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INCREASING THE UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION
OF KEY APOLOGETICS TOPICS AT HIGHLANDS
BIBLE CHURCH VERNON, NEW JERSEY

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OF KEY APOLOGETICS TOPICS AT HIGHLANDS
BIBLE CHURCH VERNON, NEW JERSEY

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For the glory of God.

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PREFACE

When I was in youth group kid in the 1980s, talk after talk was given urging us to be “witnessing” to our friends at school. However, little time was spent on the depth of the message we were supposed to be the witnesses of. I can recall feeling guilty and attempting a very awkward gospel monologue with a friend or two that usually ended with me being picked on.

Fast forward many years and I found apologetics. It was like a hundred light bulbs were going on in my head. “You mean to tell me that the gospel is deeper than an emotional push to accept Jesus into our hearts? You mean to tell me that there are ANSWERS to the hard questions people ask about our faith?!” Not merely answers, but robust and intellectual answers. Answers that seemed to do appropriate justice to the greatest message of all: the gospel of our King. I launched into a quest to know more about apologetics and how I could respond and engage in a conversation, not a guilt-motivated awkward monologue.

This project is dedicated to my 1980s self and how I want to be always ready to give an answer.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the students and faculty of Southern Seminary—you have consistently edified my soul. Thank you particularly to Dr. Andrew Walker, my faculty supervisor for your guidance encouragement. Thank you to my wonderful wife for your patience and faithfulness.

Mike Ruel

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“We are facing nothing less than a comprehensive redefinition of life, love, liberty and the very meaning of right and wrong.”¹ So begins R. Albert Mohler’s book *We Cannot Be Silent*. If this is a true statement, which Christians should believe it is, then the church cannot be caught unprepared, but rather equipped and ready to speak up. But how does the church speak up? Especially when the culture is changing nearly daily into a new and thinly structured dogmatism. Douglas Murray writes, “A dogmatism that insists questions are settled which are unsettled, that matters are known which are unknown and that we have a very good idea of how to structure a society along inadequately argued lines.”²

Into this minefield the church must walk and “be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Pet 3:15).³ However, the church at-large is not equipped to do this. All this centers around one’s view of the world, or their “worldview,” which is a critical perspective to be developed when seeking to grow in the understanding of key apologetic topics. The church needs dedicated instruction, anchored in worldviews, to increase the knowledge of key apologetics topics to effectively defend the faith and share the hope it proclaims in Jesus.

¹ R. Albert Mohler Jr., *We Cannot Be Silent: Speaking Truth to a Culture Redefining Sex, Marriage, & the Very Meaning of Right & Wrong* (Nashville: Nelson, 2015), 1.

² Douglas Murray, *The Madness of Crowds Gender, Race and Identity* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2020), 232.

³ All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

Context

Highlands Bible Church (HBC) is a young church in a rural part of northwest New Jersey. It officially launched on March 27, 2016, as a campus of the Green Pond Bible Chapel (GPBC) and is a fully independent church as of January of 2019. I am the lead pastor and planter and am blessed by God to be serving here.

The mission at HBC is to “bring glory to God through the making and maturing of disciples of Jesus Christ.” We believe the gospel is the center of the Bible and therefore should be the center of the church. We are expositional in preaching and missional in relationships. Members and attenders are excited to be part of a young church plant and passionate about engaging the culture with the hope of the Jesus.

However, much has changed in culture at-large and people have grown less receptive to the message of the gospel and more receptive to the gospel of progressive culture. Long established definitions and societal norms are changing beneath our feet. Murray writes, “The interpretation of the world through the lens of ‘social justice,’ ‘identity group politics,’ and ‘intersectionalism’ is probably the most audacious and comprehensive effort since the Cold War at creating a new ideology.”⁴ Into this milieu, Christians are ill-equipped to give a credible defense for hope that they have in Jesus with gentleness, respect, and intelligence. Therefore, this project proposed to increase the understanding and awareness of key apologetics topics at HBC.

Strengths

There were several key strengths in the current ministry context of HBC. First, despite its immediate rural demographic, the town of Vernon is a little more than an hour’s drive from New York City and therefore feels the pull of the NYC metro area to embrace progressive ideology. Furthermore, there is an influx of families from urban

⁴ Murray, *The Madness of Crowds*, 2. See also William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

areas moving into the county, which increases the proliferation of this progressive thought and provides opportunities to engage in apologetic discussions.

Second, the area lacks faithful gospel-preaching churches. There are many mainline protestant churches which are slowly dying. There are also several non-denominational churches which unbelievers see as questionable at best and cult-like at worst. Roman Catholic churches have always been a powerful presence in the NYC metro area, but they are increasingly seen as ineffective for giving hope in the deeper questions of life. In short, unbelievers predominantly view local churches as not able to answer the modern objections to faith. Paul Gould explains, “The church has grown anti-intellectual and sensate, out of touch with the relevancy of Jesus and the gospel to contemporary life.”⁵ In the immediate ministry context, there was a real opportunity for a church to engage the hard issues with the hope of the gospel.

Third, the people of HBC asked for training in apologetics. People realized they could be better equipped to answer the deeper questions from their friends, neighbors, co-workers and even family members. “How do I answer someone who says . . .” was among the top pastoral questions asked. This is the essence of the contextualized gospel. Timothy Keller writes in his book *Center Church* that “the great missionary task is to express the gospel message to a new culture in a way that avoids making the message unnecessarily alien to that culture, yet without removing or obscuring the scandal and offense of biblical truth.”⁶ HBC members are mission-focused and know they need better training in how to do this well.

Fourth, and most importantly, by equipping members and attenders in apologetics, HBC is fulfilling the mission of the church. Members saw a direct

⁵ Paul M. Gould, *Cultural Apologetics: Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience, and Imagination in a Disenchanted World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 18.

⁶ Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 19.

connection of defending the faith and the core mission of HBC to make and mature disciples through the gospel. Keller states, “Many churches subscribe to gospel doctrines but do not have a ministry that is shaped by, centered on, and empowered through the gospel.”⁷ A gospel-grounded mission paired with knowledge of key apologetics topics will energize people to confidently share the hope of Christ, even in the hard questions.

Weaknesses

Several weaknesses in the ministry context can also be identified. First, as much as the culture needs solid answers to biblical questions, culture’s polemic and apologetics could be seen as divisive or argumentative, or to use a word from the current cultural milieu “intolerant.” Changing the thinking of some churchgoers is an uphill challenge. Even among many Christians this is new territory. In *A New Kind of Apologist*, Sean McDowell writes, “Many Christians dismiss apologetics because they have seen apologists being arrogant, dismissive, and uncharitable to others. Many dismiss apologetics because of a bad experience.”⁸

Second, the question arises, “Will people understand why apologetics is critical?” Some are not comfortable thinking deeply about some things, and others would simply prefer not to. Apologetics training stretches some out of their comfort zones. William Craig writes, “American churches are filled with Christians who are idling in intellectual neutral.”⁹ No church can afford to idle in neutral, at the rate the culture is speeding by in the fast lane.

Third, the biggest weakness was a lack of skills to engage people intellectually and gently with the gospel. I suspect many church goers were like me: a few sparse

⁷ Keller, *Center Church*, 29.

⁸ Sean McDowell, *A New Kind of Apologist: Adopting Fresh Strategies, Addressing the Latest Issues, Engaging the Culture* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2016), 12.

⁹ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 20.

evangelistic encounters and lots of anxiety when faced with deeper objections to the faith. Many Christians might think that the gospel presentation is a monolog, when in fact it is a dialog. It is not pressuring someone for a decision, but is the introduction of an entirely new worldview. As Nancy Pearcey puts it, “The Christian message does not begin with ‘accept Christ as your Savior’; it begins with ‘in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.’”¹⁰

Rationale

The elders believe that the mission of HBC is the same as any other faithful church, as given by Jesus himself: “And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age’” (Matt 28:18-20). HBC exists to bring glory to God by the making and maturing of disciples of Jesus Christ, and this drives every ministry that originates from HBC. Yet we needed to be better equipped for this mission. Apologetics training is crucial to effectively mobilizing this mission in today’s culture. Lesslie Newbigin’s question rings true: “What would be involved in a missionary encounter between the gospel and this whole way of perceiving, thinking and living that we call ‘modern Western culture?’”¹¹ This question needs to be answered, and it needs to be answered by the church.

Evangelism, in the power of the Holy Spirit, is how disciples are made. Yet many church members and attenders are unaware, inexperienced, and uncomfortable with evangelism. This sentiment is increasing as the rapidly changing ideology of culture seeps

¹⁰ Nancy Pearcey and Phillip E. Johnson, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*, study guide ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 45.

¹¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 1.

into every corner of life. What is needed is apologetics-driven evangelism. Paul Gould calls for cultural apologetics: “Cultural apologetics is the work of establishing the Christian voice, conscience, and imagination within a culture so that Christianity is seen as true and satisfying.”¹² Churches must teach their members and attenders what the Bible says about current issues and practically equip them to have these conversations. The goal is not monolog evangelism, but establishing the Christian voice in culture against the backdrop of a “crooked and depraved generation” (Phil 2:16).

The work of the church, in the power of the Holy Spirit, is how believers are matured. As Christians endeavor to faithfully follow Christ in their lives, and as people are engaged with the message of the gospel, Christian maturity, growth, and confidence are the by-products. Fear, while always present to some degree, becomes less of an issue as confidence increases in sharing the gospel. (1 Pet 3:15; Col 4:6; 2 Tim 2:25). Blessings multiply through obedience.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop and implement an apologetics curriculum for HBC to equip its members to increase their understanding and application of key apologetics topics to build confidence in evangelism and defense of their faith.

Goals

To bring structure to this project in specificity, the following four goals were proposed:

1. Assess the understanding of key apologetics topics in church members at HBC.
2. Form a curriculum which would serve to increase the understanding of key apologetics topics at HBC.
3. Measure the curriculum’s effectiveness after the apologetics curriculum.

¹² Gould, *Cultural Apologetics*, 21.

4. Further foster spiritual maturity and apologetics effectiveness by developing a strategic plan for a future Apologetics Institute at HBC.

To measure the successful completion of these goals, a specific research methodology is detailed in the following section.

Research Methodology

Successful completion of this project depended upon the completion of the four goals. The first goal was to assess the understanding of key apologetics topics in church members at HBC. This pre-assessment was for members, as the elders had verified the testimonies of personal faith as well as their biblical understanding of the gospel. Furthermore, this pre-assessment was completed before any curriculum had begun to gain clarity in topics that need to be targeted. The pre-assessment was conducted via an online survey and results automatically compiled and summarized.¹³ This goal was considered successfully met when at least 75 percent of HBC membership had responded to the pre-assessment survey and responses have been summarized.

The second goal was to form a curriculum which would serve to increase the understanding of key apologetics topics at HBC. As an introduction to the curriculum and to create awareness, a short sermon series was preached in advance. Following the sermons, this curriculum was developed to increase the understanding of the key apologetics topics noted in the survey. This goal was considered successful when the sermon series and curriculum had been written.

The third goal was to measure the curriculum's effectiveness by testing the church members who went through the curriculum on the last day of the class. This goal was considered successful when 90 percent of the class attendees had returned the post-assessment surveys and results compiled and compared to the pre-assessment.

Additionally, a *t*-test was run on the data to ensure that the results were statistically reliable.

¹³ See appendix 1. All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use.

The fourth goal was to further foster spiritual maturity and apologetics effectiveness by developing a strategic plan for a future Apologetics Institute at HBC. The Apologetics Institute could include ongoing apologetics seminars covering new topics in current culture; an online presence for apologetics blog posts, book reviews and helpful website links; and in-person engagement through debates, evangelistic conversations, or interviews that could be video recorded for further training and education. This goal was successful when a detailed plan for the Apologetics Institute had been created and submitted to the elders of HBC for review and discussion.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

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

Apologetics. As defined and used within this project, *apologetics* is taken from 1 Peter 3:15 where Christians are called to “be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” The Greek term for “defense” is the word *apologia*. Thus, *apologetics* is the defense of the Christian faith.

Worldview. As defined and used within this project, *worldview* “is the structure of understanding that we use to make sense of our world.”¹⁴

Expositional. As defined and used within this project, *expositional* is a method of preaching usually successive scriptural passages “that takes for the point of a sermon the point of a particular passage of Scripture.”¹⁵

Gospel-centered. As defined and used within this project, *gospel-centered* is “a biblical theology that flows towards Jesus and the gospel.”¹⁶

¹⁴ Philip Graham Ryken and David S. Dockery, *Christian Worldview: A Student’s Guide* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 19.

¹⁵ Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 40.

¹⁶ The Gospel Coalition, “Gospel-Centered Ministry,” accessed January 8, 2021, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/publication/gospel-centered-ministry/>.

Elders. As defined and used within this project, *elders* are those men who are called and commissioned to have spiritual responsibility for the church, as outlined in passages such as 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and Titus 1:5-9.

MidWeek service. As defined and used within this project, the *midweek service* is the successive Wednesday night service at HBC.

Two delimitations applied to this project. First, no single apologetic method was specified. To mitigate this limitation, the most common apologetic methods were introduced. Second, only HBC members were assessed in the surveys. The reason for this is that the elders have verified their testimonies of faith and their understanding of the gospel.

Conclusion

The world does not know who an evangelical Christian really is. Thomas Kidd writes, “The word evangelical itself is a source of confusion: scholars, journalists and the public, can’t seem to decide what it means.”¹⁷ If the world does not know who or what evangelical Christians stand for, then how can the church engage the world with the gospel? Evangelicals need to know how to find common ground with unsaved friends, neighbors, co-workers, and family members. Eternity for millions is hanging in the balance.

Enter apologetics. Training in apologetics equips people to find common ground and provide answers for the deeper questions they are asking. This is the mission and calling of the church.

¹⁷ Thomas S. Kidd, *Who Is an Evangelical? The History of a Movement in Crisis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2019), 1.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR A DEFENSE OF THE FAITH

It might be tempting to seek out modern day authors to assess issues regarding key apologetics topics. However, this would be a tragic mistake, for the church is not facing anything new in today's culture and its resistance to the gospel. It would also seem tempting to attack this issue from a pragmatic perspective; for instance, what ten action steps should be taken right now to increase the knowledge of apologetic topics at Highlands Bible Church? This approach would also be short-sighted.

Instead, Christians need to make a habit of going to Scripture first. John M. Frame writes, "The apologist's message, ultimately, is nothing less than the whole of Scripture, applied to the needs of his hearers."¹ One of the core beliefs of historical orthodox Christianity is that the Bible is the very Word of God, and that "his divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence" (2 Pet 1:3). Edward J. Carnell explains, "The Word of God is self-authenticating. It bears its own testimony to truth; it seals its own validity. If the word required something more certain than itself to give it validity, it would no longer be God's Word."²

For those reasons and more, God's Word needs to be the primary source of information for apologetics topics. Timothy writes, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,"

¹ John M. Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*, ed. Joseph E. Torres (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2015), 31.

² Edward J. Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics: A Philosophic Defense of the Trinitarian-Theistic Faith* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 66.

that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim 3:16-17). This maturity is the ultimate goal—a spiritual maturity in the faith, suitably equipped to provide robust yet gentle answers to questions about Christianity, grounded in the bedrock of Scripture. And Scripture as a whole, not just independent verses taken out of context. The Bible offers a consistent and unified message that presents a solid worldview. Great apologist Cornelius Van Til states,

If we are to defend Christian theism as a unit, it must be shown that its parts are really related to one another. . . . The whole curriculum of an orthodox seminary is built upon the conception of Christian theism as a unit. The Bible is at the center not only of every course, but the curriculum as a whole. The Bible is thought of as authoritative on everything of which it speaks. Moreover, it speaks of everything. We do not mean that it speaks of football games, of atoms, etc., directly, but we do mean that it speaks of everything either directly or by implication. It not only tells us of the Christ and his work, but also tells us who God is and where the universe has come from. It tells us about theism as well as about Christianity. It gives us a philosophy of history as well as history. . . . This view of Scripture, therefore, involves the idea that there is nothing in this universe on which human beings can have full and true information unless they take the Bible into account.³

What does the Bible have to say about teaching apologetics? An entry for “apologetics” will not be found in any biblical concordance; rather, the model for apologetics will be found within its pages. Avery Cardinal Dulles writes, “While none of the New Testament writings is directly and professedly apologetical, nearly all of them contain reflections of the Church’s efforts to exhibit the credibility of its message and to answer the obvious objections that would have arisen in the minds of adversaries, prospective converse and candid believers.”⁴

For the purposes of this study, the scriptural survey will be limited to the New Testament only, but that should not lead anyone to believe that the Old Testament has nothing to say about apologetics. From the very first words of the Old Testament, the Word is unmistakably God-centered. Three key evidences of God in the Old Testament are verified in the world daily. First, creation is God’s primary apologetic for his

³ Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2015), 19-20.

⁴ Avery Cardinal Dulles, *History of Apologetics* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005), 24.

existence. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1). The heavens and the earth since then have been “declaring the glory of God and the sky above proclaiming his handiwork” (Ps 19:1). Creation itself is God’s primary apologetic that he exists and that he is good and profoundly wise beyond all full comprehension.

Second, the fall of man into sin and the resulting brokenness of the world is lived with every day. When Adam and Eve rejected God in Genesis 3, it fractured humanity’s relationship with its Creator King and unleashed evil into his perfect creation. Later, God established his nation Israel through which he would not only work his plan but also provide his standard: his law. God’s law reflects the character of God, particularly in his holiness. David overflows with love for God’s Law for its clarifying power in Psalm 119: “Through your precepts I gain understanding; therefore, I hate every false way” (v. 104). God’s Law not only clarifies what is truth and what is not, but it also provides a glimpse into God’s character and tells his children how they are to live, *coram deo*. The foundation of a God-centered worldview is fulfilled by the arrival of Jesus the Messiah in the New Testament. Today’s culture has turned against God’s law and rejected the concept of objective truth. Those who still hold to a biblical morality and ethic will stick out like a sore thumb and had best be prepared to give answers for why a biblical worldview is held out as truth.

However, God’s law cannot save, and it was never intended to. It can only show sin, which leaves people as spiritual orphans in need of redemption. The third apologetic of the Old Testament is the foreshadowing of redemption through the Messiah. The gospel is preached consistently throughout the Old Testament, starting as far back as Genesis 3:15. At the very moment when Adam and Eve’s sin is found out, God holds court in the garden, and before he disciplines his children, he rises to their defense and proclaims that Satan will never have victory because one is coming to defeat him. “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen 3:15).

Therefore, any apologetic model must be grounded in the gospel because apologetics is not merely a set of techniques to win an argument, but rather a heartfelt desire to see people restored with their Creator. Josh Chatraw and Mark Allen explain, “The goal of apologetics cannot simply be intellectual respectability or a defense of theism, as if belief in any deity will do. The goal of apologetics must be the cross.”⁵ As such, this chapter will argue that the New Testament consistently presents a contextualized, compassionate, and compelling apologetic approach in order to evangelize the lost and equip the church. To that end this chapter will look at three New Testament passages from three main figures: Jesus in Matthew 19:16-22; Paul in Romans 1:1-23; and Peter in 1 Peter 3:15.

Jesus in Matthew 19:16-22

One should hope that in any exploration into a spiritual topic, one would not only start in God’s Word but also with God Himself. In this case, God the Son, Jesus the Messiah. Norman Geisler and Patrick Zukeran write, “That Jesus is one of the greatest teachers who ever lived is not in dispute, even by most non-Christians who are aware of his teachings. Certainly, he is the ultimate model for Christian teaching. Given this fact, we can only conclude that Jesus was also the greatest apologist for Christianity who ever lived.”⁶

Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and law and the centerpiece in God’s glorious plan of redemption, the main storyline of the entire Bible. In today’s world there is no shortage of opinions of who Jesus was and what his mission was. Concerning himself, Jesus first has to say that he was the fulfillment of the words of the prophet Isaiah:

⁵ Josh Chatraw and Mark D. Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross: An Introduction for Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 29.

⁶ Norman L. Geisler and Patrick Zukeran, *Apologetics of Jesus: A Caring Approach to Dealing with Doubters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), introduction, Kindle.

And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:17-21)

Second, he said he was the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matt 5:17). Paul in Romans writes, “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (10:4). Clearly, Jesus thought he was the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets.

Third, Jesus directly claimed that he was the Messiah, God in the Flesh. This is perhaps the most distinguishing aspect of Christianity: Jesus’s own self-awareness of his Messianic identity. In *The Case for Jesus*, Brant Pitre writes, “The problem is that the claim that Jesus is not depicted as God in the synoptic gospels is flat out wrong. The only way to hold such a claim is to completely ignore both the miracles of Jesus in which he acts as if he is the one God as well as the sayings of Jesus in which he speaks as if he is the one God.”⁷ This claim is also critical to the core of orthodox historical Christianity, as Geisler explains, “Orthodox Christianity claims that Jesus of Nazareth was God in human flesh. This doctrine is absolutely essential to true Christianity. If it is true, then Christianity is unique and authoritative. If not, then Christianity does not differ in kind from other religions.”⁸

Jesus spoke to the woman at the well: “The woman said to him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I who speak to you am he’” (John 4:25-26). He told the Jewish leaders that he was the eternally existent God YHWH, the “I AM” in John 8: “Jesus said to them,

⁷ Brant Pitre, *The Case for Jesus: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ* (New York: Image, 2106), 121.

⁸ Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 329.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (v. 58). In addition, shortly before his crucifixion he told the Jewish council,

And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, “Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?” But he remained silent and made no answer. Again, the high priest asked him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” And Jesus said, “*I am*, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.” And the high priest tore his garments and said, “What further witnesses do we need? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?” And they all condemned him as deserving death. (Mark 14:60-64)

There are many other examples in the gospel accounts of Jesus directly claiming to be God the Son.

What Jesus claimed about himself is the ground on which one must stand here. Scripture clearly indicates that he claimed to be the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets and the Messiah, God in the Flesh. Since that is the case, when looking at apologetic approaches, Jesus should be the first and greatest source. Chatraw and Allen state, “Apologetic Methods should not be understood apart from the climactic event of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension. May we never lose sight of Jesus as we study apologetics.”⁹ The apologetic method of Jesus was contextualized, compassionate, and compelling, and Matthew 19 is a robust example.

Contextualization

The account is a familiar one: Jesus and the rich young man. Jesus is in the middle of his earthly ministry and moving closer to the cross, but always focused on the mission. Yet, Jesus consistently draws people in. He consistently reveals a contextualized response that is demonstrated in three ways in this passage.

First, in verse 16, Jesus offers a contextualized apologetic approach by asking questions. The young man approaches him and asks, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” Who is this young man? Even though this account is in all three gospels, no name is provided—all that is known is that the man is young and apparently

⁹ Chatraw and Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross*, 43.

rich. Mark and Luke are more detailed in how this mysterious rich man addresses Jesus. He calls him “Good Teacher,” to which Jesus responds, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone” (Luke 18:19).

In Matthew 19, a progression of dialogue is seen. Jesus responds with a question, which immediately demonstrates his goal to understand context. Geisler explains, “Jesus often uses the so-called Socratic method of asking questions to draw out the answer he desires from his opponents, as he does with the rich young ruler.”¹⁰ In Matthew 19:16, the man asks Jesus, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” Jesus responds, “Why do you ask me about what is good?” This man appears to be approaching the universal question of, “What must I do to be right with God?” from the standpoint of doing good works and is also aware of how far short he falls. D. A. Carson writes, “He wants to earn eternal life, and in the light of v.20, he apparently thinks there are good things he can do, beyond the demands of the law, by which he can assure his salvation.”¹¹

The second way Jesus is presenting a contextualized apologetic is by identifying the reason behind the man’s questions. Jesus is seeking to gain more context: why is this man asking these things? R. T. France explains, “Jesus recognizes and responds to his spiritual ambition.”¹² Jesus goes beyond surface contextuality and recognizes that this man is not at peace with his spiritual condition, and he is trying to resolve a spiritual tension. This must be a central thrust of apologetics, as every person walks around with a spiritual tension they are trying to resolve, and they try to resolve it in creative yet futile ways without Jesus. France continues, “[This man] wants nothing less than the best in his service of God and merely keeping the commandments has not brought him to this point.”¹³

¹⁰ Geisler and Zukeran, *Apologetics of Jesus*, chap. 12.

¹¹ D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, *Matthew and Mark*, ed. Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 477.

¹² R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 734.

¹³ France, *Matthew*, 734.

Surely, one of the most critical skills to be developed in any apologetic approach is not only to know the surface context of any interaction, but also to press further into the heart issues in play. Jesus is the master at this.

The third example in this exchange of Jesus' contextual response is that he presses in further and identifies the source of hope in this man for salvation. Even the casual reader of Scripture will be filled with questions from a quick read of this passage. Who is this man? Why is he calling Jesus good? Why is he asking about good deeds? While none of the gospel accounts give any such information about the man, one can glean from his subsequent responses that he knows God's Law and has endeavored to keep it diligently. Jesus goes through an extra round of questioning with this man, quotes the Law directly, and the man still feels that he lacks something. Jesus, of course, knows this and identifies the man's source of hope as his obedience to the Law, yet if he was happy with that he would not be asking Jesus what he needed to inherit eternal life. Jesus also presses into the truth of where the man's identity is: his material wealth and possessions. Jesus tells him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Matt 12:21). Jesus is not taken by surprise when the man turns and walks away sorrowful, for wealth is his true identity. His obedience to the Law would not cost him much, but following Jesus would cost him everything.

One must not be satisfied with surface responses and should press further into context to find the heart motivations and underlying assumptions. Matthew 19 proves Jesus to be the master of a contextualized apologetic approach.

Compassionate

Jesus understood the context, responded contextually, and demonstrated a compassionate apologetic response in two ways. First, Jesus presents a compassionate apologetic by loving this man. Though not in Matthew nor Luke's account, Mark specifies that Jesus loved this man. Mark 10 records the heart of Jesus: "And Jesus,

looking at him, *loved him*, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (v. 21). Carson notes, “Recognizing the man’s sincerity, Jesus responded in love.”¹⁴ Love must be the driving force behind any apologetic encounter. In fact, love is the greatest commandment, as Jesus proclaimed later in Matthew: “And he said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets’” (22:37-40). Geisler and Zukeran write, “Jesus realized that love is a great attraction to truth; it gives the warmth that makes otherwise unpalatable truth more digestible. He knew that truth without love is cold and unappealing and love without truth is unthinking.”¹⁵

Compassion is critical to be an effective apologist and that compassion must be grounded in love. Jesus loves the lost. He loved his disciples; he loved the sick and the lame. He had compassion on them. Matthew 9:36-38 says, “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

The second way Jesus presents a compassionate apologetic is by inviting the man to come and follow him. Jesus is not dismissive and cold; he is warm and compassionate, though direct. Jesus did not even have to engage this man, but he did. This may be Jesus calling this man’s bluff, but he invites him nonetheless. Craig Keener notes, “Early Jewish and Greek tradition seems to assume that disciples are responsible for acquiring their own teachers or the law . . . yet Jesus generally called his own chief

¹⁴ Carson, *Matthew*, 865.

¹⁵ Geisler and Zukeran, *The Apologetics of Jesus*, chap. 12.

disciples.”¹⁶ However, Jesus is also clear with the man as to what is required to be his disciple; he speaks the truth in love (Eph 4:15). Again, Keener writes, “As here, Jesus sometimes thrusts them aside—probably like some other ancient teacher to test the would-be student’s real willingness to become a learner.”¹⁷ It is not compassionate to underestimate the truth of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

Knowing that the man’s true source of identity lay in his wealth and possessions, Jesus also compassionately taught the man that this would never do as one of his disciples. Jesus must own the heart, not money, so before any discipling relationship would begin this issue must be set straight. F. F. Bruce states, “Jesus was stating a law of life when he said that where one’s treasure is, there the heart will be also. He would clearly have liked to enroll the rich man among his disciples...but the sticking point came when he was asked to unburden himself of his property.”¹⁸

Only the Son of God could possibly know that a man would still reject him, but the human apologist should continue to compassionately hold out the offer of salvation to all by inviting them to follow Jesus. The level of devotion Jesus requires should not be misrepresented, no matter how tempting it may be to water it down. Rather a faithful apologist should compassionately call everyone to a full commitment that goes beyond all other heart allegiances. In this regard, Jesus is the ultimate example of a compassionate apologist.

Compelling

Not only is Jesus demonstrating a compassionate apologetic, but he also demonstrates a compelling apologetic model. In apologetic interactions with people, the

¹⁶ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 476.

¹⁷ Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 476.

¹⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus*, The Jesus Library (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1983), 176.

context must first be understood and then one should seek to present a compelling defense of the faith so that people are prompted to act, called to respond, or at least seriously rethink their positions. Only Jesus knows the heart, but it can be seen how Jesus is the picture of a compelling response in this passage in two ways.

The first way Jesus demonstrates a compelling apologetic approach is through his use of the Law of God. After Jesus contextually identified the source of the man's hope as obedience to the law and his identity in his wealth, he applies the heart of the law with devastating results. Carson comments, "Jesus calls into question his interlocutor's inadequate understanding of goodness. In the absolute sense of goodness required to gain eternal life, only God is good. Jesus will not allow anything other than God's will to determine what is good."¹⁹ Carson brings out the heart of the issue: the hope of eternal life goes beyond mere obedience to God's Law. Jesus confronts the man with this truth and immediately compels the man to rethink his assumptions.

The man proudly responds to Jesus that he believes he has kept the law, so what else does he need to do? The man says in verse 20, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" Jesus responds masterfully in verse 21: "If you would be perfect [*telos* means complete], go, sell what you possess and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come follow me." The man went away sorrowful, for this he simply could not do. Jesus was asking too much—these requests were too close to his heart where his treasure was. Keener writes, "The young man wanted a 'teacher'; he did not want a Lord who demands sacrifice. No wonder the man was "grieved."²⁰

The second way Jesus demonstrates a compassionate apologetic is by inviting the man to come and follow him. Jesus not only cuts through to the heart of the man's hope of salvation and decimates it, but he also does not leave the man hopeless. He invites the man to come and follow him. The point of apologetics is not to win an argument, but

¹⁹ Carson, *Matthew*, 477.

²⁰ Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 475.

it is evangelization and an invitation to follow Jesus. Winning an argument is not compelling, but a contextualized and compassionate invitation to follow Jesus is. Frame writes, “It is not enough for the apologist to respond to the unbelievers’ objections. He is called to turn the attack against God’s enemies. This is the role taken by the Lord himself.”²¹ Jesus goes beyond this and does not simply attack the man. He speaks the truth of what is required to follow him. He knows what is in the man’s heart and yet still invites him to be a disciple.

This truth has not changed—apologists’ mission is still to compel people to respond by counting material possessions and wealth as secondary to Jesus. Americans are infamous for their materialism, greed, and rabid pursuit of money. In this milieu of misplaced hope and identity there is great opportunity but it must be seized with a compelling call to respond. Os Guinness points out, “Our age is quite simply the greatest opportunity for Christian witness since the time of Jesus and the apostles and our response should be to seize the opportunity with bold and imaginative enterprise.”²² The faithful apologist will press into this age with a compelling defense of the faith as Jesus did.

Conclusions

Matthew 19 may seem like a strange text to show an example of a contextualized, compassionate, and compelling apologetic method of Jesus, as the man walks away sorrowful at the end of the exchange. However, apologetics is a conflict of worldviews. Bruce writes, “This teaching was not given to one special individual, it was intended for Jesus’ followers in general. He urged them to have the right priorities, to seek God’s kingdom and righteousness above all else.”²³ Full devotion to Jesus is required, and Jesus calls this man to it as well and the man walks away.

²¹ Frame, *Apologetics*, 189.

²² Os Guinness, *Fool’s Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015), 16.

²³ Bruce, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus*, 176.

There is also something to be said about telling the truth, even if it hurts. Many pastors, preachers, and would-be apologists stray from the truth of Scripture in an attempt to make the truth more acceptable to modern ears, which is a tragic mistake. Jesus responds to this man contextually, compassionately, and compellingly—and in the end this man walks away. There was no greater apologist than Jesus in the history of the world, and this man walked away. He walked away from God himself. There will always be people who reject the truth of the gospel. Rejections should not discourage but instead encourage an apologetic approach that is grounded in a theological reality. Jesus is the preeminent example of a contextualized, compassionate, and compelling apologetic approach.

Paul in Romans 1:1-23

From the biblical apologetic of Jesus now to Paul. Indeed, there is much to learn from Paul—a man who was once an enemy and a persecutor of the church who became perhaps its greatest champion. He was a Jewish Pharisee and expert in the law, ferocious in his adherence and enforcement. Philippians famously says, “Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless” (3:5-6). Yet as Philippians goes on, Paul considers those tremendous religious achievements to be garbage compared to knowing Jesus Christ.

Paul went from being an enforcer of the law to a persecutor of the new church of Jesus Christ. Acts 8 tells that Paul, then called Saul, “was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison” (v. 3). He saw this new “Way” of the church of Jesus as something to be despised and eliminated, until he became part of it.

What caused this 180-degree turnaround? In a nutshell, his own conversion to Christianity. It might be wise not to omit one simple truth of any apologetics approach: one must be a regenerated believer before any apologetics can be done to the glory of

God. One must be personally transformed by the Holy Spirit through the gospel of Jesus and that must carry through as a burden for others who do not believe. Paul was converted in spectacular fashion, being literally knocked off his horse by the risen Christ himself (Acts 9). After that he was sent on a mission as an official apostle of Jesus. Romans begins in verse 1 by stating that he was “called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.” He engaged others about his faith with wit, intelligence, and wisdom while planting and pastoring churches throughout Asia Minor and beyond. Through this, Paul demonstrated an apologetic approach that was contextualized, compassionate, and compelling. One could turn to many passages to demonstrate this, but this discussion will be anchored in Romans 1:1-23.

Contextualized

The first way Paul demonstrates a contextualized apologetic approach is by grounding the gospel in the context of the Old Testament. From the onset, Paul’s mission is clear: his mission is the gospel, and he is called as a servant and an apostle of this mission. He goes on to explain what this gospel is in a highly contextualized way—rooted in the Old Testament prophets. The gospel (*euangelion*) literally means “good news” that God has a plan to rescue his children from his wrath for sin, and that plan is centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ. This plan was not a reaction to sin, but instead one that has been formed since the creation of the world and foretold in the Old Testament prophets.

Paul says in verse 2 that the gospel of God was “promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh.” Although by most accounts the recipients of the letter to the Romans are Gentile Christians, Paul immediately presents a contextualized gospel apologetic grounded in the Jewish Scriptures to argue that the gospel is the plan of God the Father and centered on the person of Jesus Christ, who is the Messiah from Israel. Jesus “descended from David” and was “declared to the Son of God in power according

to the Holy Spirit.” Thomas Schreiner writes, “Paul contends that Jesus is the true Son of God. He is the true Israel. The OT promises regarding the vindication of Israel have been fulfilled in and through him. The promise of a Davidic king and a Messiah also applies to Jesus.”²⁴ Paul deeply grounds the gospel in the context of redemptive history.

The second way Paul presents a contextualized apologetic approach is through the context of creation. Paul heads directly for the grand apologetic of creation, which is in anyone’s immediate and obvious context. Paul explains that there is a truth about God that is plain: “His invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have clearly been perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made” (Rom 1:20). All anyone would need to be certain that God exists is to step outside their front door and look around at creation. Look at the beauty and complexity of creation and it will proclaim that there is a God. This is a context that anyone can experience in any place on earth.

The third way Paul presents a contextualized apologetic in the passage is found in verses 5-7 where he includes the readers themselves. After contextually grounding the gospel in the grand plan of God in creation and through the Old Testament prophets leading up to Jesus, he makes it very personal by including the Roman church. He declares that all of them have “received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ” (Rom 1:5-6). Paul speaks to the immediate context of the Roman church and brings them into the mission of God to proclaim hope in Jesus to all who would hear.

No gospel apologetic is complete without a personal appeal, bringing the message directly to the person as the gospel itself is not only a global message for God’s glory to be seen in the nations, but also a personal message of individual faith and salvation

²⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 49.

in Jesus. Paul's gospel burden for the salvation of his people is obvious, which is evidence of his compassion.

Compassionate

Paul demonstrates a compassionate apologetic in at least two ways in this passage. First, by an apologetic based in love and second a gospel of urgency. First, the heart of Paul is shining through in verses 8-15. Paul overflows with gratitude for the church at Rome based on their faith. "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world" (Rom 1:8). He thanks his God for all of them. He prays for them. He misses them and wants to travel to them to see them. "Without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you" (Rom 1:9-10). He wants to encourage them in the faith and specifically he is "eager to preach the gospel" to them (Rom 1:15). His love for them drives him to equip them in the witness of the gospel.

Any apologetic approach must be rooted and grounded in love for God and love for others. This is the greatest commandment in both the Old and New Testaments (Deut 6:4; Matt 22:37-40). If the motivation for defending the faith is anything other than compassion for others' spiritual condition welling up in love, then course correction is surely needed. Winning an argument is not a good basis for apologetics, love is. Love is the apologetic model of Jesus and now with Paul. Jesus and Paul loved God and loved people; this is their supreme motivation.

Second, Paul's compassion in the text is seen with an urgent message warning them of the impending wrath of God for sin. Verse 18 tells that the "wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and the unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth." The reality of God's wrath drives him to proclaim the gospel. The verse begins with a purpose clause (*gar*) and the revealing of God's wrath is in the present voice (*apokaluptetai*), denoting ongoing continuous action. The wrath of God is now real and those who reject God, refusing to obey God by honoring

him as rightful King over all, will be judged severely. This is the very dilemma God foreknew and provided Jesus as the Savior of the world.

An apologetic defense must be driven by compassion, or the biblical mark is being missed. Paul demonstrates this clearly in Romans 1. He has a burden for non-believers that they would come to see their spiritual position, their warped way of thinking, their false wisdom and trust in themselves, and ultimately their misdirected worship of created things instead of the Creator. Paul is indeed a compassionate apologist.

Compelling

Paul presents a compelling apologetic in at least three ways in this passage: an apologetic from a transformed heart, of the resurrected Jesus, and to resolve an imminent spiritual crisis. First, Paul gives personal testimony of how faith in Jesus personally transformed his heart. This is not an academic message for Paul—this is a personal message with very personal implications. He transparently proclaims in verse 16 that he is “not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew and also to the Greek.” If this statement is looked at through the lens of Paul’s background, then it will quickly be realized why Paul had a reason to be ashamed of the gospel. As a former Pharisee and violent persecutor of the church, to its greatest evangelist and proponent. Yet, Paul lays all that aside for the truth and power of the gospel, which is a sincerely compelling apologetic. Few things in this life are more compelling than a personal testimony from a transformed heart. In verse 16 he boldly proclaims that he is “not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” Here Paul is explaining *why* he is not ashamed of the gospel. Schreiner writes, “The dynamis theou, power of God, in the gospel is the effective and transforming power that accompanies the preaching of the gospel.”²⁵ Coming from the lips of Paul, this is truly a compelling defense of his new faith.

²⁵ Schreiner, *Romans*, 64.

The second way Paul demonstrates a compelling apologetic approach is by appealing to the resurrection of Jesus. Paul is basing the power of the gospel in the person and work of the resurrected Jesus. It is not possible to overstate the importance of the resurrection in a compelling apologetic approach. Paul says elsewhere that if “Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1 Cor 15:14). The truth of the gospel hangs on a few key doctrines, and the bodily resurrection of Jesus is surely one of them. N. T Wright puts it this way: “The bodily resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of this letter, the heart of the gospel of Jesus’ Lordship, the centre of Paul’s implicit critique of Caesar, and the source of his doctrines of justification and salvation.”²⁶

In verse 4 he proclaims that Jesus was declared to be the Son of God, through the Spirit, “by his resurrection from the dead.” In other words, without the resurrection of Jesus, there is no gospel and therefore no faith to defend. Paul’s apologetic approach is compelling for many reasons, but one of the most compelling is that Jesus Christ died for sins and was resurrected from the dead.

Third, Paul’s apologetic is compelling as he points out an impending spiritual crisis, resulting in an obligation to proclaim the hope of Christ. In verse 14 he states he is “under obligation to both Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.” Paul is a man compelled to preach the gospel and defend the faith. In 1 Corinthians 9:16 he exclaims, “Woe to me, if I do not preach the gospel!” Let the aspiring apologist beware! Several reasons could be given for such a compelling statement, but in the context of this passage the imminent wrath of God compels him. In verses 19-23 he points out that this is not just a message to be considered and decided if it is worthy; it is an urgent plea that if heeded will save its hearers from spiritual destruction. The King’s law has been broken and therefore legitimate wrath and judgement are imminent unless the grace and mercy of

²⁶ N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God. Vol. 3, The Resurrection of the Son of God.* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 245.

God in Jesus is recognized. Paul tells them that this wrath has been revealed in the unrighteousness and ungodliness of men, and that the truth of God's existence and who he is also revealed in creation as general revelation. He shockingly says that this is so plain that there is no excuse, literally without an apologetic and without a defense against the wrath of God.

Conclusions

The book of Romans is a theological and apologetic masterpiece. F. F. Bruce explains that, in it, Paul “sets the scene for the exposition of his gospel by emphasizing the universal need for such a message if there is to be any home for mankind.”²⁷ Besides Jesus, no one provides such a contextualized, compassionate, and compelling defense of the faith other than Paul in Romans 1:1-23.

Peter in 1 Peter 3:15

There perhaps is no more well-known apologetic text than 1 Peter 3:15, for it is from this text that we get our word apologetics. First Peter 3:15 says, “But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.” The Lord should be honored as holy, and therefore one should be always ready to give a defense (*apologia*) to anyone who asks for the reason for the hope. He goes on to say this defense should be with “gentleness” and “respect.” This text sets the tone for an apologetic response that is contextualized, compassionate, and compelling.

Contextualized

As far as well-known apologetic texts, 1 Peter 3:15 may be preeminent. The first way Peter presents a contextualized apologetic is by targeting the heart of the believer. It is easy to jump to the second part of the verse and be always ready to defend the faith,

²⁷ F. F. Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 327.

but the first part of the verse gives the immediate context. Peter exhorts his readers to honor the Lord as holy “in our own hearts” before the battle is staged on the reasons for God. The main verb, *hagadzo*, is the command to set apart the Lord as holy; thus, the first context that must be set is in the heart. The defense of the faith from the right place, from the right heart—one that is fully devoted to Christ as Lord.

The second way Peter demonstrates a contextualized apologetic is within the context of personal conversations. Such a defense must be given from a heart that is warmed to Christ, but also to anyone who asks for the reason for hope. There is to be no partiality or selectively in whom a reason is provided. The gospel has always been a global message; one that is commanded in the most well-known Great Commission to “go and make disciples of all nations.” God knows who are his, so this is part of the secret knowledge of God. There is no context and no audience that the faith should not be defended in. Schreiner writes, “It envisions informal circumstances when believers are asked spontaneously about their faith. . . . Believers respond to a wide variety of people.”²⁸ However, it is also worth saying that “pearls are not cast before swine” (Matt 7:6). If the gospel is rejected and scorned, then a defense should not continue to be forced, but it would be better to wait for the Holy Spirit to do its softening work and proceed as the opportunity represents itself.

The third way Peter demonstrates a contextualized apologetic is in the context of suffering. Peter’s overall context of the apologetic defense is generated from someone noticing the hope, but specifically in the context of this letter from a life that has experienced suffering. David Helm and Kent Hughes makes this point: “People will be wondering how we patiently endure the unjust decisions and treatment of those in authority over us. And when they ask, we can explain the reason for the hope that is in us.”²⁹

²⁸ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 174.

²⁹ David R. Helm and R. Kent Hughes, *1 & 2 Peter and Jude: Sharing Christ’s Sufferings* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 116.

Schreiner agrees, “Setting apart Christ as Lord in the heart is not merely a private reality but will be evident to all when believer suffer for their faith.”³⁰

If one aspires to give a defense of the faith, then it needs to come from an authentic life of faith that looks differently than the world. The foundation for apologetics should be a hope that is solid and anchored in the bedrock of the supremacy of God in the face of Jesus Christ, which should manifest itself through the Holy Spirit in an actual palatable difference to others in all circumstances of life. In the current blasphemous culture of the United States, such a contextualized witness will only become more necessary.

One needs to stand out from the surrounding world, who may base their hope on what is temporal. The Christian apologist bases his hope on what is eternal and unchanging. Peter notes that this noticeable hope should cause questions to come to the surface. This does not mean that a question needs to be asked first about the hope before sharing, for one should always be at the ready, which includes steering conversations toward spiritual topics. A life based on the hope of Jesus should be a life that others around them want to know more about.

Compassionate

Peter also gives an example of a compassionate apologetic response in at least two ways. The first demonstration of a compassionate apologetic model is the desire to speak truth of anyone who asks. One should be ready to give a defense of the hope to anyone who asks. One cannot be closed hearted, calloused, or too spiritually proud to pass over someone whom the Holy Spirit is prompting to engage. To ignore the promptings of the Holy Spirit is the ultimate lack of compassion in apologetics—to not even engage someone with the hope of the gospel.

³⁰ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 174.

However, the context of the passage that immediately precedes verse 15 is in verse 14, where Peter has exhorted to “have no fear of them, nor be troubled.” Perhaps the greatest hindrance to compassion in apologetics is fear. It is safe to say that no matter who one is, what “level” of spiritual maturity has been attained, or how much schooling or training has been accomplished, there will always be a level of uncomfortableness at best, and fear at worst, when engaging others about the hope of the gospel. There are eternal things in play and the call of complete life transformation, and they should not be discussed frivolously or glibly. There should be a level of sobriety in any apologetic defense, yet one that is not overly proud or fearful—this is the compassionate context Peter provides.

The second way Peter demonstrates a compassionate apologetic is the heart behind the defense of the faith. Peter exhorts the Christian apologist to give the defense with gentleness and respect. and as verse 16 goes on to tell, with a good conscience. “Gentleness” (*prautais*) according to one lexicon, is “the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one’s self-importance, humility, courtesy, meekness.”³¹ One of the main misrepresentations of apologetics is that it is argumentative, proud, and self-seeking. It should be apparent that is a false understanding of apologetic context, as Peter instructs to defend the faith from a position of humility.

“Respect,” as the ESV translates *phobos* in the Greek, may be better thought of as “reverence.” This is the concept of “fearing” someone or something else, but not in a paranoid sense, in a respectful and reverent sense. The Christian is commanded numerous times in Scripture to fear God above all else. This is not a fear in the sense of abject and irrational terror, but one of supreme honor and holiness. Therefore, in the context of apologetics, Peter says there should be a reverent, respectful position toward those being engaged with the defense of the faith.

³¹ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. “prautais.”

It is worth noting that in this passage are both aspects of fearing (*phobos*) others. In verse 14, the Christian is called to “have no fear of them.” Fear of man cannot be an impediment to sharing the hope of the gospel in defending the faith. In verse 15 the Christian is called to defend the faith with gentleness and “fear.” In other words, to have appropriate respect and reverence in our apologetic context. Peter is saying that a compassionate apologetic is a balance of both aspects of fear.

What should be obvious then is that the wrong context for apologetics would be the opposite of respect, but rather one of contempt; one that is seen as rough, prideful, argumentative, or disrespectful of the other person and their perspective. This is an unbiblical and therefore sinful context for apologetics and should be rejected. The world does not need one more prideful and combative Christian, for this works against the effective context for apologetics to which Scripture calls.

Compelling

Finally, Peter calls the Christian apologist to a compelling apologetic approach in at least two ways. The first way is that any apologetic defense of the faith must be from a heart that is always ready to engage. The exhortations of how to cultivate such an ever-vigilant heart can be plentiful, but perhaps in this discussion a few focused examples can be provided. The Holy Spirit must fill the individual, which will then compel the defense of the faith. Other cannot be engaged in a compelling way if the apologist is not personally compelled by the truths of the gospel of Jesus through the Holy Spirit. The old saying here is appropriate here: we cannot lead others where we have not gone personally.

Another way to cultivate the right apologetic heart is to cultivate an awareness of others. This may seem simplistic, but in this distracted and self-consumed day the temptation is to drift quickly into isolated lives with little engagement outside of individual circles. The apologist is to be a people person—one who notices others and is always scanning for opportunities to engage. This requires a shift in focus and bravery as in the

ministry context of the northeast, people do not seem ready to talk, but oftentimes will engage readily enough if one is able to crack through their thin shell of individualism.

To be ready always, one must also seek to sharpen oneself in how to biblically defend the faith. This means, as noted, being saturated with the Holy Spirit, but also being students of God's Word and what it actually says, as there are many wrong ideas about the meaning of Scripture. J. Gresham Machen said it best: "False ideas are the greatest obstacles to the reception of the gospel."³² To be ready to give a compelling apologetic defense as Peter commands, a solid knowledge of the Bible and the ability to contradict false ideas are necessary.

A second way Peter presents a compelling apologetic is through the desire to have a reason for our faith. Peter exhorts believers to be ready to provide "a reason" for the hope possessed. Christians are called to give an intelligent and intellectual response to questions about their hope, not merely seeking to win arguments with volume or emotion. Such faith is logical, not (primarily) emotional or pragmatic. Nancy Pearcey points out this is one of the failures of evangelical Christianity, particularly in America: "Evangelical groups tended to downplay the role of theology in favor of practical application such as personal devotion, more living, and social reform."³³ The Christian faith is a solid faith, grounded in the truth of God and manifested through the truth of His Word. Jesus himself says that his followers are to be sanctified in the truth, specifically the truth of God's Word as "your Word is truth" (John 17:17).

The word for "reason" is the Greek word *logos*, which has deep meaning and significance. It is the essence behind all things, the "logic," the basis for what is seen in the world. It is the rationale behind how things work, or how things are perceived to work. It is not a stretch to call it a worldview, which is a foundational concept in providing a

³² J. Gresham Machen, "Christianity and Culture," in *What Is Christianity? and Other Addresses*, ed. Ned Stonehouse (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1951), 166.

³³ Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*, study guide ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 253.

compelling apologetic response. Over and above all, the reason/*logos* is centered on Jesus Christ. John 1 famously tells, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (vv. 1-5).

The “word” is not only Jesus, but he is the *logos* of all things. So Peter is actually calling the Christian to have a compelling apologetic response that is solid, intellectually informed, and historically robust apologetic, and that cannot be divorced from Jesus.

Conclusions

Peter grounds his calling for every Christian to be an apologist in contextualized, compassionate, and compelling ways. However, one should not be intimidated thinking that all that is needed is to master apologists is to give such a well-rounded defense. Schreiner sums it up well: “The truth of the gospel is a public truth that can be defended in the public arena. This does not mean, of course, that every Christians is to be a highly skilled apologist for the faith. It does mean that every believer should grasp the essentials of the faith and should have the ability to explain to others why they think the Christian faith is true.”³⁴ Schreiner is exactly right. The Christian is not called to answer every question or refute every objection, but rather called to be faithful in the responsibility to be contextual, compassionate, and compelling in a defense of the faith. The next chapter will deal with sharpening apologetic skills in an effort to be faithful witnesses.

³⁴ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 175.

CHAPTER 3

PRACTICAL ANALYSIS OF WORLDVIEW SYSTEMS

Everyone has a way of looking at life. Everyone has a way of processing or viewing the world around them; thus, everyone has a worldview. Philip Ryken writes, “Everybody has a worldview. Whether we know it or not, we all have a fundamental perspective on the world that shapes the way we live.”¹ Individuals may not even be aware of the existence of their worldview, nor how their worldview came to be formed. Tim Keller agrees and refers to a worldview as a

master narrative, an account about the meaning of life along with a recommendation for how to live based on that account of things. Some call this a “worldview” while others call it a “narrative identity.” In either case it is a set of faith-assumptions about the nature of things. . . . Everyone lives and operates out of some narrative identity, whether is thought out and reflected upon or not.²

The modern concept of a worldview is from the German theological ideas of “Weltansicht” and “Weltanschauung.” James Orr wrote in 1893 that “both words mean literally ‘view of the world.’”³ Thus, a worldview can be defined as how one attempts to make sense of life. One may think that worldviews would be as diverse as the people who hold them, but the reality is that a commonality is sought. Nancy Pearcey adds, “Our worldview is the way we answer the core questions of life that *everyone* has to struggle with: What are we here for? What is the ultimate truth? Is there anything worth living

¹ Philip Ryken, *Christian Worldview*, Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 17.

² Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Riverhead, 2008), 16.

³ James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1908), 173, Kindle.

for?”⁴ Orr writes, “Everywhere the minds of men are opening to the conception that, whatever else the universe is, it is one—one set of laws holds the whole together—one order reigns through all.”⁵

This order of commonality, or “common thread,” of a worldview is revealed in questions in which the worldview is attempting to answer: Nancy Pearcey and Phillip E. Johnson explain, “After all, every philosophy or ideology has to answer the same fundamental questions: (1) Creation: How did it all begin? Where did we come from? (2) Fall: What went wrong? What is the source of evil and suffering? (3) What can we do about it? How can the world be set right again?”⁶ Greg Koukl agrees with the concept of a common set of questions but adds a fourth element: “Every worldview has four elements. They help us understand how the parts of a person’s worldview story fit together. These four elements are called creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.”⁷ J. V. Fesko, summarizing N. T. Wright says, “The way in which people view reality, with worldviews typical providing answers to life’s key questions: Who are we, where are we, what is wrong with the world, and what is the solution?”⁸

These questions could be answered in many ways. (1) Who people are can be answered in terms of identity, activity, ethnicity, occupation, family ties, interests, philosophy, and a host of other categories. (2) What went wrong could be answered in terms of scientific explanation, social tensions, political issues, psychological reasoning,

⁴ Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 51.

⁵ Orr, *Christian View of God and the World*, 228.

⁶ Pearcey *Total Truth*, 25.

⁷ Gregory Koukl, *The Story of Reality: How the World Began, How It Ends and Everything Important That Happens in Between* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 25.

⁸ J. V. Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics: Retrieving the Classic Reformed Approach to Defending the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 97-98.

or others. (3) The solution can be addressed in similar categories—scientific, social, political, or psychological.

A critical question to be addressed is this: how does God fit into a worldview? Some would say not at all, some would have him fit in but be subservient to humanity, and others would submit to him as King. Abraham Kuyper categorizes three fundamental relations in a worldview: “Our relation to God, our relation to man, and our relation to the world.”⁹ Herein lies the crux of the issue—a worldview must address how one thinks of God, of others, and the world around them.

The Christian worldview, as defined in the Bible, is the only consistent worldview in which to interpret life primarily because every person, if being intellectually honest, has some sense of or longing for a deeper purpose in their life, relationships, and the world around them. In other words, biblically speaking, they have a sense the concept of God. John Calvin referred to this as the “*sensus divinitatis*”:

That there exists in the human mind and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity [*sensus divinitatis*], we hold to be beyond dispute, since God himself, to prevent any man from pretending ignorance, has endued all men with some idea of his Godhead. . . . This is not a doctrine which is first learned at school, but one as to which every man is, from the womb, his own master; one which nature herself allows no individual to forget though many, with all their might, strive to do so.¹⁰

The Bible clearly proclaims this universal sense of God. Romans 1:19-20 reads, “For what can be known about God is *plain to them* because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been *clearly perceived*, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.” All humanity knows there is a God not only through his creation, but also his character expressed in his law, and the imprint it leaves upon one’s conscience to follow it. Michael Peterson writes, “Human experience according to Lewis includes ‘moral phenomena’—we make ethical judgments, praise and blame, and have

⁹ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism: Six Lectures from the Stone Foundation Lectures Delivered at Princeton University* (Lexington, KY: Readaclassic.com, 2010), 11.

¹⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 9.

feelings of obligation and guilt, and all in reference to an assumed standard.”¹¹ Quoting John Calvin, J. V. Fesko writes, “There is a certain (sic) agreement between the Law of God and the order of nature, which is engrafted in all men.”¹²

Whether a biblical worldview is accepted ultimately has to do with worship. Harold Best states, “At this very moment, and for as long as this world endures, everybody inhabiting it is bowing down and serving something or someone—an artifact, a person, an institution, an idea, a spirit of God through Christ.”¹³ The Bible clearly proclaims God as Creator and humanity as his created beings, and a choice must be made—either one worships God, worships self, or worships some other aspect of God’s creation. Pearcey writes, “As Romans 1 puts it, we either worship and serve the true God or we worship and serve created things (idols). Humans are inherently religious beings, created to be in relationship with God—and if they reject God, they don’t stop being religious; they simply find some other ultimate principle on which to base their lives.”¹⁴

Every worldview, then, must have a center—an object from which one seeks to make sense of God, others, and the world around them. Specifically, a worldview can put nothing in the center (atheism), man in the center (selfism), or God in the center (Christian theism). Each of these categories will be explored in the pages that follow with the goal of proving that a theistic worldview is the only consistent worldview that can make sense of life and such a worldview can be defended by knowing key apologetic topics and common obstacles to faith.

¹¹ Michael Peterson, *C. S. Lewis and the Christian Worldview* (New York: Oxford, 2020), 61.

¹² John Calvin, quoted in Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics*, 57.

¹³ Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003), 17.

¹⁴ Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 40.

Worldview Category 1: Atheism

The first worldview to investigate is that nothing in the center, most commonly known as atheism. Atheism is defined as “a system of beliefs that asserts categorically that there is no God. Atheism usually affirms as well that the only form of existence is the material universe and that the universe is merely the produce of chance or fate.”¹⁵

Furthermore, an atheist does not believe in a higher power or any central purpose in life. James Spiegel writes, “An atheist is someone who disbelieves in God. However, the term is usually intended in the broader sense of rejecting all forms of belief in the divine. This means that atheists are almost always naturalists.”¹⁶ Naturalism focuses on the here-and-now, the material universe as the primary, if not ultimate, essence of life, and rejects the immaterial as evidence. Such naturalism maintains that there is no other deeper plan or purpose to life. Commenting on the earlier atheistic beliefs of C. S. Lewis, Peterson writes, “Many naturalists hold, as Lewis did, that materialism is true - the belief that nature consists in nothing but the material or physical.”¹⁷

The belief that there is nothing but the material or physical would also preclude the belief that there is a higher purpose holding everything together. Quoting Richard Dawkins, Spiegel writes, “The universe we observe has precisely the properties they should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.”¹⁸ Bertrand Russell expressed a similar sentiment by saying, “we must build our lives upon ‘the firm foundation of unyielding despair.’”¹⁹ Even if God does exist, which atheism claims he does not, atheist Christopher Hitchens

¹⁵ Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 17.

¹⁶ James S. Spiegel, *The Making of an Atheist: How Immorality Leads to Unbelief* (Chicago: Moody, 2010), 22.

¹⁷ Peterson, *C. S. Lewis and the Christian Worldview*, 18.

¹⁸ Richard Dawkins, quoted in Spiegel, *The Making of an Atheist*, 27.

¹⁹ Bertrand Russell, quoted in William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 78.

said that it was “fantastically arrogant” for someone to claim to know the mind of God.”²⁰ An atheistic worldview would then believe in ultimately nothing of consequence, purpose, or design at the center, and certainly not God.

Worldview Category 2: Selfism

The second worldview category to which many subscribe is selfism. This worldview is humanism, secularism, human flourishing, or one of the many varieties of self-help psychology that replaces God at the center with oneself.²¹ Commenting on the origins of this worldview and this replacement of God with oneself, Francis Schaeffer writes, “Humanism, man beginning only from himself, had destroyed the old basis of values, and could find no way to generate with certainty any new values. In the resulting vacuum the impoverished values of personal space and affluence had come to stand supreme.”²² Humans, in the absence of transcendent values from God, will invent their own. In the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment caused a great acceleration of the rejection of outside truth. Pearcey states, “The credo of the Enlightenment as autonomy. Overthrow all external authority, and discover truth by reason alone.”²³ Such a pace has only increased in the years that followed.

The self is then the worldview through which life is processed. In his aptly titled book *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, Carl Trueman writes, “For me to be a self in the sense that I am using the term here involves an understanding of what the purposes of my life is, of what constitutes the good life, of how I understand myself—my self—in

²⁰ Christopher Hitchens, quoted in Michael J. Kruger, *Surviving Religion 101: Letters to a Christian Student on Keeping the Faith in College* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 53.

²¹ Selfism would also include any of the modern “spiritualistic” movements that seek to combine aspects of different religions, as the ultimate determiner of what is right or wrong from each faith is still the individual.

²² Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Then Should We Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1976), 209.

²³ Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 101.

relation to others and the world around me.”²⁴ The self used to be something conformed to an external transcendent reality, “the authority of the created order was obvious and unavoidable.”²⁵ However, this is no longer the case. Trueman continues, “Today’s world is not the objectively authoritative place that it was eight hundred years ago; we think of it much more as a case of raw material that we can manipulated by our own power to our own purposes.”²⁶

What does this lack of objective reality have to do with a worldview? In this new world centered around the self, there are no other authorities, transcendent truths, or objective realities in which to submit. Rather, people make the world around them submit to their idea of self.

Worldview Category 3: Christian Theism

Finally, in biblical worldview of Christian theism, God at the center.²⁷ This is clearly proclaimed from the very first page of Scripture: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1). He created everything from nothing (*ex nihilo*). On the sixth day of his work, he created human beings—his crowning, ultimate expression of his character, as all human beings are “created in our [his] image and after our [his] likeness” (Gen 1:26). This creator God is not only then transcendent, existing over and above all this creation, but also immanent, his presence near and even within people. The Psalmist declares, “Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?” (Ps 139:7). Yet, other Scriptures pronounce him the transcendent and sovereign King of Kings and Lord of Lords (2 Tim 6:15; Rev 17:14; 19:16).

²⁴ Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 22.

²⁵ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 40.

²⁶ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 41.

²⁷ Technically, theism would include worship of other known deities (ex. Buddhism, Islam, Judaism); however, in the immediate ministry context of this project it is highly unlikely that any such religions would be regularly encountered. Thus “Christian” is added for clarification.

God as both a transcendent and immanent creator is a unique and all pervasive worldview. John Frame explains, “God is ‘absolute’ in the sense that he is the Creator of all things and thus the ground of all other reality.”²⁸ The concept of a divine being as “transcendent” or “absolute” is common to any and every religious or philosophical worldview. However, only Christianity presents God as both transcendent and personal. Frame continues, “Only biblical religion calls us with clarity to worship a personal absolute.”²⁹

It is critical to separate what Christianity has become from what these implications have led to. Frame writes, “In our time (as opposed to say, six hundred years ago), people are ignorant of the basic Christian worldview.”³⁰ Hence, the question of “what is Christianity?” needs to be addressed. Koukl explains,

The correct answer to the question ‘What is Christianity?’ is this: Christianity is a picture of reality. It is an account or a description or a depiction of the way things actually are. It is not just a view from the inside (a Christian’s personal feelings or religious beliefs or spiritual affections or ethical views or “relationship” with God). It is also a view of the outside. It is a view of the world out there, of how the world really is in itself.³¹

Why believe in such a worldview? C. S. Lewis may have said it best, that Christianity is a worldview “I believe in Christianity as I believe the Sun has risen, but only because I see it, but because by it, I see everything else.”³²

How do these worldviews stand the test of reason? Are they consistent? These questions will be explored in the pages that follow.

²⁸ John M. Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2015), 34.

²⁹ Frame, *Apologetics*, 37.

³⁰ Frame, *Apologetics*, 33.

³¹ Koukl, *The Story of Reality*, 23.

³² C. S. Lewis, quoted in Peterson, *C. S. Lewis and the Christian Worldview*, 30.

Assessment: Atheism

Can one live consistently within an atheistic worldview? Without much effort, it can be immediately proven that no one can live consistently within such a worldview. The atheistic worldview is not a consistent worldview because no one actually lives like an atheist. William Lane Craig summarizes, “The fundamental problem with this solution is that it is impossible to live consistently and happily with such a worldview. If one lives consistently, he will not be happy; if one lives happily, it is only because he is not consistent.”³³ Pointing to a dualistic or “two-story” worldview that Schaeffer famously confronts, Craig explains further,

In the lower story is the finite world without God, here life is absurd, as we have seen. In the upper story are meaning, value and purpose. Now modern man lives in the lower story because he believes there is no God. But he cannot live happily in such an absurd world; therefore he continually makes leaps of faith into the upper story to affirm meaning, value and purpose, even though he has no right to, since he does not believe in God. Modern man is totally inconsistent when he makes this leap because these values cannot exist without God, and man in his lower story does not have God.³⁴

An intellectually honest atheist cannot live consistently within his worldview, as he will have to continually “borrow” from the theistic worldview when he lives with meaning, value, and purpose. Spiegel agrees, “The truth is that moral values and the belief that life is meaningful are borrowed capital for the atheist, borrowed from the very thing the atheist aims to demolish - belief in God. Meaning and value transcend the physical world and must therefore find their source in the supernatural.”³⁵

Human beings are meaning-makers and value-seekers, which literally soaks through every aspect of life, as hard as it is to say that life has no true purpose. To see newborn baby, or a glorious sunrise, to feel joy or sadness in relationships, or sit by the ocean and truly believe that there is nothing other than the beauty of that moment is illogically empty. In doing so, the truth that the Creator exists, which he has placed within

³³ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 78.

³⁴ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 78.

³⁵ Spiegel, *The Making of an Atheist*, 34.

us, is suppressed. Lewis says, “I was at this time living, like so many Atheists or Antitheists, in a whirl of contradictions. I maintained that God did not exist. I was also very angry with God for not existing. I was equally angry with him for creating a world.”³⁶ Pearcey writes, “This is the tragedy of the postmodern age: The things that matter most in life—freedom and dignity, meaning and significance—have been reduced to nothing but useful fictions. Wishful thinking. Irrational mysticism.”³⁷

Where this issue has very practical implications is that if God exists and he is King, then he can tell me how to live, which perhaps is the real crux of the issue. Peterson explains, “Now, if theism is true, then we are distinct personal beings and God is our transcendent creator, and we owe obedience to him. Thus the philosophical truth of theism had practical implications.”³⁸ Spiegel identified what the practical implications are in *The Making of an Atheist*: “Atheism is not the result of objective assessment of evidence, but of stubborn disobedience, it does not arise from the careful application of reasons but from willful rebellion. Atheism is the suppression of truth by wickedness, the cognitive consequence of immorality. In short, it is sin that is the mother of unbelief.”³⁹ Whether this is willful commission of sin, such as sexual immorality, or just the noetic effects of sin on the conscience and cognition, sin is at the core of the unbelief of atheism.

Assessment: Selfism

A worldview with self at the center is a truly warped worldview. Theologian Charles Hodge points out the inevitable danger of selfism: “To tell men, therefore to look within for an authoritative guide, and to trust to their irresistible convictions is to give

³⁶ Peterson, *C. S. Lewis and the Christian Worldview*, 17.

³⁷ Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 110.

³⁸ Peterson, *C. S. Lewis and the Christian Worldview*, 28.

³⁹ Spiegel, *The Making of an Atheist*, 18.

them a guide which will lead them to destruction.”⁴⁰ Indeed, the Bible confirms this truth in Jeremiah: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (17:9). Proverbs reminds, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death” (Prov 14:12).

Os Guinness emphasizes further issues with a self-centered worldview. First “all human thinking is sinful.”⁴¹ As finite, fallen and sinful creatures, one’s thinking can never be something other than self-interested to some degree. Second, “all human thinking is idolatrous.”⁴² Humans, being made in the image of God, still have a spiritual and rational power that can inflate even their worse and most self-interested thinking beyond its natural range. And third, “all human thinking is hypocritical. Rather than acknowledging the bias and self-interest in our thinking, we are able to hide our dishonesty by aligning our ideas with higher ideals and more general interests so that we can appear nobler and more generous than we really are.”⁴³

Overall, what is actually contended for is the source of truth. If atheists ultimately believe there is no such thing as transcendent objective truth, then a self-centered worldview declares that truth is within themselves and thus subjective. McDowell writes, “truth is determined internally by the subject or person,” and that also “there is no objective standard by which truth may be determined, so that truth varies with individuals and circumstances.”⁴⁴ Michael Kruger points out how this is actually self-refuting: “Relativism runs into some serious, if not insurmountable intellectual problems. Relativism ends up being self-contradictory. The statement ‘There is not objective truth’ is itself an

⁴⁰ Charles Hodge, quoted in Edward J. Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics: A Philosophic Defense of the Christian Faith* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1948), 33.

⁴¹ Os Guinness, *Fool’s Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015), 92.

⁴² Guinness, *Fool’s Talk*, 92.

⁴³ Guinness, *Fool’s Talk*, 92.

⁴⁴ McDowell, *The New Evidence*, 586-89.

objective truth claim.”⁴⁵ Frame agrees, “To assert that ‘the truth is that there is no truth’ is both self-refuting and arbitrary. For if this statement is true, it is not true, since there is no truth.”⁴⁶ Thus, relativism and ultimately selfism, is a woefully inconsistent worldview.

The Bible paints a very different picture, telling clearly that God himself is the objective standard of truth that exists transcendentally outside of oneself. Jesus himself in John 14:6 says, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Assessment: Christian Theism

Theism is the only consistent worldview for three reasons. First, theism is a comprehensive worldview where there is no need to borrow from any other worldviews to fill the gaps in what is missing. As mentioned, the atheistic worldview is inconsistent in that it attempts to limit worldview to the lower realm of naturalism and yet no one actually lives as such; they constantly borrow from the upper realm of value and morality. With theism, there is no worldview borrowing required. Pearcey writes, “We do not have to resort to an irrational upper-story leap. Given the starting point of a personal God, our own personhood is completely explicable. . . . The Christian worldview provides a firm basis for the highest human ideals.”⁴⁷ Carnell writes powerfully,

The sine qua non for any system of truth then, is consistency. Without consistency, there is no truth. Truth is always chaperoned by consistency. It is in the light of this observation that one facet of Christianity’s claim to truth is to be evaluated. God “never lies” (Titus 1:2). He never affirms and denies the same thing at the same time. Negatively then, God does not break the law of contradiction and involve himself in error.⁴⁸

The Bible proclaims a consistent worldview in the God who is consistent, truthful, immanent, and transcendent. The Old Testament proclaims that the Law of God,

⁴⁵ Kruger, *Surviving Religion 101*, 58.

⁴⁶ Frame, *Apologetics*, 44.

⁴⁷ Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 111.

⁴⁸ Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*, 60.

the expression of his character, is truth: “But you are near, O LORD, and *all* your commandments are true” (Ps 119:151). Jesus himself requests that his followers are “sanctified in the truth, your word is truth.” (John 17:17). Hebrews famously proclaims the consistency of Jesus Christ being the “same yesterday, today, and forever” (13:8). The Bible proclaims Christian theism to, as Pearcey writes, be “the Truth, not a collection of truths.”⁴⁹

Second, theism is the only consistent worldview because it recognizes an outside objective truth. Atheism rejects the idea of absolute truth which, as stated previously, is self-refuting, impossible and illogical, as even the statement “there is no absolute truth” is itself an absolute truth. Selfism runs into the same roadblocks, as selfism would view truth as subjective, relative, and self-generated. This logic is fatally flawed. Kruger explains, “If a doctor says a person has cancer, will he respond by saying ‘That’s *your* truth, not *my* truth?’ Common sense tells us that relativism simply doesn’t work.”⁵⁰

C. S. Lewis recognized the contradictions of an atheistic worldview and the inability to resolve this tension was part of what finally drove him to faith in God. Lewis realized that if we have moral categories of good and evil, then it “presupposes a third element for making the evaluation—an objective standard of good and evil” This standard is the Law of God. Peterson goes further: “For the terms ‘good’ and ‘evil’ to be meaningful, they must be linked to some objective standard, but (quoting Lewis) “then this standard, or the Being who made this standard is farther back and higher up than either of them, and He will be the real God.”⁵¹

Third, only theism has the answer to the universal human dilemma of sin. Evil is clearly present in the world. It is seen every day in natural evil, human evil, and even demonic evil. Peterson states, “Sin is relational damage: human persons are not in right

⁴⁹ Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 33.

⁵⁰ Kruger, *Surviving Religion 101*, 58.

⁵¹ Peterson, *C. S. Lewis and the Christian Worldview*, 22-23.

relation to themselves or to God and thus cannot be in right relationship to others or the rest of creation.”⁵² However, none of the other worldviews have a resolution to this problem. Carnell writes, “Based upon the ultimate postulate, the existence of the God who has revealed himself in Scripture, Christianity claims to be a worldview which is qualified to solve these basic problems of epistemology and metaphysics, and to outline the nature and destiny of man.”⁵³

The Christian worldview explains that God as the Creator King created the world perfectly, without sin, and created human beings to “glorify God and enjoy him forever.”⁵⁴ However, as Genesis 3 continues, man rejected God as King and fell for the lie of Satan to be “like God” and decided for himself what was good and evil (Selfism). This fractured the relationship with the loving Heavenly Father and unleashed sin into the world, thus the explanation for sin and evil in the world is the curse of sin from that moment. Each human being then has gone on to sin, in both nature and choice, and the earth bears further consequences.

God, in his sovereign plan, provided the answer to this dilemma in the only solution that was possible. His Son, Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah, came from the line of Israel, lived the perfect life that we could not, and died a substitutionary death on the cross for our sins. To prove that this sacrifice was acceptable, God raised Jesus from the dead. Those who have faith in Jesus can be forgiven and reconciled with God.

However, that is not the end of the story, as the theistic worldview goes well beyond personal reconciliation. God will make the world perfect again. One day Jesus will return to judge evil permanently and usher in his eternal kingdom where his children

⁵² Peterson, *C. S. Lewis and the Christian Worldview*, 99.

⁵³ Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*, 90.

⁵⁴ R. C. Sproul, *The Reformation Study Bible* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust, 2015), 2471.

will live with him forever. Neither atheism nor selfism has other alternative answers for the problem of sin and thus theism is the only consistent worldview.

So, how do Christians at large fare at holding a biblical worldview?

Unfortunately, even though a majority of Americans would self-identify as Christian, a small percentage would actually have a biblical worldview and endeavor to live accordingly. Researcher George Barna, reporting for the 2021 American Worldview Inventory at Arizona Christian University, writes,

For example, the vast majority of American adults (69%) self-identify as “Christian” and embrace many basic tenets of the faith. But a closer look shows that at the same time, many in this group hold views clearly in conflict with traditional teachings and only 9% actually possess a biblical worldview . . . and within this larger universe of self-identified Christians is a segment known as “Integrated Disciples,” a minority of American adults (6%) who possess a biblical worldview, and demonstrate a consistent understanding and application of biblical principles.⁵⁵

A biblical worldview needs to be more deeply understood within the church, and this is accomplished through increasing knowledge of key apologetics topics.

Combatting False Worldviews

Now that a foundation has been set which defines each worldview, shows the weaknesses of each, and argues that the theistic worldview is the only consistent and thus truthful, worldview, how are false worldviews to be combatted? As the central purpose of this project is to increase knowledge of key apologetics topics at Highlands Bible Church to effectively defend the faith and share the hope it proclaims in Jesus, what steps can be taken to combat false worldviews?

Know the Bible

As discussed, at the center tension point between all three competing worldviews, and their ever-growing mutations, is the concept of truth. For the atheist, there is no truth. For selfism, truth is determined by the individual. Then, for the theist,

⁵⁵ Arizona Christian University, “AWVI 2021: What Does It Mean When People Say They Are ‘Christian?’” August 31, 2021, https://www.arizonachristian.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/CRC_AWVI2021_Release06_Digital_01_20210831.pdf, 1.

truth is found in the Bible, the literal words of God. Cornelius Van Til writes, “To be sure, the Christian view of life is true and all other views are false; that is to say the Bible presents a view of God, of man, and of Christ that is exclusive of all other views.”⁵⁶

William Tyndale famously said, “A ploughboy with the Bible would know more of God than the most learned ecclesiastic who ignored it.”⁵⁷

The Christian who is seeking to combat false worldviews must know the Bible as thoroughly as possible because the Bible is the very word of God (1 Tim 3:16-17) and documents the theistic worldview. The theistic worldview is found in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. Van Til writes, “It is therefore the system of truth as contained in Scripture that we must present to the world.”⁵⁸ Pearcey states, “We must begin by being utterly convinced that there is a biblical perspective on everything—not just on spiritual matters.”⁵⁹

God has not hidden this plan but has revealed it clearly in Scripture. Carnell states, “The Christian operates under one major premise—the existence of God who has revealed himself in Scripture.”⁶⁰ Therefore, it is critical in seeking to increase the knowledge of key apologetic topics to increase knowledge of the Bible. Sadly, the average Christian has not read the whole Bible and knows little of the overall redemptive metanarrative contained throughout. A Lifeway Research poll in 2022 reports that only 11 percent of Americans surveyed have read the entire Bible.⁶¹ How can the biblical worldview be defended if it is not truly known? The theistic worldview, as detailed in the

⁵⁶ Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 4th ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008), 23.

⁵⁷ William Tyndale, quoted in McDowell, *The New Evidence*, xxxi.

⁵⁸ Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 29.

⁵⁹ Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 45.

⁶⁰ Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*, 175.

⁶¹ Lifeway Research, “How Much of the Bible Have You Personally Read?” April 25, 2017, <https://research.lifeway.com/2017/04/25/lifeway-research-americans-are-fond-of-the-bible-dont-actually-read-it/>.

Bible, is the only worldview that consistently answers the common worldview questions mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, summarized as (1) creation: how did we get here?, (2) fall: what went wrong?, and (3) redemption: How do we fix it?

First, creation: how did we get here? To be consistent with the previous statements, the Bible starts with God. Like the Bible itself, the beginning of all things is God. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1) From page 1 of Scripture, the theistic worldview proclaims a Creator God who is sovereign over his creation. However, God himself is not a created being and as such is in a totally unique and set apart category. This is the essence of the one attribute that colors all his other attributes: his holiness. Scripture makes this clear: “To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One” (Isa 40:25, see also Isa 40:18; 46:5). What is this God like? God has incommunicable attributes that none of his creation shares. He is eternal, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, and the source of all life, including human beings. Any attempt to understand God must begin with the holy uniqueness of God. Psalms cautions, “You thought that I was one like yourself” (50:2).

All human beings are also made unique, as they are created with the image of God stamped on every soul (Gen 1:28). Humans are God’s crowning creation, none of the other animals are like humans. Psalm 8:4-5 says, “What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.” Both the Psalms and Genesis declares that human beings are to have dominion over God’s creation as his vice-regents (Ps 6:6-8; Gen 1:28). Humans are distinct from the Creator yet share in some of his communicable attributes—his love, grace, kindness, mercy, among many others—but all imperfectly, whereas God is perfect in the expression of all his attributes. Humans are imperfect due to the reality of sin.

The answer to the second question, “what went wrong?,” is sin. Wayne Grudem defines sin as “any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature.”⁶² Sin is rebellion against God, which first came into the world at the fall, as recorded in Genesis 3 and since has cursed the entirety of God’s creation, human beings included. In the Bible, only two chapters after the creation of the world the federal representatives, Adam and Eve, bought the lie of Satan and rejected their Creator. Interestingly enough, the first tactic that Satan employs is to question God’s Word.

He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. (Gen 3:1-6)

The apostle Paul makes the clear connection between the sin of Adam and the curse of sin on all of mankind: “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Rom 5:12) Every human being is therefore born guilty of sin, by nature and choice. Gregg Allison writes, “The picture of sin that Paul and the other authors paint is one of universal depravity and corruption.”⁶³

Furthermore, God as Creator is completely sovereign over his creation, which includes all of humanity. God has every right to tell his human beings how to live in his law for their good, as the transcendent authority. The Westminster Catechism says, “To glorify God and enjoy him forever”⁶⁴ is the highest goal and ultimate purpose. Sin replaced

⁶² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 490.

⁶³ Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 343.

⁶⁴ Westminster Shorter Catechism Project, “Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 1,” accessed April 18, 2022, https://www.shortercatechism.com/resources/wsc/wsc_001.html.

God with the self, and therefore the new goal and purpose is to “glorify ourselves and enjoy ourselves forever.” Sin is also what fractured the relationship with the Creator King and henceforth unleashed a curse on all the earth. This is the reason for the existence of evil and suffering. Koukl, referencing a famous saying by author G. K. Chesteron, writes, “Chesteron famously points out that original sin is the one doctrine of Christianity that can actually be proven.”⁶⁵ Koukl continues, “There is something terribly wrong with the world. Things are no the way they are supposed to be, a fact so obvious to everyone it constitutes the nonbeliever’s main objection to the existence of God, at least the kind of God that Christians believe in.”⁶⁶

If sin is the problem, then what is the solution? In his divine foreknowledge, God had already designed the plan of salvation from the curse of sin through his Son, Jesus Christ. The Bible reflects this truth once more with the apostle Paul in the Epistle to the Romans:

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (5:18-21)

Jesus Christ, God in the flesh and the fulfillment of the Old Testament Jewish Messiah, came to do what no man could do—pay the penalty for sin and satisfy the wrath of God. This Jesus was the “Word made flesh that dwelled among us” (John 1:14), meaning Jesus was truly man and truly God. The book of Hebrews tells that he “had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest” (2:17). Philippians tells that Jesus had “the form of God . . . but made himself to nothing . . . being born in the likeness of men” (2:5-8). Allison explains, “His deity demonstrated by his own claims supported by his divine attributes and miraculous

⁶⁵ Koukl, *The Story of Reality*, 78.

⁶⁶ Koukl, *The Story of Reality*, 81.

activities. His humanity demonstrated by the virgin birth and his human attributes, activities, relationships, trials and temptations.”⁶⁷ The early church was also very clear in the affirmation of Jesus as fully man and fully God. The early creeds verify this, as reflected in the Chalcedonian Creed (AD 451): “Our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in divinity and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man . . . of one substance with the Father.”⁶⁸

What Jesus came to do resolves the problem of “what went wrong.” Jesus once for all absorbed the full wrath of God and penalty for sin on the cross, dying in the place of the sinners who rejected God’s authority over their lives. He was miraculously raised from the dead three days later to show that God the Father approved of the sacrificial atonement for sin. The Bible consistently proclaims the work of Jesus in his perfect life, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection as the reconciliation of what went wrong. Paul in Colossians writes that “through him” all things on heaven and earth are reconciled by the blood of the cross (1:20). The cross was not a reaction, but the foreordained plan of God in Jesus Christ. God the Father, made “known to us the mystery of his will according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan of the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1:9-10).

Through repentance and faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ, one can have complete forgiveness of sins and therefore reconciliation with God and man. The apostle John wrote, “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Furthermore, we are free to serve our King in holiness without fear. As Luke writes in the announcement of Jesus the Messiah coming as a baby, “that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days” (Luke 1:74-75).

⁶⁷ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 365.

⁶⁸ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 376.

To increase the knowledge of key apologetics concepts, one must first begin with increasing knowledge of the Bible, which contains the overarching story of reality. So much apologetic misunderstanding can be done away with by simply knowing the “big story” of the Bible. Additionally, church members and attenders can feel increasingly more confident with knowing what they believe and why through a deeper knowledge of the Bible. Much of the attacks on Christianity from atheism to selfism are due to a lack of biblical understanding, particularly biblical theology.

Know Responses to Common Objections

Second, Christians who are seeking to combat false worldviews must not only know the basics of what they believe and why, but should know how to defend their faith against common objections. As previously discussed at length, 1 Peter 3:15 commands the believer to not only “honor Christ the Lord as holy” but also to “always be prepared to make a defense (*apologia*) to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.” Quoting F. R. Beattie, McDowell writes,

Christianity is either EVERYTHING for mankind or NOTHING. It is either the highest certainty of the greatest delusion. . . . But if Christianity be EVERYTHING for mankind, it is important for every man to be able to give a good reason for the hope that is in him in regard to the eternal verities of the Christian faith. To accept these verities in an unthinking way, or to receive them simply on authority, is not enough for an intelligent and stable faith.⁶⁹

To engage biblically, it is critical to note that one does not engage in apologetics to win arguments, but rather to win souls. Any apologetic approach must be compassionate, not merely contextualized and compelling. McDowell explains, “God saves-apologetics do not. On the other hand, God uses apologetics, or evidences to help clear away obstacles to faith that many people erect, and also to show that faith in Christ is reasonable.”⁷⁰ Clark Pinnock agrees, “An intelligent Christian ought to be able to point up the flaws in a non-Christian position and to present facts and arguments which tell in

⁶⁹ F. R. Beattie, quoted in McDowell, *The New Evidence*, xxx.

⁷⁰ McDowell, *The New Evidence*, xxxi.

favor of the gospel. If our apologetic prevents us from explaining the gospel to any person, it is an inadequate apologetic.”⁷¹

This project provided responses to the common objections (“problems”) that one encounters when seeking to defend the faith. What problems does the theistic worldview need to face? First is the problem of truth. As covered previously, truth in current culture is not widely accepted as objective, which makes it difficult to defend Christianity as truth if truth itself is not known to exist.

Second is the problem of Scripture. This problem is closely related to the problem of truth, as Scripture presents itself as the very words of God and therefore cannot be false. Most people in today’s culture view Scripture as fables and fairy tales from a culture long since forgotten or the product of the church to create the religion it desired. It is difficult to call upon the truth of Scripture when Scripture itself is not recognized as truth.

Third is the problem of Jesus. While it is hard to historically deny that Jesus of Nazareth existed, it is near impossible in modern culture to get consensus on who he claimed to be. It is difficult to defend Jesus as the centrality of Christianity if there is not agreement on who he was.

Fourth is the problem of evil. This is perhaps the most well-known and hardest problem in apologetics. The argument basically says that “if God exists and he is good, why does evil exist? Either God does not, or he is not good, or he is not powerful enough to intervene.” While there is consensus that evil exists (the “what went wrong?” question), there is not consensus on why evil happens to some and not others and how to process when it does. It is difficult to defend God as good and powerful in light of the problem of evil.

Fifth is the problem of science. The common retort in modern culture today is, “Hasn’t science disproven Christianity?” After all, Christianity is founded on the

⁷¹ Clark Pinnock, quoted in McDowell, *The New Evidence*, xxxii.

miraculous (God existing, creating the world from nothing, recorded miracles in the Old and New Testaments, and most importantly, the resurrection of Jesus). It is difficult to defend Christianity with a culture hyper obsessed with science.

Sixth is the problem of Christians. It is sad but true that Christians are their own worst enemy and provide more ammunition against Christianity sometimes than evidence for it. Gandhi famously said, “I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. They do not look much like your Christ.” Surely, if one were to survey the news on any given day many embarrassing stories of the behavior of Christians, especially pastors and leaders, would prove this to be true. Furthermore, the perception of the average Christian is one who is narrow minded, overly simplistic and anti-intellectual. It is difficult to defend the faith with the current perceptions, some based on reality, are held by many in modern culture.

Seventh is the problem of exclusivity, which is perhaps one of the most common objections to the Christian faith, as it is considered offensive for Christians to say Jesus is the only way to God. It is commonly said that there are “so many religions” and “billions of people in the world,” and to assert that there is only one true faith is not only offensive, but also arrogant and illogical.

Eighth is problem of sexuality. In today’s LGBTQ+ climate, the LGBTQ+ objection is perhaps the hottest of all hot-button topics. People object to Christianity simply because the Bible clearly takes a position that homosexuality is sinful, and God is the one who assigns either male or female gender at birth. LGBTQ+ issues are also very personal objections because many people have friends or family members who struggle with same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria. How can a Christian be prepared to respond to all these objections?

Practice Responses to Common Objectives

Third, the Christian who is seeking to combat false worldviews must practice actual engagement in dialog with opposing worldviews. Apologetics is not just a defense

of the faith, but an offense against opposing worldviews. R. C. Sproul writes, “Apologetics, however, does not just entail defense. It also involves offense, the positive task of constructing a case for Christianity that shows itself to be applicable to every culture. . . . In other words, apologetics can be used to show that Christianity is true and that all non-Christian worldviews are false.”⁷² Engaging with people of opposite worldviews is the best way to not only understand their viewpoint, but be able to research and refute false ideas. Koukl in his book *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*, identifies a few steps that can be asked when engaging with opposite worldviews.

The first step is to ask clarifying questions, such as, “what do you mean by that?”⁷³ This question is a humble and open-ended question which sets the tone that one is listening with the goal to understand. The question also forces the opposing worldview to define terms and provide more detail on their position, which may expose some holes in logic or biblical misunderstandings.

The second step is to dig deeper to get behind the answers to the first question with a follow up question, such as, “how did you come to that conclusion?”⁷⁴ Koukl points out, “The first question helps you know what another person thinks. The second question helps you know why he thinks the way he does.”⁷⁵ The Christian apologist does not merely want to know the facts of the opposing worldview, but the reasons behind the worldview.

The third step is to turn the tables and try to expose any logical flaws or inconsistencies in the opposing worldview. This again is greatly helped by knowing the biblical worldview thoroughly, as many times an atheistic or self-centered worldview has

⁷² R. C. Sproul, *Defending Your Faith: An Introduction to Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 16.

⁷³ Gregory Koukl, *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 49.

⁷⁴ Koukl, *Tactics*, 61.

⁷⁵ Koukl, *Tactics*, 61.

serious biblical misunderstandings. By knowing the real truth of the Bible, it is possible to spot inconsistencies in other worldviews. Calvin powerfully summarizes this sentiment: “If godly men take these things to heart, they will be abundantly equipped to restrain the barking of ungodly men; for this is proof too clear to be open to any subtle objections.”⁷⁶

True Christian theism is not about empty rule following, but taking the real truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ into one’s heart. Quoting Scotch Presbyterian Thomas Chalmers, author William Farley writes powerfully, “The best way to overcome the world is not with morality or self-discipline. Christians overcome the world by seeing the beauty and excellence of Christ.”⁷⁷

In chapter 2, the focus was to prove that biblical apologists had a contextualized, compassionate, and compelling approach. This cannot be lost in mere technique. Guinness offers a healthy caution here: “We need to remind ourselves again and again, and then again, Jesus never spoke to two people the same way, and neither should we.”⁷⁸ In hopes of equipping Highlands Bible Church to respectfully engage individuals with the truth of the biblical worldview, the details of the project are addressed in chapter 4.

⁷⁶ John Calvin, quoted in Sproul, *Defending Your Faith*, 17.

⁷⁷ William P. Farley, *Gospel Powered Parenting: How the Gospel Shapes and Transforms Parenting* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2009), 24.

⁷⁸ Guinness, *Fool’s Talk*, 33.

CHAPTER 4

ELEMENTS OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

This ministry project consisted of a three-week sermon series titled “Defending the Faith” and a ten-week interactive training seminar titled “Problems with Christianity,” where the top objections to Christianity were discussed. The research methodology elements consisted of a pre-seminar survey and a post-seminar survey. The research elements were designed to meet the goals of the project specifically: (1) assess the understanding of key apologetics topics in church members at HBC, (2) form a curriculum that would serve to increase the understanding of key apologetics topics at HBC, (3) measure the effectiveness of the curriculum after the apologetics curriculum, and (4) further foster spiritual maturity and apologetics effectiveness by developing a strategic plan for a future Apologetics Institute at HBC.

Scheduling

The project was first discussed and approved with the elder team at the May 11, 2022 elder meeting, and then announced publicly at the May 22, 2022 member meeting, and promoted in subsequent Sunday morning worship services and social media accounts. The project began with a pre-seminar survey which was sent out on June 22, 2022. Eighty-two survey responses were collected and organized electronically. The three-week sermon series began on June 19, 2022, and continued through June 26 and July 3. The ten-week interactive seminar started on Wednesday, June 29 and ran until September 7, with an average weekly attendance of thirty people.

Participants

As stated in the Research Methodology section of chapter 1, the assessment survey was sent out only to members of HBC, as the elders had previously verified the testimonies of faith as well as their biblical understanding of the gospel. Additionally, the survey was sent to several non-member regular attendees of the seminar to track their growth in key apologetics topics as well.

The pre-assessment survey consisted of a basic demographic section, two general questions on the definition and value of key apologetics topics to HBC members and then eight multiple-choice questions set up on a six-point Likert scale. The eight questions were corresponded with the main topic of each of the weekly seminars to track knowledge before and after the seminars.

Participants were also given the option to view the sermon series and interactive seminar on video livestream or audio podcast.

Synopsis of Sunday Sermon Series

The Sunday morning sermon series ran for three weeks. Each sermon showed how three key figures of the New Testament—Jesus, Paul, and Peter—defended the faith in a contextualized, compassionate, and compelling way. Three key New Testament Scripture passages were preached expositionally. What follows is a brief summary of the sermons as preached.

Sermon 1

Jesus is the center and greatest apologist of the Christian faith. For sermon 1 I preached Matthew 19:16-22, which is the account of Jesus and the rich young ruler. The man asked Jesus, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (v. 16), to which Jesus initially replied for the man to follow the law of God. The man said that he had done so from his youth, but still lacked assurance. Jesus called him to sell all he had and give it to the poor and to come and follow him. The man walked away upset because he had a “great many possessions.”

In response to the man's first question, Jesus asked, "Why are you asking me about what is good?" Through this interaction, one learns that defending the faith involves asking context questions. Mark's parallel account makes it clear that Jesus loved the man and therefore had compassion on him. Defending the faith involves having compassion for the lost. Jesus did not disregard the man, he invited him to come and follow him after he told him the hard truth. Defending the faith involves speaking the truth and compelling people to respond.

Sermon 2

In Romans 1:1-23 is Paul's masterful and rational defense of the faith. He grounds his defense in the fulfillment of the Old Testament Messianic prophecies, his own transformed life, and the grand apologetic of creation. Defending the faith includes presenting a rational context. One of the many concerns leveled at Christians is that they are not "rational" or "intellectual," and they base their faith purely on emotion and feeling. The apologetic of Paul calls Christians to more.

Paul also points out that those who do not believe do so from a heart that is "suppressing the truth in their unrighteousness" (v. 18). They are lost because they are spiritually blind, but they are actively rejecting the truth of the gospel. Defending the faith involves having compassion for those who refuse to submit to God. Salvation is a monergistic work of God and therefore God is the only one who can soften a sin-hardened heart.

Third, Paul grounds his defense in a compelling need to proclaim the truth of the gospel. He tells says he is "not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of salvation for all who believe" (v. 16). Paul demonstrates that a key part of his defense of the faith is being personally compelled to speak up. I challenged the church to not let the opportunity pass by to personally speak up when the Holy Spirit prompts them.

Sermon 3

The apostle Peter models his contextualized, compassionate, and compelling defense of the faith in 1 Peter 3:15, a critical passage for apologetics, which reads, “But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.” It is critical to note that the context of the passage is the imminent persecution of believers for their faith, so Peter first explains that defending the faith involves being persecuted in some way for the faith. Persecution is certainly seen today in the US, but not to the extent as in other countries that are hostile to the gospel. Nevertheless, persecution for faith, even in the US, is to be expected in some way and therefore Christians must be ready to give a defense.

Second, in a climate that can be hostile to the church and Christians, Peter teaches that defending the faith involves responding to opponents with gentleness and respect. The primary reason for doing so is to remember that the purpose of apologetics is not to win an argument, but to win souls for Christ. In compassionate responses to questions of the faith, prayer must be central for the Holy Spirit to do the heart-work required that he alone can do.

Third, Peter models a compelling defense of the faith by challenging Christians to be ready ahead of time to give a logical defense of the faith. Christians need to have reasons thought out in advance for what is believed and why. The metanarrative or “big story” of Scripture must be understood deeply. Defending the faith involves knowing the biblical worldview.

Synopsis of Mid-Week Series: Problems with Christianity

The Sunday morning sermon series was followed by a ten-week interactive seminar held weekly on Wednesday nights at 6:30 p.m. This is the usual time slot for the church’s MidWeek series. The class was initially moved it to the sanctuary as increased attendance was expected due to the excitement from the material. Adding to the urgency

was the timing of the Supreme Court decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and increasing tension from the LGBTQ+ worldview, as the Lutheran church in the town recently hired a married lesbian woman to be their pastor. In short, this series could not have been timed by God any better, and for that I rejoice!

Attendance was taken at each seminar and remained consistent over the weeks. Additionally, there was also significant interaction and discussion at each seminar. The series was also live-streamed, video recorded, and posted as an audio podcast to all of our church feeds. The following are summaries of each of the ten weekly sessions.

Week 1

The Problems with Christianity series started with an introduction to apologetics and worldview. I defined what *apologetics* is and its two purposes: evangelism (Matt 28:19-20) and equipping the church for ministry (Eph 4:11-15). In other words, this definition corresponds directly with the mission of HBC, which is to bring glory to God by making and maturing disciples of Jesus Christ.

I then defined the term *worldview* by saying it is a way of processing the world that shapes how one interprets life on a very practical level. Each worldview has common questions: (1) who am I?, (2) what is my purpose in life?, (3) what went wrong?, and (4) what is the solution? Ultimately, a worldview is a search for truth. I introduced the two-story philosophy of truth where reality and faith must be separated.

I then set the foundation of worldviews by introducing the three general worldview categories: (1) atheism—nothing at the center of the worldview, (2) selfism—self at the center of the worldview, and (3) theism—God at the center of the worldview. I spent time stressing the theistic worldview as the biblical worldview where everything is from God and finds its fullest meaning in God.

Week 2

The second week's topic was the problem of truth. I defined *truth* as a statement or belief that matches reality. The problem is that opponents would claim that actual truth cannot be known. I proposed answers according to the three worldviews mentioned in the previous week. An atheistic worldview would say that we cannot know truth, as objective truth does not exist in a world ultimately without a plan, central purpose, or overarching meaning. The selfism worldview would answer the question by saying that truth is up to the individual; in other words, what I feel is true, is true for me. This is the essence of expressive individualism—that truth is discovered by expressing feelings and desires. Ultimately, in the worldview of selfism, truth is subjective and relative, yet no one actually lives this out consistently.

Finally, I answered the question of “How do we know what is true?” From the theistic worldview by stating that God's Law is the standard of truth. This is consistently the testimony of Scripture and makes God out to be the external objective standard of truth as reflected in his Word.

How we answer this question also has tremendous implications in our personal, apologetic, and practical lives. Personally, we need to answer for ourselves how we know Christianity to be true. In an apologetic context, we need to know the varying approaches to truth to make a contextualized, compassionate, and compelling case for Christianity. Practically, we need to know how to navigate constantly changing morals in a secularized culture. I asserted that even in such a culture truth can be known. There are ways of knowing truth, some are more reliable than others. One can reliably know any truth from things like reason, logic, consistency, evidence, or official announcement. There are more dangerous ways of knowing truth such as instinct, feeling, majority opinion, traditions, customs, or pragmatism.

I also introduced the laws of logic popularized by R. C. Sproul in his classic book *Defending Your Faith*: the law of noncontradiction, the law of causality, and the law

of sense perception.¹ I clarified the difference between a contradiction and a paradox or a mystery and maintained that a belief in God can be legitimately defended by using these principles.

Finally, I discussed some ideas of how to engage with other competing ideas of truth. Know why you personally believe Christianity to be true—have a well thought out narrative. Ask questions of the other side and continually seek to define terms. Seek to understand their worldview thoroughly. Plant doubts in their worldview and always remember the goal of apologetics is not to win an argument but is evangelism and equipping the church as Christians seek to make and mature disciples of Jesus Christ for the glory of God.

Week 3

The third week's topic was the problem of Scripture. Today's culture has many different views on the definition of Scripture. Specifically, depending on worldview, one will have differing perspectives on the nature of Scripture. Again, the problem was addressed by investigating each of the three worldviews. An atheistic worldview would say that Scripture is not objectively true nor authoritative as ultimately atheism is not consistent with absolute and objective truth in general. The selfism worldview would define Scripture as the words of men and therefore any truth would be subjective and relative to the feelings of the individual. The theistic worldview would define Scripture as the very Word of God, and therefore authoritative. Ultimately, the theistic worldview is the only viable worldview because if Scripture is not the Word of God, then what he requires of us cannot be known.

Critical terms were defined within the theistic worldview pertaining to Scripture. *Inspiration* was defined as God the Holy Spirit using human authors to write the actual words of the Bible. *Inerrancy* as in the original writings and properly interpreted, Scripture

¹ R. C. Sproul, *Defending Your Faith: An Introduction to Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), chaps. 3-8.

is 100 percent true in everything it affirms. Scripture is also complete—the canon is not missing any books of the Bible. Scripture is *authoritative*, as the Word of God, and has the authority to command obedience. Lastly, Scripture is *sufficient*, in the words of 2 Peter 1:3, we have “all things that pertain to life and godliness.” It was noted how the current landscape of evangelicalism demonstrates a wide-ranging disparity in the belief of any of these essential terms, even in our own town.

Next, I pointed out what a critical resource church history is in the study of Scripture. The historical orthodox church has consistently understood the Bible to be the Word of God. This is seen in the internal evidence from the early church within the pages of Scripture and also from external evidence of the writings of the early church fathers from the first, second, third centuries and beyond. A few selected quotes were reviewed from several church fathers in those time periods.

Scripture was written by over forty authors, over one thousand years, in various geographical locations and cultural contexts, yet all remain consistent in telling the one central story—the plan of God to redeem people faithful to him from a human race that rejected him as King. The canon of Scripture was defined as the rule or standard by which writings are recognized as the true Word of God. The formation of the Old Testament canon was reviewed briefly in relation to the many verses contained within it that specify “God said.” I mentioned that the Septuagint from 250 BC, and the Masoretic Texts from the fifth century AD, when compared to the Dead Sea Scrolls found in 1947 very closely resemble one another. I asserted that the Old Testament canon was settled by the time of Jesus.

Changing gears, the New Testament canon was discussed, specifically how New Testament Scripture made its way from oral tradition to written record persevered by the Holy Spirit and the eyewitnesses. I focused on the reliability of the gospel accounts as the bullseye of an apologetic of Scripture as Christianity comes down to the claims of

the person and work of Jesus Christ. I discussed the concept of “controlled oral tradition”² with the eyewitnesses as the ones who ensured the accuracy of the events as told and preserved. Additionally, the New Testament manuscripts were copied thousands of times and there are more copies of ancient manuscripts than any other classic literature from those time periods. This is the practice of textual criticism should fill us with the confidence of the reliability of the modern translations of the Bible.

I summarized by focusing on the truth of Scripture as the Word of God as the foundation for the mission of the church in making and maturing disciples of Jesus Christ.

Week 4

The fourth week’s topic was the problem of Jesus; specifically, who is Jesus? This is the critical question when entering a dialogue with others about the faith. If one were to ask random people on the street, one would encounter many different answers from “a good moral teacher,” to “Savior and Lord,” to “I don’t know,” and everywhere in between. Christians know that Jesus is everything, the Christian faith is all about Jesus. Sproul writes, “No person in history has provoked as much study, criticism, prejudice, or devotion as Jesus of Nazareth.”³ Depending on the worldview, the question of “who is Jesus” might be answered in various ways. An atheist most probably would say something along the lines of, “We can never know the true historical Jesus.” Someone prescribing to a self-centered worldview might answer, “Jesus is who I understand him to be.” However, the biblical worldview, theism, would say that “Jesus is the Messiah, God the Son.”

Common objections and responses were discussed. First was the objection that Jesus did not exist at all. This is fairly easy to defeat as numerous extra-biblical historical

² Kenneth E. Bailey, “Informal Controlled Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels,” *Themelios* 20, no. 2 (1995): 4-10.

³ R. C. Sproul, *Who Is Jesus?* Crucial Questions Series (Sanford, FL: Ligonier, 2019), 2.

sources provide evidence that he did. Objection 2 was that the Jesus in the Gospels was created by the church and thus the true historical Jesus cannot be known. For this, I provided several responses. The first response was to immediately acknowledge that everyone has presuppositions that affect what is accepted as historical truth, and to remember that no one can prove the biblical Jesus beyond all doubt. However, the true Jesus can be known from Scripture and opponents need to answer the question, “Why aren’t the Gospels historically reliable?” This question was addressed in detail in week 3, so I provided a brief review of those reasons.

The second response to the assertion that the historical Jesus cannot be known is to ask opponents, “Can you provide an example of a ‘mistake’ in the gospel accounts?” A case study was reviewed, taken from Bart Ehrman’s *Jesus Before the Gospels*, of the tearing of the temple curtain after the death of Jesus.⁴ Ehrman’s objections were discussed and then I asked the class to respond as an exercise. I also encouraged the class to read material from the opposing side to better understand counterarguments and be ready to give a reason for the hope that Christians have.

The third response to the assertion that the true historical Jesus cannot be known is to ask opponents, “If the gospels were a creation of the church and are historically unreliable, then what was Jesus’ self-understanding of who he was?” He was aware he was the Messiah; he was executed for claiming to be God (as the placard on his cross historically testifies the Romans understood this as his claim too); he invoked the name of Yahweh; he said the kingdom of God as at hand; he referred to himself as the Son of Man; he demonstrated control over creation; he did many miracles; he taught with sole authority; and he demonstrated control over evil. Each of these examples provides strong evidence that Jesus did not merely claim to be God the Son, the Messiah—he consistently acted with that self-understanding of his identity.

⁴ Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus before the Gospels: How the Earliest Christians Remembered, Changed, and Invented Their Stories of the Savior* (New York: HarperOne, 2016), 174-76.

The fourth response would be to demonstrate that the church of Jesus immediately, consistently, and unanimously considered Jesus to be the Messiah, God the Son. As William Lane Craig writesm “Within 20 years of the crucifixion a full-blown Christology proclaiming Jesus as God incarnate existed.”⁵ Several key quotes from early church fathers were cited to further strengthen this claim.

The fifth response would be ask, “If he were merely a legend, then why did people react like he was Lord?” This is especially powerful when realizing that many of the first converts were Jewish, and by worshipping Jesus as Lord they would be breaking the first commandment of God’s Law to have no other gods before him. For them to worship Jesus as Lord, they must have understood him as the Messiah.

The sixth response would be to provide proof that if the Gospels were fabricated legends and myths, they are not written in that style. I provided a lengthy quote from C. S. Lewis, as one of the world’s foremost experts in literature, that the Gospels were not written in the style of a legend whatsoever: “I have read quite a bit of legends and I am quite clear that they are not the same sort of thing.”⁶ In so stating this, Lewis was anticipating and rebutting the objection that Jesus was merely a legend as created in the Gospels by the church.

The last objection to the biblical worldview of Jesus being the Messiah, God the Son, was that “Jesus loved and accepted everyone, that is all he was.” I provided two responses to this objection. First, he was harsh with the Jewish religious leaders, as seen in Matthew 23 and many other places. Jesus pronounced judgment on them because they distorted the law of God, and therefore Jesus claimed that God does have a standard that

⁵ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 300.

⁶ C. S. Lewis, quoted in Justin Taylor, “Is C. S. Lewis’s Liar-Lord-or-Lunatic Argument Unsound?,” Gospel Coalition, February 1, 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/is-c-s-lewiss-liar-lord-or-lunatic-argument-unsound>.

he calls people to. Additionally, the religious leaders failed to accept Jesus as the Messiah, thereby providing that there is exclusivity to the claim of Jesus as the Messiah.

The second response to the last objection is to demonstrate from Scripture that Jesus calls his followers to an ever-higher standard of holiness than originally seen in the law of God. For example, in Matthew 5:17-48 Jesus increased the requirements of the law from mere outward obedience to true obedience in the heart. Therefore, Jesus cannot merely love and accept everyone, regardless of their sinful behavior, but rather calls his disciples to a true standard of holiness.

Week 5

The fifth week's topic was the problem of evil, as indicated in the classic syllogism (1) Christians claim that God exists, (2) evil clearly exists, (3) therefore, God cannot exist, or if he does he is unable or unwilling to prevent evil. There are two types of the problem of evil: the logical problem—how can both God and evil exist?, and the practical problem—why is this particular evil happening *to me*? There are also different types of evil itself. Moral evil is when an agent causes evil; for example, one human being sins against another human being. Natural evil is when no agent caused evil; for example, hurricane, tornadoes, or tsunamis. There is also a metaphysical evil, which includes demons and Satan. Lastly, there is an eternal evil which John MacArthur states, is Hell itself.⁷

The three main worldviews were reviewed along with common responses to the problem of evil. An atheist worldview, having nothing at the center, would be forced to admit that evil just happens randomly and without reason. This worldview fails as it is inconsistent. A good example of such an inconsistency would be justice. If an atheist is robbed at gunpoint, they would probably expect justice to be done, and not disregard it as random and meaningless.

⁷ John MacArthur, "Why Does God Allow So Much Suffering and Evil?," Ligonier Ministries, May 12, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LFzk1afiD8&t=3354s>.

Second, the selfism worldview would probably maintain that the problem of evil must be explained in a way that they could understand. This fails because no one is owed an explanation for any and all events in life, and furthermore what is to say that such an explanation could understand if one was provided? Therefore, selfism also brings the temptation to reinvent God to make him understandable. This is seen in views such as process theology, open theism, or dualism. Process theology states that God is developing and changing in response to circumstances. Open theism maintains that there are some things that God is not in control of, nor aware of. Dualism states that there is a war of good versus evil and God sometimes wins and sometimes loses.

Finally, theism was reviewed, which is the biblical worldview. When looking at the problem of evil this view would say that God is completely sovereign over all things including evil. Biblical texts were cited that demonstrated the spectrum of God's sovereignty including Deuteronomy 32:39; 1 Samuel 2:6-7; Isaiah 45:7. This view has a major challenge, however, in that it leaves God open to the charge of being the author of sin and therefore evil if he is sovereign over all things. In a biblical worldview, human beings are clearly responsible for the entrance of sin into God's perfect creation at the Fall (Gen 3); however, the real answer is that while God did not create evil, he does sovereignly ordain it for his purposes.

From there I explained a few common theodicies that attempt to downplay God's sovereignty over evil in order to "get him off the hook," when instead what is needed is to leave the biblical tension where it lies. Damage is done to the apologetic witness when the sovereignty and depth of God's person is watered down. I reviewed six theodicies and why they fail. The illusion theodicy states that evil is just an illusion and does not actually exist. This fails because the pain of evil is real and thus is caused by evil, which does actually exist. The best possible world theodicy states that God is not responsible for evil because God could not create perfect sinless beings, because they would be God, so they had to be a little less than God and therefore open to sin and evil.

This failed because God is free to make his creation any way he deems necessary and finite humans lack the wisdom to know what is a “best” world in the first place.

The free will theodicy states that God is not responsible for evil because he wanted humans to have free will above all else, despite knowing the possibility that humans would choose evil. The free will theodicy fails because God is sovereign and man is in fact responsible for his choices, as seen numerous times in Scripture from Adam and Eve, to Old Testament Israel, and Pharaoh. The greater good theodicy states that God cannot be responsible for evil because he will always bring a greater good from any evil act. This fails because this is not 100 percent true. Sometimes greater good from evil is not seen at all.

The Ex Lex theodicy states that God is not responsible for evil because he is above the law. This fails because God’s law reflects God’s character, so he is not actually above his own law. Finally, the fallen world theodicy states that God is not responsible for sin because it was human beings that brought sin into the world at the fall. This is partially true as Genesis 3 records the original sin, but if God is going to be sovereign over all things, he must have a purpose for allowing evil to continue.

I asserted that at the end of it all, we do not know why God allows evil, but the reality is that no other worldview does either, and of all the worldviews, the Bible has the most consistent and logical explanation. The limitations and purposes of apologetics must be kept in mind. The limitation is that no one will never prove the existence of God, nor solve the problem of evil, beyond all doubts. The purpose of apologetics is to provide a contextualized, compassionate, and compelling defense of the faith that stimulates serious consideration.

So, what is the defense when faced with the problem of evil? First, admit the weight and seriousness of the problem and confess no one worldview can completely rationalize such a deep issue. Next, explain the biblical worldview, which brings the hope that God already has done something to counter evil in the cross of Jesus Christ. The

biblical worldview also brings the hope that God will forever defeat and banish evil at the return of Jesus. Lastly, the biblical worldview is an assurance of the reality of God's presence when suffering is encountered, knowing that God is good and has a sovereign plan.

Next, I encouraged the class to emphasize the sovereignty of God and assert that the existence of evil does not exclude the existence of God, nor does it mean that there are no purposes for evil. Just because a purpose for evil is not immediately seen or understood, that does not mean that God does not have any. Furthermore, there are plenty of real-world evidences of purpose in evil. For example, painful medical treatments that bring life, people thriving from horrific personal tragedy, or the pain of loss eventually bringing new life that was not there before,

Perhaps most powerfully, opponents to the biblical worldview should be asked to explain the problem of evil from their worldview. As stated, no other worldview has a consistent and logical answer to the problem of evil and it will fall short of the biblical worldview.

In all, when the problem of evil is considered from the biblical worldview, it should cause wonder and worship of God to soar to new heights. As Romans 11:33-36 says,

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:33-36)

In the end, this truth must be stood on—evil exists because a sovereign God allows it to exist, for his purposes.

Week 6

In week 6 the problem of science was investigated, meaning the false idea that science has proven Christianity impossible. This relates directly to the concept of the two-story truth reviewed in week 1 where facts and science belong in one story of the

house and feelings and faith reside in another. Science does not disprove Christianity namely because science and Christianity are compatible explanations of different parts of God's creation. John Lennox writes, "Science does not compete with God as an explanation. Science gives a different kind of explanation."⁸

To believe that science is the only source of truth is to commit the error of scientism. Science can explain some things, but science cannot explain everything. God has created human beings as meaning seekers and not merely factfinders, and science can never answer the biggest question of all: why is there something rather than nothing?

The three worldviews were reviewed along with their probable responses to the problem of science. An atheist may be prone to say that science proves that God is unnecessary and therefore cannot exist. This is illogical as science cannot prove that God exists, it only seeks to explain the natural world. God can still exist in any explanation. It also fails because a real bias against Christianity within the scientific community must be acknowledged. This presupposition prevents many from ever believing that God can exist. Richard Lewontin famously said, "We have a prior commitment to materialism . . . it is absolute . . . for we cannot allow a Divine foot in the door."⁹

The worldview of selfism may say that the determination of what is true or false is self-determined based on whatever evidence can be observed, understood, and accepted by the individual. This also fails as understanding is never a condition of objective truth. Furthermore, it betrays the discipline of science itself, which is based on finding absolute, objective, external truth, and not relative, subjective, and internal truth.

Finally, a biblical worldview or theist worldview would answer the problem of science in saying that there is no problem at all. Science is the study of what God created. In fact, science needs the biblical worldview to function. For example, a biblical worldview presents the natural world as stable and consistent. Furthermore, without the biblical

⁸ John Lennox, *Can Science Explain Everything?* (Surrey, UK: Good Book, 2019), 7.

⁹ Richard Lewontin, quoted in Lennox, *Can Science Explain Everything?*, 48.

worldview, logical reasoning is not validated either, for if the universe is truly random with no purpose, then scientific reasoning cannot be relied upon either.

Several responses were reviewed to address the problem of science. First, Christianity is not blind faith. Biblical passages were cited where the facts of the gospel were verified by eyewitness evidence. Furthermore, Scriptures such as 1 Corinthians 14:15 call the Christian to engage the mind in prayer and even while singing God's praises.

Second, the Bible is in fact reliable. Material from week 3 was reviewed where the reliability of the Bible was covered in detail.

Third, there is scientific evidence for the benefits of Christianity that are not usually mentioned in best-selling books attacking Christianity. For example, a recent peer-reviewed journal article cited a study that said religious involvement correlated strongly with increased happiness, satisfaction, hope, and self-esteem, as well as a decrease in loneliness and depression.¹⁰

Fourth, when answering this question, terms must be defined, specifically addressing which "god" is being deemed scientifically impossible. The God of the Bible has no problem with miracles as he is the sovereign Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of his own creation.

Fifth, worldview borrowing cannot be allowed—meaning, if someone were to say that science disproves Christianity, then they need to stay within their own worldview consistently. For example, science has no answer for the problem of evil and suffering as those are meaning questions, not science questions. Meaning questions are the realm of the biblical worldview. Therefore, a scientist cannot use meaning questions about the problem of evil and suffering in their counterargument against Christianity. As such this leads to the sixth response, which is to remind any opponents that the goal of science is to

¹⁰ Lennox, *Can Science Explain Everything?*, 21.

provide reasonable theories on how things work in the natural world; science can never answer why or what questions.

Finally, I pointed out that the conflict of science versus Christianity never used to be an issue. Many of the founders of science were Christians. Between 1901 and 2000 over 60 percent of the Nobel laureates were Christians. Additionally, Rebecca McLaughlin points out that there are an increasing number of Christians teaching at major academic institutions, such as MIT.¹¹

Week 7

In week 7 the “Problem of Christians” was addressed. Christians in general can make apologetic tasks more difficult through a lack of personal faithfulness and a balanced understanding of what God has called them to in His Word.

I reviewed a brief history of evangelicalism, much of which has brought forth the bad fruit in the church seen today—an over-emphasis on emotion and personal experience at the expense of doctrine, anti-intellectualism, individualistic faith, and celebrity pastors. Additionally, a misguided political reform where non-Christians are held to a Christian standard of morality in politics.

I identified three main ways Christians have made the apologetic task more difficult. First, privatization of faith causes a more individualistic focus and less of a church-centered focus. This breeds “lone-ranger” Christianity and a downplaying of the necessity of church membership and responsibilities. Second, the hypocrisy of church leaders and individual Christians distorts the truth and causes the world to see an unbiblical version of Christianity. Third, a disconnect from historic, apostolic, and orthodox Christian doctrine leads to many negative net effects—the church is then less effective at the Great Commission as it is a gospel without truth and power. False ideas gain a foothold in the minds of non-believers. Theological pendulum swings are seen in which, if held too highly,

¹¹ Rebecca McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 117.

lead to needless schisms and denominationalism over secondary matters; if held loosely, it leads to liberalism. Lastly, without a connection to historical Christianity dangerous errors in primary matters often result.

I shifted to application and identified four ways apologetic effectiveness can be improved: (1) prioritize the local church above individualistic faith; (2) seriously pursue holiness, as apologetic efforts will be useless without holiness; (3) reconnect with the historic, apostolic and orthodox Christian faith; and (4) engage others with humility. Christians are justifiably accused of over-simplifying complex areas of doctrine, and sometimes the best answer is “I don’t know,” followed up by diligent research on the question from church history.

Week 8

In week 8 the “Problem of Exclusivity” was investigated, meaning the claim that Jesus is the only way to God and thus Christianity is the only true religion. I started by reviewing some current public sentiment about this claim; namely, bumper stickers that read “Coexist” or “My God is too big for any one religion.” The problem of exclusivity might be the most prevalent objection to Christianity. A syllogistic problem statement might be framed as followed:

1. Christianity claims that Jesus is the only way to God.
2. There are clearly many different ways to God in other religions.
3. Therefore, Jesus cannot be the only way to God.

I reviewed how various worldviews might address this question. An atheist worldview might say that to claim there is only one way to God is incredibly arrogant. In the words of famous atheist Christopher Hitchens, it is “fantastically arrogant to claim to know the mind of God.”¹² Furthermore, an atheist worldview might dismiss these claims by saying that religion is cultural, or that exclusive religion is harmful. I specified

¹² Michael J. Kruger, *Surviving Religion 101: Letters to a Christian Student on Keeping the Faith in College* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 53.

responses for each of these dismissals. Ultimately, the atheist response to the exclusive claims of Christianity fails because it is a claim to exclusive truth in and of itself.

A self-centered worldview might respond by saying that religions are true for the people that believe them, which is consistent with their central tenant of relative truth. They would consider Christians to be narrow-minded. I reviewed the famous “Blind Men and the Elephant” drawing which highlights how each blind man sees only part of the elephant and then decides what the elephant is like based on only that part. However, this illustration fails as the person who sees all this taking place is not blind and can clearly see the true nature of the complete elephant. I also reviewed the dangers of a relativistic perspective of truth. Ultimately, the selfism response to the exclusive claims of Christianity fails because it is a claim to exclusive truth in and of itself.

Third, I reviewed the theistic or biblical worldview responses to the problem of exclusivity. Christians must boldly stand on the testimony of Scripture which clearly presents Jesus as the only path to God—see John 14:6, Ephesians 2:18, 1 John 5:20, Acts 4:12, and 1 Timothy 2:5. Most importantly, Christians must point out that the claim to exclusivity is not a human claim, but rather it is the direct claim of Jesus himself.

I then spent time reviewing some responses. First, Christians can point out that all truth by definition is exclusive. $1+1=2$, not 3 or -23. Speed limits are the exclusive law, like it or not. All humans live in a world of external objective truth, like it or not. Second, Jesus understood the Christian faith to be exclusive, see again John 14:6 for example.

Third, Christians can point out that all religions claim exclusive truth, particularly monotheistic religions such as Judaism and Islam. All religions are not the same and they claim mutually exclusive truths. Most appropriate to the gospel message, Christianity is the only religion that claims a solution to the problem of sin in the cross of Jesus Christ.

Fourth, disagreement does not mean disrespect. Christians have to be able to disagree with other human beings' point of view and strive for intellectual robustness and diversity. Likewise, if the claim was made that all religions were in fact the same, it would be disrespectful claim. For example, a Muslim certainly does not believe the same things about Jesus Christ as a Christian does.

Fifth, Christians can clarify that the goal is not the right religion, but reconciliation with God, which no religion can do in and of itself. Humans can never placate or satisfy the God of all creation with religious acts, but only by faith in submitting to his Son Jesus Christ in faith. This is yet another opportunity to explain the gospel and the hope that goes beyond all religion in a reconciled relationship with God through Jesus. Sixth, Christians can point out that Christianity is the opposite of exclusive, it is actually inclusive. The Word of God tells clearly that anyone who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved.

Therefore, and finally, if Christianity is true and it is indeed the only way to God, it is not exclusively harsh; it is the most compassionate thing Christians can do to spread the good news of Jesus to all who will hear. Thus, the big question is not "How can it be so exclusive?," but instead, "Is it true?"

Week 9

This last week before the review week was the Problem of Sexuality, specifically the objection that Christians maintain that homosexuality is a sin. Some would say that this is cruel, bigoted, and hateful and therefore they could not believe in Christianity.

When reviewing each of the three main worldviews and how they would most likely respond, I started with atheism. Atheism would likely say since the here and now is all there is, and morality is cultural, subjective, and fluid, and there is no judge, then therefore no one should tell someone else how to live their lives.

The worldview of selfism would most likely say that my sexuality is up to me—I determine what is right or wrong and what is right for me is therefore right. The ultimate goal in life is human flourishing through expressive individualism. I spent some time discussing and defining expressive individualism as the view where each “person has a unique core of feeling and intuition that should unfold or be expressed if individually is to be realized.”¹³ Expressive individualism is achieved by acting on one’s inward feelings and expressive individualism as the default setting for understanding oneself in the twenty-first century. Most importantly, expressive individualism is one’s authentic identity and cannot be withheld and must be publicly affirmed.

Finally, I explained how the biblical worldview of theism would address the problem of sexuality. The Bible clearly and consistently teaches that heterosexuality is the moral standard created by God and therefore homosexuality is a sin. Furthermore, authentic identity cannot be in sexuality, but rather human beings are created in God’s image. I spent some time reviewing our church’s doctrinal statement on gender, marriage, and sexuality, and summarized that biblical sexuality is rooted in creation and exclusively consummated in a heterosexual marriage. I briefly went to Scripture to support this claim and cited Genesis 1:27-28 and Genesis 2:24.

I then shifted to identifying common objections and responses to them. First, I reminded the class that Christians need to consistently responding with questions to further probe someone’s worldview and how they arrived at a particular conclusion. Second, Christians have to know the audience: some will be convinced; therefore, they may be contentious, and most will be confused. Christians also must consider that there are many people who may be considered opponents who have suffered deep sexual hurt in the past, and so the aspiring apologist must be cautious when engaging others in the topic of sexuality.

¹³ Carl R. Trueman, *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 22.

The first objection identified was, “But the Bible doesn’t condemn homosexuality.” This is the best possible objection, as it is a green light to go to the Bible and clarify what the Bible actually says. I went to several passages, starting with Genesis 1:27-29 and Genesis 2:24, which were confirmed by Jesus himself in Matthew 19:1-6, which is a defense against anyone who may say that Jesus never condemned homosexuality. I also cited 1 Timothy 1:9-10, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, and Romans 1:19-27. I also briefly discussed that the Greek word *pornea*, as found in many other New Testament verses, which refers to any and all sexual immorality, including homosexuality.

A second objection against the biblical view of homosexuality is that “Christians pick and choose the biblical commands they want to follow.” For example, eating shellfish is no longer a sin, but homosexuality is, or gluttony is a sin, but you don’t worry about that. To respond to this objection, Christians need to clarify the place of the Law of God in redemptive history. For example, food laws are no longer in effect as they were for ethnic geographic Israel, but the moral law of God is still in effect as upheld by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. Christians can additionally explain that while sins like gluttony are still valid, there are differences in the severity of sins. A sin such as homosexuality is called an “abomination” by God in the Scriptures, yet gluttony is not.

A third objection would be “You are on the wrong side of history,” to which the Christian can respond that historical or cultural progress does not necessarily mean correctness. A favorite example used here is the issue of slavery. Christian slaveowners used to use the Bible as justification for owning slaves and they were clearly wrong; therefore, Christians are now wrong on the issue of homosexuality as well. This is not the case as Christians should all agree that slavery is in fact a sin and Christians themselves worked to abolish it. These are not the same issues.

The fourth objection is, “Take it up with my Creator, because He made me this way.” The response to this must be clear and firm, and state that he did not make anyone gay for at least three reasons. First, original creation upholds biblical heterosexuality.

Second, original sin corrupted God's perfect creation, including sexuality. Therefore, third, homosexual desire is sinful and must be resisted like all other sinful temptations. Christians must also not lose sight of the hope of the transforming power of the gospel, where through the power of the Holy Spirit believers can mortify sin, including homosexuality.

A fifth objection is, "The New Testament was not talking about modern, committed, monogamous homosexual relationships." This objection does not hold any water either, because the apostle Paul is not concerned with the nature of homosexuality, but rather grounds his argument squarely in homosexuality being against nature (Rom 1:26-27). This would then open the door to bring in Natural Law and how the biological anatomy of men and women proves the scriptural truth that homosexuality is a sin.

A few summary thoughts were presented. First, remember the community. Is the supreme goal of life really human flourishing through expressive individualism? It cannot be, as all humans know they are wired for community and relationships. How can we flourish as a culture if what we do has negative effects on the community as a whole, such as homosexuality? Second, remember grace. Christians must show others the grace that God showed them as sinners, and continues to show them every day in Jesus Christ. Third, remember regeneration. The gospel is never, "Stop being gay!," but rather to trust in Jesus alone for him to give a new life through the power of the Holy Spirit where all desires can be renewed.

Week 10

Week 10 was a summary week and wrap up. We spent time reviewing the key points from the biblical worldview for each of the nine weeks and then discussed how to defend the faith specifically.

Conclusion

The sermon series and particularly the seminars were a lot of fun and well-received. Each week during the Problems with Christianity series I gave away a book that

I had cited in the discussion. My aim was to further equip the attendees and also spark further reading in whatever apologetic topic might interest them. Approximately a week after the seminars ended, I distributed a post-assessment online survey, and the results will be discussed in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION AND REFLECTION

This chapter will provide an evaluation of the project's effectiveness in accomplishing its purpose. The project results will be assessed to determine if the goals were achieved. Additionally, the chapter will analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the project. Finally, it will offer theological and personal reflections.

Evaluation of the Project Purpose

The project's purpose was to develop and implement an apologetics curriculum at HBC to equip its members to increase their understanding and application of key apologetic topics to build confidence in their evangelism and defense of the faith. The project purpose was completed successfully with the conclusion of the ten-week "Problems with Christianity" MidWeek series held at HBC. A key assumption in the purpose statement of this project is the centrality of the local church to accomplish this purpose. Ephesians 4:12-13 calls the local church to "equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God." To that end, I consistently preach expositionally with a focus on a biblical worldview, and I preached a short three-week topical series titled "Defending Your Faith" in preparation of and to promote the "Problems with Christianity" midweek series for this project. I identified eight key topic areas and designed the series curriculum to address one key apologetic topic per week during the "Problems with Christianity" series.

Evaluation of the Project Goals

The first project goal was to assess the understanding of key apologetics topics in church members at HBC. To determine a baseline knowledge level before beginning the project, an online pre-assessment survey was implemented,¹ and 84 responses were collected. This pre-assessment survey was considered successful when at least 75 percent of HBC members returned the survey. At the time of the pre-assessment, HBC had 95 members and therefore this requirement was met as 88.4 percent of members submitted the pre-assessment survey. The pre-assessment survey focused on the confidence level of participants to address the objection to Christianity. The pre-assessment survey revealed an average score of 4.99 on a Likert scale of 1 through 6 of confidence in answering the eight key apologetic topics that are common objections to Christianity, covered in the Problems with Christianity midweek series.²

I was pleasantly surprised at the high average rating, but also slightly suspicious that people had overestimated their abilities to respond to objections to the faith. Nevertheless, a steady diet of expositional preaching with a focus on worldview would have a positive effect on the ability of HBC members and attendees to answer common objections to the faith.

The second project goal was to form a curriculum that would serve to increase the understanding of key apologetic topics at HBC. This goal was accomplished as the Problems with Christianity midweek series ran for ten weeks from June 29, 2022, through September 7, 2022. Teaching materials for each week consisted of speaker notes, presentation slides projected on a screen at each session, and fill-in-the-blank handouts. Additionally, each week was live-streamed, and video and audio recordings were

¹ See appendix 1.

² See appendix 2.

archived on the church website and social media pages with a link to the completed fill-in-the-blank handouts.³ Attendance was taken each week with a sign in sheet.

The third project goal was to measure the curriculum's effectiveness after the apologetics curriculum. This goal was successfully completed through the use of a post-assessment survey which was given after the midweek series had finished.⁴ The survey included the same statements that were on the pre-assessment survey along with the same six-point Likert scale to identify participants' responses.⁵ Over the course of the ten-week Problems with Christianity series, there was an average attendance of thirty people in person and online. I created the post-assessment survey using the same eight key questions. Twenty-eight surveys were submitted; however, four participants did not complete a pre-assessment survey so they could not be included. The final number of valid post-assessment surveys was twenty-four. The average Likert scale score increased to 5.54 thereby giving a 11 percent increase in knowledge of key apologetics topics. A *t*-test was also performed which indicated a high level of statistical reliability and significance.⁶ While significantly less than the number of pre-assessment surveys received, this amount of surveys was consistent with the average attendance per week. I sent out numerous reminders for people to return the both the pre-assessment and post-assessment surveys.

Once all the post-assessment surveys were collected, I created a detailed analysis to compare the pre-assessment to the post-assessment participant responses. All eight statements received significant increases in participant confidence to answer the

³ For an example see Mike Ruel, "Problems with Christianity—Week 10—Wrap Up," Highlands Bible Church, September 7, 2022, <http://www.highlandsbiblechurch.org/messages/problems-with-christianity-week-10-wrap-up/>.

⁴ See appendix 3.

⁵ Based upon feedback from participants, I edited the format of the questions on the post-assessment survey to increase clarity.

⁶ See appendix 5.

specified objection to Christianity. Five of the eight statements saw over a 10 percent increase and the overall average increase in participant confidence to answer the eight common objections to Christianity was 10.96 percent.⁷

Statement 4 (If someone were to say “Jesus never claimed to be God!” I would be able to explain why this statement is false and defend the biblical worldview) received the least amount of increase in participant confidence at 6.82 percent, which is still significant. This statement scored the lowest, I believe, because of the consistent, expositional preaching at Highlands Bible Church that is focused on worldview and addressing the hard questions of the faith. I recently finished a two-year series preaching through the book of Matthew and the truth of the deity of Jesus Christ was frequently argued from the pulpit.

The statement that saw the greatest increase was statement 2 (If someone were to say “The Bible is full of mistakes!” I would be able to explain why this statement is false and defend the biblical worldview), with an increase of 16.81 percent. I believe this significant increase was because I had more time than a usual Sunday morning sermon to explain how we got our modern Bibles. On Sunday mornings I am focused on preaching and applying the sermon passage, but most of the time does not include detail about how the Bible came to be and how reliable it is. Therefore, this was a knowledge gap for the average attendee of HBC. During the midweek series, I had the freedom of more time to trace the process of manuscript authoring and copying, textual criticism, and cite common objections from prominent atheist thought leaders such as Bart Ehrman and Richard Dawkins.

Statements 1, 5, 6, 8 all had double-digit increases in confidence to address common objections to the Christian faith. Statement 3 addressed the question of Jesus claiming to be God, statement 5 addressed the objection of science disproving Christianity, statement 7 addressed the objection of the exclusivity of Christianity, and statement 8

⁷ See appendix 2.

addressed the objection of homosexuality as a sin. This statement saw the second-highest increase at 13.94 percent. I attribute this to the fact that it is such a hot-button issue as well as an issue that merely everyone can relate to personally, as most people have friends or family members struggling with sexual identity and sin. Even though this is a common topic on a Sunday morning as the context of the passage allows, it is a prevalent and highly charged issue, and people are always interested in being equipped to respond more effectively.

The fourth goal of the project was to further foster spiritual maturity and apologetics effectiveness by developing a strategic plan for a future Apologetics Institute at HBC. This goal was completed with the strategic plan noted in appendix 6, which will be reviewed by the elders of HBC at a future date.

Strengths of the Project

This project had a few key strengths. First was the need for this material. Objections to Christianity are all around today—on social media, in our families, between co-workers, etc. Therefore, there is a great need to equip the church to address these major objections to the faith that are so common in the world today. Not only are objections to Christianity common in the world at large, but church members are encountering these objections to Christianity from other professing Christians. Local churches make varying statements on many of these key objections, such as homosexuality, and people get confused as to which view is actually biblical. Furthermore, not many pastors are talking about these issues, which leaves a need for answers. This unmet need is partly due to fear of conflict in their churches if they speak on hot button “political” issues, but the larger problem is that some pastors do not hold to a biblical worldview themselves. A recent study by George Barna finds that “among a representative sample of America’s Christian pastors shows that a large majority of those pastors do not possess a biblical worldview. In fact, just slightly more than a third (37%) have a biblical worldview and the majority—

62%—possess a hybrid worldview known as Syncretism.”⁸ Certainly, if pastors do not possess a biblical worldview then they are not compelled to teach it to their congregants, nor even understand it to be a need in the first place. Therefore, there is a need to teach key apologetic topics to equip the church. Previous to the launch of this project, there were even a few people at Highlands asking for training in key apologetic topics!

The second strength was the timing of the project. Within the last two years, Christians have seen tremendous challenges to their faith in current cultural and political events. The COVID-19 lockdowns, the 2020 election, LGBTQ+ issues, racial tensions, increasing crime, and violent protests in major cities all have been at the forefront of people’s minds. Perhaps most powerfully, the start of the Problems with Christianity series corresponded to the overturn of *Roe v. Wade* in the United States. The first midweek study was on June 29, 2022, and the verdict came down to overturn *Roe* on June 24, 2022. Tensions were high and the conflict was all around us as close friends and family strongly opposed any ban on abortion. People in the church quickly realized the urgency of being equipped to respond biblically and intelligently to objections to the faith.

The third strength of the project was the existing cultural momentum at Highlands Bible Church to not back down from the hard questions of the faith. Through expositional preaching, HBC regularly comes across hard topics in the Bible on Sunday mornings. People at Highlands are used to engaging intellectually and biblically with tough topics and therefore an existing momentum was ready to embrace this project in the church. They are used to being challenged to think biblically about tough current issues. I imagine that launching a sermon series on defending the faith and a Wednesday night series that tackles key objections to Christianity would have less favorable reception in many churches, but that was not the case at Highlands.

⁸ George Barna, “AWVI 2022: Release #5: Shocking Results Concerning the Worldview of Christian Pastors,” Arizona Christian University, Cultural Research Center, May 10, 2022, https://www.arizonachristian.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/AWVI2022_Release05_Digital.pdf, 1.

The fourth strength of the project was the existing setup for podcasting, live streaming, and video/audio teaching archives at HBC. This setup increased participation for those who could not physically make it out to church during the sermon series, or during the ten-week midweek series. It also opened the material to a wider audience of those who may not attend Highlands Bible Church but are looking for answers to common objections to the faith, or training in key apologetics topics. A few videos were in the top five highest views of all our videos on YouTube. In fact, in two of the videos posted to YouTube, I was able to have a dialog in the comments section with an atheist woman who was protesting the content of the midweek videos and objecting to the Christian faith.

The fifth strength of the project was the participants' responses. On the post-assessment survey, I included two additional questions: what did you find most helpful about the Problems with Christianity series?, and do you have any suggestions for how we can improve the series for next time?" As Appendix 4 shows, the participants' responses were overwhelmingly positive, with a few solid suggestions for improvement.

Weaknesses of the Project

This project had a few weaknesses. First, attendance could have been higher. While each session had a good dialog and above-average Wednesday night attendance each week, I would have liked more HBC regular attendees to have participated. Low attendance could have been because of a few reasons. First, even though I felt I promoted the project well, I could have promoted it better. I had new graphics created, full support of the elders, and I made frequent references to it each week in service and in regular announcements. However, the project could have benefitted from an above-average promotional push. Second, today's culture, especially in New Jersey, is one of breathless busyness. People are trapped by their schedules of work commitments, kids' sports, and other engagements, and lack the courage to make schedule changes to accommodate important spiritual activities, such as the midweek series. Some people work long hours,

and committing to coming out on a Wednesday night may sometimes be difficult. Third, the live stream is a double-edged sword; while it allows for people who would physically be attending the chance to not miss a week, it also allows people who are less inclined to come physically the chance to stay home with a half-hearted commitment to the series.

The second weakness of the series was that people at times felt an information overload, which caused some to not attend all the sessions. Attendance was strong in the beginning weeks, but dropped off toward the end of the series. The material was sometimes complex and I could tell at points that I was overwhelming participants with information. Key apologetics are deep topics, and today's culture at large is not used to thinking deeply and rigorously. At the end of a long workday in the office or at home raising the kids, some people may not have had the bandwidth to be engaged with the midweek series and became discouraged.

The third weakness of the project was that the series was held over the summer of 2022. Many people vacation during the summer, so consistent attendance was an issue. Additionally, the summer timing created some logistics issues. Due to increased attendance, I moved the Wednesday midweek series to the main sanctuary, which was great for the first week, but once we got into July and August, holding the sessions in the sanctuary became impossible as there is no air conditioning in the sanctuary and it becomes very hot. Therefore, I moved the midweek sessions to my office upstairs, which does have air conditioning, but as a medium-sized room it soon became crowded and the air conditioning could not keep up, so it was hot in that room as well. Additionally, the upstairs location was problematic for some older people to navigate the stairs, as our elevator is not working well.

What I Would Do Differently

Despite my overall happiness with how the project turned out, I would do a few things differently next time around. First, I would increase the length of the preparatory sermon series from three weeks to at least four. While the three-week "Defending Your

Faith” sermon series was good, it went by quickly and I would have liked some more time to seed the midweek series by going into more general apologetics topics to generate interest in the follow up series. Additionally, I made a mistake by selecting a passage from Matthew, and I had been preaching through Matthew for close to two years by this point. I received comments that indicated people were confused as to why we were going “backwards” and why I was preaching through a passage in Matthew again. In hindsight, I should have picked a different passage, such as Jude 3: “To contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.”

Second, I would move the timing of the midweek series from the summer to either the fall or January of a new year. For the reasons previously outlined, the summer was not ideal for the midweek series due to the heat; therefore, I would move it to a different time of year when the heat would not be an issue. I would also couple promotion with the change in time to increase awareness. Additionally, not holding the midweek series in the summer would hopefully allow more people to attend.

Third, I would increase promotion in a few specific ways. First, I would do short “man on the street” interviews of local people at familiar places (such as the local supermarket) speaking their objections to believing in Christianity and show the videos on Sunday mornings and on social media. This would cause people to realize that these issues are a local and urgent problem and one that could be addressed with increased training in key apologetic topics. Second, I would pay for social media advertising. It was a conscious decision to only target members of Highlands with this training, but in hindsight I would have opened it up to non-members and even outsiders. This change could risk some contentious discussions, but those are essential elements in building a biblical worldview. Third, I would print up posters and graphic slides to distribute to local churches to invite them to attend.

Fourth, I would seek to increase the dialog during the weekly sessions. Even though I regularly encouraged participation and tried to ask leading questions, at times I

felt I was drifting more into “lecture mode,” and that is when I saw people getting overwhelmed and disengaging. A few comments from the additional post-assessment survey questions suggested incorporating role-playing responses to the common objections to the faith, which I think is a great idea.⁹

Fifth, even though it is not necessarily a common objection to the faith, I would find a way to directly address abortion. At the time of the midweek series, abortion was the number one topic in America, and people associate Christians with a “pro-life” stance. There is much tension in and around this issue and I feel like I should address the topic in some way.

Theological Reflections

As I reflect on the project theologically, several things come to mind. First and foremost is the power of God’s Word in defending the faith. One of the many things that kept coming up was that the misunderstanding of God’s Word leads to all kinds of worldview chaos—for those inside and outside the church. As J. Gresham Machen writes, “False ideas are the greatest obstacles to the reception of the gospel.”¹⁰ As the “deconversion craze” continues, people are shunning the Christian faith that they once pledged allegiance to, but what almost always comes to light is that they never fully understood the true biblical faith to begin with. Most of the time people are deconverting from a bad church experience, having never sought biblical reconciliation or answers themselves to the tough questions covered in this study. These are the people that now have become “opponents.”

Similarly, the most well-known atheist authors, such as Bart Ehrman or Richard Dawkins, demonstrate a lack of biblical understanding. They consistently find obscure biblical inconsistencies and miss the entire context of the passage. I have learned that

⁹ See appendix 4.

¹⁰ J. Gresham Machen, “Christianity and Culture,” in *What Is Christianity? and Other Addresses*, ed. Ned Stonehouse (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1951), 166.

theology in the church, particularly on a Sunday morning, must be rock solid and crystal clear. The most famous opponents to the Christian faith do not understand the Bible correctly, therefore believers must.

Second, it is the role of the church to defend the faith. Christians cannot sit idly by and let parachurch organizations take the lead. The answers to the hard questions of the faith must come from pastors, elders, deacons, small group leaders. Children must be encouraged to ask the hard questions, and Sunday school teachers must be equipped and ready. Parents must be starting these conversations with their children and teaching them the truth of Scripture so when their children encounter errors they know how to respond. Again, so many deconversions were set in motion when these questions were asked in the church setting and no deep consideration was given to answering them biblically.

Likewise, the church, as the bride of Christ, must be holy. In the same book as the apologetic Great Commission, Peter writes “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Pet 1:14-16). The world sees the lack of holiness in the church, and it negatively impacts the defense of the faith. One of the best defenses of the faith I have learned is to first pursue personal holiness. When Christians act hypocritically, they do serious damage to the credibility to defend the faith.

Third, the saints are the ones on the front lines and sometimes those lines fall within families. During the midweek series I was consistently asked to help someone who was dealing with a family member who is an atheist, homosexual, or thinks the Bible is full of mistakes. Perhaps this battle is most severe in public schools. Children are literally in the battle every day against gender dysphoria, the breakdown of the traditional family, disrespect for authority, and a myriad of other issues. The saints need to be equipped for their daily battles.

Fourth, I learned more than anything else that training in key apologetics is critical in the church. The church for far too long has avoided the hard topics and believers are paying the price now and playing catch up. Thousands are “deconverting” from a faith they never completely understood in the first place. However, there is a reawakening of the priority of this topic as the church sees the need. I am more fully committed to expositional preaching and equipping the saints for the work of the ministry by addressing key apologetics topics with the Word of God.

Personal Reflections

This project pushed me harder intellectually than I have ever been pushed. I felt this most acutely every week in preparation for the midweek study. On top of a normally heavy ministry load, I spent upwards of ten hours a week getting ready for each Wednesday night and each week felt like I just finished prepping minutes before the session started. It was stressful and at times I was overwhelmed. However, I was thankful for the core seminars that pushed me to read deeply on this subject and have stimulating discussions with other men in my classes.

However, I was also convicted that I need to be engaging with others in personal, one on one apologetic discussions as often as possible. This is a growth area for me. I spend so much time in the church teaching God’s Word and shepherding God’s people that I sometimes let personal evangelism and apologetics fall in priority. One risk is that I merely become a “subject matter expert” on apologetics while never practicing. I need to have more frequent evangelical conversations with non-Christians that I regularly come in contact with outside the church, such as my neighbors.

I also felt the support of the church. People were very interested in this topic and those who attended the seminars were committed and engaged. They regularly encouraged and thanked me for putting together the seminars. One woman said she had a contentious conversation with a co-worker about the faith and felt more equipped to respond intellectually and biblically because of the midweek series. As a “reach goal” I am very

excited as I consider starting a ministry that would go to other churches and teach this material as apologetic seminars.

I also was thankful for the support of my wife, despite her working a full-time job herself. She came to every midweek session, gave great feedback, and supported me every step of the way. God has truly blessed me with my wife.¹¹

In all, despite having been draining at times, this project was an experience of much growth and renewal, and I am very happy to have accomplished it, and most of all, to have helped others grow in defending the faith.

Conclusion

This project has been one of the highlights of my ministry, and I have received so much encouragement from the church while doing it. I hope and pray that more pastors will be bold to talk about the objections to the faith head-on and equip their churches with knowledge of key apologetic topics. However, I know such a task will face resistance. Just this week, I received a text message from a friend who pastors in Maryland whose church asked him to stop talking about current issues from the pulpit. I hope that this project will serve as a resource for other churches, and that churches will return to standing boldly on the truth of God's Word proclaimed from the lives of members who know why they believe, what they claim to believe, and trust it with their whole hearts.

¹¹ My wife also graciously brought me dinner weekly from some of our favorite local restaurants. This project may have been fueled by burritos and salads.

APPENDIX 1
PRE-ASSESSMENT SURVEY

The pre-assessment survey was distributed on June 21, 2022 to all Highlands Bible Church members. The first section includes an introduction and agreement to participate. In the second section, I asked a series of statements designed to meet goal 1, to assess the understanding of key apologetics topics in church members at HBC.

PRE-ASSESSMENT SURVEY

Thank you for taking this survey! This will help Pastor Mike in his doctoral work regarding existing knowledge of key apologetics topics among members of Highlands Bible Church. Please answer the questions as honestly as possible. No one else will see your answers except Pastor Mike. Thanks again!

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess knowledge of key apologetics topics at Highlands Bible Church. This research is being conducted by Pastor Mike Ruel for purposes of doctoral project research. In this research, you will answer questions indicating your knowledge of key apologetics topics. 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 completing of this survey and entering your E-mail address below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Email: _____

Introductory Questions

1. State in your own words what the term “apologetics” means.
2. Why is apologetics important to a member of Highlands Bible Church?

Key Apologetics Topics – Multiple Choice

Using the following scale, select the number that best reflects your confidence in being able to respond to a friend who might identify an objection to Christianity.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. I feel that I could confidently respond to someone who made the assertion, “What’s true for me, is true!”
2. I feel that I could confidently respond to someone who made the assertion, “The Bible is full of mistakes!”
3. I feel that I could confidently respond to someone who made the assertion, “Jesus never claimed to be God!”
4. I feel that I could confidently respond to someone who made the assertion, “If God exists, why is there evil and suffering in the world?”

5. I feel that I could confidently respond to someone who made the assertion, “Science has disproved Christianity.”
6. I feel that I could confidently respond to someone who made the assertion, ”I can never believe in Christianity - you Christians are all hypocrites!”
7. I feel that I could confidently respond to someone who made the assertion, “There are many ways to God. Christianity is just one of them.”
8. I feel that I could confidently respond to someone who made the assertion, “Christians are homophobic bigots. Jesus never said LGBTQ+ is wrong!”

APPENDIX 2

PRE AND POST-ASSESSMENT SURVEY RESPONSES

The following appendix shows a detailed analysis of the Likert-scale responses from the pre-assessment and post-assessment surveys along with the percentage increase for each statement and also the total percentage increase.

Statement	Pre-Assessment	Post-Assessment	Difference	Percent Increase
1. If someone were to say “What’s true for you, is true!” I would be able to explain why this statement is false, and defend the biblical worldview.	4.71	5.33	0.63	13.27%
2. If someone were to say “The Bible is full of mistakes!” I would be able to explain why this statement is false, and defend the biblical worldview.	4.71	5.50	0.79	16.81%
3. If someone were to say “Jesus never claimed to be God!” I would be able to explain why this statement is false and defend the biblical worldview.	5.50	5.88	0.38	6.82%
4. If someone were to say “If God exists, why is there evil and suffering in the world?” I would be able to explain and defend the biblical worldview.	5.04	5.46	0.42	8.26%
5. If someone were to say “Science has disproved Christianity” I would be able to explain why this statement is false and defend the biblical worldview.	4.67	5.17	0.50	10.71%
6. If someone were to say “I can never believe in Christianity—you Christians are all hypocrites!” I would be able to explain and defend the biblical worldview.	4.92	5.42	0.50	10.17%
7. If someone were to say “There are many ways to God. Christianity is just one of them.” I would be able to explain why this statement is false and defend the biblical worldview.	5.29	5.75	0.46	8.66%
8. If someone were to say “Christians are homophobic bigots. Jesus never said LGBTQ+ is wrong!” I would be able to explain why this statement is false and defend the biblical worldview.	5.08	5.79	0.71	13.93%
TOTALS	4.99	5.54	0.55	10.96%

APPENDIX 3
POST-ASSESSMENT SURVEY

The following appendix contains the post-assessment survey. The first section contains an introduction and agreement to participate, followed by a series of statements designed to achieve project goal 3, which was to measure the curriculum's effectiveness after the apologetics curriculum. The Problems with Christianity MidWeek series ended on Wednesday, September 7, 2022, and the post-assessment survey was distributed electronically on Tuesday, September 13, 2022. It is acknowledged that the participants who regularly attended the MidWeek series most likely had a previous interest in apologetic topics.

POST-ASSESSMENT SURVEY

Thank you for participating in the Problems with Christianity MidWeek series. I hope you found it both informative and helpful...but also spiritually edifying.

If you attended in person or viewed any of the sessions online, please take a few minutes to fill out this form based on your experiences from the Problems with Christianity series. Even if you did not attend/view all the sessions, your responses will be helpful. Thank you!

Pastor Mike

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess knowledge of key apologetics topics at Highlands Bible Church. This research is being conducted by Pastor Mike Ruel for purposes of doctoral project research. In this research, you will answer questions indicating your knowledge of key apologetics topics. 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 entering your E-mail address below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

1. How many Problems with Christianity sessions did you attend, in person and/or online?
 - a. 1-3
 - b. 4-6
 - c. 8-10
2. How did you attend the sessions?
 - a. In person
 - b. Online
 - c. Mix of in person and online

3. Please state in your own words what the term “apologetics” means.

4. Why is apologetics important to a member of Highlands Bible Church? Has that changed as a result of the Problems with Christianity series?

Key Apologetics Topics - Multiple Choice Questions

Using the following scale, select the number that best reflects your confidence in being able to respond to a friend who might identify an objection to Christianity.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. If someone were to say “What’s true for you, is true!” - I would be able to explain why this statement is false, and defend the biblical worldview.
2. If someone were to say “The Bible is full of mistakes!” - I would be able to explain why this statement is false, and defend the biblical worldview.
3. If someone were to say “Jesus never claimed to be God!” - I would be able to explain why this statement is false and defend the biblical worldview.
4. If someone were to say “If God exists, why is there evil and suffering in the world?” - I would be able to explain and defend the biblical worldview.
5. If someone were to say “Science has disproved Christianity” - I would be able to explain why this statement is false and defend the biblical worldview.
6. If someone were to say “I can never believe in Christianity - you Christians are all hypocrites!” - I would be able to explain and defend the biblical worldview.
7. If someone were to say “There are many ways to God. Christianity is just one of them.” - I would be able to explain why this statement is false and defend the biblical worldview.
8. If someone were to say “Christians are homophobic bigots. Jesus never said LGBTQ+ is wrong!” - I would be able to explain why this statement is false and defend the biblical worldview.

Additional Questions:

1. What did you find most helpful about the Problems with Christianity series?
2. Do you have any suggestions for how we can improve this series for next time?
Different format? Additional topics?

APPENDIX 4
ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES
FROM POST-ASSESSMENT SURVEY

The following appendix contains the additional questions and responses from the post-assessment survey, which were not included in the pre-assessment survey. The additional questions were designed to further achieve project goal 3, which was to measure the curriculum's effectiveness after the apologetics curriculum.

What did you find most helpful about the Problems with Christianity series?

1. Great views and truths shared
2. Simply put it gave me a much better understanding of how important it is and your teachings gave me the tools to better explain that to the unbeliever.
3. I thought the separation of topics and explanation of the different world views was very helpful.
4. Homosexuality. I have a close, married, friend who has recently began struggling with homosexual thoughts and lifestyles. I fell that the next time I interact with this person I will be well equipped to speak the Truth in love by pointing towards bible verses. It is not a me vs you conversation, it is a you vs scripture.
5. The way it was broken down in sections and the feed back from everyone was helpful.
6. Addressing the basics of appealing to logic as a means to counter arguments based on subjective worldviews.
7. I enjoyed very much the opportunity to learn and share in a group setting! I found Mike to be fully prepared and well-versed on all topics. It was a fun, relaxed and informative series.
8. I found the logical, reason based approach to be most helpful.
9. The practical ways to defend your faith. Also the 4 worldviews, atheist, selfism and biblical were very helpful
10. I really appreciated going through the differing worldviews. I think that was very helpful!
I also always like hearing everyones thoughts on the practical conversation parts. It's helpful to hear different approaches and encouraging that our church is really grounded in/always comes back to the gospel.
11. It was very informative in how to defend my Christian beliefs and knowing when to be able to say I'm not sure when faced with topics I may not be fully versed in yet
12. Help me to stand firm in my faith
13. Addressing some of the topics that I have not really had to defend ie science
World views
14. I learned so much and the weekly hand outs I will keep for a long time to refer to review what I learned.
15. I will be able to better defend my faith along with our excellent outlines and notes.
16. Just how easy defending the gospel really is but how much overthinking I have and can do.
17. It was a very practical series. There was so much information that is helpful in sharing my faith. Now, thanks to my notes, this information is with me and easier for me to reference when needed.
18. Listening and asking questions rather than making statements regarding the faith is a more effective approach,

19. How it was broken up into the biblical view and what someone might say meaning the worldview and then going through them and using the Bible to disprove the worldviews.
20. Being to engage people in love with Gods word which is truth which points to the gospel
21. The format was good. Considering how the different world views look at each of the topics was helpful.
22. An excellent condensation of a very large topic, providing actionable responses that are well grounded in Scripture and edified with excellent secondary scholarly resources. The handouts were extremely helpful and allow me to easily organize and refer to them again as part of my growth in discipleship.
23. It helped me to think outside my own head and heart and beliefs to better meet others closer to where their minds are in order to keep the conversation going and give them truths to think more about.
24. It was easy to understand, and hit on all major topics that are most common in the world
25. This series covered a wide range of topics, some of which I had not given deep thought into how our actions even if “loving” may be construed as condoning an un-biblical worldview. We need to take a firm stance on attacks on biblical truth and this series equipped me with more resources with which to defend our beliefs.

Do you have any suggestions for how we can improve this series for next time?

Different format? Additional topics?

1. No
2. Q & A
get attendees involved more
3. I felt it was done very well, just wish it were easier me to comment during the session when online which is not a negative but in person instead of online is always different.
4. I think it would be helpful to role play different scenarios to become familiar with how we can better respond to different challenges we may encounter.
5. Yeah I think definitely a different format would be good and additional topics too I think would help learn us better.

6. For the first few sessions, I was often confused when we were discussing a nonbelievers point of view, until I got into the swing of the routine of the information being provided.
Some of the beginnings of each session was so rapid fire my brain was struggling to know if it was a Biblical truth or an erroneous world view.
I loved having the outlines to write notes on.
Because it is mentioned now and then at HBC, a session on the Westminster Catechism would be helpful to those of us who did not grow up in Bible Churches and maybe a session on the Apostle's and Nicene Creeds for those who did not grow up with those as a basis for their beliefs.
Or just work up sessions based upon HBC's "What We Believe" statements.
I think one of the most serious topics we face today is when we are in conversations with other people, usually dear friends or relatives, who believe that they are devout Christians and they believe they are called to accept all manner of lifestyles because we are called to love all people. And that snowballs into what we are forced to accept being taught in public school...
7. Is there any physical proof the Bible is real that we could discuss?
8. Including mock "Christian vs. Opponent" scenarios where participants can practice actually responding in real time to staged conversations using the information/evidence they've acquired in each class, would help reinforce the facts, evidence, and arguments they should have at the ready for real-life apologetic conversations.
9. No suggestions! I would love to see more content like this at HBC.
10. I can't think of anything.
11. I would have liked to stayed on some topics longer. I think 2 or 3 weeks per topic would be good to really be able to dive in deep
12. I thought it was very well done!
13. A little earlier.
14. Maybe starts a little early
15. Perhaps some role playing. You being the believer and someone asking you questions. See how you go about it.
16. Format was great.
Additional topic - 10 commandments
17. Great presentation. Personal and engaging. Relaxed format with class feedback was a great learning experience.
18. Spreading out the sessions more - maybe breaking up in groups to role play.
19. I enjoyed the format. I found the discussion helpful.
The concept of "sin is sin" vs. the consequences of sin being different is a topic that I am struggling with and would be interested in learning more about.
20. More Q and A with the attendee's?
21. No sir... maybe a bigger room
22. I loved the format. As our world is spiraling thre wil be more issues non Christian will bring up and answers can always be found in. gods word
23. Additional topics would be good.

24. I feel extremely blessed that Pastor Mike freely and concisely shares the fruit of his biblical studies with our congregation. A quality, no-cost bible education at my local church is not only the essence of the Great Commission, it's an inspiring act of the Spirit! What could be done better? I'm not qualified to say and I couldn't imagine what it would be.
25. It was very helpful - Right at the moment, no suggestions come to mind. Very glad that we have access through the website to refer back to this entire series at the click of a button as a refresher whenever needed. Super valuable to me personally! Thank you.

APPENDIX 5
T-TEST ANALYSIS

The following appendix contains the *t*-test analysis which further achieves project goal three which was to measure the curriculum's effectiveness after the apologetics curriculum. The *t*-test analysis showed a very low statistical variance, thereby proving that the curriculum's effectiveness was both statistically reliable and significant.

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>
Mean	4.989583333	5.536458333
Variance	0.09015377	0.060732887
Observations	8	8
Pooled Variance	0.075443328	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	14	
t Stat	-3.982058592	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.000681596	
t Critical one-tail	1.761310136	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.001363192	
t Critical two-tail	2.144786688	

APPENDIX 6

APOLOGETICS INSTITUTE STRATEGIC PLAN DRAFT

The following appendix contains a draft of the strategic plan to achieve project goal 4, which was to further foster spiritual maturity and apologetics effectiveness by developing a strategic plan for a future Apologetics Institute at HBC.

Last Update: Friday, December 9, 2022

Strategic Plan for an Apologetics Institute at HBC

1. Executive Summary

1.1. The Apologetics Institute (AI) at HBC will be an independent non-profit apologetics education ministry supported by and affiliated with HBC that will serve the church at large.

2. Vision Statement

2.1. The vision of the AI is to make and mature disciples of Jesus Christ through increasing confidence in the biblical worldview.

3. Mission Statement

3.1. The mission of the AI is to equip church members with knowledge, tactics, and confidence to engage others in the defense of the faith.

4. Rationale

4.1. The rationale for the AI is based on the reality that the typical pastor does not have the training, time, nor inclination to teach the “hot button” issues in their local church.

4.2. The AI will come alongside pastors and churches to fill this gap.

5. Elements of the AI

5.1. Problems with Christianity In-Person Seminars - An AI instructor will teach an in-person seminar series (“Problems with Christianity”) at a church to deepen knowledge of key apologetics topics.

5.2. The seminar series is designed to equip church members to respond to common objections to the faith.

5.3. Video Seminars - Pre-recorded or “Zoom” based instruction of the Problems with Christianity seminar series.

5.4. YouTube “Man on the Street” interviews - short videos of an AI instructor engaging with people “on the street” and discussing current cultural topics from a biblical worldview.

5.5. AI Website and Social Media Presence- resource center to host:

5.5.1. Apologetics information, resources, and links

5.5.2. Promotion and registration for upcoming seminars

5.5.3. Book reviews for apologetics related issues

5.5.4. Apologetic blog posts.

5.6. Timeline

- 5.6.1. Create and launch pilot seminar series (Complete)
- 5.6.2. HBC elder review and approval (Q1 2023)
- 5.6.3. Formalize non-profit corporation (Q2 2023)
- 5.6.4. Launch website and social media presence with branding (Q3 2023)
- 5.6.5. Begin to seek opportunities with local churches for in-person seminars (Q4 2023)

5.7. Long Term Goals

- 5.7.1. Develop additional instructors through HBC membership
- 5.7.2. Launch local independent affiliates of AI in other churches^[L]_[SEP]

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ABSTRACT

INCREASING THE UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION OF KEY APOLOGETICS TOPICS AT HIGHLANDS BIBLE CHURCH VERNON, NEW JERSEY

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Andrew T. Walker

The purpose of this project was to equip the members and attenders of Highlands Bible Church in Vernon, New Jersey to be better prepared to, as 1 Peter 3:15 says, “Always make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you yet do it with gentleness and respect.” This project was designed to be a reproduceable course to continue to equip for future generations. Chapter 1 introduces the need for deeper training in key apologetics topics and defines the scope of this study. Chapter 2 sets the biblical foundation for apologetics in the models of Jesus, Paul, and Peter. Chapter 3 provides a practical analysis of three major worldview systems—atheism, selfism, and biblical theism. Chapter 4 details the elements of the ministry project, and chapter 5 is a summary evaluation, personal, and theological reflection.

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