizes to the one who is lost that they have an anti-God bias; their rejection of God is driven by the will more than a lack of evidence.

The testimony of G. K. Chesterton demonstrates that the realization of this anti-God bias can play an important role in an evangelistic application of apologetics. Though he did not realize it at first as an unbeliever, Chesterton observed the communal or cultural manifestation of the noetic effects of sin—a widespread anti-God bias. His reflections upon the pervasive objections to Christianity in his day are enlightening.

> It [Christianity] was attacked on all sides and for all contradictory reasons. No sooner had one rationalist demonstrated that it was too far to the east than another demonstrated with equal clearness that it was much too far to the west . . . .This puzzled me; the charges seemed inconsistent. . . . A man might be too fat in one place and too thin in another; but he would be an odd shape. At this point my thoughts were only of the odd shape of the Christian religion; I did not allege any odd shape in the rationalistic mind.[108]

The contradictory critiques of Christianity eventually led Chesterton to consider what he had not at first considered—that there was indeed "an odd shape in the rationalistic

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[107] Frame, "Presuppositional Apologetics," 223.

[108] Gilbert K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane, 1908), 155–58.

mind."[109] What Chesterton realized culturally, the believer aims to help the unbeliever realize personally through dialogue—that his mind is oddly biased against God.

Third, the believer completes his defense of the reality of sin by explicitly delivering a diagnosis of sin to unbeliever. Chesterton's reflections caused him to recognize that sin was "a fact as plain as potatoes"; he even went so far as to say that original sin was "the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved."[110] Chesterton recognized that it was sin that gave the mind an "odd shape." Similarly, the unbeliever's preference for irrationality requires a scriptural identification—sin. By using the biblical term, the apologist corrects the common misconception that sin is confined to actions or even attitude, in contrast to it characterizing fallen human nature.[111] This naturally leads to a presentation of or reemphasis upon the gospel and a calling for a faith response.

Through a loving and kind dialogue, the believer shares truth and asks questions that highlight the unbeliever's rebellion. In the garden of Eden, the omniscient God lovingly confronted the sin of our first hiding parents with the question, "Where are you?" (Gen 3:9). God's question was caring because he knew that Adam and Eve needed to recognize their sin.[112] Similarly, since God's revelation is unavoidable, those who reject God need to be lovingly asked to explain the implications of the ideologies that they are hiding behind. As the believer helps the unregenerate to realize the reality of sin, he confidently relies on the Holy Spirit to convict according to God's sovereign purpose.

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[109] Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 158.

[110] Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 24.

[111] Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 490–491.

[112] Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 92.

**An Apologetic of Redemption**

An apologetic approach that is aligned with God's redemptive message will seek to confirm gospel truth. In light of the above analysis of human nature and God's special revelation, it must be recognized that every person needs to know that the gospel of Jesus Christ is true. The redemptive message must be shared today because the salvation that Christ purchased in the past is applied to lives in the present. Therefore, when dealing with special revelation, the apologist should employ an apologetic of redemption—a defense of the historical truth and contemporary relevance of the gospel. An apologetic of redemption supports the historical claims of the gospel by offering evidences and demonstrates the contemporary relevance through the testimony of the life-lived in Christ. In other words, employing the apologetic of redemption means giving the evidence that the gospel happened and living the evidence that the gospel matters.

**Give the evidence that the gospel happened.** Evidences may be given to support the testimony of redemptive revelation—specifically concerning the historical foundation of the gospel. Some apologetic thinkers, particularly those with an affinity toward "fideism," tend to downplay the benefit of evidences in apologetics due to the recognition that the gospel is beyond the reach of reason.[113] "Reformed epistemologist" Kelly James Clark likewise devalues evidential appeal, asserting that apologists "vastly underestimate the evidential demand necessary to overcome the immense initial improbability that God would be in Christ reconciling the world to himself."[114] In response to Clark's view, it needs to be noted that the apologist should not accept a burden of absolute proof; in fact, it is precisely *because* the gospel extends beyond human reason that the apologist ought not claim to be able to demonstrate every aspect of its truth with reason. Even considering these perspectives which emphasize the

[113] Boa and Bowman Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 490.

[114] Kelly James Clark, "A Reformed Epistemologist's Response," in Cowan, *FVA*, 143.

limitations of reason, the apologist should not hesitate to offer evidences for the gospel for three reasons: (1) the practice is modeled in the Bible, (2) redemptive revelation may be easily avoided, and (3) historical truths are open to historical inquiry.

First, the apologist should offer evidence in support of the gospel because the practice is repeatedly modeled in the Scripture. Bauckham, for instance, notes the intentional appeal to historical evidence for Jesus's resurrection within the oral formula of 1 Corinthians 15:3–8.[115] Furthermore, Paul appealed to the historical evidence of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus in order to "persuade [Agrippa] to become a Christian" (Acts 26:27–28). Interestingly, neither a recognition of the noetic effects of sin nor the limitations of human reason prevented Paul from offering evidence, even to an unbeliever. John likewise emphasizes his eyewitness testimony as evidence for the truth of the gospel as he proclaimed evangelistically the message of "eternal life" (1 John 1:1–4). Any theologian that completely denies the legitimacy of gospel evidences is guilty of theologizing beyond the plain teaching of Scripture. It comes as little surprise that fideist theologians, who undermine the legitimacy of evidence, also tend to "undermine confidence in the Bible."[116]

Second, the apologist should use evidences because it is recognized that redemptive revelation may be easily dismissed and avoided. The distinction between general and special revelation must be kept in mind. Regarding general revelation, the unbeliever is known to be actively suppressing the knowledge of God; therefore, utilizing evidences in order to convince someone of what is already known is not proper apologetic application. In contrast to general revelation, redemptive revelation is consciously received; the unbeliever must choose to listen to his Christian friend, read the Bible or a gospel tract, or attend church, *etc*. in order to be exposed to the gospel. On the

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[115] Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 307–08.

[116] Boa and Bowman Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 422.

one hand, Donald Bloesch may devalue the use of evidence because the gospel is "self-authenticating" and "provides its own evidence."[117] On the other hand, it does not follow that the use of evidence is unwarranted—for evidences may encourage the unbeliever to give the gospel an external *hearing* so that the Holy Spirit may give one ears to truly *listen*.

Therefore, by giving evidences the believer may be used by God to prevent one from dismissing Christian claims too quickly due to faulty information. It is a sobering thought that, without supportive evidence, some people will likely dismiss the Bible without ever considering its content or paying any attention to the gospel. It is likely, for example, that many people quickly dismiss the Bible as unreliable, believing scholars, such as Bart Ehrman, who have compared its textual transmission to that of a "telephone game."[118] By presenting historical evidence for reliable transmission, the believer may help lead the unbeliever to consider the Bible's redemptive message for the first time.

Third, it is appropriate for the apologist to present historical evidences because human salvation is grounded in God's redemptive acts in history and therefore, open to historical inquiry.[119] George Eldon Ladd observes, "It is widely recognized that revelation in history is one of the most distinctive things about biblical religion."[120] In this light, the historical nature of redemptive revelation is an asset to the apologist, as it sets Christianity apart. As one seeks to confirm gospel truths, issues such as the reliability

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[117] Bloesch, *The Christian Witness in a Secular Age*, 124.

[118] Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 49.

[119] Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 198.

[120] Ladd, *I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus*, 144.

of the Bible, the evidence for the resurrection, the implications of the virgin birth, the fulfillment of prophesy, *etc*. may arise—all of which intersect with history.

As a historical claim, the resurrection is particularly important—the apex of Christ's redemptive work. Arguments supporting the fact that Jesus rose from the dead also give historical affirmation of the divine nature of his person and his teachings.[121] Notably, Jesus's teaching includes statements concerning his saving work and purpose, helping the believer to maintain his evangelistic focus. While the full salvific and cosmic significance of the resurrection are certainly beyond reason, the historical occurrence of Jesus's resurrection is supported by significant evidence. Licona demonstrates that, through an examination of competing theories for the miracle claim, the resurrection may be shown as the "best explanation of the historical bedrock."[122] The believer, therefore, has evidence that helps confirm gospel truth and keep the dialogue focused on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

What if, after a presentation of evidences, a person does not believe? On the one hand, the believer should be devoted to prayer and patient in continued dialogue with the unbeliever, knowing that the Holy Spirit's drawing does not always happen at once. On the other hand, if unbelief persists in the face of evidence, the apologist eventually needs to address the willful nature of the unbeliever's skepticism. In this situation, the apologist ought to utilize the applicable components from an apologetic of rebellion, aiming to help the unbeliever see that he or she is trying to hide from truth. For instance, the unbeliever may be suppressing the truth by having chosen a secular philosophy of history that presupposes the impossibility of miracles.[123] If the unbeliever seems firmly resolved to reject truth regardless of the evidence, he or she needs to be lovingly

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[121] Gary Habermas, "Evidential Apologetics," in Cowan, *FVA*, 118.

[122] Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 619.
[123] Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 615.

confronted.[124] Similar to discussions concerning general revelation, by addressing the willful undervaluing or refusal of the evidence, the apologist has another opportunity to emphasize the message of sin and salvation, *i.e.*, rebellion and redemption.

**Live the evidence that the gospel matters.** The apologist needs to demonstrate that the gospel has contemporary relevance to the unbeliever. It is one thing to present evidence that Jesus historically rose from the dead; it is another thing to show that those events have existential significance nearly two-thousand years later. The fideist approach to apologetics, despite its weaknesses, rightly emphasizes that Christ is to be experienced contemporarily.[125] A biblical approach, while relying on the Holy Spirit, recognizes the apologetic value of one's life-witness. Having explicitly called for a faith response to the gospel, the believer will demonstrate the contemporary and personal relevance of Christ's work through actions and lifestyle.

The apologetic value of one's lifestyle is communicated in the Scriptures in exclamation, exhortation, and example. First, one should note Jesus's familiar words, "By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:35). In the age of impersonal social media apologists, one is right to hear Jesus's words as an exclamation—Christian love is an apologetic to the world. Second, Peter's exhortation to "Always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet 3:15) assumes the lifestyle witness of his readers. Regarding this verse, Chatraw and Allen observe that "this community's joy and peace in the midst of trials will confound unbelievers, leading them to ask questions like 'Why do

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[124] For example, the late Christopher Hitchens proudly asserts that neither Jesus's virgin birth nor the resurrection, even if proven true, would confirm his divine nature or teachings. See Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Warner Books, 2009), 116, 143.

[125] Boa and Bowman Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 419–422. With ties to neoorthodoxy, the fideist emphasis on a personal encounter of Christ *through* the Scriptures often diminishes the propositional nature of revelation.

these people have such hope?'."[126] Third, the example of Stephen's witness preceding the most well-known conversion story in the Scripture—the salvation of Saul of Tarsus—is instructive. Luke was careful to establish Saul's presence at Stephen's execution (Acts 7:58–8:1), for this event would be firmly imprinted into the mind of the apostle from that point forward; the apostle would later pray about the event (Acts 22:20) and reflect upon his persecution of the church (1 Tim 1:12–15). Without doubt, Stephen's verbal witness was supported by his life-witness as he demonstrated a firm faith under pressure and a Christ-like love even to his own murderers (Acts 7:59–60). The believer's lifestyle is an apologetic for the gospel.

An apologetic of redemption aspires to give the evidence that the gospel happened and live the evidence that the gospel matters. While there is an abundance of historical evidence to which appeal may be made, the believer's lifestyle communicates the contemporary relevance of God's historical acts. An unwavering hope through difficulty and a Christ-like love for others are powerful witnesses to the reality of the God of redemption. Historical evidences help confirm gospel truths and the life-witness of the believer provides flesh and blood evidence that what Jesus has done matters today; this, in turn, supports the apologist's efforts, as he lovingly calls the unbeliever to a faith response.

## Conclusion

This chapter has sought to lay a theological groundwork for a proper evangelistic application of apologetics. It has been proposed that the framework of *redemptive apologetics* accomplishes this by aligning the defense of the faith with an evangelistic presentation of the gospel. The two components of redemptive apologetics, an apologetic of rebellion and an apologetic of redemption, are defenses of human sin and Christ's salvific work respectively. Therefore, this approach is shaped by the gospel

[126] Chatraw and Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross*, 139.

and informed by a biblical view of human rationality, God's revelation, and the saving ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is recognized that this framework may have trouble accommodating some particular apologetic topics (*e.g.*, God's command for the complete destruction of Canaanites); however, the framework for redemptive apologetics offers a broad paradigm that may be used to keep the evangelistic task central in apologetic conversations with unbelievers.

# CHAPTER 4

# THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

## Introduction

The purpose of this ministry project was to strengthen personal evangelism through apologetics at First Baptist Church of Rogersville, Tennessee (FBCR). This endeavor focused upon four inter-related goals. The first goal was to assess the FBCR members' knowledge of apologetic arguments and orthodox Christian doctrine. This assessment informed the execution of the second goal—to develop a ten-lesson curriculum introducing apologetics and demonstrating its role in evangelism. The third goal was to implement the curriculum and equip course participants to apply apologetics in evangelism. Finally, the fourth goal was to increase the collective number of gospel conversations in which all course participants engage in a fourteen-day period. Overall, this project was aimed to increase the frequency and effectiveness of conversational evangelism among skeptics and those antagonistic to Christianity through apologetics. This chapter provides an account of the preparation, implementation, and follow-up periods of this ministry project.

## Preparation Period

The preparation period focused on the planning and writing of an evangelistic apologetics curriculum to be implemented in the life of FBCR.

### Curriculum Planning

The planning process entailed an assessment of knowledge levels at FBCR and the development of an outline for the curriculum.

**Assessing knowledge levels.** The curriculum planning process began by assessing the knowledge and confidence levels regarding apologetic arguments and orthodox Christian doctrine at FBCR. As this research endeavor involved human subjects, approval from the Research Ethics Committee of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was obtained on January 26, 2021 prior to survey distribution and data collection. In accordance with the research methodology for this project's first goal, a pre-project survey was administered to twenty-five FBCR members.[1]

An analysis of these pre-project surveys informed the content to be incorporated in the ten-week curriculum. On the surface, the surveys seemed to indicate such a high degree of knowledge that such a project may not be helpful or needed.[2] Indeed, the mean score of the assessment surveys was 179.13 out of 198 or 90.47 percent with a standard deviation of 10.42 or 5.82 percent.[3] A possible "ceiling effect," suggested by this high score and low variance, cautioned against drawing research conclusions without a closer examination of the data;[4] a split analysis of the two parts of the survey revealed a more nuanced picture of the knowledge levels regarding orthodox doctrine on the one hand and confidence levels regarding evangelism on the other.[5] On the one hand, a very high aggregate part two mean score of 97.25 percent with a low relative standard deviation of 5.02 percent indicated that FBCR has a strong doctrinal foundation. On the other hand, the aggregate mean score for part one, measuring confidence levels in

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[1] See appendix 1 for the pre-project survey.

[2] See table A1 in appendix 5 for participant scores from the full assessment survey. Note that, out of the twenty-five surveys administered, one was discarded to prevent the skewing of analyzed data. Participant with PIN 412 neglected to complete the final page of the survey, leaving thirteen questions blank.

[3] See table A2 in appendix 5 for aggregate group statistics for full assessment survey.

[4] Duncan Cramer and Dennis Howitt, *The SAGE Dictionary of Statistics: A Practical Resource for Students in the Social Sciences* (London: SAGE, 2004), 21, https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.sbts.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=251276.

[5] See table A3 in appendix 5 for participant scores from part 1 of the assessment survey; See table A4 in appendix 5 for participant scores from part 2 of the assessment survey.

apologetic evangelism, was significantly lower at 72.38 percent with a relative standard deviation of 18.46 percent.[6] In other words, while respondents were firmly orthodox in terms of doctrine, confidence levels as a group were unstable when it comes to expressing those beliefs in a skeptical culture. This supported my hypothesis that the curriculum should focus on a biblical evangelistic *method* for apologetics, as opposed to merely teaching key apologetic arguments and Christian doctrine alone. In this manner, the pre-project survey analysis confirmed the potential benefit of this project.

The pre-project survey analysis also helped to identify certain apologetic topics to be included in the curriculum. On part 1 of the survey, respondents expressed the least perceived confidence levels on questions dealing with moral relativism, religious pluralism, and scientific naturalism, respectively.[7] It is noteworthy that, in terms of doctrine, part 2 of the same survey indicated a high level of doctrinal orthodoxy on questions pertaining to the same topics; this again indicated that doctrinal knowledge was present even while evangelistic confidence in an antagonistic culture was lacking.[8] This observation was helpful because a curriculum is necessarily limited on the number of topics that may be addressed. While a general idea of important topics to be covered was already in mind, moral relativism, religious pluralism, and scientific naturalism would need to be among those especially highlighted.

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[6] See table A5 in appendix 5 for a comparison of aggregate group statistics for full survey, part 1, and part 2.

[7] See table A6 in appendix 5. Most of the questions yielded a mean group confidence level in the mid to upper seventy percent. Three questions, however, yielded a lower mean group confidence level; questions four, six, and eight scored 69 percent, 72 percent, and 70 percent, respectively. Note that question one, which scored only 34.67 percent does not deal with a particular objection, while the other eight questions do.

[8] See table A7 in appendix 5. Questions two, nine, eleven, sixteen, nineteen, twenty-one, twenty-three, and twenty-four of part 2 of the survey are relevant to the topics of moral relativism, religious pluralism, or scientific naturalism. Respondents indicated a high orthodoxy on these topics.

**Curriculum outlining.** The planning process continued with the formation of a general outline for the curriculum in February 2021. The curriculum would focus on teaching *how* to evangelistically engage unbelievers who assert common objections to Christianity. Both the content and approach covered in each lesson would be intentionally shaped by the evangelistic task. To maintain this focus upon evangelism, each lesson's topic would be explicitly anchored to key components of the three circles evangelism tool (3CT). On April 1, 2021, permission was granted from the NAMB for the 3CT graphic to be utilized throughout the implementation of the project. A title eventually emerged for the curriculum to be developed and the course to be taught; The curriculum and course, inspired by Peter's exhortation to "always be ready" (1 Pet 3:15), would be entitled *Ready: Strengthening Gospel Conversations Through Apologetics*. Originally, it was planned to consist of twelve lessons in three parts.

Part 1, comprised of lessons one through three, was to teach a practical framework for guiding apologetic conversations toward the gospel. In line with the example of the apostle Paul in Acts 17, as detailed in chapter 2, this framework would equip Christians to utilize apologetics evangelistically—connecting on common ground, confronting sin, calling for a faith response, and confirming gospel truths to unbelievers. Specifically, the *apologetic of* rebellion and the *apologetic of redemption*, as detailed in chapter 3 of this project, would provide the two-pronged approach for this evangelistic framework. In this way, project participants would be taught to engage in apologetic conversations that do not merely aim at winning arguments, but rather direct attention to the gospel by addressing the reality of sin and pointing to Jesus as the Savior of all who believe.

Part 2, comprised of lessons four through eleven, was to apply the evangelistic framework from part 1 to common gospel objections that may arise in a secular society. Objections to be addressed were to be those associated with scientific naturalism, moral relativism, religious pluralism, the problem of evil, the trustworthiness of the Bible, and

the charge of hypocrisy. It was decided that the lesson format of these lessons would intentionally follow the same general routine and format, as repetitive application of the same *redemptive apologetics* framework would help develop thought patterns that increase competency for gospel conversations. To maintain a focus on practical evangelism, part 2 would also incorporate opportunities for course participants to engage in role-play evangelism.

Part 3, comprised of one final lesson, was to motivate learners to be ready when evangelism opportunities arise. To be ready is more than merely knowing clever apologetic arguments; indeed, it is more than having a good conversational framework or strategy, as helpful as that is. In this final lesson, a study of 1 Peter 3:13–17 will remind course participants of the importance of having a godly lifestyle and a humble attitude as they evangelistically defend the hope of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

## Curriculum Writing

The writing process encompasses the detailed development and panel evaluation of the *Ready* curriculum.

**General description of the writing process.** The curriculum writing process, which officially began in March 2020, took over six months to complete—much longer than anticipated. On the one hand, each lesson required an extensive amount of research into pertinent apologetic issues and objections to the Christian faith. On the other hand, each lesson also needed to be written for pedagogical effectiveness for the membership of FBCR. The curriculum was written in an accessible format such that it could be utilized by other teachers in the future. Each lesson format included three main sections: (1) a detailed "Teaching Plan" complete with key teaching points, illustrations, and classroom learning activities, (2) an accompanying "Biblical and Theological Commentary," (3) a

"Class handout" to aid the course participant in the learning process.[9] Furthermore, each class handout would include reading recommendations from the *CSB Apologetics Study Bible* to reinforce course material.

**Adjustments to the curriculum outline.** During the writing process several adjustments were made to the original outline as described above. It would take four lessons to appropriately introduce the evangelistic framework for apologetic conversations, as opposed to the three originally planned. Furthermore, with approval from my project supervisor, the curriculum was shortened to a ten-week teaching plan, as opposed to the originally planned twelve weeks; this was done primarily to encourage course registrations by slightly lessening the attendance commitment to be expected from each course participant.[10] Within this shorter format, the issue of the trustworthiness of the Bible was not included in this curriculum, as it is a particularly broad topic that could alone require multiple lessons to sufficiently address. The three "low-confidence" topics identified in the assessment survey analysis—moral relativism, religious pluralism, and scientific naturalism—along with the topic of evil and suffering would serve as the primary emphases for evangelistic engagement in the curriculum. In the final lesson, which highlighted the importance of holy living, the objection of hypocrisy in the church would also be addressed. In summary, the curriculum introduced the conversational framework for evangelistic apologetics in lessons one through four, applied this framework to specific objections in lessons five through eight, reviewed key concepts in

[9] See figure A1, along with all other figures in appendix 6, for a representative example lesson from the curriculum.

[10] Timothy Paul Jones, as my project supervisor, officially approved this amendment regarding the duration of the curriculum through an email from Katie Williamson, Assistant to the Vice President for Doctoral Studies, on August 10, 2021.

lesson nine, and exhorted believers to live a godly lifestyle for the sake of the spread of the gospel and defense of the faith in the final lesson.[11]

**Curriculum panel evaluation.** In accordance with the Research Methodology of chapter 1, a preliminary draft of the *Ready* curriculum was reviewed by an expert panel consisting of the Holston Valley Baptist Associational Director, two local pastors, and one FBCR deacon. These four evaluations were received in early September 2021, all unanimously rating the biblical faithfulness, scope, teaching methodology, and applicability of the curriculum as "exemplary" on the provided rubric.[12] While these written evaluations indicated that no revisions were required, individual conversations with these reviewers revealed some minor phraseology and grammar suggestions that helped create a better final version.

## Implementation Period

The implementation period focused on the teaching of the *Ready: Strengthening Gospel Conversations Through Apologetics* curriculum at FBCR. The course was taught weekly on Thursday evenings from 6:30 to 7:45 p.m. from September 9, 2021 through November 18, 2021.[13] Throughout the course, a total of fourteen individuals attended the course, all of whom completed the pre-course survey and questionnaire. On average, the attendance each week was nine.[14] Each lesson followed the teaching plan in the *Ready* curriculum, but with a flexibility that allowed for group discussion and time for questions. To maintain a practical focus upon evangelism, lessons

[11] See appendix 7 for a "Descriptive Table of Contents" for the "Ready" curriculum. This provides a brief lesson by lesson synopsis of the curriculum.

[12] See table A8 in appendix 8 for each evaluator's scores.

[13] While the course includes only ten lessons, this date range includes eleven Thursdays, due to there being no class on October 14, 2021.

[14] See table A9 in appendix 9 for attendance numbers for each course participant. See table A10 in appendix 9 for attendance numbers for each course session.

regularly began with prayer for the lost, appealed to the 3CT for gospel conversations, and incorporated role-play conversational practice. In the latter two lessons, the role-play conversational practice was more closely observed and evaluated using the evaluation rubric.[15] Following these evaluations, feedback was given to group participants to both encourage and constructively correct. At the conclusion of the course, the identical post-course survey was administered.

## Follow-Up Period

The follow-up period focused on the collection and analysis of the post-project surveys among FBCR course participants. Following the conclusion of the course, the post-project survey and the post-course questionnaire were administered to participants who had attended the minimally required number of class sessions.[16] Following some personal reminders to participants, the completed documents were received within fourteen days, with the minor exception of one participant who submitted documents late.

The follow-up period also included a course debrief that was emailed to participants. This email accomplished a fourfold purpose: (1) expressing gratitude to those who participated, (2) briefly reviewing key course concepts, (3) clarifying any misunderstandings apparent from surveys, questionnaires, or teacher observation, and (4) encouraging further development. The transcript of the debrief video is available in the appendix.[17]

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[15] See appendix 3 for the participant evaluation rubric. Note that one participant was unwilling to participate in the role-play evaluation process. Other class participants, who met the necessary attendance threshold for analysis, welcomed and enjoyed the role-play exercises and evaluation. The results of these evaluations will be addressed in chapter 5.

[16] The results of these pre and post-course surveys and questionnaires will be analyzed in chapter 5. Note that the project methodology of chapter 1 requires participants to attend a minimum of eight out of ten course sessions for their data to be used in post-project analysis.

[17] See appendix 10.

# CHAPTER 5

# EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This final chapter is for the purpose of evaluating the project. The project's purpose and goals will be evaluated, followed by an analysis of strengths and weaknesses. These evaluative insights will lead to a consideration of what should be done differently if the project were to be implemented again. Lastly, theological and personal reflections will be considered before this chapter is drawn to a close, along with plans for further emphasis upon evangelistic apologetics in the life of FBCR.

## Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project, as detailed in the introductory chapter, was to strengthen personal evangelism through apologetics at FBCR. For many Christians, it seems that evangelism has become increasingly intimidating and challenging in our present culture. The interconnectedness of the modern world guarantees that cultural secularism and antagonism to the gospel do not stay in large cities or university towns but spread with great influence into many rural settings. In such a rural context, this project sought to educate and equip individuals in Rogersville to utilize apologetics in a biblical manner for the greater and more fundamental calling of evangelism. Each previous chapter of this project was directed to this kingdom purpose.

While the introductory chapter disclosed the project's stated purpose, chapter 2 provided it with a strong biblical basis. An exegesis of Acts 17:22–34 explored Paul's famous encounter in Athens as a model for evangelistic apologetics. By defending Paul's Areopagus speech as a *model* to be followed, a biblical case was made for the legitimacy of the project's purpose; as Paul utilized apologetics to evangelize the lost in Athens, so

may FBCR in its context. Furthermore, the exegesis provided practical direction for carrying out such a purpose. Following Paul's example, apologetics may be used to conversationally connect on common ground, confront sin, call for a faith response, and confirm gospel truths, thereby evangelistically engaging the lost.

The project's purpose was further legitimized and guided in chapter 3 as a theological foundation was established for the development of a *proper* conversational framework for evangelistic apologetics. This theological analysis lent further support to the insights gained in chapter 2. Due to general revelation and God's design of the human mind, all people have a knowledge of God; therefore, a believer can confidently connect on common ground with unbelievers. However, due to the reality of sin, the unbeliever's refusal to acknowledge God is not fundamentally motivated by the intellect but by the will; therefore, an evangelistic application of apologetics must confront the sin of unbelief, instead of merely attempting to convince the mind. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit saves exclusively through the special revelation of the gospel; therefore, an evangelistic application of apologetics must aim intentionally for God's saving message. As a confrontation of sin prepares the way for the good news of the Savior, the *redemptive apologetics* framework presented in this project focuses on the two core concepts of rebellion and redemption. This framework was comprised of two related conversational approaches, which I have labeled the *apologetic of rebellion* and the *apologetic of redemption*. Remaining centered on the stated purpose for this project, these approaches apply apologetics with a distinctively evangelistic aim.

Chapter 4 described the development and implementation of the ministry project. A curriculum was developed and a course was taught to fulfill the stated purpose.[1] The curriculum was designed to teach a distinctively evangelistic approach to

[1] See appendix 6 for a descriptive table of contents for the developed *Ready* curriculum. This provides a brief lesson by lesson synopsis of the curriculum. See figure A1, along with all other figures in appendix 5, for a representative example lesson from the developed curriculum (lesson 3).

apologetics. The biblical and theological insights from chapters 2 and 3 greatly informed the content of the lessons; the twin approaches of the *apologetic of rebellion* and the *apologetic of redemption* that were developed in chapter 3, once taught, provided the framework for dealing with each gospel objection dealt with in the course. Throughout the project, the stated purpose has been maintained. This final chapter now evaluates the overall project with this purpose in mind. As will be shown below, while certain improvements could be made, a curriculum was developed and a course was taught that largely fulfilled the stated purpose of this project.

## Evaluation of the Project's Goals

The purpose of the project was to be accomplished through four goals. This section analyzes the success of each goal.

### FBCR Knowledge Assessment

The first goal was to assess FBCR members' knowledge of apologetic arguments and orthodox Christian doctrine. To accomplish this assessment, a pre-project survey was first administered to twenty-five FBCR members.[2] This survey included thirty-three Likert-scale questions, with nine questions focusing on confidence levels in apologetic evangelism and twenty-four questions focusing on doctrinal belief.[3]

This goal was then accomplished through an analysis of the completed surveys, providing a clearer assessment of the general apologetic knowledge levels at FBCR. A split analysis of the two sections of the survey revealed that, while respondents were highly orthodox in terms of doctrinal belief, evangelism confidence levels when

[2] See table A1 in appendix 7 for each participant's total score. Note that, out of the twenty-five surveys administered, one was discarded to prevent the skewing of analyzed data. Participant with PIN 412 neglected to complete the final page of the survey, leaving thirteen questions blank.

[3] See appendix 1 for the pre-project survey utilized for this assessment.

faced with common objections to Christianity was significantly lower.[4] The mean scores, expressed as a percentage, highlight the disparity; on the "Christian Orthodoxy Scale" of part 2, respondents scored on average 97.25 percent, while scoring only 72.38 percent on the "Confidence Level in Apologetic Evangelism" of part 1.[5] This indicated that respondents generally hold orthodox Christian belief but lack confidence expressing those beliefs in an unbelieving culture. This gave a sense of confirmation that a course on evangelism and apologetics may indeed be a useful endeavor in the life of FBCR.

Further analysis highlighted particular apologetic issues where respondents indicated slightly lower evangelism confidence levels. While most of the nine questions in the "Confidence Level in Apologetic Evangelism" part of the survey yielded a group mean in the mid to upper seventy percent, questions four, six, and eight yielded a mean group confidence level of 69 percent, 72 percent, and 70 percent respectively.[6] This indicated that the corresponding challenges of moral relativism, religious pluralism, and scientific naturalism may warrant special attention in the course to be taught.

**Curriculum Development**

The second goal was to develop a ten-session curriculum introducing apologetics and demonstrating its role in evangelism. The curriculum, entitled *Ready: Strengthening Gospel Conversations Through Apologetics*, was painstakingly developed and written, in full and in great detail.[7] In terms of apologetic content, it is well-

[4] See table A3 in appendix 5 for participant scores from part 1 of the assessment survey; See table A4 in appendix 5 for participant scores from part 2 of the assessment survey.

[5] See table A5 in appendix 5 for a comparison of aggregate group statistics for full survey, part 1, and part 2.

[6] See table A6 in appendix 5. Note that question one, which scored only 34.67 percent does not deal with a particular objection to Christian belief, while the other eight questions do.

[7] See appendix 7 for a descriptive table of contents for the developed *Ready* curriculum. See figure A1, along with all other figures in appendix 6, for a representative example lesson, demonstrating the detailed labor involved in the development of each lesson.

researched and has sought to be true, faithful, and fair to all points of view. In terms of evangelistic focus, every lesson considers apologetic issues explicitly in the context of the Christian's responsibility to share the gospel. In terms of teachability, it is designed with clear teaching points, illustrations, and classroom learning activities, with the hopes that other teachers within the life of FBCR, and perhaps elsewhere, may utilize the lessons. While there are certainly places for improvement, the curriculum reflects the seriousness with which I have approached this task. The four evaluations from my expert panel all unanimously rated the biblical faithfulness, scope, teaching methodology, and applicability of the curriculum as "exemplary" on the provided rubric.[8] This goal was successfully met.

### Curriculum Implementation

The third goal was to implement the curriculum and equip course participants to apply apologetics in evangelism. The success of this goal is measured by two aspects: knowledge of course content and competency in evangelistic skill. Each of these aspects will be explored to determine whether or not this goal was successfully met.

**Knowledge of course content.** The content aspect of this goal aimed to provide a deeper knowledge and a humble confidence regarding a core set of apologetic and doctrinal issues. To measure the course's impact on knowledge and confidence levels, identical pre and post-course surveys were administered.[9] While average class attendance was nine, only six of the fourteen total class participants met the attendance threshold and submitted surveys for analysis.[10] The pre and post-course survey total

[8] See table A8 in appendix 8 for each evaluator's scores. See appendix 2 for the curriculum evaluation rubric.

[9] See appendix 1 for the pre and post project survey utilized in this project.

[10] See table A9 in appendix 9 for attendance numbers for each course participant. See table A10 in appendix 9 for attendance numbers for each course session.

scores were calculated, showing an increase in the score for each participant following the *Ready* course.[11] A t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre and post-project survey scores: t (5) = -3.676, p = .00717.[12] The content aspect of this goal, dealing with knowledge and confidence levels, was met successfully.

**Competency in evangelistic skills.** The competency aspect of goal 3 aimed to equip course participants to apply apologetic arguments for the specific purpose of evangelism. To measure the course's impact on evangelism competency, participants were observed applying apologetic arguments in role-play evangelism. As the course instructor, I measured the skill of each participant using the participant evaluation rubric, which rated participants in terms of both apologetic knowledge and evangelistic approach.[13] Of the six participants who met the attendance threshold necessary for project analysis, one did not agree to be evaluated in a role-play evangelistic scenario. The success levels of the five other participants varied.[14] On the one hand, it was encouraging to see each of these course participants engage the apologetic challenge presented to them and to do so evangelistically; I am able to praise God for the growth that was evident in each of these individuals. On the other hand, only three of the five, or sixty percent, met a "sufficient" or above level on *all* categories on the evaluation rubric, falling short of the seventy-five percent threshold determined for success on this aspect of this goal. Therefore, with both the content and competency aspects considered, I was only partially successful in accomplishing goal 3.

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[11] See table A11 in appendix 11 for a side by side comparison of total pre and post-survey scores by participant.

[12] See table A12 in appendix 11 for statistical results of the ministry project.

[13] See appendix 3 for the participant evaluation rubric.

[14] See table A13 in appendix 12 for participant scores for each criterion on the participant evaluation rubric.

### Greater Evangelism Frequency

The fourth goal was to increase the number of gospel conversations that all course participants collectively engage in within a fourteen-day period by one-hundred percent. This goal was measured by administering an identical pre and post-course questionnaire to discover whether or not course participants were collectively engaging in evangelism.[15] From the six respondents who met the attendance threshold necessary for analysis, the total number of pre-course gospel conversations reported in a fourteen-day period was five. Following the course, the post-course questionnaire indicated that the number of gospel conversations with unbelievers had increased to seven, a forty percent increase.[16] The descriptions of these evangelistic encounters, which often indicated participants' use of apologetics, was encouraging; however, this goal was considered successfully met only if the aggregate number of gospel conversations within a fourteen day period increased by a minimum of one-hundred percent; this goal, therefore, was not successfully met.

## Strengths of the Project

While the evaluation of the goals detailed above shows a degree of success, the strengths of this project extend far beyond what is quantitatively measured. Three notable strengths of the project are the biblical and theological foundation, the evangelistic focus, and the *Ready* curriculum.

First, the biblical and theological foundation of the project is a key strength. The detailed exegesis and research of chapters two and three form the theological backbone of the project as a whole. While many may assume that the disciplines of apologetics and evangelism naturally cooperate, I went to great lengths in chapter 3 to formulate a theologically-grounded framework where the two may properly and

[15] See appendix 4 for the pre and post course questionnaire.

[16] See table A14 in appendix 13.

prosperously dwell together. The input and discussion among the *Ready* course participants demonstrated how illuminating and liberating the *redemptive apologetics* approach can be for those individuals who are genuinely concerned for the lost. For instance, the realization that God's general revelation is unavoidable and that God has designed all people with an inner awareness of Him was freeing; for the first time, course participants seemed to realize that God had been testifying to the unbeliever concerning his existence—long before they showed up to share the gospel. Likewise, a recognition of the reality of sin was also liberating as participants realized that their primary job in evangelism is to engage the heart of the unbeliever, not merely to convince the mind. There were several "light-bulb" moments in class as participants learned a framework to use apologetics to engage the unbeliever's heart—confronting sin and pointing to the gospel. This project was not merely a course of apologetic answers to tough questions, as valuable as that may be. Rather, it taught an overall approach to evangelistic apologetics that is built upon a firm biblical and theological foundation.

A second key strength of the project is its consistent and practical focus upon evangelism. From the beginning of the project, sharing the gospel was primary. Apologetics is a tool, or perhaps one of the toolboxes; evangelism is the overall construction assignment. Of course, tools used improperly can cause great damage, which is one reason why I believe that the *Ready* course was beneficial. This project engages heavily in apologetics, but with the aim that evangelism is strengthened, not obstructed. This evangelistic focus prevented the project from becoming trapped on mere theoretical concepts. The biblical and theological concepts detailed in chapters two and three were explored carefully for practical implications for sharing the gospel. Moreover, in each lesson of the curriculum, apologetic issues were intentionally placed within a gospel-conversation context. Furthermore, many of the most beneficial class discussions arose when participants shared about family members or friends who object to Christianity; as a group, discussion would ensue about how to continue a gospel conversation with that

person. Classes most often started or ended with prayer for lost individuals. Evangelism remained the priority throughout the project.

Lastly, another noteworthy strength of the project is the *Ready* curriculum itself. It was in the development of this curriculum that the biblical insights of chapter 2 and the evangelistic framework of chapter 3 were packaged for the task of teaching. To know foundational truths for evangelistic apologetics is good, but to impart them to everyday church members is exceedingly challenging and wonderful; teaching is a difficult task. While constructing the teaching plans for each lesson, I was challenged to find ways of presenting the core concepts of *redemptive apologetics* in memorable ways.

With regard to the apologetic of rebellion, the teachability of the curriculum is evident in the memorable metaphors of the *mirror* and the *window*—two conceptual tools for exposing the irrationality of unbelief. The mirror metaphor reminds the Christian to reflect an unbeliever's claim back on itself. This technique is effective because the unbeliever often makes claims that are self-refuting. A simple example is the assertion that "there is no universal truth," since it cannot itself be universally true; the unbeliever's claim melts in its own reflection. Likewise, the metaphorical window reminds the Christian to weigh the unbeliever's claim against observations from everyday life. This technique is effective because an unbeliever's claims are often unlivable. The Christian invites the unbeliever to the "window," where it can be observed that real life does not work according to his or her viewpoint. For example, the claim that "there is no absolute truth" is unlivable—every person lives like certain universal truths exist. Together, the mirror and the window served as regular reminders throughout the *Ready* course of how to expose an unbeliever's irrationality. While these metaphors do not capture the totality of the apologetic of rebellion approach, they do illustrate the way the curriculum takes theoretical concepts and presents them in a practical, memorable, and teachable format.

Regarding the apologetic of redemption, the curriculum was likewise developed to be teachable and memorable. For example, the historical evidences for the

resurrection of Jesus are central to the apologetic of redemption; therefore, an acronym was developed to help course participants commit a core set of resurrection facts to memory. The resurrection FACTS, as displayed in table 1, are referred to multiple times throughout the *Ready* curriculum, becoming an essential tool for course participants.

Table 1. The resurrection FACTS acronym

| — | *Keyword(s)* | *Fact* |
|---|---|---|
| F | Foretold | Jesus foretold his resurrection (Mark 8:27–33). |
| A | Appearances | Jesus appeared to many, transforming lives (1 Cor 15:1–8). |
| C | Cost | The apostles shared a costly testimony (1 Cor 4:9–13). |
| T | Time | The apostles shared a timely testimony (1 Cor 15:1–8). |
| S | Setting | The apostolic testimony spread in the immediate setting of Jesus's death (Acts 2:22–36). |

Undoubtedly, the project was strengthened through the preparation for and the practice of teaching. The curriculum, developed for this task and available for repeated implementation, is a lasting product of this endeavor. While the curriculum was designed for the current membership of FBCR, the content would translate across many ministry contexts and will remain relevant for years to come. Each lesson plan was well-researched and developed in painstaking detail; the result is a resource that is specifically designed to train believers to apply apologetics within an evangelistic framework.

## Weaknesses of the Project

There are a few notable weaknesses that were highlighted as the project was implemented. First, I think that the *Ready* course curriculum was slightly too ambitious for my ministry context at FBCR. The curriculum sought to teach both apologetics and an evangelistic application of apologetics in one ten-week course. The result is that some of the lessons are content heavy, which sometimes left little time for effective role-play

evangelism to take place at the tail-end the lessons. While I believe the project was effective in many ways, I believe that the *Ready* course would be more effective in a context where participants already have a basic knowledge of apologetic arguments. In that case, less time would be devoted to teaching apologetic arguments and more time spent exploring how to apply apologetic arguments in gospel conversations.

Another weakness lies in the fact that participants who have not been exposed to challenging contexts for evangelism may lose interest in the course content. In other words, *Ready* is not an entry-level evangelism course; rather, it is an evangelism course that would be most helpful for the Christian who has already engaged with unbelievers in the trenches of our secular society. The issue is one of motivation, not intellectual ability. Having taught the *Ready* course once now, I believe that many average church members have the intellectual ability, but do not have the motivation because they are not personally struggling to witness to a loved one, a friend, or a neighbor who is antagonistic toward the gospel. Once one has had that sort of challenging or even painful experience, the content of such a course becomes deeply relevant. This weakness became increasingly evident as attendance began to dwindle as the study progressed. While some course participants seemingly could not get enough, even asking for the class to be taught again, others seemed to lose interest. This class may motivate those who are already sharing the gospel to do so more, but it did not appear to motivate those who do not share the gospel to begin doing so.

Lastly, attendance was an issue, and this resulted in a smaller sample size than desired for use in evaluation of project goals. There are probably several factors that contributed to this issue. As mentioned above, a few who seemed to lose interest were increasingly absent. Others may have missed for other reasons, but felt that they had fallen behind regarding the course content. The rise and fall of COVID-19 numbers also impacted the attendance of a few. Unfortunately, one probable factor was self-inflicted. While I had originally planned to teach the course on Wednesday evenings, in

conjunction with regular church gathering times, I instead chose to host the course on Thursdays. This decision was made out of a concern for the interest level desired for course participation; it was assumed that a Wednesday evening course would be attended primarily out of habit and tradition. Many of these individuals may not have any particular interest in apologetics, but they would still attend. I feared that the attendance of larger numbers of disinterested individuals would negatively impact the learning environment for those who really desired to engage the study. By placing the study on an evening that the church does not normally gather, I assumed that those who attended might be slightly fewer but would have greater motivation to learn. My assumption concerning motivation may have been correct, but the negative trade-off with attendance was greater than anticipated.

### What I Would Do Differently

In hindsight, there are a few adjustments that I would make before implementing this project again. First, to address the weakness of attendance, I would teach the course on Wednesday or Sunday evening in conjunction with regular church gathering times. I would also consider recording all course lessons, making them available as a resource to those who had been absent. This accommodation may prevent participants from giving up on the study following absences. Perhaps these adjustments would have encouraged greater attendance, resulting in more surveys available for goal analysis.

Second, before teaching the *Ready* curriculum again, I would begin preparing the church months in advance. An evangelistic apologetics course would be more applicable and effective if it followed a church-wide emphasis upon evangelism. Prior to the *Ready* course, I would take the entire church through a sermon series highlighting the 3CT, encouraging and challenging church members to engage in gospel conversations. I would also consider preparing the way for the course by organizing a reading group for

the purpose of exposing church members to books on apologetics. In this scenario, *Ready* course participants would be prepared with evangelism and apologetic knowledge prior to learning how to put the two together.

Third, it occurred to me while evaluating the project that an old-fashioned evangelism tool—the gospel tract—would be particularly helpful in this course. A separate gospel tract could be developed to correspond with each lesson. This adjustment would provide three benefits: (1) a gospel tract would encourage course participants to share what they have learned with others, (2) a gospel tract would provide course participants with a model, for each gospel objection, of apologetics within *the redemptive apologetics* framework, and (3) a gospel tract could serve as a further gospel witness to unbelievers. The gospel tracts would not serve as a replacement for the verbal conversational witness of the believer, but rather as a supplement to reinforce course material and encourage evangelism.

Lastly, in hindsight, some of the terminology coined in the project could be refined for greater clarity and to protect against misunderstanding. For example, the idea of "confronting sin," though central to the *redemptive apologetics* approach, may not communicate the love and gentleness with which I believe that a Christian ought to carry out this task. Similarly, the phrase, "apologetic of rebellion," lends itself to misinterpretation. One could misconstrue the phrase to signify a defense of sin. The idea, of course, is to defend or highlight the reality of sin in the heart of the unbeliever. In this light, it may be more fitting to describe it as an "apologetic against rebellion."[17] In this case, the *redemptive apologetics* framework would be comprised of an apologetic *against* rebellion and an apologetic *for* redemption. Especially when these concepts are taught to everyday church members, terms should be reevaluated for simplicity and clarity.

[17] This phrase was mentioned as a possibility by my project supervisor, Timothy Paul Jones.

## Theological Reflections

In a very real sense, theological reflection has been foundational to every aspect of this project. Even so, in the implementation of the project I was reminded of, or even confronted with, several realities that inspired deeper contemplation. These reflections included the practical nature of good theology, the stubborn persistence of the belief that human nature is good, and the uniqueness of Christianity as to its grounding in history.

First, I was reminded in this project of a basic truth—good theology has practical implications. The truths of Scripture are not merely for the sake of curiosity but are to impact our daily lives, including our evangelistic methods. As noted in chapter 3, there is often a disconnect between evangelism and apologetics. For example, Christians often engage in evangelism with the theological realization that all people are sinners in need of a Savior; nevertheless, the same Christians often engage in apologetics as if all people are good, level-headed, and fair-minded seekers of truth that merely need persuasive arguments. Such an approach is open to the charge of double-mindedness. In contrast, this project has sought to create an evangelistic framework for apologetic *praxis* that is firmly anchored in theological truth, as opposed to humanistic, rationalistic, post-modern, or pragmatic assumptions. With the application of the *redemptive apologetics* framework to particular objections to Christianity in the *Ready* curriculum, I was repeatedly reminded that this project is a theological application to real life; I believe and pray that it has been an exercise in good theology.

Secondly, the implementation of this project also caused me to reflect upon the stubborn persistence of the belief that human nature is good. Contrary to this common assumption, the *redemptive apologetics* framework developed in chapter 3 presupposes a sinful view of humanity. In particular, the apologetic of rebellion approach requires a recognition of the noetic effects of sin—that fallen humanity is not neutral but harbors a disdain for God. Early in the *Ready* course, the reality of unbelief was emphatically

presented as the natural expression of fallen humanity's rebellious nature, as sinners suppress the truths of general revelation and refuse to acknowledge God (Rom. 1:18–32). It was surprising, therefore, to see individuals continue to struggle with these truths.

Course participants seemed to understand the moral dimension of belief in theory, but often failed to recognize it when dealing with particular examples of unbelief. One memorable example came from course session 5, which dealt with scientific naturalism. Briefly addressing the fine-tuning argument for God's existence, the probability was given for a life-suitable universe arising by chance, as calculated by emeritus Oxford professor Roger Penrose. According to Penrose, the probability is so unfathomably small that to write it down would require more zeros than the total number of proton and neutrons in the known universe.[18] Nonetheless, it was noted that Penrose remains committed to the worldview of scientific naturalism; "Do I believe in something outside science?," Penrose considered in a recent interview, "well it's a bit hard to know. . . .I like not to think that."[19] On the one hand, course participants received Penrose's calculation as a welcomed support for theistic belief. On the other hand, with regard to his continued unbelief, one course participant exclaimed, "I just do not understand *how* he could not believe?" Biblically, the reason is clear; Penrose prefers not to believe, expressed well with his words, "I *like* [emphasis added] not to think that."[20] This preference for unbelief makes sense in light of fallen human nature; however, course participants, unexpectedly, struggled to remember the practical implications of mankind's moral condition for the issue of belief.

It seems that the cultural assumption of humanity's goodness has a persistent influence on the worldview of even committed Christians. Believers often assume that

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[18] Roger Penrose, *The Emperor's New Mind: Concerning Computers, Minds, and the Laws of* Physics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 445.

[19] Thomas Fink, "A Singular Mind: Roger Penrose on his Nobel Prize," *The Spectator,* December, 19, 2020, https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/a-singular-mind-roger-penrose-on-his-nobel-prize.

[20] Fink, "A Singular Mind: Roger Penrose on his Nobel Prize."

belief is merely a matter of rational persuasion, while ignoring its moral dimension. Perhaps especially in the sciences, it is often unconsciously assumed that individuals like Penrose are morally-neutral fact processors instead of sinful, albeit intelligent, human rebels. Of course, the danger is that such an assumption often leads to a less gospel-focused application of apologetics. The *redemptive apologetics* framework taught in this project sought to avoid this danger, and thankfully, course participants did seem to show gradual progress as they grappled with these realities.

Lastly, this project caused me to reflect more deeply on the uniqueness of Christianity as to its grounding in history. The historical nature of special revelation, and particularly the salvific work of Christ, was emphasized in chapter 3. However, as I was preparing lesson 7 for the *Ready* curriculum, which dealt with religious pluralism, this reality took on a doxological flavor of praise to God. I realized, more than before, that the historical nature of the gospel message explains Christianity's uniqueness among the world religions. A century ago, J. Gresham Machen profoundly stated:

> The way was opened, according to the Bible, by an act of God, when, almost nineteen hundred years ago, outside the walls of Jerusalem, the eternal Son was offered as a sacrifice for the sins of men. To that one great event the whole Old Testament looks forward, and in that one event the whole of the New Testament finds its center and core. Salvation then, according to the Bible, is not something that was discovered, but something that happened. Hence appears the uniqueness of the Bible. All the ideas of Christianity might be discovered in some other religion, yet there would be in that other religion no Christianity. For Christianity depends, not upon a complex of ideas, but upon the narration of an event.[21]

As Machen observed, Christianity is set apart from other religions by history.

However, probing deeper, I considered *why* Christianity bears this historical uniqueness. This led me to praise God for his grace. After all, grace is why the gospel message is so unique. While nothing humanity could do—no philosophies, rules, or rituals—could merit salvation, Jesus entered human history to save sinners. In other words, while other religions major on what humans should be doing—works, Christianity

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[21] J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, new ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 60, LBS.

centers on what God has done—grace. I also realized that, when dealing with the objection of religious pluralism, the historical nature of Christianity gives the opportunity to highlight both the historical truth and the grace of the gospel. Indeed, "the Word became flesh . . . full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Apologetics and evangelism come together most beautifully in the incarnate Christ.

## Personal Reflections

Without doubt this project has presented the greatest academic challenge in my life thus far. Never have I devoted myself to such detailed and thorough study and research. As a characteristically slow writer, the process was grueling at times. In addition to the ongoing demands of life, there were several seasons of pronounced family and church responsibilities, and these areas were given priority over the project. Making time for research and writing was an ongoing challenge.

The challenges, of course, were not limited to me. As a husband, father, and pastor, at times I wondered if I had anything left to apply to the project. However, I pressed on, realizing that my wife and children have made sacrifices as well; in truth, the completion of this project will be a family accomplishment. Moreover, particularly in the discouraging and overwhelming seasons of this project, I was compelled to reflect upon the potential significance of this project for the kingdom of God. I realize, now more than before, how deeply personal this endeavor was for me. Time and time again, I remembered myself as a college student struggling to witness to others at the University of Tennessee. Being challenged by religious pluralism and the secular ideologies on campus, I remember seeking more deeply for truth and finding satisfaction in Christ and his Word. Of the hundreds of conversations with lost individuals, I still remember many of them. I realize that the *Ready* curriculum, though written for the membership of FBCR, was written always with that younger version of myself in mind. This realization encouraged me to press on to create a resource that I wished that I would have had; after

all, many FBCR members or their loved ones struggle within a culture that is even more antagonistic than I experienced as an undergraduate nearly twenty years ago. Furthermore, a concern for my own lost family members and friends loomed in my mind, a consistent reminder that this project may have eternal significance.

Most significantly, God sustained and encouraged me through the Scriptures. With his sustaining strength, I have poured my passion and energies into the research, writing, and teaching entailed in this project. I know that the curriculum will be utilized for the kingdom in the coming days; I also know that my family is proud of my dedication and relieved that the project is coming to an end. Mostly, I pray that God is pleased, considering it a labor of love and a work of worship.

## Conclusion

This project has focused upon evangelism, particularly sharing the gospel in a world where many have grown cold to the things of God. Christians, however, cannot be pessimists; there is a future hope that is certain in Christ. In the meantime, each believer should strive to be the best witness that he or she can be. We ought to labor in prayer, know the gospel well, strive to understand the unbeliever's objections, and point our lost world to Jesus. Evangelistic engagements with skeptics may continue for months and years without visible fruit. Yet even so, we must be obedient to share, trusting not in our own arguments or charisma, but in the one who said, "I will build my church" (Matt 16:18).

# APPENDIX 1

## PRE/POST PROJECT SURVEY

The pre/post project survey is designed to assess and measure the confidence and the knowledge levels of apologetics and evangelism.

**Pre/Post Project Survey**

**Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess your current confidence level and understanding of apologetics as it relates to evangelism. This research is being conducted by Trey Meek at First Baptist Church of Rogersville, Tennessee for purposes of collecting data for a doctoral research project. In this research, you will answer questions before the implementation of an apologetics course and those who complete the course will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the course. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this survey, and checking the appropriate box below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

[ ] I agree to participate
[ ] I do not agree to participate

**Course Participant Identification and Information**

1. Please provide a three-digit identification number using the specified formula:

Use the **last** digit of your**:** _____ Mobile no. -_____ Street Address -_____ Birth Year

2. How many years has it been since you trusted in Jesus for salvation? _____

3. How many of the twelve course sessions have you attended? _____
*This Question is only to be answered after course completion*

**Part 1: Confidence Level in Apologetic Evangelism**

Directions: Please complete questions in Part 1 using the following scale:

| **1 Strongly Disagree** | **2 Disagree** | **3 Disagree Somewhat** | **4 Agree Somewhat** | **5 Agree** | **6 Strongly Agree** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| Please circle the appropriate abbreviation for each question: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I would share the gospel if I felt more knowledgeable. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. I feel equipped to share the gospel with a person who doubts God's existence due to the presence of evil in the world. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. I feel equipped to share the gospel with a person who blames God for their suffering. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. I feel equipped to share the gospel with a person who believes that morality is man-made. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. I feel equipped to share the gospel with a person who claims that the resurrected Jesus is a legend. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6. I feel equipped to share the gospel with a person who claims that many religions may lead to God. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. I feel equipped to share the gospel with a person who claims that the Bible cannot be trusted. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. I feel equipped to share the gospel with a person who claims that science discredits Christianity. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 9. I feel equipped to share the gospel with a person who claims that a loving God would never judge people for their sin. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

**Part 2: Christian Orthodoxy Scale**

Directions: The questions in this part of the survey are from a validated tool known as the Christian Orthodoxy Scale designed to measure a respondent's understanding of Christianity.[22] Please complete questions in Part 2 using the following scale:

| **1 Strongly Disagree** | **2 Disagree** | **3 Disagree Somewhat** | **4 Agree Somewhat** | **5 Agree** | **6 Strongly Agree** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| Please circle the appropriate abbreviation for each question: | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | God exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. | Man is not a special creature made in the image of God; he is simply a recent development in the process of animal evolution. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. | Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. | The Bible is the word of God given to guide man to grace and salvation. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. | Those who feel that God answers prayers are just deceiving themselves. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6. | It is ridiculous to believe that Jesus Christ could be both human and divine. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. | Jesus was born of a virgin. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. | The Bible may be an important book of moral teachings, but it was no more inspired by God than were many other such books in the history of Man. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 9. | The concept of God is an old superstition that is no longer needed to explain things in the modern era. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 10. | Christ will return to the earth someday. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

[22] Peter C. Hill and Ralph W. Hood, eds., Measures of Religiosity (Birmingham, Ala: Religious Education Press, 1999), 15–19.

| Please circle the appropriate abbreviation for each question: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11. Most of the religions in the world have miracle stories in their traditions; but there is no reason to believe any of them are true, including those found in the Bible. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 12. God hears all of our prayers. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 13. Jesus Christ may have been a great ethical teacher, as other men have been in history. But he was not the divine Son of God. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 14. God made man of dust in his own image and breathed life into him. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 15. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God provided a way for the forgiveness of man's sins. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 16. Despite what many people believe, there is no such thing as a God who is aware of Man's actions. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 17. Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried but on the third day he arose from the dead. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 18. In all likelihood, there is no such thing as a God-given immortal soul in Man which lives on after death. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 19. If there ever was such a person as Jesus of Nazareth, he is dead now and will never walk the earth again. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 20. Jesus miraculously changed real water into real wine. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 21. There is a God who is concerned with everyone's actions. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 22. Jesus's death on the cross, if it actually occurred, did nothing in and of itself to save Mankind. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 23. There is really no reason to hold to the idea that Jesus was born of a virgin. Jesus's life showed better than anything else that he was exceptional, so why rely on old myths that don't make sense. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 24. The Resurrection proves beyond a doubt that Jesus was the Christ or Messiah of God. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

# APPENDIX 2

## CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

The curriculum evaluation rubric is designed to assess the biblical faithfulness, scope, teaching methodology, and applicability of the apologetics curriculum to be implemented at FBCR.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

| Curriculum Evaluation Rubric | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary** | | | | | |
| **Criteria** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **Comments** |
| **Biblical Faithfulness** | | | | | |
| Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture. | | | | | |
| Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible. | | | | | |
| **Scope** | | | | | |
| The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers an introduction to each apologetic issue it is designed to address. | | | | | |
| The curriculum sufficiently covers an introduction to apologetics and its role in evangelism. | | | | | |
| **Teaching Methodology** | | | | | |
| Each lesson was clear, teaching one main apologetic idea applied specifically to evangelism. | | | | | |
| Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material. | | | | | |
| **Applicability** | | | | | |
| The curriculum clearly details how to apply apologetics in real-life evangelism scenarios. | | | | | |
| At the end of the course, participants will be able to better share the gospel in a secular context. | | | | | |

Other Comments:

# APPENDIX 3

## PARTICIPANT EVALUATION RUBRIC

The participant evaluation rubric assesses skill in the application of apologetics in role-play evangelism, considering each participant's apologetic knowledge, evangelistic strategy, and the caring attitude with which the gospel is shared.

Name of Participant: _____ Date: _____

| Participant Evaluation Rubric | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary** | | | | | |
| **Criteria** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **Comments** |
| **Apologetic Knowledge** | | | | | |
| The participant answered questions with biblical support and supporting evidence. | | | | | |
| The participant utilized relevant apologetic arguments. | | | | | |
| The participant displayed an understanding of a biblical worldview. | | | | | |
| **Evangelistic Approach and Attitude** | | | | | |
| The participant applied apologetics in a way that highlighted the need for a Savior or confirmed gospel truth. | | | | | |
| The participant exercised wisdom in making a conversational bridge to the gospel, encouraging a faith response. | | | | | |
| The participant asked thought-provoking questions, encouraging conversation instead of presentation. | | | | | |
| The participant displayed an attitude of loving respect and caring concern for unbelievers. | | | | | |

Other Comments:

# APPENDIX 4

## PRE/POST COURSE QUESTIONNAIRE

The pre/post course questionnaire is designed to measure the frequency of gospel conversations by course participants at FBCR.

**Pre/Post Course Questionnaire**

**Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure the frequency with which you share the gospel. This research is being conducted by Trey Meek at First Baptist Church of Rogersville, Tennessee for purposes of collecting data for a doctoral research project. In this research, you will answer questions before the implementation of an apologetics course and those who complete the course will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the course. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this survey, and checking the appropriate box below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

[ ] I agree to participate
[ ] I do not agree to participate

**Directions: Please complete the following:**

1. Please provide a 3-digit identification number using the specified formula:

Use the **last** digit of your**:** _____ (Mobile no.) - _____ (Street Address) - _____ (Birth Year)

2. How many years has it been since you trusted in Jesus for salvation? _____

3. In the past 14 days, how many gospel conversations have you had with people who, as far as you know, were not yet believers in Christ? _____

4. Please briefly describe each of these encounters, including what gospel truths you were able to share.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

# APPENDIX 5

## RESULTS FROM THE GENERAL PRE-PROJECT KNOWLEDGE ASSESSMENT SURVEY

The tables in this appendix present the data collected from the general pre-project knowledge assessment surveys. The purpose for administering these surveys was to gain a clearer picture of the knowledge and confidence levels of apologetic evangelism and orthodox doctrine among the general FBCR membership. The data presented below provided both affirmation of this project's potential usefulness and guidance concerning the content to be included in the *Ready* curriculum.

Table A1. Total participant scores from the full assessment survey

| — | *Participant Identification Number (PIN)* | *Total Score (out of 198)* | *Total Score (expressed as a percentage)* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 824 | 169 | 85.35 |
| 2 | 591 | 172 | 86.87 |
| 3 | 145 | 186 | 93.94 |
| 4 | 955 | 155 | 78.28 |
| 5 | 137 | 172 | 86.87 |
| 6 | 567 | 184 | 92.93 |
| 7 | 715 | 185 | 93.43 |
| 8 | 229 | 193 | 97.47 |
| 9 | 106 | 176 | 88.89 |
| 10 | 544 | 161 | 81.31 |
| 11 | 147 | 165 | 83.33 |
| 12 | 415 | 185 | 93.43 |
| 13 | 310 | 179 | 90.40 |
| 14 | 690 | 193 | 97.47 |
| 15 | 107 | 175 | 88.38 |
| 16 | 527 | 185 | 93.43 |
| 17 | 306 | 195 | 98.48 |
| 18 | 924 | 179 | 90.40 |
| 19 | 822 | 173 | 87.37 |
| 20 | 105 | 190 | 95.96 |
| 21 | 499 | 177 | 89.39 |
| 22 | 18 | 174 | 87.88 |
| 23 | 865 | 189 | 95.45 |
| 24 | 925 | 187 | 94.44 |

Table A2. Aggregate group statistics for full assessment survey

| — | *Population Mean Score (out of 198)* | *Population Mean Score (expressed as a percentage)* | *Standard Deviation* | *Relative Standard Deviation (expressed as a percentage)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total Survey (33 questions) | 179.13 | 90.47 | 10.42 | 5.82 |

Table A3. Participant scores from part 1 of the assessment survey

| — | *Participant Identification Number (PIN)* | *Part 1 Score (out of 54)* | *Part 1 Score (expressed as a percentage)* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 824 | 37 | 68.52 |
| 2 | 591 | 34 | 62.96 |
| 3 | 145 | 42 | 77.78 |
| 4 | 955 | 34 | 62.96 |
| 5 | 137 | 38 | 70.37 |
| 6 | 567 | 46 | 85.19 |
| 7 | 715 | 41 | 75.93 |
| 8 | 229 | 49 | 90.74 |
| 9 | 106 | 35 | 64.81 |
| 10 | 544 | 42 | 77.78 |
| 11 | 147 | 21 | 38.89 |
| 12 | 415 | 41 | 75.93 |
| 13 | 310 | 37 | 68.52 |
| 14 | 690 | 49 | 90.74 |
| 15 | 107 | 31 | 57.41 |
| 16 | 527 | 41 | 75.93 |
| 17 | 306 | 51 | 94.44 |
| 18 | 924 | 36 | 66.67 |
| 19 | 822 | 29 | 53.70 |
| 20 | 105 | 46 | 85.19 |
| 21 | 499 | 38 | 70.37 |
| 22 | 18 | 30 | 55.56 |
| 23 | 865 | 45 | 83.33 |
| 24 | 925 | 45 | 83.33 |

Table A4. Participant scores from part 2 of the assessment survey

| — | *Participant Identification Number (PIN)* | *Part 2 Score (out of 144)* | *Part 2 Score (expressed as a percentage)* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 824 | 132 | 91.67 |
| 2 | 591 | 138 | 95.83 |
| 3 | 145 | 144 | 100.00 |
| 4 | 955 | 121 | 84.03 |
| 5 | 137 | 134 | 93.06 |
| 6 | 567 | 138 | 95.83 |
| 7 | 715 | 144 | 100.00 |
| 8 | 229 | 144 | 100.00 |
| 9 | 106 | 141 | 97.92 |
| 10 | 544 | 119 | 82.64 |
| 11 | 147 | 144 | 100.00 |
| 12 | 415 | 144 | 100.00 |
| 13 | 310 | 142 | 98.61 |
| 14 | 690 | 144 | 100.00 |
| 15 | 107 | 144 | 100.00 |
| 16 | 527 | 144 | 100.00 |
| 17 | 306 | 144 | 100.00 |
| 18 | 924 | 143 | 99.31 |
| 19 | 822 | 144 | 100.00 |
| 20 | 105 | 144 | 100.00 |
| 21 | 499 | 139 | 96.53 |
| 22 | 18 | 144 | 100.00 |
| 23 | 865 | 144 | 100.00 |
| 24 | 925 | 142 | 98.61 |

Table A5. Comparison of aggregate group statistics for full survey, part 1, and part 2

| — | *Population Mean Score* | *Population Mean Score (expressed as a percentage)* | *Standard Deviation* | *Relative Standard Deviation (expressed as a percentage)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total Survey (33 questions) | 179.13/198 | 90.47 | 10.42 | 5.82 |
| Part 1 (9 questions) | 39.08/54 | 72.38 | 7.22 | 18.46 |
| Part 2 (24 questions) | 140.04/144 | 97.25 | 7.03 | 5.02 |

Table A6. Aggregate group scores by question from part 1 of assessment survey

| *Part 1 question no.* | *Aggregate Group Score (out of 144)* | *Aggregate Group Score (expressed as a percentage)* |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 52 | 34.67 |
| 2 | 115 | 76.67 |
| 3 | 114 | 76.00 |
| 4 | 104 | 69.33 |
| 5 | 114 | 76.00 |
| 6 | 108 | 72.00 |
| 7 | 111 | 74.00 |
| 8 | 105 | 70.00 |
| 9 | 115 | 76.67 |

Table A7. Aggregate group scores by question from part 2 of assessment survey

| *Part 2 question no.* | *Aggregate Group Score (out of 144)* | *Aggregate Group Score (expressed as a percentage)* |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 143 | 95.33 |
| 2 | 144 | 96.00 |
| 3 | 138 | 92.00 |
| 4 | 140 | 93.33 |
| 5 | 132 | 88.00 |
| 6 | 143 | 95.33 |
| 7 | 143 | 95.33 |
| 8 | 138 | 92.00 |
| 9 | 144 | 96.00 |
| 10 | 143 | 95.33 |
| 11 | 136 | 90.67 |
| 12 | 134 | 89.33 |
| 13 | 141 | 94.00 |
| 14 | 142 | 94.67 |
| 15 | 143 | 95.33 |
| 16 | 143 | 95.33 |
| 17 | 143 | 95.33 |
| 18 | 121 | 80.67 |
| 19 | 143 | 95.33 |
| 20 | 142 | 94.67 |
| 21 | 142 | 94.67 |
| 22 | 143 | 95.33 |
| 23 | 137 | 91.33 |
| 24 | 143 | 95.33 |

# APPENDIX 6

## LESSON EXAMPLES FROM READY CURRICULUM

The eleven figures in this appendix demonstrate, not only the detailed content, but also the design of lesson 3 of the *Ready: Strengthening Gospel Conversations through Apologetics* curriculum. This lesson in particular was chosen highlight the evangelistic/apologetic approach as developed and taught in this project.

## About Lesson 3

# Aiming for the Gospel (Part 1): The Apologetic of Rebellion

**Main Point:** Christians aim for gospel through two main conversational objectives: (1) confronting sin and (2) pointing to the person and work of Jesus. An *Apologetic of Rebellion* confronts sin by highlighting the unbeliever's suppression of the truth and, thereby, underscoring the need for a Savior.

**Why This Lesson Matters:** Conversations with unbelievers often venture into a variety of topics that often do not seem to be directly related to the gospel. However, these conversations can be used to help unveil the unbeliever's anti-god bias, providing an opportunity for the Christian to gently confront sin and lead to the gospel. This lesson provides practical approach to confront the reality of the unbeliever's sin, preparing the way for faith in the Savior.

**Lesson Outline:**

1. How to Aim for the Gospel
2. Confront Sin with an Apologetic of Rebellion

**Leader Preparation Checklist:**

**Preparing Course Participants:**

Read, study, and pray over the lesson.

Send a reminder to course registrants read the *Looking Ahead* materials (located on the previous lesson's handout)

*Read* and *Reflect on Acts 17:16-34*.

Optional Readings from the *CSB Apologetics Study Bible*

- *What is Apologetics?* by Kenneth D. Boa (p. XXV)
- *What are Self-Defeating Statements?* by J. P. Moreland (p. 1455)

**Supplies:**

Print sufficient copies of both pages of the Lesson 3 *Class Handout*.

**Classroom Prep:**

Draw the Three Circles on the whiteboard. (see handout)

Figure A1. Page one of lesson 3 in the *Ready* curriculum

Lesson 3 *Teaching Plan*:

## Aiming for the Gospel (Part 1): The Apologetic of Rebellion

**Teacher Tip:**

The approach taught in this lesson will serve as a crucial framework for much of the remaining course content. However, it should be taught as a general conversational guide or framework, not a strict formulaic rule.

### Introduce the Lesson

In a 2001 Washington Post article entitled *The Lobotomist,* journalist Jack El-Hai tells about infamous 20th century American psychiatrist Walter Freeman II. Freeman's infamy was gained through his efforts to promote a certain surgical procedure—which he called the lobotomy. Between 1936 and 1967, he had performed almost 3,500 lobotomies for patients dealing with various mental illnesses. The procedure itself is perceived by many to be quite horrific. As El-Hai documents, after the patient is knocked "unconscious by two or three jolts of electricity," several holes would often be drilled in the skull, and an instrument resembling an ice pick would be inserted about an inch and a half into the brain through tear ducts of each eye socket. The results of the procedure were highly questionable with obvious failures and even death being far from uncommon. Moreover, it was not rare for patients to mentally "relapse" following a lobotomy. Freeman's most famous patient (and failure) was Rosemary Kennedy, sister to John F. Kennedy, who was left severely and permanently disabled, unable to speak, and needing full-time care for the remaining 60 years of her life.[1]

**America on Human Nature:**

According to Barna's 2021 research, 69% of Americans today agree with the following statement:

"*people are basically good*"

Less that 22% of Americans rejected the notion of the "innate goodness of humanity."[2]

**TRANSITION TO LESSON TOPIC:**
Evangelism must never be carried out like an intellectual lobotomy—forcefully pouring information into someone's brain hoping to change the mind. In evangelism, the Christian may often utilize *apologetic* arguments—rationally defending the Christian faith. However, if utilized wrongly in evangelism, apologetic arguments may be ineffective or even cause more harm than good, like many of Freeman's lobotomies. Human beings are more than fact computers and must be engaged morally and spiritually, not just intellectually. Good arguments must be utilized rightly, as to aim for the gospel.

### Identify the Gospel Story Intersection

**DISPLAY**: Direct attention to the Three-Circles gospel summary on the whiteboard and in their handout.

**SAY**: This lesson deals primarily with the second and third circles, "Brokenness" and "Gospel" respectfully. By utilizing the approach taught in this lesson, the believer can utilize apologetic arguments to help unbelievers realize their moral brokenness and need for the gospel.

[1] Jack El-Hai, "The Lobotomist," *The Washington Post*, February 4, 2001, accessed 1 July 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/magazine/2001/02/04/the-lobotomist/630196c4-0f70-4427-832a-ce04959a6dc8/.

[2] George Barna, *American Worldview Inventory 2020-21,* (Glendale, AZ: Arizona Christian University Press, 2021), 61, 105.



Figure A2. Page two of lesson 3 in the *Ready* curriculum

## I. How to Aim for the Gospel

**TEACHING NOTES**

**EXPLAIN**: Looking back at Paul's speech in Athens, we can see two main conversational objectives that Christians should keep in mind while aiming conversations for the gospel.

**EXAMINE SCRIPTURE: Acts 17:29-34**

**DISCUSS: How did Paul aim for the gospel in his interaction with the Athenians?**

**TWO CONVERSATIONAL OBJECTIVES:**

1. **Confront <u>sin</u> in order to aim for the gospel.**

→ Paul confronted the Athenians' sin of idolatrous unbelief.

- "*we shouldn't think*" the way the Athenians conceived of the divine realm (**17:29**).
- The Athenians must "*repent*" (**17:30**)

**DISCUSS: Why is it important to address the reality of sin when sharing the gospel?** {Only those who know that they are sinners know that they need to be saved.}

**EXPLAIN:** Christians can confront sin by helping the unbeliever to see their own unbelief as a symptom of an anti-God bias. Paul engaged his hearers' hearts *morally*, not merely to convince their minds *intellectually*. They were willfully ignorant (**17:29**), having suppressed the truths of general revelation (**17:23-28**).

2. **Point to <u>Jesus</u> in order to aim for the gospel.**

→ Paul pointed the Athenians to Jesus.

- "Now" that Jesus has come, God commands repentance; The time for widespread salvation has come (**17:30**).
- Heeding Paul's warning of the coming judgement (**17:31**), some "believed" in Jesus (**17:34**).
- God "provided proof" by resurrecting Jesus (**17:31**)

**EXPLAIN:** To aim for the gospel, we must emphasize who Jesus is and what he has done to save sinners. His resurrection offers "proof" for the gospel message. Paul's call for repentance included the offer of salvation (see *Commentary*). Paul pointed the Athenians to Jesus—Savior of believers and Judge of all.

**SUMMARIZE AND TRANSITION:** The remainder of this lesson and the next gives a framework for how to practically aim for the gospel. The rest of this lesson focuses on objective #1—confronting sin, while lesson 4 focuses on objective #2—pointing to Jesus.

3

Figure A3. Page three of lesson 3 in the *Ready* curriculum

## Biblical and Theological Commentary

**Understand Acts 17:29-34:** After providing rational arguments for the God of the Bible, Paul continues in his Athens speech focusing on two gospel objectives: (1) confront the reality of sin and (2) point his hearers to Jesus. In evangelism, we too can aim for the gospel by adopting these two objectives as we converse with unbelievers.

**First, Paul confronted sin.** The confrontational nature of the Areopagus discourse becomes plain when Paul uses the language of personal obligation for the first time in his speech, proclaiming that "we *shouldn't* (οὐκ ὀφείλομεν) think" of God in terms of man-made images or idols (**Acts 17:29**).[3] The gentleness of his confrontation is noteworthy, for Paul switches to a first-person plural precisely at the point where he personally confronts—a tactful shift resulting in "*we* shouldn't think," as opposed to the more forceful second-person confrontation—"*you* shouldn't think."[4] Paul emphasizes that, as "God's offspring," even pagans should rationally know that the divine being is not of a "lower order" than mankind.[5] In effect, Paul gently says, "you should know better than to worship idols and you have failed to worship God," and then proceeds to call for repentance in the following verse (**Acts 17:30**).

**Second, Paul pointed his hearers to Jesus.** Markedly, Paul's Areopagus address seems to be missing elements that may normally be considered fundamental to the gospel message. For example, there is no mention of Jesus' death, grace, or forgiveness—merely a firm call to repentance. The word μετανοέω, translated as "repent," fundamentally means to "change one's mind"; in the New Testament, however, it often takes on a fuller sense, communicating the idea both of turning away from sin and turning to Christ in faith. For example, concerning the reception of the gospel among Cornelius' household, Peter announces, "God granted repentance resulting in life even to the Gentiles," though they are described as having "believed" in Christ in the previous verse (**Acts 11:17-18**). For this reason, 17th century Baptist preacher Benjamin Keach declares that faith and repentance "are twins . . . always born together."[6] While not stated explicitly, Paul's call for repentance in Athens implies an exhortation to trust in Jesus as well. Paul's exhortation for his hearers in Athens to repent "*now*" is closely related to Christ's resurrection, which, as Tony Merida notes, functions as a "hinge point in redemptive history."[7] *Now*, the offer of salvation in Jesus is available if one repents (**Acts 17:30**); otherwise, the expectation of Jesus' judgement awaits (**Acts 17:31**).

**Understand this Lesson's Focus:** This lesson is primarily concerned with an approach to confront the sin of unbelief through the use of an *Apologetic of Rebellion*—an approach that aims to defend of the reality of sin with regards to unbelief. While rational persuasion is to be used in evangelism (see **2 Cor 5:11**), it is not enough to fill the unbeliever's mind with facts. Unbelief is not ultimately caused due to ignorance of the facts, and therefore, facts alone will not be effective. Good arguments can be utilized wrongly, and the mind must be engaged in order confront the heart's rebellious unbelief. By confronting sin, conversations can be placed in the context of a "sin-salvation" evangelistic framework. By defending the reality of sin, the believer may highlight the need for salvation. In the next lesson, the apologetic of rebellion will be complemented with an apologetic of redemption—an approach that aims to defend the reality of Jesus' offer of salvation.

[3] J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies.1996), 1:670, Logos Bible Software.

[4] Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2007), 569.

[5] C.K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, International Critical Commentary, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), 849, Logos Bible Software.

[6] Benjamin Keach, *An Exposition of the Parables and Express Similitudes of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, (London: Aylott and Co., 1858), 530. Logos Bible Software.

[7] Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Reference, 2017), 260.



Figure A4. Page four of lesson 3 in the *Ready* curriculum

## II. Confront Sin with an Apologetic of Rebellion

**TEACHING NOTES**

**DEFINE AND EXPLAIN**: The Greek word, "apologia" means to offer a defense. The Christian can aim for the gospel by "defending" the reality of sin, guiding conversations to help unbelievers to realize their rebellious suppression of the truth. This is to be done in reliance upon the Holy Spirit. In a nutshell, the approach is built upon 3 observations:

1. **The Irrationality of Unbelief-** non-Christian views are irrational or, at a minimum, lack rational superiority to theistic/Christian belief.
2. **The Preference for Unbelief-** while lacking any superiority, non-Christian views are still preferred in the minds of unbelievers.
3. **The Rebellion of Unbelief-** the reason unbelief is preferred is due to the sin nature of humanity.

**APPLYING THE APOLOGETIC OF REBELLION:**

**1. Highlight the Irrationality of Unbelief**

> *"When people stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing; they believe in anything"* – **attributed to G. K. Chesterton**

**EXPLAIN:** Many helpful arguments can and should be offered for Christianity; however, Christians must put the unbeliever on the hot seat, challenging the unbeliever to articulate and explain their beliefs and their rejection of good arguments—exposing unbelief as irrational and/or lacking any superiority. To do this, the Christian must be able to identify the rational flaws of the non-Christian's chosen beliefs.

**TWO MEMORABLE WAYS:** A mirror and window are memorable metaphors for identifying the flaws of non-Christian chosen beliefs.

- By using the metaphorical *mirror*, the Christian reflects a faulty belief back on itself—often revealing its self-refuting nature.
- By using the metaphorical *window*, the Christian weighs a faulty belief against the experiences and observations from the window of life—often revealing its unlivable nature.

**ILLUSTRATE: How is the statement, "*There is no universal truth,*" an irrational belief?**

- The Mirror (reflecting a belief back on itself):
  → The statement, which rejects truth, cannot be universally true.
- The Window (weighing a belief against life observations):
  → People live like objective truth exists every day. For example: if the unbeliever's car is stolen, he or she probably would not view it as an amoral inconvenience but as an objective moral wrong—a moral absolute that has been violated.

5

Figure A5. Page five of lesson 3 in the *Ready* curriculum

## Biblical and Theological Commentary

**Understand the Concept of An Apologetic of Rebellion:** The apologetic of rebellion is a confrontational, though loving, *defense* of the reality of sin—particularly the sin of unbelief. It is built upon 3 realities concerning unbelief: (1) the irrationality of unbelief, (2) the preference for unbelief, and (3) the rebellion of unbelief. The approach seeks to show that non-Christian views are irrational or, at a minimum, not rationally superior to Christian beliefs. It then seeks to help the unbeliever realize that he or she *prefers* non-Christian views, in spite of their logical shortcomings. This uncovers an "anti-God" bias of unbelief. Finally, this approach explains this anti-God bias by explicitly addressing the root issue of sin. Ideally, this approach should be employed in a *conversational* and *dialogical* context where the Christian and non-Christian engage with each other's questions and truth claims. This apologetic of rebellion is a general framework that the Christian can use to guide conversations to show the reality of sin, leading to an emphasis upon the gospel.

**Understand the First Step—Highlighting the Irrationality of Unbelief:** First, the Christian seeks to expose the irrationality of non-Christian views. The Christian should willingly offer reasons for believing divine truths (*e.g*. the existence of God) expecting that the unbeliever's rebuttal or pushback will bring irrationality to the surface. When people try to *account* for God's world while denying God, it inevitably leads to many insufficient explanations. Therefore, the Christian must challenge the unbeliever to *explain* their rejection of truth. Christians should ask "Why?,"—putting the unbeliever on the hot seat! So often, Christians unwittingly accept the burden to explain our own beliefs without asking the unbeliever to do likewise. However, gently pressing the unbeliever for explanations by asking questions will further bring the irrationality of their views to the surface. Even if a Christian already knows what the unbeliever's faulty beliefs are, asking questions provides a gentle way to encourage him or her to think about it for themselves. Similarly, since God's revelation in creation is unavoidable, those who reject God need to be lovingly asked to explain the implications of the ideologies that they are hiding behind in order to avoid God.

The metaphors of a mirror and a window can help one remember how to identify irrationality when it is heard in conversation.

- **The metaphor of the Mirror:** A metaphorical mirror, which reflects an object back on itself, can be a helpful tool when engaging with opposing claims. In offering explanations for his or her beliefs, the unbeliever often makes claims that are *self-refuting*. As a mirror, the Christian reflects the unbeliever's claim back on itself. Similar to the way the proverbial "never say never" phrase undercuts itself, the unbeliever's views often lack internal coherence. An example would be the assertion "there is no universal truth," since it cannot itself be universally true.
- **The metaphor of the Window:** A metaphorical window, through which one makes observations about life, can also be a helpful tool when engaging opposing claims. Having been challenged in dialogue to explain the rejection of God's truth, the unbeliever often makes claims that are *unlivable*. The Christian may show the irrationality of the unbeliever's claims by taking him or her to the "window," where it can be observed that real life doesn't work according to their viewpoint. For example, the claim "there is no absolute truth" is unlivable, since every person lives like truth exists. We live everyday like gravity and death are universal realities. Moreover, we behave everyday like moral truth exists. Someone may insist that truth is a matter of *personal* perspective, yet when their personal identity is stolen by someone on the other side of the world, it is naturally considered a moral wrong, not a mere amoral inconvenience.



Figure A6. Page six of lesson 3 in the *Ready* curriculum

**II. Confront Sin with an Apologetic of Rebellion (continued)**

**TEACHING NOTES**

**2. Highlight the Preference for Unbelief**

**EXPLAIN:** Giving good arguments and exposing the irrationality of unbelief is not enough. The non-Christian's issue is not primarily with the head (intellect) but with the heart (inclinations). The unbeliever *prefers* irrational views over a belief in the God of the Bible.

*Example*: G. K. Chesterton recognized the anti-God bias or preference for unbelief on a societal level. His reflections upon the objections to Christianity in his day are enlightening.

> *It [Christianity] was attacked on all sides and for all contradictory reasons. No sooner had one rationalist demonstrated that it was too far to the east than another demonstrated with equal clearness that it was much too far to the west . . ..This puzzled me; the charges seemed inconsistent. . . . A man might be too fat in one place and too thin in another; but he would be an odd shape.* – **G. K. Chesterton**

**DISCUSS: How might a Christian highlight the unbeliever's anti-God bias?**

→ **By uncovering the *inconsistencies* in non-Christian views.**
Consider the following examples:

- Many who insist on "seeing" in order to believe in the resurrection of Jesus, often have no problem believing that the universe randomly sprang into existence billions of years ago.
- Many who insist that absolute moral truth is non-existent are often captivated by high-profile court cases regarding national issues—hoping for justice to be done.
- Many who believe that humanity is merely a product of evolution often believe that racism is morally wrong—a belief that is grounded in a Judeo-Christian worldview.

→ **By explicitly addressing the apparent anti-God bias.**

- To address it personally, the Christian might ask, "Is it possible that you do not believe because you do not *want* to?"
- To address it culturally, the Christian might ask, "Isn't it strange that many in our culture believe (x) but seem biased against biblical belief (y)? (refer to Chesterton quote above)

**3. Explicitly identify Sin as the Root Issue.**

**EXPLAIN:** the unbeliever's preference for unbelief requires a scriptural identification—sin. This naturally leads to a presentation of or reemphasis upon the gospel. Sinners need salvation.

**SUMMARIZE:** To aim conversations for the gospel, the Christian can highlight the reality of sin. These three steps of an apologetic of rebellion will be applied to a variety of conversational topics throughout this study.



Figure A7. Page seven of lesson 3 in the *Ready* curriculum

## Biblical and Theological Commentary

**Understand the Second Step—Highlighting the Preference for Unbelief.** The Christian guides the unbeliever to a self-awareness of his or her own preference for unbelief. One way to uncover this is by pointing out the *inconsistencies* in the objections raised to Christianity. For instance, many who insist on "seeing" in order to believe in the resurrection of Jesus, *inconsistently* have no problem believing that the universe randomly sprang into existence billions of years ago. Inconsistencies like this and many more help expose the anti-God bias in the human heart—a preference for unbelief.

The believer eventually proceeds to ask questions that increasingly probe the will; for example, the Christian may ask the obstinate unbeliever, "Do you think that some people may be *willing* to hold irrational beliefs because they do not *want* to believe in the true God?" After discussing this as a hypothetical possibility for "some people," the believer should respectfully be more direct, asking, "What about you—is it possible that you hold these views because you do not *want* to believe in God? By engaging the will, the Christian highlights that the rejection of God is driven by the will as opposed to a lack of evidence.

There is a great need for discernment in whether to confront the preference for unbelief in a direct or more gentle manner. A gentler approach might be wise if dealing with an unbeliever that, by God's grace, seems to be genuinely seeking answers in Christianity. In this case, the Christian should consider addressing the anti-God bias on a cultural level. The testimony of G. K. Chesterton, for instance, demonstrates that the realization of an anti-God bias can play an important role in an evangelistic application of apologetics. As an unbeliever, Chesterton observed a widespread anti-God bias in the culture of his day. His reflections upon the pervasive objections to Christianity in his day are enlightening.

> It [Christianity] was attacked on all sides and for all contradictory reasons. No sooner had one rationalist demonstrated that it was too far to the east than another demonstrated with equal clearness that it was much too far to the west . . ..This puzzled me; the charges seemed inconsistent. . . . A man might be too fat in one place and too thin in another; but he would be an odd shape. At this point my thoughts were only of the odd shape of the Christian religion; I did not allege any odd shape in the rationalistic mind.[8]

The contradictory critiques of Christianity eventually led Chesterton to consider what he had not at first considered—that there was indeed "an odd shape in the rationalistic mind."[9]

**Understand the Third Step—Explicitly Identify Sin as the Root Issue.** The Christian completes his defense of the reality of sin by explicitly delivering a diagnosis of sin to unbeliever. Chesterton's reflections caused him to recognize that sin was "a fact as plain as potatoes"; he even went so far as to say that original sin was "the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved."[10] While this is an overstatement, Chesterton recognized that it was sin that gave the mind an "odd shape." The unbeliever's preference for irrationality requires a scriptural identification—sin. This is where the Christian ought to aim the conversation, using dialogue to lead to a greater self-awareness of sin. In the garden of Eden, the all-knowing God lovingly confronted the sin of our first hiding parents with the question, "Where are you?" (Gen 3:9). God's question was caring because he knew that Adam and Eve needed to recognize their own sin.[11] This naturally leads to a presentation of or reemphasis upon the gospel and a calling for a faith response.

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[8] G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, (United Kingdom: John Lane Company, 1908), 155-58.

[9] Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 158.

[10] Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 24.

[11] Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 92.



Figure A8. Page eight of lesson 3 in the *Ready* curriculum

## *Lesson 3 - Wrap-Up*

### Emphasize the Main Point

**SUMMARIZING QUOTE:**

"we expose the true nature of unbelief, not as a neutral or unbiased attempt to account for experience, but as a flight from the God we all know."[12] **-John Frame**

**Main Point:** Christians aim for gospel through two conversational objectives: (1) confronting sin and (2) pointing to the person and work of Jesus. An *Apologetic of Rebellion* confronts sin by highlighting the unbeliever's suppression of the truth and, thereby, underscoring the need for a Savior.

### Restate the Gospel Story Intersection

**DISPLAY**: Direct attention to the Three-Circles gospel summary on the whiteboard and in their handout.

**SAY**: The evangelistic approach taught in this lesson aims for the gospel (circle #3) by helping unbelievers realize their own brokenness (circle #2). By helping unbelievers to become more aware of an anti-God bias, the Christian highlights spiritual brokenness, thereby, emphasizing the need for the gospel.

### Encourage Learners to Be Ready for the Next Lesson

**DIRECT ATTENTION TO THE *LOOKING AHEAD* SECTION IN THE HANDOUT.**

**EXPLAIN:** The next lesson looks specifically at how to defend the reality of the gospel message itself. The *Looking Ahead* article is designed to help course participants to be ready to engage in the next lesson. It includes:

- A brief article about a key concept for the next lesson.
- A recommended Scripture Passage to read.
- Optional reading recommendations from the *CSB Apologetics Study Bible*.

### Pray for Gospel Opportunities

Provide a few moments for learners to share their burdens for those whom they are concerned spiritually. Conclude the class with prayer for the lost and that God would give participants opportunities for gospel conversations.

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[12] John Frame, "Presuppositional Apologetics," in *Five Views on Apologetics*, eds. Stanley N. Gundry and Steven B. Cowan, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Pub. House, 2000), 223, Logos Bible Software.



Figure A9. Page nine of lesson 3 in the *Ready* curriculum

## Lesson 3 *Class Handout* (page 1)

Aiming for the Gospel (Part 1):
The Apologetic of Rebellion

**Main Point:** Christians aim for gospel through two conversational objectives: (1) confronting sin and (2) pointing to the person and work of Jesus. An apologetic of rebellion confronts sin by highlighting the unbeliever's suppression of the truth and, thereby, underscoring the need for a Savior.

**I. How to Aim for the Gospel** (2 objectives from Acts 17:29-34)

a. Confront _____.
(Apologetic of Rebellion)

b. Point to _____.
(Apologetic of Redemption)

**II. Applying the Apologetic of Rebellion**

**a. Highlight the _____ of unbelief.**

Two Tools:
i. The _____ – reflecting a belief back on itself.

ii. The _____ – weighing a belief against life observations.

**b. Highlight the _____ for unbelief.**

i. By uncovering the _____ in non-Christian views.

ii. By explicitly addressing the apparent _____-_____ _____.

c. **Explicitly identify _____ as the root issue.**

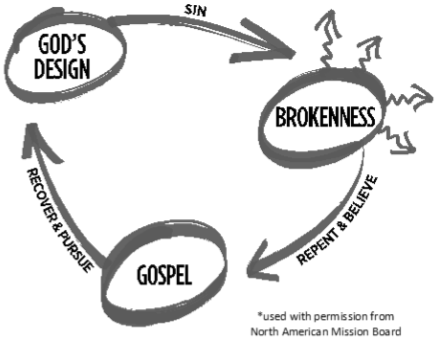
10

**NOTES**

Figure A10. Page ten of lesson 3 in the *Ready* curriculum

## Lesson 3 *Class Handout* (page 2)

**Where does lesson 3 intersect with the Gospel Story?**
(Circle on the diagram to the right)




*used with permission from North American Mission Board

**SUMMARIZING QUOTE:**

"we expose the true nature of unbelief, not as a neutral or unbiased attempt to account for experience, but as a flight from the God we all know."[13] **-John Frame**

### *Looking Ahead* to the Lesson 4

**Before our next meeting:**

- ☐ Reflect upon **1 Corinthians 15:1-19**
- ☐ Read this *Looking Ahead* article—***Showing that the Gospel is Real***:

Lesson 4 will focus on the Apologetic of Redemption—a defense of the redeeming gospel. While the Holy Spirit is the only One who can ultimately save the lost, there are several reasons why Christians should seek to persuade the lost and defend of the historical *reality* of the gospel. First, it is a sad reality that the gospel is often quickly dismissed and even avoided without due consideration. In contrast to general revelation, the gospel is consciously received; the unbeliever must *choose* to listen to his Christian friend, read the Bible, or attend church, *etc*. to be exposed to the gospel. Christians should encourage unbelievers to seek truth, instead of rashly dismissing the life-saving gospel. The Christian may be able to encourage by offering evidences for the truth of Christianity. This is especially important in a world filled with so much misinformation that would discourage the unbeliever from giving Christianity a fair hearing.

Second, providing evidences highlights the gospel historical roots, thus supporting Christianity's truth claims in comparison to other belief systems. George Eldon Ladd observes, "It is widely recognized that revelation in history is one of the most distinctive things about biblical religion."[14] In this light, the historical nature of the gospel message is an asset to the evangelist, as it sets Christianity apart. Lastly, to attempt to persuade others concerning the gospel is to follow the example of the apostles. This is evident in 1 Corinthians 15 and will be further shown in lesson 4.

The Apologetic of Redemption, however, is more than *verbal* persuasion; a biblical approach, while relying on the Holy Spirit, recognizes the apologetic value of one's life-witness. Many evidences may be given to help confirm gospel history, but the life-witness of the believer provides flesh and blood evidence that what Jesus has done matters today.

- ☐ Go deeper with these (optional) readings in the *CSB Apologetics Study Bible*:
  - "Does the Disciple's Conviction that they Saw the Risen Jesus Establish the Truth of the Resurrection?" by Gary R. Habermas (p. 1353)
  - "Can Naturalistic Theories Account for the Resurrection?" by Gary R. Habermas (p. 1347)
  - "Is the New Testament Trustworthy?" by Darrell L Bock (p. 1211)

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[13] John Frame, "Presuppositional Apologetics." in *Five Views on Apologetics*, eds. Stanley N. Gundry and Steven B. Cowan, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Pub. House, 2000), 223, Logos Bible Software.

[14] George Eldon Ladd, *I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 144.



Figure A11. Page eleven of lesson 3 in the *Ready* curriculum

# APPENDIX 7

## DESCRIPTIVE TABLE OF CONTENTS OF READY APOLOGETICS CURRICULUM

The evangelistic apologetics curriculum developed in this project, entitled *Ready: Strengthening Gospel Conversations through Apologetics*, is described below. The curriculum's table of contents, expanded with descriptions, provides a brief lesson by lesson synopsis.

**Descriptive Table of Contents for Ready: Strengthening Gospel Conversations Through Apologetics**

APPENDIX 8

RESULTS FROM CURRICULUM
PANEL EVALUATION

The panel evaluation scores for the curriculum are presented in the table below. The purpose of the evaluation process was to ensure that the developed *Ready* curriculum met a high standard of biblical faithfulness, scope, teaching methodology, and applicability. A minimum of ninety percent of the evaluation criterion was required to meet or exceed the sufficient level, indicated by scores of three or greater, prior to the implementation of the curriculum.

Table A8. Evaluator scores for each criterion on the curriculum evaluation rubric

| *Evaluator no.* | *C1* | *C2* | *C3* | *C4* | *C5* | *C6* | *C7* | *C8* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| E1 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| E2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| E3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| E4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| 1 = insufficient, 2 = requires attention, 3 = sufficient, 4 = exemplary | | | | | | | | |

APPENDIX 9

READY COURSE ATTENDANCE STATISTICS

The two tables below present the attendance data for the *Ready*: *Strengthening Gospel Conversations Through Apologetics* course.

Table A9. Attendance numbers for each course participant

| *Participant No.* | *No. of Class sessions attended (out of 10)* | *Percentage of Class sessions attended* |
|---|---|---|
| P1 | 10 | 100.00 |
| P2 | 7 | 70.00 |
| P3 | 5 | 50.00 |
| P4 | 8 | 80.00 |
| P5 | 4 | 40.00 |
| P6 | 9 | 90.00 |
| P7 | 1 | 10.00 |
| P8 | 4 | 40.00 |
| P9 | 9 | 90.00 |
| P10 | 1 | 10.00 |
| P11 | 7 | 70.00 |
| P12 | 6 | 60.00 |
| P13 | 8 | 80.00 |
| P14 | 10 | 100.00 |

Table A10. Attendance numbers for each course session

| *Course Session No.* | *Date Taught* | *No. of Attendees* |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | September 9, 2021 | 9 |
| 2 | September 16, 2021 | 10 |
| 3 | September 23, 2021 | 10 |
| 4 | September 30, 2021 | 10 |
| 5 | October 7, 2021 | 10 |
| 6 | October 21, 2021 | 10 |
| 7 | October 28, 2021 | 9 |
| 8 | November 4, 2021 | 6 |
| 9 | November 11, 2021 | 7 |
| 10 | November 18, 2021 | 8 |
| Average Attendance per Class Session = 9 | | |

# APPENDIX 10

## FOLLOW-UP DEBRIEF VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

A simple post-course debrief video was utilized for a fourfold purpose: (1) expressing gratitude to those who participated in the course, (2) briefly reviewing key course concepts, (3) clarifying any misunderstandings apparent from surveys, questionnaires, or teacher observation, and (4) encouraging further development. This appendix provides a transcript of the video.

**Ready Course Debrief Video Transcript**

This message is intended for all of you who participated in the *Ready* evangelism and apologetics course.

First, I want to say a sincere "Thank you," to each of you who attended the course. I do hope that you were blessed by our time together, but I also know that many of you are aware that your involvement also helped me take another step in the completion my doctoral studies. I really am passionate about evangelism and apologetics, and so your support and involvement meant so much to me. Additionally, I was blessed by the class discussion, as your questions and thoughts challenged me in each class to continue to grow.

I also want to encourage you to continue to share the gospel. Remember that you will never meet any lost person who is not surrounded every day with truth of God's existence. Don't ever assume that your primary job is to *convince* somebody that God exists. Instead, ask the unbeliever challenging questions and point out their inconsistencies to highlight the heart issue—they do not *want* to believe. At the times where we did role-play evangelism during the course, I was encouraged to see many of you asking good questions, and this is so very important; it is difficult to have *conversation* if you do not do this. Pray for the unbeliever, love them, and continue to be a friend enough to actually talk with them. It is in these conversations that you will have the opportunity to highlight the reality of sin, and this will give you greater opportunity to talk about the Savior! And you have learned how to give evidence for the reality of Jesus.

I want you to know that, as a group, the surveys showed great progress when compared to those you completed at the beginning of the course. That was so encouraging to me. It was wonderful to see that this course was used to help others to grow in the area of evangelism. Across the board, the surveys revealed that those of you

who completed the course had greater levels of confidence when dealing with objections to Christianity.

Allow me to take just a moment to comment on one objection that consistently scored the lowest—the issue of the trustworthiness of the Bible. It is true that we didn't really deal directly with this objection. After all, it deals with so many different issues, such as alleged contradictions, when the Bible was written, what books belong in the Bible, etc. The objection was simply too broad to be dealt with well in this curriculum. That being said, in practical conversation, instead of getting bogged down in a never-ending vortex of these issues, it is often best to just point people to the evidence of the resurrection. After all, if the One who raised from the grave believed in the existence of Holy Scripture, then that is strong evidence that others should believe too. So in conversation, use the resurrection F. A. C. T. S. to focus in on Jesus. Then you may point the unbeliever to resources that help answer their questions about the Bible; for example, the *CSB Apologetics Study Bible* has many articles throughout and charts in the back about the trustworthiness of the Bible.

Speaking of the *CSB Apologetics Study Bible*, I lastly want to encourage you to make use of it. Challenge yourself by reading the articles and thinking through the issues. Even more important is to know the Scriptures themselves. Unbelievers in our secular culture attack Christianity from all angles—yet God's truth still stands firm. But we cannot bury our heads in the sand. Many of your family members, siblings, nieces and nephews, children and grandchildren are soaking in ideas from our secular age that are toxic to Christianity. So keep studying and keep having gospel conversations with those who are lost around you. Trust the Holy Spirit to help you in your time of need and carry yourself with a bold humility—ready to give a reason for the hope that is within you.

APPENDIX 11

RESULTS AND STATISTICS FROM PRE AND POST PROJECT SURVEYS

The two tables below present the pre and post-course survey results and statistics.

Table A11. Comparison of pre and post survey scores by participant

| — | *Participant Identification Number (PIN)* | *Pre-Course Score (out of 198)* | *Post-Course Score (out of 198)* | *Change* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 591 | 172 | 178 | +6 |
| 2 | 147 | 154 | 179 | +25 |
| 3 | 310 | 180 | 197 | +17 |
| 4 | 306 | 187 | 198 | +11 |
| 5 | 865 | 188 | 192 | +4 |
| 6 | 925 | 187 | 195 | +8 |

Table A12. Statistical results for ministry project

| — | *Pre-Test Survey Totals* | *Post-Test Survey Totals* |
|---|---|---|
| Mean | 178.000000 | 189.833333 |
| Variance | 175.600000 | 81.366667 |
| Observations | 6.000000 | 6.000000 |
| df | 5.000000 | — |
| t Stat | -3.676241 | — |
| P(T<=t) one-tail | 0.007175 | — |
| t Critical one-tail | 2.015048 | — |

APPENDIX 12

RESULTS FROM PARTICIPANT ROLE-PLAY
EVANGELISM EVALUATION

The table below presents the scored results from the participant role-play evaluation. The purpose of these evaluations was to measure the competency of course participants in applying apologetic arguments in simulated evangelism scenarios. To successfully meet the competency aspect of goal 3, a minimum of seventy-five percent of evaluated participants must meet or exceed the sufficient level across all criterion, indicated by scores of three or greater.

Table A13. Participant scores for each criterion on the participant evaluation rubric

| *Participant* | *C1* | *C2* | *C3* | *C4* | *C5* | *C6* | *C7* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| P1 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| P2 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 4 |
| P3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| P4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| P5 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| 1 = insufficient, 2 = requires attention, 3 = sufficient, 4 = exemplary | | | | | | | |

## APPENDIX 13

## DATA COLLECTED FROM PRE AND POST COURSE EVANGELISM QUESTIONNAIRES

The table below presents data from the pre and post course questionnaires, measuring for change. This data is used to determine whether the *Ready* course may have encouraged participants to engage in gospel conversations more frequently. For goal 4 of this ministry project to be successfully met, the number of aggregate gospel conversations would have needed to increase by one-hundred percent.

Table A14. Comparison of aggregate number of gospel conversations

| *Pre-course aggregate number of gospel conversations* | *Post-course aggregate number of gospel conversations* | *Change* |
|---|---|---|
| 5 | 7 | +2 |

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# ABSTRACT

## STRENGTHENING PERSONAL EVANGELISM THROUGH APOLOGETICS AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF ROGERSVILLE, TENNESSEE

Edward Gary Meek III, DMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Timothy P. Jones

This project sought to equip the members of First Baptist Church at Rogersville, Tennessee (FBCR) to utilize apologetics in evangelism. A curriculum was developed and taught, applying an *evangelistic* approach to several common objections to Christianity. Course participants were taught to go beyond the arguing of an apologetic point to the evangelizing of a person. A pre-project assessment identified some of the most pressing apologetic issues among FBCR membership. It also revealed that high levels of doctrinal orthodoxy do not necessarily translate into evangelistic confidence in a secular society. Post-project measurements indicated increases in levels of knowledge and evangelistic confidence for course participants. Growth in evangelistic competency when dealing with apologetic issues was also evident. While post-project measurements showed only slightly increased frequency in evangelistic encounters between course participants and unbelievers, the overall statistically significant gains indicated a base to build upon in the future at FBCR.

# VITA

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EDUCATION

BS, University of Tennessee, 2007
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Student Pastor, Ridgeview Baptist Church, Knoxville, Tennessee, 2009–2011
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