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TRAINING CHURCH MEMBERS IN CHRISTIAN
APOLOGETICS AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
IN WATERTOWN, WISCONSIN

A Project
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Educational Ministry

by
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May 2017

APPROVAL SHEET

TRAINING CHURCH MEMBERS IN CHRISTIAN
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To my compassionate Father,
Who adopts the fatherless and brings the lonely into His family

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PREFACE

The completion of this doctoral project would not have been possible without the love and support of many people. In His grace, God has blessed me with a godly family, as well as godly friends and colleagues who have encouraged and sustained me throughout the duration of this project. First, I would like to thank Dr. Oren Martin for his help and supervision. His theological insight and commitment to the Word of God not only has provided the practical guidance needed for this project's success, but has served to nurture within me a greater passion for God and His Word.

Second, I want to express my appreciation to First Baptist Church for allowing me to serve as elder. In this gracious appointment they have cultivated my spiritual growth by providing me with many opportunities to teach, preach, counsel, and disciple, and have facilitated the completion of this project. I am grateful for their enthusiasm for the project and for their kind investment in my life and ministry.

Third, the Lord has blessed me with a wonderful family for which I will be forever grateful, and without whom this project would not be possible. A special thank you goes to my mother, whose love, care, and affirmation of God's grace in my life is a constant source of encouragement and sustaining grace. I am grateful as well to my brother, Robert, for continually sharing with me his wealth of biblical and theological knowledge, which is almost as enriching as his love and friendship. I would also like to express my deepest love and thanks to our daughter, Karissa Leilani, my "gracious gift of love from heaven," for the irrepressible joy she brings to my life; every time I look at her beautiful face I am reminded how much God loves me and am moved once again to cling to *my* loving Father.

More than any other person, the completion of this project is owed to my beautiful wife, Becky. She has tirelessly sacrificed and served our family in a thousand different ways to support me in this work, and has done so with a selfless, joyful spirit. In her I daily see Christ's humble, loving heart. She is my friend, partner, and most precious gift. My words could never express my love and thankfulness for her.

Finally, any praise or worth attributed to this project is due my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who is pleased to use the foolish things of this world to exalt His eternal glory, and by whose mercies I am can present my life and this project as an acceptable sacrifice to God.

Roger C. Olson

Watertown, Wisconsin

May 2017

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The mission statement of First Baptist Church (FBC) declares, “We exist by the grace of God and seek to bring Him glory by passionately preaching Christ, so that all peoples might be glad in God.” This doxological purpose entails a three-fold emphasis of gospel, community and mission. To this end, members who are faithful in attendance weekly receive Christ-centered, expositional preaching from the Word of God. This singular voice of truth, however, can be drowned out by a deluge of conflicting voices hostile to the truth claims of Christianity, and even to the notion of truth itself. These false views threaten to undermine the faith of our members by holding them captive (Col 2: 8), plundering them of their security in the gospel, and thus their source of loving community and boldness in mission. Apologetics engenders steadfast faith in the objective truth of the gospel by breaking the chains of falsehood that hold believers captive. Thus, the apologetic task fuels a love for the body of Christ and the lost, and enables believers to engage the world rather than retreating or acquiescing to it. Therefore, the leadership of First Baptist Church has purposed to train church members in Christian apologetics.

Context

First Baptist Church in Watertown, Wisconsin, has been given new life through a church revitalization effort begun in 2012. This new growth has exposed the need for Christian apologetics. Broadly speaking, the contextual influences that contribute to this need are the church backgrounds of our present members and our current cultural milieu. A brief history of the church will provide insight into the spiritual formation of FBC members relevant to the purpose of this project.

Prior to 2012 the church had stagnated under the leadership of the former pastor, whose tenure spanned forty years. Though the church began in the 1880's and enjoyed many decades of vibrant growth, it had dwindled to an average attendance of about thirty members by 2012. The predecessor of the former pastor embraced liberal theology, which caused a division in the church.¹ His successor continued the same liberal trajectory until his retirement in 2012. The members that split from FBC formed an independent fundamental Baptist church that became closely associated with the newly formed Maranatha Baptist Bible College.² Since the revitalization effort began in 2012, the average attendance of FBC has grown from about thirty to roughly two hundred. Much of the new member growth has been transfer growth from the independent fundamental Baptist churches in Watertown. What follows is an explanation of how the spiritual formation of the two main groups within the church has shaped the need for apologetic training.

The original members of FBC had been influenced heavily by a steady diet of liberal theology from the former pastor. A major feature of his theology was his agreement with the ecumenical or interfaith movement;³ accordingly, he sought to unify the disparate churches of Watertown at the expense of scriptural authority. This

¹Ernest Pickering describes theological liberalism as promoting “a liberal interpretation of the Bible and the Christian faith as over against the historic Christian position.” This theological approach is characterized by “the rejection of the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible, the acceptance of the findings of destructive higher criticism, the denial of the efficacy of Christ’s blood atonement, a considerable emphasis on the social aspects of the gospel, a favorable interest . . . in the current ecumenical movement, and a general disparaging of the historic, orthodox Christian faith.” Ernest Pickering, “The Relation of Theological Liberalism to Political Liberalism,” *Central Bible Quarterly* 7 (Winter 1964): 2.

²Historically, the term “Independent Fundamental Baptist” is a self-designation by churches associated with the Conservative Baptist movement. These churches separated from the Northern Baptist Convention because of the influence of modernism, and formed the Fundamentalist Fellowship. Through separation they sought to avoid compromise and defend the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. Warren Vanhetloo, “Convicted Conservative Baptist Beliefs,” *Central Bible Quarterly* 4 (Spring 1961): 26. See also Rolland D. McCune, “The Self-Identity of Fundamentalism,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 1 (Spring 1996): 9-34.

³The ecumenical movement refers to an agenda held by a number of mainline denominations and ecclesiastical bodies that has as its goal the world-wide unification of all Christian sects. Unavoidably, this unity is possible only at the cost of core biblical doctrines. This movement received official sanction with the formation of the World Council of Churches. Rudolf A. Renfer, “The Historical Setting of the Ecumenical Movement,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 110, no. 473 (January 1953): 67.

ecumenical emphasis coupled with a critical approach to Scripture diminished the belief in the veracity of Scripture among the members of FBC. As a result, faith in the objective truth and power of the gospel was undermined in the face of growing skepticism and subjectivism within the church.

The spiritual lives of many new FBC members had been suppressed to varying degrees by their former churches' insistence on another kind of unity—unity in nonessentials; this entailed the obligation to maintain uniformity with the church on both non-essential points of doctrine and standards of living. These standards were not an expression of biblical imperatives but rather were impositions on the liberty clearly granted to believers in the New Testament. Though these fundamental churches taught the authority of the Scripture, the authoritative and controlling nature of the leadership unwittingly undermined it. That is to say, because of their dependence on leadership they were not free to study the Bible and come to their own conclusions. Accordingly, many of our newer members had not been taught to study the Scriptures objectively or to think critically about competing worldviews.

As divergent as these perspectives are, their commonality is a shift in authority away from the Bible to some other source of truth. The liberal theology taught to the original members of FBC looked to reason and empiricism as the final authority. The fundamentalist approach to Scripture gave credence to tradition. These subtle attacks on the authority of the Bible experienced by FBC members are continually reinforced by the influence of mainstream liberal denominations in Watertown, as well as local Catholic churches that displace scriptural authority in favor of the writings, doctrines, and pronouncements of the Catholic Church. For these reasons a defense of the veracity of the Bible would help remove stumbling blocks to faith in the objective truth of the gospel.

Though Watertown is a relatively small city of approximately 24,000 people, electronic media has created a global culture. New ideas are instantly downloaded and

saturate the growing global society at an alarming rate. In this regard, even rural communities take on the thought life and cultural features of large metropolitan centers. Trending words and phrases such as narrative, tolerance and politically correct are endemic to our pluralistic culture and expose its embrace of relativism. Consequently the problem of FBC and by extension the community of Watertown is not just degrees of unbelief in the truth of Scripture but the corresponding slide into syncretism or the wholesale embrace of false ideologies—there is never a vacuum of worship.

Rationale

The contextual features just described have convinced FBC elders of the need for instruction in Christian apologetics. As mentioned above, when belief in the authority of the Bible is undermined, another belief takes its place. So to fill the void of worship, believers are drawn to embrace false worldviews. Sin blinds people to the error and self-exalting nature of false beliefs because these beliefs mirror the deceit and pride in their own hearts. The world, in its collective acceptance of unbiblical ideologies, exerts tremendous pressure on believers to do likewise. It is hard to resist the mass appeal of the popular and the apparent legitimacy it fosters.

In light of this reality, though the preceding discussion in the context section centered on the authority of Scripture, this project must address the competing worldviews and philosophies that vie for the hearts of FBC members and threaten to hold them captive. Several factors coalesce with the above context to reinforce the need for this project.

First, there has not been apologetics training in the past. Since the renewal of 2012, the unity and supernatural nature of the Bible have been supported by preaching and teaching the centrality of Christ in all of Scripture. The truth of God's Word is asserted and tacitly assumed in all we do as a church—it is our only sure foundation. Nevertheless, the church has not taught a class or offered any type of instruction defending the truthfulness of the Christian faith. Consequently, many have not developed

the discernment to identify false beliefs as they encounter them, even as these beliefs gain a foothold in their lives.

Second, the pervasiveness of the attacks on the Christian worldview in our culture makes training in Christian apologetics a necessity. Christ calls us to love Him with all our minds (Matt 22:37), emphasizing the rational nature of our faith. Yet there is confusion within the church about the place of reason and evidence in a life of faith. This misunderstanding stifles serious study of Scripture and bolsters the effectiveness of attacks on our faith. Additionally, many Christians believe the gospel but are double-minded or feel ill-equipped to engage with those who have questions about Christianity.

Third, several New Testament imperatives provide abundant biblical rationale for Christian apologetics: “contend for the faith” (Jude 1:3), give an answer to anyone who asks us of our hope (1 Pet 3:15), develop the discernment to avoid being taken captive (Col 2:8), demolish the strongholds of false philosophies (2 Cor 10: 4-5), and liberate those held captive to wrong views (2 Tim 2: 25-26).⁴ In addition, the scriptural examples of Christ and the apostle Paul also provide a biblical warrant for believers to develop the competence to defend the Christian worldview.

Fourth, the New Testament record of the debilitating influence of false ideas on spiritual growth supports training in apologetics (1 Cor 3: 1-4; Gal 3: 1-3; Col 2: 6-10; Heb 5: 11-14; 2 Pet 2: 1-3; Jude 1: 3-7). Sin always involves believing a lie (Rom 1: 25). Consequently, the deception of worldly philosophies has occasioned much of the biblical counseling at FBC, as believers fail to root their identity in Christ. Conversely, unhindered faith in the truth of the gospel will result in joy and confidence that manifests itself in worship—worship expressed by joyful evangelism and greater degrees of glad-hearted investment in the body life of the church. This is because apologetics helps believers see the truth more clearly; it aligns their thoughts to achieve a greater correspondence to reality. The resulting clarity and renewed faith in the gospel sets them

⁴Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

free to not only see the superiority of the Christian worldview, but to live as they were created to live (John 8:32).

Therefore, training in apologetics is vital for the spiritual life of FBC members because it will strengthen their faith in the truth of the gospel and thus will deepen their love for Jesus Christ. This training will serve to fulfill our purpose to bring glory to Christ by extending His love both inward to our church community and outward to the community of Watertown.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to train church members in Christian apologetics at First Baptist Church in Watertown, Wisconsin.

Goals

Training FBC members in Christian apologetics required the implementation of four sequential goals. These goals served to equip the members of FBC with knowledge in apologetics and ultimately to nurture a greater faith in the gospel and love for Jesus Christ. The purpose of this project was accomplished when the following four goals were completed:

1. The first goal of this project was to assess the apologetic knowledge of 10 to 15 members of First Baptist Church of Watertown, Wisconsin.
2. The second goal of this project was to develop an eight-week instructional curriculum on Christian apologetics.
3. The third goal of this project was to increase the apologetic knowledge of FBC members by teaching the eight-week apologetic curriculum.
4. The fourth goal of this project was to equip members of FBC to defend the truth of the gospel using apologetics.

The four goals stated above require a defined means of measurement and standard of success to ensure their completion. The following section details the research methodology and instrument used to measure the success of each consecutive goal, which will in turn contribute to the successful completion of the project.

Research Methodology

The research methodology for this project incorporated identical pre- and post-training surveys to be completed by each member in the apologetics course. In addition, two assessment rubrics were to be used: one to measure the class member's effectiveness in practically applying apologetic knowledge, and another to evaluate the apologetic curriculum.⁵

The first goal of this project was to assess the apologetic knowledge of 10 to 15 members of FBC. This number was chosen in order to facilitate discussion and interaction during the training sessions. Before the start of the training, the Worldview and Apologetic Survey (WVAS) was to be administered as a pre-course survey in order to measure each member's level of apologetic knowledge. The WVAS includes questions on worldviews, rational and evidential arguments for God's existence, the authority of Scripture and other topics.⁶ The successful completion of the first goal required the participants to complete the pre-course survey so the results could be recorded for analysis.

The second goal of this project was to develop an eight-week instructional curriculum on Christian apologetics. The apologetics training course was intended to consist of eight, ninety-minute sessions. The content of the training course covers basic worldviews and epistemology, rational and evidential arguments for God's existence, a defense of the biblical Christian worldview against its theistic contenders, the authority of the Bible, and evidences for the historicity of Christ and the resurrection. The classes were to take place in a small group setting to facilitate interaction with the concepts being presented. Each group member was to be engaged in learning through taking lecture notes, participating in class discussions, and dialoguing with partners. In addition, they were to be given unit handouts and weekly reading assignments. These handouts and

⁵All 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 in the ministry project.

⁶See appendix 1.

assignments could then be compiled by the student into an apologetics notebook for future reference. An expert panel was enlisted to determine the success of this goal by applying a rubric to measure biblical fidelity, factual accuracy, clarity, thoroughness, argumentation and scope.⁷ This goal was to be considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or surpassed the sufficient grade level. If the panel's evaluation did not yield a 90 percent rating, the curriculum was to be revised in accordance with the committee's recommendations until it met the required standard.

The third goal of this project was to increase the apologetic knowledge of FBC members by teaching the eight-week apologetics curriculum. The completion of this goal was to be measured by re-administering the WVAS as a post-class survey. This was to be done within one week of the completion of the course in order to determine if there was an increase in apologetic knowledge. The third goal was to be considered successfully accomplished if the t-test for dependent samples exhibited a positive statistically significant difference in the participant's pre- and post- training apologetic knowledge. The t-test was selected for this analysis as it compares the means of the scores from the pretest and posttest which measured apologetic knowledge among the select group of median adults.⁸

The fourth goal of this project was to equip members of FBC to defend the truth of the gospel using apologetics. At the conclusion of the training, class members were required to demonstrate their ability to defend the Christian faith against various challenges in a role-playing exercise. During the exercise I was to observe the class members' use of apologetics and determine their level of competency utilizing an evaluation rubric.⁹ This goal was to be considered successfully met if the class average

⁷See appendix 2.

⁸Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 189.

⁹See appendix 3.

for all the criteria scored at the sufficient or above level on the evaluation rubric.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The reader's grasp of this project requires a preliminary knowledge of key terms that will be used throughout. The following definitions of key terms will be used in the ministry project:

Apologetics. The term *apologetic* is derived from the Greek word *apologia*, a forensic term meaning to make a defense.¹⁰ The scriptural basis for defending the truth of Christianity is found in both the examples of Christ and the apostles as well as imperatives such as 1 Peter 3: 15, "But in your hearts regard 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 term *apologetics* was used in this project to refer to Christian apologetics, which can be defined as defending the truth of the Christian faith.¹¹

Worldview. A worldview is one's fundamental perspective of the world that shapes the way that person lives.¹² It consists of presuppositions about reality that form a perceptual lens or interpretational grid through which one understands all of life and reality.¹³ All people have a worldview whether or not they are aware of it. The worldview of the Christian ought to be based on and continually informed by Scripture. A helpful definition of worldview is offered by James Sire:

¹⁰Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2005), 1. See also Steven B. Cowan, *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); John M. Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*, ed. Joseph E. Torres, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015); Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976); Douglas Groothuis *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011). The topic of apologetics will be treated more thoroughly in chapter three.

¹¹Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 1.

¹²James N. Anderson, *What's Your Worldview? An Interactive Approach to Life's Big Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 12.

¹³Norman L. Geisler and William D. Watkins, *Worlds Apart* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 11.

A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.¹⁴

Two limitations pertained to the successful completion of this project. The first limitation was the length parameters for the Doctor of Educational Ministry project set by Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The field of apologetics is vast, and so this limitation was helpful in pressing me to carefully analyze possible topics and evaluate their degree of importance in order to determine the most foundational and helpful concentrations for the curriculum. This limitation has also provided a vision for ongoing training in apologetics by expanding the foundation laid by the initial training course. The second limitation of this project was the participants' level of commitment to the training course. Some would possibly fail to make a meaningful investment in the apologetics training and be unwilling to attend all the sessions, participate during the classes, or engage the material. An attempt to mitigate this limitation required two preventative measures. First, the class schedule was intentionally arranged for the convenience of the participants. While an extra obligation during the week always involves some sacrifice, an effort was made to coordinate a class schedule that was mutually agreeable. Second, each participant was required to sign a commitment form. The form briefly detailed the vital need for apologetic training, and made students aware of the expectations for each class member. This helped them to count the cost before enrolling in the course, and approach the apologetics training course with a higher level of commitment.

Two delimitations were applied to this project. First, the class was limited to only 10 to 15 FBC members to facilitate greater class interaction. After the successful completion of the course, the intention was to repeat the process with other FBC

¹⁴James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 122. See also David S. Dockery and Gregory Alan Thornbury, eds., *Shaping a Christian Worldview: The Foundations of Christian Higher Education* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2002); James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 5th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009); Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basis for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985). Worldviews will be treated more thoroughly in chap. 3.

members. Due to the depth of the content, the course was offered to only mature teen or adult members. Another reason for this restriction was that the participants were encouraged to apply what they learned in mentoring and discipleship relationships, both in their homes and with other members of FBC. Second, the project was limited to a fifteen-week duration. This time frame included the pre-course assessment, the curriculum development, the eight weeks of curriculum instruction, and post-course assessment.

Conclusion

The church of Jesus Christ has been under attack from its inception; today is no exception. The world around us is continually undermining belief in the truth of the gospel. Chapter 2 will detail the scriptural solution to this problem, supplying biblical imperatives and examples that instruct believers to make a defense for their faith. Chapter 3 provides a cultural imperative for apologetics by describing the decline of the Christian worldview in America and the growing culture of despair. These chapters together provide abundant biblical and cultural rationale for concluding that apologetic training is vital for the spiritual life of FBC members.¹⁵

¹⁵Oren R. Martin has astutely observed that “there is no such thing as a presupposition-less theology. . . . It is, therefore, essential to recognize presuppositions and evaluate them under the authority of Scripture.” Oren R. Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land: The Land Promise in God’s Redemptive Plan*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 34 (Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2015), 27-28. With this commitment clearly in view, the foundational presupposition informing the apologetic approach of this project is that Scripture provides the sole authority to establish the role and methods of Christian apologetics. Therefore chap. 2 details biblical examples and imperatives demonstrating the value of apologetics for both non-believers and believers by removing barriers to belief, protecting the church from heresy, and promoting steadfast faith in the objective truth of the gospel. Because Scripture employs rational, evidential and presuppositional apologetics, this project utilized an eclectic approach that incorporated these three approaches. In regard to presuppositional apologetics, it is heartily acknowledged that all human knowledge, particularly knowledge of God, is entirely contingent on God, and that life is only comprehensible from the perspective of the Christian worldview. See John Webster, “Editorial,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16, no. 4 (October 2014): 371. Yet the Bible depicts God using a variety of modes of revelation which both the spiritual and natural man (by God’s common grace) are capable of comprehending (Rom 1:18-2:16). This will be discussed more thoroughly in chap. 2.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION FOR
TEACHING CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

Introduction

Scripture is the self-revelation of God to mankind, manifest in His acts of redemption. His saving works are embedded in history, which means they can be witnessed and have produced undeniable effects, and so are by nature evidential. Hence, they provide rational grounds for faith. By God’s design, the various redemptive types, events and prophecies find their fulfillment in the atoning death and resurrection of the promised Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. As Martin explains, “God intentionally planned certain persons, events and institutions in redemptive history *in order that* they would serve later redemptive—and Christological—realities.”¹ In Christ, redemptive history reaches its apex, as God’s converging perfections are revealed in the cross of Christ. Thus, God Himself, and the biblical narrative by extension, is apologetic—in it God provides copious evidence and a record of fulfillment that vindicates the truth of God’s glory encapsulated in the gospel.

At the opening of the NT, after Matthew records the genealogy of Jesus Christ and notes in rapid succession his fulfillment of various messianic prophecies, Christ proclaims to the gathered multitude that He did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them (Matt 5:17). In accord with the apologetic character of God’s revelation in the OT, Jesus Christ is Himself *the Apologetic* and *the Apologist*. As *the*

¹Oren R. Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land: The Land Promise in God’s Redemptive Plan*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 34 (Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2015), 26. To this point, Martin’s aim, profitably expounded in this excellent volume “is to demonstrate that the land promised to Abraham advances the place of the kingdom that was lost in Eden and serves as a type throughout Israel’s history that anticipates the even greater land—prepared for all of God’s people throughout history—that will come as a result of the person and work of Christ. In other words, the land and its blessings find their fulfillment in the new heaven and new earth won by Christ.”

Apologetic, His life, passion and resurrection supply the object and content of our faith in fulfillment of messianic promises. The gospel as fulfillment of these promises provides a rational basis for faith (John 20:30-31).² As *the* Apologist, Christ used evidence to confirm the veracity of His claim to be the Messiah. He cited fulfilled prophecy and performed miracles as evidence of His identity (e.g., Luke 4:16-22; John 10:22-33). These two lines of evidence merge to establish the ultimate rationale for the Christian faith—the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Cor 15:12-20). Christ repeatedly alluded to or plainly predicted his impending crucifixion and resurrection so His messianic identity would be proven after His resurrection (Matt 12:39-40; 20:17-19; 26:2; 27:62-63; Mark 8:29-32; 9:31; 10:34; Luke 18:31-33; 24:6-8; John 3:14-15; 12:31-33; 18:31-32). Christ pronounced His atoning sacrifice to be *the* paradigm for interpreting the OT (Luke 24:13-32; 44-49). In addition to evidence, Jesus employed reason and logic in defending His identity, and demonstrated how the love of God in the gospel provided the only answer to man’s deepest longings. By the Spirit of God, the apostles and inspired authors of the NT both model and mandate this rational basis for instilling and defending the Christian faith. That is not to say that people can be reasoned into the Kingdom of God, rather, the Holy Spirit uses the rational, historical content of the gospel to “convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8).³

Christ said, “Everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). Therefore believers must learn to rationally and relationally defend the truth of the

²Exercising faith requires first comprehending the identity and work of Jesus Christ on behalf of sinners (John 3:16; Rom 10:9-14). This is not to say that Christ’s appeal and the power of the gospel are purely propositional, void of emotion or love. Rather, as the Spirit illumines our understanding of gospel truth, our hearts are arrested and captivated by the unmerited and boundless love of God in Christ. Thus, our faith and love for God issues from understanding the reality of His love for us in Jesus Christ (1 John 4:19).

³The use of *rational* here and elsewhere in this project is not meant to suggest an epistemology in which autonomous human reason is the primary or sole source of knowledge and test of truth as in *rationalism*. Reason is not pitted against nor does it trump the self-authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit to testify to the truth of the Word, and to produce and grow our faith. Rather, God has sovereignly chosen to use human faculties of reason in concert with the work of the Holy Spirit to comprehend and give assent to the real, historic truth of the gospel—the content of faith, and then to exercise saving trust in Jesus Christ.

gospel. In the apologetic task, believers mirror God's redemptive work throughout history; in their love for each other and the lost, they personify the resurrection power of the Christ they proclaim. Paul exemplifies these characteristics. His defense before the Areopagus will now be considered as a model for apologetics in a multicultural society (1 Cor 11:1; Eph 5:1-2). This will be followed by a brief study of selected NT mandates for apologetics in order to grasp the urgency of this charge for believers, and to expound the value of apologetics for the church.

A New Testament Model for Apologetics

The world of the twenty-first century is a multicultural one. In our country alone there is a vast array of divergent religious and philosophical views that claim to provide some level of meaning and coherence to human existence. The sheer number and variety of these belief systems exposes the universal longing of the human soul.

The Multicultural Connection: Ancient Athens and Contemporary America

This inherent impulse within man produced the same religious diversity in the Mediterranean world of the first century. Nowhere was this religious yearning more evident than in the city of Athens. Though its glory had waned by the first century, Athens was still known as the intellectual capital of the world.⁴ It had been home to some of the world's greatest philosophers, including Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, and attracted people from all over the world who came to study the disciplines of philosophy and rhetoric.⁵ Philosophy in first-century Athens was not merely an intellectual pursuit, but involved adherence to various metaphysical systems that encompassed all areas of life, and so functioned as a religious worldview.⁶ In addition to the many philosophical

⁴John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church and the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 276. See also Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 560.

⁵J. Daryl Charles, "Engaging the (Neo)Pagan Mind: Paul's Encounter with Athenian Culture as a Model for Cultural Apologetics," *Trinity Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 50.

⁶D. A. Carson, *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan,

schools in Athens, the city was “full of idols” (Acts 17:16). Stott maintains that the idea conveyed by the adjective κατείδωλον is that Athens was submerged or “swamped” by idols so that “what Paul saw was a veritable forest of idols.”⁷ In fact a Roman satirist who was a contemporary of Paul quipped that in Athens “it is easier to meet a god in the street than a human.”⁸

Thus, when the apostle Paul arrived at Athens from Macedonia, he was faced with a culture not unlike our own. Most Americans are not idolaters in this primitive sense, but when ultimate meaning is ascribed to something in the created order, it has become an idol. This was also true of the Athenian philosophers, even though they dismissed idol worship as ignorant.⁹ They attributed ultimate meaning, identity, and happiness to their philosophies—their functional idols. In two millennia mankind has not changed. “Each culture is dominated by its own set of idols. . . . Each one has its shrines—whether office towers, spas and gyms, studios, or stadiums—where sacrifices must be made in order to procure the blessings of the good life.”¹⁰ All idolatry is based on believing the satanically inspired lie, insidiously nuanced and developed into the plethora of worldviews present today (John 8:44; Rom 1:18-23; 1 Cor 10:20; Eph 6:11-12). It is vital for believers to understand that false beliefs are the source of false worship.

Like Paul in Athens, believers in America today are immersed in a pluralistic culture that conceives of reality in fundamentally different thought categories than that of the Christian. Just a few decades ago this was not the case; Americans by and large

2000), 389.

⁷Stott, *Message of Acts*, 277.

⁸Paul Copan and Kenneth D. Litwak, *The Gospel in the Marketplace of Ideas: Paul's Mars Hill Experience for Our Pluralistic World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 30.

⁹David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 490.

¹⁰Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters* (New York: Dutton, 2009), 12. See also John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 55. Here Calvin famously said that “the human mind, so to speak, is a perpetual forge of idols.”

viewed life through a Christian lens because biblical presuppositions dominated the culture. Sharing the gospel began with a mutually understood conception of core doctrines such as the nature of God, truth, sin, judgement, and the birth and resurrection of Christ.¹¹ Someone who denied God was denying the God of the Bible, which “meant that the categories were still ours. The domain of discourse was ours.”¹² But without this Judeo-Christian framework, elements of the gospel will seem nonsensical or irrelevant to unbelievers, or will be misinterpreted by defining them according to their own worldview categories. Christians today have essentially overlooked this culture shift. In this regard, Mohler suitably applies a metaphor from Aristotle:

Aristotle once described our challenge as the problem of a fish in water. Knowing nothing but life in the water, the fish never even realizes it is wet. This describes the situation of many Christians in America—they do not even know that they are wet. We are swimming in one of the most complex and challenging cultural contexts ever experienced by the Christian church. Every day brings a confrontation with cultural messages, controversies, and products. We are bombarded with advertisements, entertainments, and the chatter of the culture all around us. We are Aristotle’s fish.¹³

This ignorance has certainly decreased the evangelistic effectiveness of the church and increased its vulnerability to the false worldviews of our culture.

Paradigm for Cross-cultural Evangelism

The culture shift ought to prompt the church to echo Tertullian’s question, “What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”¹⁴ In other words, what is the relationship between secular worldviews and the Christian worldview? How do believers effectively engage false ideologies with the truth of the gospel? On some level the church has grasped this challenge. For example, the church has recognized the need for

¹¹Carson, *Telling the Truth*, 384.

¹²Ibid.

¹³R. Albert Mohler, *Culture Shift: Engaging Current Issues with Timeless Truth* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2008), xi.

¹⁴Greg L. Bahnsen, “The Encounter of Jerusalem with Athens,” *Ashland Theological Journal* 13, no. 1 (1980): 4. In his article Bahnsen quotes Tertullian’s rhetorical question and applies it to the subject of epistemological priority and apologetics.

missionaries to receive specialized training in contextualizing the gospel to their mission field by studying its dominant cultural ideologies.¹⁵ But the American church generally has not applied this approach to its own post-Christian culture. Most unbelievers hold to views that are in many respects antithetical to the gospel. They need to reject these views before they can embrace the truth, which requires believers to be skilled at deconstructing unbiblical ideologies by exposing their falsehood. It also requires the Christian witness to rebuild the unbeliever's conceptual foundation with a comprehensive presentation of the gospel that begins with the God of creation.¹⁶ To accomplish this task, the witness must speak in a way that is intelligible to others without compromising on scriptural truth. These tactics are evident in Paul's address to the Athenians. His masterful evangelism at the Areopagus has become a paradigm for apologetics.¹⁷

Paul was superb at adapting his gospel presentation to fit his audience.¹⁸ For example, the Jews in the synagogue knew the OT scriptures and conceived of life in relation to a personal God using thought categories such as law, sin, sacrifice and covenant. Appropriately then Paul filled his defense with references to OT messianic promises and types and their historic fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 13:16-41). Any such reference is conspicuously absent in his defense before the Areopagus, whose members knew nothing of the Jewish Scriptures.¹⁹ Our own culture increasingly parallels this ignorance to Scripture, which makes Paul's apologetic method particularly instructive for us in twenty-first century America.

¹⁵Carson, *Telling the Truth*, 385.

¹⁶Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 89.

¹⁷Kenneth Boa and Robert M. Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2005), 10.

¹⁸Copan and Litwak, *Gospel in the Marketplace of Ideas*, 72. Luke's apologetic purpose in writing his two-volume work is evident from the opening of his gospel (Luke 1:1-4). To this end he recounts selected portions of sermons and defenses by the apostles that provide an apologetic pattern for his readers (2:14-36; 3:11-26; 4:5-12; 7:1-53; 13:16-41; 17:16-34; 20:17-35). The authors conclude that "this speech, like all the speeches in Acts, serves as a template for how believers can, and probably should orient or structure their presentation of the gospel in audience-specific ways."

¹⁹Bahnsen, "Encounter of Jerusalem with Athens," 5.

Before considering the content of Paul's speech, it is important to note that Luke only provides a summary of the content of this speech, as well as the other speeches and sermons in Acts; a full manuscript of the messages would have been much too lengthy.²⁰ The brevity of the speech as recorded was not consistent with the culture or with Paul's practice, as Eutychus could well attest (Acts 20:7-12)! The ideas within Paul's speech recorded in Acts 17 are doubtless major themes that were developed in detail by the apostle.²¹

Paul began his address to the philosophers of the Areopagus by securing their interest in a way that appealed to their worldview perspectives.²² He spoke to them using Hellenistic vocabulary and thought categories, yet infused them with meaning and themes that were unmistakably embedded in the Christian worldview. Though Paul has been criticized for capitulating to secular philosophical tenets in order to reach his audience, this is unquestionably not the case.²³ As I. Howard Marshall contends,

Paul's reported speech in Athens is addressed to a non-Jewish audience and, like that in chapter 14, does not cite the OT but has a basis in it. . . . Instead of direct employment of biblical language (except in 17:31) or paraphrase, there is the expression of OT motifs in a recognizable way but using the language of the Hellenistic world in a clear attempt to accommodate to non-Jewish hearers.²⁴

²⁰Copan and Litwak, *Gospel in the Marketplace of Ideas*, 65-66. The authors contend that "the standard of offering the basic ideas of a speech, rather than a complete transcription as we might expect in a newspaper for a speech by a politician in the twenty-first century, was established long before Acts was written." See also Bahnsen, "Encounters of Jerusalem with Athens," 8. With regard to the omission of the crucifixion, Bahnsen persuasively reasons that "it is quite difficult to imagine that Paul, who had previously declared "Far be it for me to glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal 6:14), and who incisively taught the inter-significance of the death and resurrection of Christ (e.g., Rom 4:25), would proclaim Christ as the resurrected one at Athens *without* explaining that He was also the crucified one—only later (in Corinth) to determine not to neglect the crucifixion again. We must conclude that solid evidence of a dramatic shift in Paul's apologetic mentality simply does not exist."

²¹Carson, *Telling the Truth*, 391.

²²Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 564. Paul secured the interest of his listeners in part by identifying his listeners as δεισιδαιμονεστέρους, which has a semantic range that allows for a complimentary sense (very religious) or a pejorative sense (superstitious). It is likely that Paul ascribed this term to his audience not to flatter them, but as a statement of fact. Some perhaps took this as a compliment; for others, the term's intentional ambiguity may have focused their attention on Paul's address. Bock argues here that δεισιδαιμονεστέρους can refer "to either a sincere pursuit of the divine transcendent being (whether a true pursuit or not) or an embracing of superstition."

²³Charles, "Engaging the (Neo)Pagan Mind," 48.

²⁴I. Howard Marshall, "Acts," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 594-95. The OT

For instance, Paul uses the Athenians' altar "to the unknown god" as a point of contact to segue to the one true God (Acts 17:23). This is not to say that Paul is endorsing their understanding and worship of this god as the Athenians perceived him. Rather, he deftly uses their admitted ignorance to turn the tables on the philosophers and highlight his authority as the one who had a true, rational and comprehensive knowledge of God.²⁵ In the same manner, Christians today should strive to connect with unbelievers by "speaking their language" and understanding the deficiencies of their worldviews in an effort to point them to the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the love of God in the gospel that energizes this effort while at the same time keeping believers firmly rooted in the truth (1 Cor 9:16-23).

The Gospel: The Transcultural Connection

Paul begins his argument by noting the syncretic nature of the Athenians worship ("the objects of your worship") and by logically asserting the antithesis between their conceptions of god and "the God who made the world," the "Lord of heaven and earth" (Acts 17:24).²⁶ Only the gospel corresponds to the true nature and character of God.²⁷ The prominent philosophies in Athens were Stoicism and Epicureanism; it was

motifs cited by Marshall include the polemic against idols (Isa 40-55), worship of God as unknown (Isa 45:15), the Lord as Creator of heaven and earth (Gen 1:1; Exod 20:11; Neh 9:6), God does not dwell in temples made of hands (Gen 14:18; Lev 26:1, 30; Isa 46:6), God is not served by human hands (Ps 50:7-15), God as the source of life and breath (Gen 2:7; Isa 42:5; 57:15-16).

²⁵F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 356. The Stoics and Epicureans in the marketplace accused Paul of being a σπερμολόγος (seed-picker), one who scavenges and picks up scraps of philosophy here and there with no true knowledge or coherent system (Acts 17:18). See also Joshua W. Jipp, "Paul's Areopagus Speech of Acts 17:16-34 as Both Critique and Propaganda," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 131, no. 3 (2012): 570. Jipp indicates that to enhance Paul's authoritative position to a Hellenized audience, Luke may have intentionally presented him as Socrates *redivivus*, hence we find him in the Socratic tradition debating in the marketplace, arguing with the Stoics and Epicureans, and on trial for introducing a foreign god. In this manner Paul is presented in the narrative as the wise protagonist and the philosophers of the Areopagus as the antagonists. This culminates in a confrontation that showcases the superiority of the gospel over the best of Greek philosophy. This allusion to Socrates is frequently noted by scholars.

²⁶Douglas R. Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 36.

²⁷This is not to say that Paul's point is to provide the Athenian philosophers with a lesson in logic. But from the outset of his defense he makes it evident to them that legitimate belief systems are bound by laws of logic, such as the law of noncontradiction that he applies here.

members of these philosophical schools that talked with Paul in the agora and brought him before the Areopagus. The Stoics were “essentially pantheistic, god being regarded as the World-soul.”²⁸ They viewed reason as the highest expression of god and thus prided themselves in their intellect and self-sufficiency.²⁹ For the Epicureans, the gods were detached and disinterested in the affairs of men. There was no afterlife or day of reckoning, so superstitions about the gods that engendered fear were scoffed at. Accordingly, the chief aim of life for the Epicureans was pleasure, to be as the gods who enjoyed freedom from the troubles and cares of life.³⁰ These philosophies are very much like the various pantheistic and atheistic worldviews of today; modern man’s attempts to attain the knowledge of God, despite the accumulated knowledge of centuries, have fared no better than the ancients. Just as Paul flatly denied the empty Athenian philosophies, believers should understand the nature of truth, equip themselves to identify conflicting ideas in competing worldviews, and proclaim the truth with boldness.

It is important to observe that despite their intellect and pride, the philosophers of Athens had an emptiness in their soul characterized by a continual longing for new knowledge (Acts 17:21). Athens’ religious and philosophical promiscuousness and endless curiosity in the wake of its golden years was only equaled by its fixation on erotic pleasure; first century Athens was being consumed by a culture of longing, indicative of its despair—philosophy had not saved them.³¹ Their darkened reason and idolatrous desire blinded them to the truth of life that was everywhere animated by “the unknown God.” Paul pierced their darkness with the light of truth: “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything” (Acts 17:24-25).

²⁸Bruce, *Book of Acts*, 350.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰*Ibid.*, 351.

³¹Charles, “Engaging the (Neo)Pagan Mind,” 51.

Paul asserted that God is transcendent, unlike the self-created pantheistic god of the Stoics. As the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, God Himself is the fount of all reason and knowledge—not man. The apostle denied the universal Reason or Logos of the Stoics as a self-contradiction; the existence of reason requires a personal, rational Creator as the first and greatest Cause, not an impersonal force. God is immanent, continually involved in life by providing man with “life and breath and everything.” In this Paul counters the Epicurean’s deistic conception of god as being detached and disinterested in the welfare of mankind. Both the Stoics and the Epicureans advocated logic and reason, yet illogically they accepted pluralism. Conversely, Paul used logic to contradict the nonsensical notion of multiple metaphysical realities by asserting the true nature of God and the created order. God is presented in His fullness—he is transcendent yet immanent, sovereign, righteous and just as well as personal, caring and relational. Paul models the need to present a worldview perspective by beginning with the doctrine of God. Without it Jesus is adapted to the listener’s worldview, not seen as the only Lord and Savior.³²

In their constructions of God, the philosophers mirrored the craftsmanship of the idol makers, and to the same end: to demote and domesticate God and exalt themselves. For the Stoics the world-soul was an impersonal force which found its highest expression in human reason.³³ Thus, man is the supreme expression of god and so has functionally displaced Him. The indifferent gods of the Epicureans were irrelevant, so Epicureans operated as agnostics or atheists. The gods imposed no moral law, so man became the supreme moral authority. When God is constructed within the confining temple of man’s fleshly pride, whether materially or philosophically, his throne has been usurped (Acts 17:24, 29). But Paul announces that God cannot be contained and manipulated by the rituals or philosophies of man; reality cannot be made to conform to

³²Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 36.

³³Copan and Litwak, *Gospel in the Marketplace of Ideas*, 34.

their sinful imaginations.³⁴

Paul turns the philosopher's satanic worldview upside-down (2 Cor 4:4; 1 Cor 10:20; Lev 17:7). God is not the creation of man; rather, man is the creation of God: "He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26). He is not "served by human hands," instead "He Himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything" (Acts 17:25). This God is sovereign in the affairs of men, "having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling places" (Acts 17:26). For the philosophers of the Areopagus, metaphysical truth was arrived at through reason. The Stoics in particular believed that the truth of god, or the divine Logos, resided within them by virtue of their reason.³⁵ Paul reorients this false epistemological view by asserting the need for God's revelation, both through nature and "the man whom he has appointed" to judge the world (Ps 19; Acts 17:31). Sinful man does not discover God unaided—God had to reveal Himself if sinful man was to know Him.

In His sovereign grace God has provided the answer to one of philosophy's greatest questions: "What is the purpose of man's existence?" Paul explains that God has providentially cared for men so "that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him" (Acts 17:27). Here Paul returns to the theme of the philosopher's ignorance and inability by picturing them as blind men groping helplessly for God. Astonishingly, blind humanity is graciously helped in their ruinous state; the transcendent God is a personal God, and has created mankind to seek their joy in Him alone. God will be found by those who seek Him, for "He is actually not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27). It is noteworthy that Paul supports the theme of God's immanence by quoting Epimenides of Crete, a pagan poet from the sixth century BC.³⁶

³⁴Bock, *Acts*, 565. In the OT, phrases such as "made by man" and "served by human hands" are derogatory, indicative of man usurping the Creator's role (Acts 17:24-25; cf. 1 Kgs 8:27; Isa 66:1-2; Mark 14:58; Acts 7:47-50).

³⁵Copan and Litwak, *Gospel in the Marketplace of Ideas*, 130. Apparently the divine Logos was schizophrenic, as reason led members of the Areopagus to contradictory philosophies.

³⁶Stott, *Message of Acts*, 286.

He likewise argues that God is the Father of all humanity by quoting the Stoic poet Aratus from the third century BC, who wrote that “we are his [God’s] offspring” (Acts 17:28).³⁷ Quoting a recognized authority was a standard Greek rhetorical technique.³⁸ To quote the OT would not have carried any authority for the members of the Areopagus. Paul’s example provides the rationale for believers to study the worldviews of their culture to build bridges to the gospel.³⁹ As Mohler astutely concludes, “Every single person we will try to reach with the gospel is embedded in some culture. Understanding the culture thus becomes a matter of evangelistic urgency.”⁴⁰

Worldview Deconstruction and the Gospel

Like Paul, believers need to develop the analytical skills to distinguish elements of truth within other worldviews—all worldviews contain truth that has been gleaned from general revelation. They also need to be able to demonstrate how those truths fail to fit within flawed, unbiblical systems, but integrate perfectly within the superior framework of the biblical worldview; this seamless integration is indicative of their rightful source. For instance, Paul uses an *a fortiori* argument demonstrating the logical absurdity of the offspring of God conceiving of their maker as inferior, a mere product of man’s imagination with none of man’s capacities (Acts 17:29). This argument condemns physical and philosophical images of God and rationally demonstrates God’s necessary preeminence.

The Athenians are culpable for their ignorance. Aspects of the truth about God are evident in their own writings, yet they have resisted and suppressed the truth in favor of their idols (Rom 1:18-23). Paul highlights God’s grace and forbearance in not

³⁷Stott, *Message of Acts*, 286.

³⁸Copan and Litwak, *Gospel in the Marketplace of Ideas*, 124.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Mohler, *Culture Shift*, xiii.

immediately judging their sin (cf. Rom 2:4), and announces God’s authoritative command for all to repent. Here Paul arrives at the climax of his argument—the resurrection of Christ from the dead (Acts 17:31). This is non-negotiable for Paul; he did not shy away from the bodily resurrection of Christ (or His substitutionary death) because it was offensive to his listeners.⁴¹ This is instructive to believers today: we must not flinch in giving the whole gospel even if it causes offense.⁴²

Paul appeals to evidence in his presentation of the gospel by arguing that God has πίστιν παρασχὼν πᾶσιν or “supplied assurance to all” of the coming righteous judgement of the world by Christ;⁴³ he has done so in the historically verifiable resurrection of Christ. The word πίστις denotes a “firm persuasion, or conviction . . . a firmly relying confidence.”⁴⁴ Richards observes that “*Pistis* and related words deal with relationships established by trust and maintained by trustworthiness.”⁴⁵ Trust and confidence are grounded in sound reason and supporting evidence. Believers today need to realize that faith is built upon reason that is founded upon evidence. The rational, evidential nature of the Christian faith should be a source of confidence for believers, and should empower them to lead people patiently from where they are to the gospel. Requisite in this task is the ability to defend the historicity of Christ and the resurrection.

In summary, Paul was skilled at critiquing unbiblical ideologies and restructuring them on the foundation of the gospel. He noted the flaws in their

⁴¹Carson, *Telling the Truth*, 398.

⁴²As noted earlier, Luke records only a summary of Paul’s speech. It is inconceivable that Paul would have mentioned the resurrection of Christ in the context of God’s impending judgement and the need for repentance without also including the substitutionary death of Christ (Rom 4:25). In fact, the entire focus of Paul’s ministry was the cross of Christ (1 Cor 2:2; Gal 6:14). See Carson, *Telling the Truth*, 391-92. Here he states that the book of Romans provides a good example of how Paul would have elaborated on the gospel before the Areopagus.

⁴³Joseph Henry Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 513.

⁴⁴Ethelbert W. Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 271.

⁴⁵Lawrence O. Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 116.

philosophical systems and made a case for the coherence of the Christian worldview. To accomplish this, Paul painted with the broad strokes of the biblical metanarrative, beginning with creation and concluding with eschatological judgement.⁴⁶ He reordered their thinking through a detailed explanation of theology proper, and developed a biblical anthropology that emphasized their status as both children of the Creator and condemned before God. That is, because God is the Creator of all things (Acts 17:24) including mankind (Acts 17:26), He must be a personal God with all the capacities of man (Acts 17:29). Therefore, mankind owes God reverence, worship and loving devotion. For their refusal to acknowledge God they were culpable and needed to repent (Acts 17:30). Beginning with the God of creation in this way, Paul lays the foundation necessary to introduce the person and work of Christ. Paul was effective in this task because he understood the Athenian's worldview perspective and so was able to find common ground and speak in terms that were intelligible to them, without compromising on scriptural truth. He assembled his argument for the gospel point by point, leading his listeners progressively to the resurrection of Christ, which he argued for on the basis of verifiable historical fact. Paul's apologetic before the Areopagus is paradigmatic for believers who must engage a pluralistic society with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Additionally, some observations are in order. Paul would have conceived of any dichotomy between theology and apologetics to be absurd. Bahnsen points out that “the two [theology and apologetics] require each other and have a common principle and

⁴⁶Michael Scott Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 17. The term *metanarrative* is used by many to describe the biblical storyline, unaware that philosophically it denotes a “dispensable myth” that merely represents universal truths beyond it (the prefix *meta* means beyond). Here Horton argues that the Bible's big story points to nothing beyond itself because God Himself is the source and center of the story. He further contends that “the biblical faith claims that its story is the one that God is telling, which relativizes and judges the other stories about God, us, and the world—especially the ones that have assumed the shape of Promethean metanarratives.” Horton provides a needed distinction: the philosophical definition of *metanarrative* cannot be rightly applied to the biblical storyline. However, *metanarrative* is commonly understood as an overarching story, one that unifies all its constituent parts or smaller stories by providing the big picture; in this way its function in common usage is similar to that of a worldview. Therefore, being mindful of this helpful distinction and for the sake of clarity, this project will use the term *metanarrative* as defined by common usage to denote the Bible's big story of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.

source: Christ's authority."⁴⁷ In his speech Paul appropriates the best aspects of Greek philosophical thought and locates those truths properly within the framework of the gospel, exalting it as *the* superior philosophy.⁴⁸ Christians can love God with their whole mind precisely because the biblical metanarrative alone is intelligible, internally consistent, coherent, comprehensive and thus supremely satisfying to the intellect.

Paul explained that he became "all things to all people, that by all means [he] might save some" (1 Cor 9:22). To the philosophers who sought life through reason and intellectual pursuit, Paul demonstrated the gospel to be the supreme philosophy and Christ the living Logos. To others like the Epicureans who sought life through pleasure, Christ is the supreme joy. To the legalistic Jews, Paul presented Christ as the One who fulfilled the law in our stead. All people yearn for God, most without knowing it. That is, in their rebellion against God, people look to the created order to satisfy the longings left by their estrangement from God. In meeting people at the altar of their own idols and leading them to the cross, believers follow in the steps of their Master, who fed the hungry with the bread of life, quenched their thirst with living water and healed their wounds with His own.

When Paul arrived in Athens, "his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols" (Acts 17:16). Paul patiently witnessed to the truth of the gospel to the Athenians because he was provoked to jealousy for the glory of God. Many believers do not share their faith because they do not feel the same godly provocation. When Paul arrived in Athens he was neither intimidated by the intellectual elite nor impressed by the grandeur of the city. Instead, he felt anger because he saw their idolatry. Believers today largely do not see the idolatry of the culture around them because they are captivated by it. Because they do not see idolatry their spirits are not provoked;

⁴⁷Bahnsen, "Encounter of Jerusalem with Athens," 6.

⁴⁸Joshua W. Jipp, "Paul's Areopagus Speech of Acts 17:16-34 as Both Critique and Propaganda," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 131, no. 3 (2012): 569.

consequently they do not speak the word of life to their neighbors who are groping for God (Acts 17:27).⁴⁹ The task of apologetics, by God’s design, attends to this blindness that so profoundly affects both the church and the world.

The New Testament Mandate for Apologetics

Selected NT passages that mandate apologetics will now be considered. These passages describe how apologetics is intrinsic to the Christian faith, the life of the church, and the proclamation of the gospel. As such the discipline of apologetics addresses the needs of both believers and unbelievers.

1 Peter 3:15: Defending the Truth of the Gospel

The New Testament mandate for believers to defend their faith is most patently expressed 1 Peter 3:15: “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 significance of the text. This imperative from the apostle Peter has been called “the charter verse of Christian apologetics.”⁵⁰ Our modern word “apologetics” is derived from the Greek term *apologia*, which in 1 Peter 3:15 is rendered, “make a defense.”⁵¹ Peter is not using *apologia* here in the contemporary sense of a formulated, systematic discipline. Nevertheless, like Paul, he is using the term to describe a rational defense of the gospel (Phil 1:7, 16).⁵² Such a prepared defense is needed to present the gospel as objective truth to unbelievers. Yet the value of apologetics goes beyond our witness. Preparation for a rational defense of our hope in Christ strengthens the believer’s

⁴⁹Stott, *Message of Acts*, 290.

⁵⁰John M. Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*, ed. Joseph E. Torres, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015), xxxvi.

⁵¹Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 24.

⁵²Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 13.

faith in the truth of the gospel; this renewed faith produces within the heart of believers a greater affection for Christ and commitment to Him as Lord. 1 Peter 3:15 is foundational in understanding the relationship between faith, reason, evidence, and the believer's heart response to the truth of the gospel.

Peter's purpose. In the closing of his first epistle the apostle Peter states the purpose of his letter: "I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it" (1 Pet 5:12). In this manner Peter informs his readers that the exhortations and testimony set forth in the epistle form a consistent line of argument aimed at persuading his recipients of the *truth* of the grace of God they had received in Christ.⁵³ Peter's concern for them was to see them stand firm in this grace in the midst of their present circumstance.⁵⁴ Jobs concludes that in making his purpose explicit, Peter exposes a real danger facing these believers: "Peter's stated concern implies that the situation of his readers was causing them doubt or confusion about God's work and presence in their lives and that the temptation to abandon, or at least waver in, the Christian faith was a real and present possibility."⁵⁵

In the face of worldviews hostile to their faith, these believers were experiencing abuse and rejection and struggled to believe the reality of the gospel. As a result, the purpose commonly attributed to 1 Peter is the encouragement of believers to faithfully endure suffering.⁵⁶ This is surely a dominant theme; there is ample support for this within the letter (1 Pet 1:6-7; 2:12, 18-21; 3:9, 13-14, 16-17; 4:1-2, 12-19; 5:8-10). But Peter's own declared purpose that his readers "stand firm in" the *true* grace of God

⁵³Karen H. Jobs, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 42.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 45. See also Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 64-65; Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 24; Wayne Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 39; Scot McKnight, *1 Peter*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 29.

ought to shape our understanding of Peter's intent, namely, *how* believers are aided in enduring trials. That is, the ability to remain steadfast in the faith hinges on the belief that the gospel is true.⁵⁷ Accordingly then, Peter builds a case for the truth of the Christian worldview and details how this living reality manifests itself in the life of the believer through their experience of suffering. In doing so Peter models his imperative to give a defense for the hope of the gospel (1 Pet 3:15).

Peter's case for the Gospel. The recipients of Peter's first epistle were believers living in Asia Minor (1 Pet 1:1) in approximately A.D. 62-63.⁵⁸ In addressing them Peter immediately begins his defense by identifying his readers as ἐκλεκτοῖς παρεπιδήμοις διασπορᾶς (1 Pet 1:1). In doing so he begins to lay a foundation that reorients their thinking about their true identity and their relation to the society in which they live. Peter uses their alien status as a metaphor for their identity as citizens of God's heavenly city.⁵⁹ Rather than exposing the gospel as false, the rejection and slander they were receiving from the world actually demonstrated the truth of their belief and their identification with Jesus their King (1 Pet 1:6-9, 17; 2:4-8, 11, 19-25; 3:17-18; 4:1-2, 12-19; 5:6-11).⁶⁰ Their standing as exiles in society was brought about by the sovereign

⁵⁷Hope in the midst of trials, another theme ascribed to 1 Peter, is likewise contingent on believing the truth of the gospel. Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 65. The biblical conception of *truth* will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter 3.

⁵⁸Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 36-37. This date is predicated on a Petrine authorship predating the Neronian persecution.

⁵⁹Jobes, *1 Peter*, 25. Jobes concludes, the "metaphorical sense these terms carry for the Christian life need not exclude some literal sense related to the letter's original historical circumstances." See also Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 228. "This phrase [*paroikoi*] is drawn not from the political arena of the Greco-Roman world to describe the political status of the readers . . . but rather is again chosen under the influence of the controlling metaphor, the chosen people, and applied to Christians."

⁶⁰The enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman foretold in the *protoevangelium* is developed extensively through the storyline of the OT (the antagonists include Cain, the antediluvian civilization, Pharaoh, the nations in and surrounding Canaan, Haman, etc.) and is immediately reiterated by Simeon at the advent of the Messiah (Luke 2:25-35). Christ said He came to bring a sword and to turn even family members against one another (Matt 10:24-25; 32-36). This is evident in the consistently mixed response to the gospel, both during Christ's earthly ministry and the ministry of the apostles recorded in Acts. Thus Christ is the great Divider that runs through every tribe, tongue, and nation. Our union with Christ guarantees not only our temporal suffering, but our eternal victory over the serpent (Rom 16:20). Peter makes the connection between his recipient's present circumstances and the cosmic battle foretold in the *protoevangelium* explicit in 1 Pet 5:8-9 by identifying the Messiah's adversary as their "adversary the Devil." In doing so, Peter explains their suffering by their identification with the Messiah and His seed, their "brotherhood throughout the world" who are experiencing "the same kinds of

power and foreknowledge of God, who set them apart through His Spirit to live in joyful obedience to Christ on the basis of His shed blood on their behalf (1 Pet 1:2). This new reality has been brought about by the re-creative power of the new birth (1 Pet 1:3).

So in spite of the real threat they were facing, their life in Christ is their new governing reality; it is impervious to death, sin and decay because it is secured by God's power through the resurrection of Christ from the dead (1 Pet 1:3-5).⁶¹ Repeatedly in this short epistle Peter presents the death and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ as a true historical fact, and hence the basis of their true and living hope (1 Pet 1:3, 18-21; 2:21-24; 3:18, 21; 5:1). Through trust in Christ's vicarious atonement they have experienced their own exodus from slavery to sin and enjoy real solidarity with their King and His covenant people (1 Pet 1:4, 15-17; 2:4-5, 9-10; 3:5-6).⁶² Even their trials are a cause for rejoicing because it confirms the veracity of their faith, their union with Christ in His sufferings, and their future glorification with Him (1 Pet 1:6-9; 2:4-5, 18-25; 3:17-18; 4:1-2, 12-16; 5:1, 8-11).⁶³ Their living hope follows the paradigm of OT believers, who in the midst of their trials trusted in the saving promises of God and were delivered (Ps 107). This unquenchable hope would serve as a witness to the certainty of God's eschatological salvation, both to suffering believers and the watching world (1 Pet 1:3, 13, 21; 3:15). The certainty of their new life in Christ is also assured by the self-authenticating nature of Scripture. Fulfilled messianic prophecy, the unity of Scripture (1 Pet 1:25 and the many OT quotations and allusions), and the regenerating and sanctifying power of the gospel unite to confirm that the message they received is indeed the "living and abiding word of God" Himself (1 Pet 1:10-12, 22-25).⁶⁴

suffering." This insight would no doubt help them to "resist" the Devil by standing "firm in [their] faith" that the gospel is true.

⁶¹Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 63.

⁶²D. A. Carson, "1 Peter," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 1030.

⁶³Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 64.

⁶⁴G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 854. The unity of Scripture is evident in that Peter in 1:25

Peter has specified multiple lines of evidence to encourage his reader's faith in the truth of the gospel (1 Pet 1:5, 7, 9, 21; 5:9). In the face of attacks to their faith by the unbelieving world, this assurance was sorely needed. The believer's faith-generated obedience to, and desire for the word of God is the means by which they would grow in sanctification (1 Pet 1:22; 2:2).⁶⁵ As Peter demonstrates, there is no conflict between exercising faith in the authority of the revealed Word of God and the use of evidence to support it. Here as in many other places in Scripture, evidence is employed and advocated by God and His messengers to confirm God's revelation (Deut 18:21-22; 1 Kgs 18:20-45; Isa 41:21-29; 42:9; 44:6-8, 24-28; 52:6; Luke 7:18-23; Acts 2:22-24; 16:30-31).⁶⁶ As modeled by Peter, God uses evidence and reason to clear away the falsehood hindering believers (and unbelievers) from clearly seeing the truth of the gospel (John 20:24-31; Acts 2:14-41). This clarity promotes a steadfast faith in Christ springing up into a living hope that stands firm in the face of trials, and prompts the interest of the unbelieving world (1 Pet 1:3, 13, 21; 3:15). 1 Peter 3:15 encapsulates and explicates this relationship.

Peter's imperative to defend the Gospel. The believers in Asia Minor were suffering for their faith. The nature of this suffering is described by Peter as "various trials" which included accusations (1 Pet 2:12), reviling (1 Pet 3:9), slander (1 Pet 3:16), threats (1 Pet 3:14), maligning (1 Pet 4:4), and insults (1 Pet 4:14). The paragraph in which 1 Peter 3:15 is found begins by exhorting believers to practice love and kindness, even in the face of such evil (1 Pet 3:8-9).⁶⁷ Peter uses the conjunction $\delta\epsilon$ (but) to

identifies "the good news that was preached" to his readers with the OT Scripture he quoted from Isa 40. Concerning this Beale notes, "Most in focus may be the segment of Scripture in Isa 40-55, which found beginning fulfillment in Christ." In this case as well as his other OT citations Peter demonstrates the Christocentric unity of Scripture culminating in the gospel preached to them. Additionally, Peter's recipients are those who have been brought into union with Christ and His covenant people. The unity of Scripture showcases its supernatural nature and as such is good evidence for the truth of the gospel.

⁶⁵Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 855.

⁶⁶Steven B. Cowan, *Five Views on Apologetics*, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 245-46. Gary Habermas, in his response to Presuppositionalism, asserts that the use of evidence is not an appeal to a standard higher than Scripture. On the contrary, we are commanded to use evidence "to test God's revelation to us."

⁶⁷Carson, "1 Peter," 1036. The rationale for such a response is provided in an OT quote from

introduce a contrast between verse 14b and 15a: “do not fear them, but sanctify Christ as Lord.”⁶⁸ Peter’s use of ἀγιάσατε (sanctify, set apart as holy) supplies the means by which the fear of man is quenched—by fearing the Lord alone.⁶⁹ Quoting loosely from Isaiah 8:13 in the LXX, Peter identifies Jesus Christ as the Lord they are commanded to fear.⁷⁰ This is a strong statement on the deity of Christ, identifying Him with Yahweh, but this statement also locates their suffering and trials within the paradigm of the life and sufferings of Christ. Because these believers are being persecuted for their faith in Christ, they are challenged by Peter to honor Christ rather than those who threatened to harm them.⁷¹ Regardless of the threat, Christ alone is to be set apart as Lord; this sanctifying is to be done within the heart. The term καρδία, rendered “hearts” in the ESV, refers to the inner self or real person (1 Pet 3:4). It is the seat of man’s thoughts, affections, volition, and reason.⁷² Schreiner, however, warns against viewing the heart as merely our inner, private lives: “The heart is the origin of human behavior (cf. 1:22; 3:4), and from it flows everything people do. . . . The inner and outer life are inseparable, for what happens within will inevitably be displayed to all, especially when one suffers.”⁷³ In this regard, the sanctifying of Christ that Peter has in mind necessarily encompasses living a holy life (1 Pet 1:2, 13, 22; 2:1-2, 5, 24; 4:1-6).⁷⁴

Ps 34, which serves to redirect their focus to God whose gaze is ever upon them (1 Pet 3:12). God loves and protects His redeemed people, and assures them that like David, they will be ultimately delivered from their enemies. Because of their covenant relationship with God they are blessed even in suffering (1 Pet 3:14; cf. Matt 5:10). This being the case, they are commanded not to be afraid or troubled by those who would cause them to suffer (1 Pet 3:14), because “the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (1 Pet 3:12).

⁶⁸Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 232. In this text Peter is loosely quoting Isa 8:12-13.

⁶⁹Grudem, *First Peter*, 152.

⁷⁰Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 232. There is debate in this case whether “Christ” is viewed to be predicative or appositional.

⁷¹Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 173.

⁷²James Strong, *The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 1164.

⁷³Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 174.

⁷⁴McKnight, *1 Peter*, 213.

Therefore, living a holy life before others *begins* in one's heart, as believers' thoughts are captivated by Christ through the power of the Spirit (Rom 12:1-2). This entails believing the truth of the gospel, thus the supremacy of Christ over all rivals. Peter has used various lines of evidence and reason to convey this reality to his readers. The convergence of God's perfections is unveiled in the factual content of the gospel; because it is true, their future glorification with Christ is assured in spite of their present trials (1 Pet 1:7, 13). This has been Peter's focus in addressing their trials. Nevertheless, these distresses seemed "strange" to the believers in Asia Minor, apparently at odds with the conception of God as both a sovereign and merciful Father (1 Pet 1:2-3; 4:12).

The resulting doubt in the hearts of these Asian believers threatened their spiritual vitality and enticed them to adopt another foundation on which to build their lives (1 Pet 4:12-14; 5:12). This is the case for all believers: hearts bent on idolatry daily interact with people, ideologies and events orchestrated to reshape their ultimate beliefs concerning the existence and nature of God (Rom 12:2; Eph 6:10-12). This poses a perpetual danger to believers, who must guard against idolatry and the distortions to truth that inevitably develop with it (Rom 12:2). In this regard, Peter emphasizes the vital need for true thinking:

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. . . . Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ. (1 Pet 1:13, 18-19a)

Here Peter exhorts his readers to guard their minds with the truth of the gospel because they had been ransomed from their *ματαιία* (useless, void of the truth) way of life. This empty lifestyle was based on a false worldview that was again pressuring them to conform their thinking and consequently to corrupt their way of life (1 Pet 1:14-16; cf. Col 2:8). In the LXX, *ματαιία* commonly refers to idolatrous paganism (Lev 17:7; 1 Kgs 16:2; 2 Kgs 17:15; Ps 23:4).⁷⁵ All false worldviews are rooted in idolatry and their

⁷⁵Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 405.

influence continues to threaten the church today.⁷⁶ Concerning this Kapic warns, “One of the greatest theological challenges of our time is to move our worship beyond self-absorption.”⁷⁷

The choice before these first-century Christians was unavoidable: fear the world around them and embrace its truth claims, or fear Christ and embrace the truth of the gospel. Jesus Himself asserted the impossibility of serving two masters (Matt 6:24). Therefore Peter commands them to intentionally set Christ apart as holy within their hearts by believing his testimony to the truth of the gospel. Sanctifying Christ in this way actuates one’s affections for God and one’s will to please Him; this issues in living boldly for Christ in the face of suffering.

Defending the gospel and sanctification of Christ. The imperative to “sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts” (NAS) is explained and elaborated in the second part of the verse: “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” (1 Pet 3:15b). The phrase ἑτοιμοὶ ᾄει in the opening of 15b functions as an imperative (“always being prepared”) that is linked to the main verb ἀγιάσατε in 3:15a.⁷⁸ As such it defines the means by which believers can “sanctify Christ as Lord in [their] hearts.” Namely, sanctifying Christ in one’s heart is accomplished by means of a believer’s continual preparation to give an answer for the reason of his hope in Christ.⁷⁹ There is a sovereignly ordained relationship between a biblically informed mind and a desire to set Christ apart as Lord in the heart, where He alone receives uncontested worship and

⁷⁶G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 16. Beale’s thesis developed from Isa 6 is “what people revere, they resemble, either for ruin or restoration.”

⁷⁷Kelly M. Kapic, *A Little Book for New Theologians: Why and How to Study Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 19.

⁷⁸Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 174.

⁷⁹Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 233. God has sovereignly ordained the believer’s sanctification to be accomplished through the agency of the Holy Spirit, as believers behold Christ in the Word of God (2 Cor 3:18; Rom 1:16).

adoration:

The biblical remedy for disordered affections is for God to speak his truth to the mind There is an intrinsic, ordered relationship between the thoughts and the affections that guide our actions. The formation of the heart comes through the transformation of the mind. Therefore, one of the primary ways the Holy Spirit changes the things we love and worship is by changing the way we think.⁸⁰

The Greek ἀπολογία (make a defense) may at times be used in a forensic sense, as in a legal trial, though this is not Peter's focus (Acts 19:33; 22:1; 24:10; 25:8, 16; 26:1-2, 24).⁸¹ Peter's use in 3:15 does encompass a forensic application, but his primary concern is the daily opportunities to give reasoned answers to "anyone who asks" of their hope in Christ.⁸² The state of readiness commanded to believers implies continual study of the truth of God revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christians are to defend the truth using λόγον, which is the verbal expression of inferential thought or reasoning.⁸³ Concerning this reasonable defense, Schreiner maintains "Peter assumed that believers have solid intellectual grounds for believing the gospel."⁸⁴ The intellectual grounds include evidence and reason. Groundless, empty faith that is independent of evidence and reason, or fideism, is not a scriptural phenomenon. As it turns out, faith is a method of belief based on trustworthy testimony.⁸⁵ By divine design, the propensity to believe the testimony of others is normative in human relationships. It is essential in our formative years and is exercised daily by all people as the most common method of belief.⁸⁶ Thus, there is no contradiction between faith and reason; rather, faith is built upon reason.

⁸⁰Philip Graham Ryken, *Christian Worldview: A Student's Guide* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 28.

⁸¹Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 174.

⁸²Jobes, *1 Peter*, 230.

⁸³Strong, *Dictionary of Bible Words*, 1213.

⁸⁴Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 175.

⁸⁵Mitch Stokes, *A Shot of Faith (to the Head): Be a Confident Believer in an Age of Cranky Atheists* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 31.

⁸⁶Stokes, *A Shot of Faith (to the Head)*, 33.

J. P. Moreland clarifies the relationship between faith and reason with a historic definition of biblical faith:

Throughout church history, theologians have expressed three different aspects of biblical faith: *notitia* (knowledge), *fiducia* (trust), and *assensus* (assent). *Notitia* refers to the data or doctrinal content of the Christian faith (see Jude 3). *Assensus* denotes the assent of the intellect to the truth of the content of Christian teaching. Note that each of these aspects of faith requires a careful exercise of reason, both in understanding what the teachings of Christianity are and in judging their truthfulness. In this way, reason is indispensable for the third aspect of faith—*fiducia*—which captures the personal application of trust involved in faith, an act that primarily involves the will but includes the affection and intellect too.⁸⁷

This is not to minimize the role of the Holy Spirit or the power of the gospel, but rather clarifies the nature of faith and the means God uses to bring about (justification) and continue (sanctification) His work of salvation (John 6:37). God has chosen to use human intellect to comprehend the content of what is believed; this content consists of evidence or testimony. The faculties of reason then evaluate the validity of the evidence (or testimony) and confirm its truthfulness. The Holy Spirit guides this confirmation process which utilizes support or corroboration to sovereignly generate and fortify faith within the heart of a believer; this faith consists of comprehending the content of the gospel, acknowledging (believing) its truth, and trusting in Christ's provision. Therefore, human cognition, by God's design and awakened by the Holy Spirit, is indispensable to saving faith. Scripture itself is God's written testimony to the truth of His person and work, culminating in the revelation of His righteousness in the gospel of Jesus Christ. In explaining the relationship between faith and the real events of Christ's passion, Francis Watson concludes that "faith is itself the recognition and acknowledgment of the divine saving action . . . God's saving act in Christ seeks to elicit the answering faith that acknowledges it as what it truly is."⁸⁸ Scripture is replete with evidence from both general and special revelation utilized to bring people to faith in God's saving promises.

⁸⁷James Porter Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997), 60.

⁸⁸Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 75.

Creation, conscience, law and gospel testify in unison to this end. It is precisely this capacity to understand and judge the truthfulness of the evidence for God's nature and character that renders mankind without excuse before the divine tribunal (Rom 1:18-20).

Therefore, the rational basis of the gospel is intelligible to unbelievers. They share a common knowledge of self-evident truth such as morality, their own sinfulness, the emptiness of worldly pursuits, logical contradictions of their own worldview, the reality of the triune God's existence displayed in creation, and "the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience" that is "*meant* (emphasis mine) to lead [people] to repentance" (Rom 1:18-23; 2:4). To this point, Olson asserts,

Rom 1:18-3:20 presents a collapsing or reading together of salvation-historical eras designed to convey continuity, a continuity depicted in large part by Isaiah's typology of captivity. This continuity embraces and emphasizes general revelation (Rom 1:18-21), which . . . communicates to humanity not simply a knowledge of God and his law, but of man's guilt before that law, and with that guilt a realization of certain judgment (Rom 1:20-21, 32; 2:1-3). This "inner tribunal" as it portends the coming judgment in Rom 2:1-3 is in verse 4 accompanied by a further revelation and reality, that of God's "kindness and forbearance and patience." Verse 4, then, becomes descriptive of a state in which the knowledge of personal guilt and its consequent, impending judgment is coupled with the knowledge of God's kindness, a kindness disclosed in the gifts of providence (Rom 1:21), but expressed most poignantly in the deliberate delay of the execution of his justice. This *period of patience* is divinely intended to "lead [one] to repentance," and therefore, in light of and coupled with [guilt before] divine law, has the nature of promise. It communicates to the soul God's desire not only to forgive sin but also to restore the fallen creature to the image of his Creator whose law he has so willfully and continually broken. This restorative intent in light of divine law is confirmed and expressed in the immediate context both in one's "perseverance in doing good" (Rom 2:7), and ultimately in the reinstatement of the repentant soul to the glory, honor and immortality lost in the fall as he is granted the gift of eschatological life (Rom 2:7; cf. Rom 6:23).⁸⁹

In light of this common knowledge graciously conveyed through general revelation, the gospel is rational, for in God's divine wisdom, general and special revelation maintain a flawless continuity that finds its climax in the gospel, which is perfectly suited to answer all the miseries of fallen humanity.

Preparedness to provide a rational answer to "anyone who asks" must also

⁸⁹Robert C. Olson, *The Gospel as the Revelation of God's Righteousness: Paul's Use of Isaiah in Romans 1:1-3:26*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament, 2.428 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 191-92.

entail knowledge of other thought worlds, or worldviews; this knowledge enables believers to understand their ways of thinking. This understanding is evident in the examples of Jesus, Peter and Paul (John 4:7-42; Acts 2:14-41; 17:16-34). In the same way, Christians should have a familiarity with the worldviews and beliefs of all who may ask them of their hope, in order to communicate truth in a way that makes sense to their inquirers.⁹⁰

Like the command to sanctify Christ as Lord, the command to prepare for a rational defense is aimed at the heart, or the faculties of thinking and reason. But this is no mere intellectual exercise or assent to facts. The process of preparation grants believers a vision of the truth of Christ that is unclouded by false views. In the revelation of the truth, the glory of Christ shines with vivid clarity (2 Cor 3:18). Unobscured, this truth enlivens the affections, for at its core is Christ's loving sacrifice to secure for us the joy of intimate communion with the living God. Therefore, right thoughts about God fuel a life of worship, because one's growing comprehension of God through Scripture and creation reveal a God of infinite glory. The only response to this glory is worship—this is sanctifying Christ as Lord in one's heart (John 4:23). In summation, setting Christ apart as holy is a response to understanding and believing the truth, which issues from preparing to give a reason for our hope.

Renewed faith in the truth of the gospel produces within the heart of believers a greater affection for Christ and commitment to Him as Lord; this renewed faith is displayed in loving kindness toward others, even to those who do evil. It is this counterintuitive love for one's enemies that showcases the Christian's hope and arouses questions in the hearts of the lost.⁹¹ When believers respond with love and joy in the midst of cruelty, the world takes notice. Such a response provides evidence of resources

⁹⁰Jobes, *1 Peter*, 231.

⁹¹John Piper and David Mathis, *Think It Not Strange: Navigating Trials in the New America* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2016), 112.

not available in this world, and points to a hope beyond it. It makes sense then that our *ἐλπίς*, our hope or confident expectation, is that for which we must answer.⁹² Piper profitably elaborates the meaning of hope in this context: “Hope is a heartfelt, joyful conviction that our short-term future is governed by an all-caring God, and our long-term future, beyond death, will be happy beyond imagination in the presence of the all-satisfying glory of God.”⁹³ This living hope is essential for energizing spiritual life and growth (1 Pet 1:3, 13, 21; 3:15), and is realized through believing the truth of the resurrected Christ. The hope “that is in” believers empowers them to respond to hostility with “meekness” toward others and “fear,” or reverence toward God.⁹⁴ In this hope, the believer’s manner and message unite as a living witness to the truth of the gospel.

First Peter 3:15 has been considered in greater depth than the subsequent passages for several reasons. First, it “has often been regarded as the classic biblical statement of the mandate for Christians to engage in apologetics.”⁹⁵ Such a mandate legitimizes the disciplined study of apologetics. Second, it is foundational in understanding the relationship between faith, reason, evidence and sanctification, or the believer’s heart response of setting Christ apart as Lord. As such it addresses how apologetics strengthens our faith in the truth of the gospel and thereby our sanctification of Christ. This finds expression contextually in a profound love for both believers and unbelievers, which yields enhanced community within the church and heightened witness to the world (Eph 4:11-14). Third, it informs the manner of our witness, namely “with meekness and reverence.” This manner flows from a view of Christ and our relation to Him that enlightens our view of the world. With this foundation laid, attention will now

⁹²Strong, *Dictionary of Bible Words*, 1077.

⁹³Piper and Mathis, *Think It Not Strange*, 109.

⁹⁴Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 176. Though some commentators view “the hope that is in you” in 3:15b as a corporate hope shared by the church, it should be understood as parallel to “in your heart” in 3:15a which would then refer to a living hope residing within an individual believer.

⁹⁵Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 13.

be turned to other NT imperatives to grasp more fully the value of apologetics for the church.

Jude 3: Contending for the Faith

Jude intended to write a letter to a church or group of churches concerning their “common salvation,” but “found it necessary” to write concerning a more urgent matter (Jude 3).⁹⁶ Jude describes this pressing circumstance as follows: “For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” (Jude 4).

The priority of contending for the faith. The priority of this matter, even over the exalted subject of salvation, was due to the insidious danger these intruders posed to the salvation of the church.⁹⁷ False teachers had infiltrated the church by misrepresenting their true nature and beliefs.⁹⁸ The imminent threat of their false teaching compelled Jude to write his epistle. Jude therefore appeals to the church “to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

In his use of παρακαλέω, Jude issues to the church a fervent summons to engage in battle for the truth (Jude 3).⁹⁹ The Greek term ἐπαγωνίζεσθαι denotes a “struggle, or earnestly contending for a thing.”¹⁰⁰ This is not meant to suggest a physical contest, but was a common metaphorical usage of a term used literally for Greek athletic

⁹⁶Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 17. Davids explains that though Jude addresses a particular problem in a particular church or group of churches, the general greeting provides no specific information on the recipients, but is phrased so as to apply to all believers in Jesus Christ. For simplicity I will refer to the recipients as a singular church. See also Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 408-9.

⁹⁷D. Edmond Hiebert, *Second Peter and Jude: An Expository Commentary* (Greenville, SC: Unusual Publications, 1989), 217.

⁹⁸Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 35. See also Davids, *Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, 43.

⁹⁹Strong, *Dictionary of Bible Words*, 1290.

¹⁰⁰Strong, *Dictionary of Bible Words*, 1093.

contests.¹⁰¹ Jude is urging the church to exert strenuous effort in their struggle for the πίστει, rendered “faith.” In context πίστει refers not to belief or trust but “the content of what is believed,” or the gospel, and was frequently used in this way by Paul (Gal 1:23; Eph 4:5; Col 1:23; 1 Tim 3:9; 4:1; 6:10, 21).¹⁰² The church was to engage in this battle for the truth of the gospel because the deception had already begun. Some believers in the church were already falling prey to the error of the false teachers and were in grave danger of sharing in their eternal destruction (Jude 4, 14-15, 22-23). The truth of the gospel for which they were to contend was already settled, for it was “once for all delivered to the saints” by the apostles (Jude 3, 17). The body of truth concerning the saving message of salvation in Christ is completed; any additions, omissions or corrections would be rejected.¹⁰³ As in Jude’s day, a contemporary application of this principle invalidates any religions that claim further revelation from God in adding to scripture (Mormonism, Islam), or claim exclusive authority of interpretation which takes precedence over Scripture (Jehovah’s Witnesses, Catholicism).

The church was in danger of rejecting the grace of God in the gospel and embracing falsehood. This peril would be averted by contending for the faith. This speaks to the nature of truth and implies both a negative and positive element in this struggle. Negatively, believers need to understand, identify and refute false teaching or unbiblical worldviews. Positively, they need competence in rationally supporting the truth of the gospel.¹⁰⁴ Apologetics therefore requires knowledge of false doctrine and worldviews so they can be engaged and defeated. The contest against falsehood is more than ideological; it is practical, sustained by the Spirit-empowered love evident in the lives of believers (Jude 22-23). Accordingly, the church is reminded often in this short letter that they are

¹⁰¹Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 31.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁰³Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 436.

¹⁰⁴Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 32.

beloved by God (Jude 1, 3, 17, 20). Indeed it was the fruitlessness, the barrenness of love and fleshly indulgence of the false teachers that alerted Jude to their rejection of Christ (Jude 4, 12; cf. Matt 7:15-20).¹⁰⁵ There is evident then, a relationship between remaining in the love of God and contending for the truth of the gospel.

Kept by God through contending for the faith. It is instructive that though believers are encouraged in the greeting and closing of the letter with God's power to τετηρημένοις (keep) them secure in the love of Christ, when their souls are in jeopardy, the church enters into God's keeping activity by contending for the truth of the gospel.¹⁰⁶ Jude elaborates on how this is accomplished: "But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life" (Jude 20-21). Believers keep each other in the love of God by building themselves up in their "most holy faith."¹⁰⁷ The term πίστει, "faith," connects this text to Jude 3 and likewise refers to the gospel of Jesus Christ. So believers are to keep themselves in the love of God by continuing to grow in their understanding and knowledge of the gospel.¹⁰⁸ This requisite pursuit of truth also facilitates contending for the faith, which reinforces the link intended by Jude (Jude 3, 20). Schreiner draws together the connection between a believer's apprehension of the truth and his experience of God's love by concluding,

This faith is "most holy" because it comes from the holy God, and Christian growth occurs through the mind, as believers grow in their understanding of God's word and of Christian truth. Jude did not think that growth occurred mystically or mysteriously. Instead, believers experience God's love as their understanding of the faith increases. Affection for God increases not through bypassing the mind but by

¹⁰⁵Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 440.

¹⁰⁶Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 573. The word τετηρημένοις in Jude 1 is a perfect passive participle. This indicates that believers are recipients of God's power to keep them through His action accomplished in the past with results that continue into the present.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁷Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 111. See also Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 482. The participles "building," "praying," and "waiting" constitute the means by which the imperative is accomplished. They carry the force of the imperative.

¹⁰⁸Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 482.

means of it.¹⁰⁹

Thus God sovereignly keeps believers in His love, at least in part, by means of their studied understanding of and contending for the gospel of Jesus Christ. In this it can be concluded that God uses the constituent elements of that faith. Namely, God uses rational, evidential and experiential truth, in concert with the Holy Spirit, to bear witness to the veracity of the gospel and activate faith in the heart of the believer. The heart that is freshly awakened to the reality of the love of Christ is a heart that is irresistibly drawn to and kept in that love. Therefore God graciously calls believers to the apologetic task and keeps us through it. This truth makes evident the complimentary relationship between 1 Peter 3:15 and Jude 3. Knowledge of the truth keeps us in the love of Christ, who is then sanctified in our hearts because we know His love to be supreme and supremely satisfying. It could also be concluded that understanding and identifying error is a means God uses to keep us in His love. The juxtaposition of falsehood and truth draws into sharp relief the beauty and glory of the gospel.

From this text it is apparent that the threat to the church is not physical but rather ideological. God uses the apologetic task to protect the church from the danger of embracing wrong ideologies. Contending for the faith by understanding, identifying and refuting false teaching, as well as by rationally supporting the truth of the gospel, would protect the church from apostasy and would keep them in the love of Christ. This threat can be clandestine and subversive, as in the church Jude addressed, or it can be inadvertent, the result of a church member unwittingly adopting an unbiblical worldview. In any case, unbiblical worldviews pose a potentially mortal threat to the church by undermining faith in the truth of the gospel. Therefore in the apologetic task believers are to be dependent on the power of God by continually “praying in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 20).

¹⁰⁹Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 482-83.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5: Destroying Strongholds of False Belief

The apostle Paul, like Jude, was confronting a dangerous element within the church. In 2 Corinthians 10, Paul addresses a rebellious group within the Corinthian church that not only rejected his authority as an apostle, but the gospel as well.¹¹⁰ This group had been led astray by “false apostles” whose deceit was in accord with the work of Satan, who “disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor 11:13, 14). These false apostles had proclaimed “another Jesus” and a “different gospel” than the church had received, and this element within the church was allowing it (2 Cor 11:4).

The call to warfare. In describing the response to false teaching that ought to characterize believers, Paul uses *στρατείας*, a military term meaning “warfare,” as a metaphor for the spiritual battle that must be waged against false teaching (2 Cor 10:4). The apostle affirms that “though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor 10:3-5). In this martial allusion Paul is depicting siege warfare against an *ὄχυρωμάτων*, or fortress with towering ramparts.¹¹¹ Paul is leading the assault on this fortified prison to extract those held captive within (cf. Gen 39:20 LXX).¹¹² The identity of the “strongholds” (*ὄχυρωμάτων*) as “arguments (*λογισμοὺς*) and every lofty opinion” is evident by Paul’s use of cognates (*καθαίρεσις, καθαιρέω*), both translated “destroy” by the ESV (2 Cor

¹¹⁰C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1973), 245.

¹¹¹Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 463. See also George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 472. According to Guthrie, because of the presence of Roman troops throughout the empire, allusions to warfare were popular among the philosophers and orators to describe their contest with ideological opponents.

¹¹²Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 474.

10:4b, 5a). These cognates bookend ὀχυρωμάτων and λογισμοὺς, which are juxtaposed to reinforce their identity. In this Paul creates a chiasmic parallelism that explicitly communicates the meaning of the metaphor—the strongholds that must be torn down are ideological.

The captivating power of false ideologies. The word λογισμός refers to reasoning, thoughts or judgments that are hostile to the Christian worldview.¹¹³ This can apply to the full spectrum of intellectual “arguments” devised by men, and erected like lofty bulwarks in self-exalted defiance to the true “knowledge of God” revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 10:5; cf. Isa 2:11-22).¹¹⁴ The structured nature of these “arguments” in the context “shows that Paul is not here interested so much in disciplining the individual’s private thought life (though that certainly concerns him elsewhere) as in bringing into obedience to Christ every thought structure, every worldview, that presents opposition to his beloved Master.”¹¹⁵ It can be observed that wrong worldviews have the satanically derived power to hold captive the hearts of men (2 Cor 11:13-15). Thoughts are developed and constructed in such a way that they form a deceptive fortress, buttressed by the blinding sins of pride and idolatry. The significance of the mind in spiritual battle is apparent in Paul’s observations that Satan seeks to outwit believers with his “designs” (2:11), the “minds” of the Israelites were hardened when reading the old covenant (3:14), “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers” (4:4), just as “the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning [the Corinthians’] thoughts [would] be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (11:3). Thus the war we are to engage in is a battle for truth waged in the minds of men. As Guthrie observes, “Clearly Paul sees the mind as a spiritual battleground.”¹¹⁶

¹¹³Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*, 380.

¹¹⁴David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 436.

¹¹⁵Carson, *Telling the Truth*, 397.

¹¹⁶Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 475.

The power of false worldviews to captivate the thoughts of men is a common theme in the Pauline corpus. For example, in a parallel passage Paul issues a stern warning to the church at Colossae: “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col 2:8). Again, Paul uses a striking metaphor to convey his point that worldly philosophy had the power to “carry them away from the truth into the slavery of error.”¹¹⁷ Therefore they were to beware these deceptive philosophies because they are empty—void of truth. Paul contrasts empty worldviews with “all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge . . . [and in whom] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col 2:2-3, 9). Paul likewise instructs Timothy to correct “his opponents with gentleness, [because] God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the *truth* (emphasis mine), and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being *captured* (emphasis mine) by him to do his will” (2 Tim 2:25-26).

The gospel and spiritual warfare. Falsehood distorts and captivates the mind of unbelievers and believers alike, blinding them to the truth (2 Cor 4:3-4; 2 Pet 1:9). Thus, to tear down the fortified walls of false worldviews, a siege engine of divine power is needed. Though Paul does not specify in the text the spiritual weapon he intends, it is doubtless from the broader context he has in mind the truth of the gospel, and by extension the entirety of divine revelation that finds its climax in the cross of Christ (1 Cor 1:18, 23-24; 2:5; 2 Cor 3:18; 4:4-6; 6:7; see also Rom 1:16; Eph 6:17).¹¹⁸ Because the mind of believers is the target of satanic assault in the form of seductive falsehood, the battle must be fought with the truth (2 Cor 2:11; 3:14; 4:4; 11:3). Believers are set free

¹¹⁷Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 109.

¹¹⁸Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 435. See also Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*; Frank J. Matera, *II Corinthians*, The New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

from their captivity to the Devil's lies by taking "every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor 10:5; cf. 2:14).

Two-stage battle strategy. This text has clarified the apologetic task by providing a two-stage battle strategy. The first stage is to demolish false worldviews and ideologies that hold men captive (2 Cor 10:5; cf. Prov 21:22). This entails preparation to rationally deconstruct and disprove opposing worldviews. An aggressive assault on false worldviews dictates understanding those views in order to expose their fatal inconsistencies and contradictions. When these fractures are attacked the structure will be reduced to ruins, rendering it defenseless and its forces vulnerable. Having neutralized the defenses by dismantling opposing arguments, the second stage is to take "every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor 10:5). Believers need to be able to employ scriptural reason and evidence to support their belief in the truth of the gospel so they can capture for Christ those whose foundations have just been destroyed. As evident in the previous passages discussed, this mission is aided by a Spirit-empowered life that confirms the truth of the gospel and reveals the satanic nature of the opposition (2 Cor 1:8-11; 2:17; 3:2-3; 4:1-6; 5:11-12; 11:2).¹¹⁹ Accomplishing stage two of the battle plan entails disciplined study of truth. Foremost in this, the Word of God must be studied in order to anchor one's mind in the truth, develop the discernment needed to identify falsehood, and effectively apply the truths of the gospel to one's own life context as well as the unique life contexts of others. Additionally, because all truth or reality is from God, a studied knowledge of general revelation confirms the veracity of the Christian worldview not only because God's world corresponds flawlessly to God's Word, but also because on every level of the created order its unity and diversity reflect the triune glory of God. Paul typifies both the preparation and execution of this two-stage battle strategy

¹¹⁹Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 396.

in his address to the Areopagus (Acts 17:22-31).

This text has also reinforced the call to the apologetic task by emphasizing the arena of the human mind. Satan enters that arena with devastating effect by wielding false ideologies to subdue and imprison believers. Believers need to recognize this fact: the human mind is Satan's chosen theater of operations—there is a critical need to be vigilant in guarding our minds from false worldviews with the truth of the gospel (2 Cor 10:5; cf. Prov 4:23; Rom 12:2).

Conclusion

In summary, the New Testament provides a strong mandate for apologetics. God sovereignly uses a prepared defense of the gospel to cultivate within the heart of believers a growing faith in the truth of the gospel. The believer's renewed faith sanctifies Christ in the heart and produces a love for Him that is manifested in a growing love for both the church and the world; this is a powerful witness to the lost. In the same way, contending for the truth of the gospel protects the church from the danger of heresy and keeps believers in the love of Christ. The study of Christian apologetics, which first and foremost entails the study of Scripture, enables believers to destroy the strongholds of false worldviews, extricate ourselves and others from their blinding bulwarks, and bring every thought captive to Christ.

The next chapter will address the concept of worldviews. Attention will be given to the decline of the Christian worldview in America and its consequences, and will conclude by expounding the superior explanatory power of the Christian worldview. But the biblical mandate for apologetics discussed in this chapter begs the question: how can false ideas have such captivating power, even over believers? To answer this question and to benefit fully from the discussion that follows, it is necessary to begin by gaining an understanding of the meaning, nature and influence of worldviews.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL FOUNDATION
FOR TEACHING CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

Understanding Worldviews

A worldview in succinct terms refers to one's view of the world. This is not a physical view of the world but rather a theological and metaphysical view that encompasses not only the physical world but all of reality.¹ It consists of one's presuppositions, or foundational beliefs about reality, that form a kind of perceptual lens or interpretational grid through which all of life and reality is understood.²

Worldview: The Framework for Understanding Reality

Therefore worldviews are not merely theoretical; the basic human capacity of reason is dependent on the framework a worldview provides. The Enlightenment's notion that man's reason could be autonomous—unshackled from the bias of his presuppositions—is untenable:

Those who boast of a scientific neutrality in these wide psychological issues are not to be respected so much for their objectivity as suspected for their naiveté. They might claim freedom from philosophical bias in their study of human life and nature, but they in fact work from an impoverished philosophy, adopted unconsciously or uncritically. This philosophy then inevitably affects the shape of their thought whether they are aware of it or not.³

The mind cannot be stripped of all prior metaphysical assumptions. Instead, “we always process data in light of some theoretical framework that we have adopted for

¹James N. Anderson, *What's Your Worldview? An Interactive Approach to Life's Big Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 12.

²Norman L. Geisler and William D. Watkins, *Worlds Apart* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 11.

³Dick Keyes, *Beyond Identity* (n.p.: Destinee, 2012), 5.

understanding the world. . . .The important question, then, is what a person accepts as ultimate premises, for they shape everything that follows.”⁴As Sire has observed, “Whenever any of us thinks about anything, from a casual thought (*Where did I leave my watch?*), to a profound question (*Who am I?*), we are operating within such a framework. In fact, it is only the assumption of a worldview, however basic or simple, that allows us to think at all.”⁵ Consequently all people have a worldview, whether they are conscious of it or not.⁶

This is the case because “a worldview is a matter of the shared everyday experience of humankind, an inescapable component of all human knowing, and as such it is . . . prescientific.” It is “a pre-theoretical perspective on the world.”⁷ Man’s immediate experience of life provides him with an intuitive awareness of self-evident truths such as the reality of the external world, the existence of real moral categories, an awareness of one’s self-identity, the laws of logic, and others. A worldview must adequately explain the pre-theoretical truth of human experience and not deny the reality of those elements that do not fit their system of belief.⁸

Worldview: The Foundational Faith Commitment

In addition to worldviews providing a structured, cohesive framework for life, it is crucial to underscore that the beliefs comprising a worldview are presuppositions or foundational beliefs, meaning they are beliefs concerning metaphysical realities that must be accepted by faith.⁹ A worldview’s presuppositions identify its first Cause, or what it

⁴Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 41.

⁵James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 19.

⁶James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 21.

⁷Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basis for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 10.

⁸Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 312.

⁹Sire, *Naming the Elephant*, 32.

views as prime reality. For example the question, “Where did we come from?” deals with cosmology and as such cannot be answered in any definitive sense. The way a worldview answers ultimate questions such as this one exposes its basic presuppositions, which are by definition religious. In this regard, Pearcey insists,

Every system of thought begins with some ultimate principle. If it does not begin with God, it will begin with some dimension of creation—the material, the spiritual, the biological, the empirical, or whatever. Some aspect of created reality will be “absolutized” or put forth as the ground and source of everything else—the uncaused cause, the self-existent. To use religious language, this ultimate principle functions as the divine, if we define that term to mean the one thing upon which all else depends for existence. This starting assumption has to be accepted by faith, not by prior reasoning.¹⁰

Therefore, both the materialist and the Christian employ reason *and* faith in accepting their worldview. The materialist relies on faith as does the Christian, but his faith is in the ultimacy of matter rather than God. The Christian is rational in his belief, but his reason, like that of the materialist, functions within the context of his worldview presuppositions. Grasping the metaphysical nature of worldview presuppositions erases the erroneous distinction between religious and nonreligious worldviews—all worldviews require faith, and “in this sense, we could say that every alternative to Christianity is a religion.”¹¹

Worldviews: Alternative Universes

There are a variety of worldviews, many of which conceive of reality in fundamentally different ways. Because of their comprehensive nature, “they propose alternative universes.”¹² To cite two such alternatives, either the universe is the creation of a transcendent, personal God and inherently meaningful, or it is the random

¹⁰Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 41.

¹¹Ibid. In stating that all worldviews are religious it is not meant to suggest that all worldview formulations posit a supreme being or affirm physical/spiritual dualism. But all worldviews presuppose the nature of ultimate reality. This presupposition constitutes an *a priori* commitment that is not empirically or historically verifiable. Therefore all worldviews are religious because their entire system is built upon theoretical assumptions that must be accepted by faith.

¹²Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 16.

configuration of matter and intrinsically meaningless. Each of these worldviews makes a comprehensive and exclusive claim about the nature of the universe and all reality. The laws of logic such as the laws of noncontradiction and the excluded middle are indispensable in analyzing worldview claims because they force us to recognize that both of these contradictory options cannot be true.

Worldview: The Basis of Life's Purpose

Notice also that one's worldview determines one's purpose and accordingly his direction in life. This is because a person's fundamental perspective of the world shapes the way he (or she) lives.¹³ Adherence to a particular worldview involves not only intellectual assent to its tenets, but a corresponding faith commitment that has implications for all of life. Along this vein, James Sire offers a helpful definition of worldview:

A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.¹⁴

It is evident then, that a worldview cannot be dismissed as irrelevant to life. On the contrary, it functions as the heart's controlling orientation by which all people comprehend and shape their lives; this in part explains why false worldviews have the power to hold even believers captive, as discussed in chapter two. A useful way to illustrate the controlling influence of a worldview is with a pair of glasses—like a worldview, one does not look at glasses but through them to see everything else.¹⁵ One's prescription determines how he sees the world. If he has the wrong prescription he does not see the world as it really is; his view is distorted.¹⁶ For example, the worldview lens

¹³Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 16.

¹⁴Sire, *Naming the Elephant*, 122.

¹⁵Anderson, *What's Your Worldview?*, 13.

¹⁶John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 39. Calvin here uses the function of glasses to illustrate the power of Scripture in aiding us to perceive God clearly:

of naturalism prescribes the world to be the product of random, chance, material processes. So when one views the world with that prescription, the ubiquitous design manifest in nature is obscured; his worldview does not allow for the possibility of design because it has an *a priori* commitment to naturalistic causation. Thus, one only sees “apparent” design.

A worldview informs the daily thoughts, decisions and actions of its adherents. This is true because what people ultimately believe about reality shapes their values, and their values in turn determine their actions. A map illustrates this function of worldviews effectively: a map locates a person in the world and determines his direction in it.¹⁷ These two illustrations communicate the power of worldviews—they are *the* foundational influence in how people see the world, and their place and direction in it. However, one’s stated beliefs may not be one’s true beliefs. In most cases, one’s true worldview is reflected in one’s lifestyle. There are many reasons for this disparity. In any case, one of the tests of the truth of a worldview is if it is livable—if its adherents can consistently live out the implications of their beliefs in their daily lives.¹⁸ Christians are not immune to this hypocrisy; they can live in a manner that is inconsistent with the Christian worldview they profess. However, this point does not necessarily refute the truth of Christian theism but can in fact, support it. The Bible presents history as a cosmic battle being waged for the hearts of men. This is the danger addressed in chapter two—because of the sin nature, satanically inspired lies are alluring to believers and they can become casualties of this battle, captured and molded to varying degrees by false worldviews.

“As the elderly, or those with poor sight, can hardly make out the words in a book, but with the help of glasses can read clearly, so Scripture crystallizes ideas about God which had been very confused, scatters the darkness and shows us the true God clearly” (*Inst.*, 1.6.1).

¹⁷Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 5.

¹⁸Douglas R. Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 52-59. Groothuis provides eight objective criteria for worldview evaluation. The truth of a worldview is supported if it: explains what it proposes to explain, has internal logical consistency, has coherence, is factually accurate, is existentially viable, leads to intellectual and cultural fecundity, does not alter its essential claims in light of counterevidence, does not appeal to extraneous entities or be more complex than is required to explain what it proposes to establish.

This captivating influence poses a threat to the spiritual life of believers, both individually and corporately, and stifles their witness to the lost.

Therefore it is vital that churches equip their members to understand the significance of worldviews, discern false worldviews through cultural analysis, and grow in their knowledge of the Christian worldview. Having laid the necessary groundwork of the meaning and import of worldviews, attention will now be turned to the impact of false worldviews. The argument will be put forth that the decline of the Christian worldview has had devastating consequences for both the church and the culture, and necessitates training in worldviews and apologetics.

The Church Held Captive

The apologetic mandate is as relevant for believers today as it was for the first century church.¹⁹ Though some of the particulars have changed, we live under the same pressure from our multicultural pantheon that exalts the worship of idolatrous worldviews and threatens the life of the church. Indeed, elements of false worldviews have crept into the church and taken it captive. For example, ideas from secular humanism such as the exaltation of man and the hedonistic focus on fulfillment in this life are apparent in prosperity theology. Prosperity theology is pervasive in American Christianity and emphasizes personal empowerment to obtain the material blessings of God in this life; this is analogous to the humanistic concept of self-actualization. In this way the church mirrors the humanism and attendant materialism that dominates Western culture. Rather than God Himself being our chief source of joy, object of worship and fount of blessing, He is merely a means to obtain the things of this world. In prosperity theology God is not

¹⁹Douglas J. Moo, *2 Peter, and Jude*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 231. Though we are separated from the New Testament authors by two thousand years, there are many similarities between the influences shaping the first-century church and those shaping the twenty-first century church. Moo sheds light on this reality by explaining that “the New Testament authors grew up in a ‘multicultural’ environment. Most were Jews, deeply influenced by the Old Testament and Jewish tradition. Yet they were also citizens of a larger Greco-Roman world, a world formed by the traditions of Greek Philosophy and literature and by Roman legal concepts.” Unbiblical worldviews and religious pluralism exerted tremendous pressure on the early church; the same is true for the church today.

denied per se, but is relegated to the role of man's servant. However, this in effect is a denial of God as He has revealed Himself, in favor of a god of their own making; this perpetuates within the church the treacherous exchange of worship that estranged man from his Creator and brought the devastation of sin and death into the world (Gen 3; cf. Rom 1:18-25).

Submitting to the apologetic mandate is essential for believers because the contagion of false teaching in the church is pervasive and has many strains. Theological liberalism, laden with a naturalistic bias, posits a human origin of Scripture, denying its Divine source and with it a host of fundamental doctrines such as the deity of Christ and the blood atonement.²⁰ Existentialism within the church has replaced the orthodox Christian view of truth as objective and theocentric, with an anthropocentric view that recognizes subjective experience as determinative of truth. This nebulous view has been sanctioned within the church by the emergent church movement.²¹ Liberation theology has reduced the gospel to economic and social causes.²² The seeker-sensitive movement relies on strategic marketing strategies to design services based on the perceived needs and wants of the unchurched; consequently many churches have adopted a celebrity model of leadership that appeals to unbelievers and believers alike, who pack megachurches to gaze at their own glory reflected on stage.²³ This consumer driven approach has replaced scriptural ecclesiology with a business model, and the offense of the gospel with palatable entertainment. All of these examples diminish the worship of

²⁰For a thorough analysis of American liberal theology, see Gary J. Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

²¹A skillful and detailed theological assessment of the emergent church movement is provided by D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005). Another helpful and engaging resource is the following: Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We're Not Emergent: By Two Guys Who Should Be* (Chicago: Moody, 2008).

²²This resource offers a useful survey and critique of liberation theology: Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *20th Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992).

²³For a pointed appraisal of the pragmatism of the seeker sensitive movement, refer to John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

God in their theology, polity or practice and contribute to an “atomistic view of the church as merely a collection of individuals who happen to believe the same things;”²⁴ These distortions constitute an assault on the orthodox Christian faith and illustrate not only the way the church reflects the worldly values and ideologies of the culture, but also the importance of developing a robust understanding of the place the intellect in the life of the church and the development and maintenance of faith (Eph 4:11-14).

Unfortunately, examples of false doctrine could be multiplied. Nevertheless, false teaching within the church finds its source in false worldviews. The examples above find their roots in humanism, naturalism, postmodernism, Marxism and pragmatism respectively. The point of convergence of false worldviews is the spirit of antichrist—the denial of the full messianic identity of Jesus of Nazareth, including both His person and work (1 John 2:22), as well as His matchless glory and authority in the lives of believers. Guthrie’s concern over this syncretism within the church is obvious as he warns,

The church in the West stands under the most grave attacks in terms of spiritual warfare, an attack in some ways worse than the physical and social persecution faced by our brothers and sisters around the world. False gospels offered by false teachers thrive in a context of biblical and theological illiteracy. Paul understood what was at stake for the church. The question is, Do we?²⁵

This concern is well founded. Many believers across America and the world have embraced unbiblical worldviews both via culture and the church without even realizing it. Researchers have concluded that “we cannot really call the faith of American Christians a Bible-based faith. It is a synthetic, syncretic faith.”²⁶ As in all idolatry, the church’s likeness reveals the objects of its worship and its satanic origin.²⁷

²⁴Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 292.

²⁵George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 477.

²⁶George Barna and Mark Hatch, *Boiling Point: It Only Takes One Degree* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2001), 187.

²⁷G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 16.

Historical Perspective: The Subjugation of the Christian Mind

In the past, theological education happened within the family unit. Beliefs and values were transmitted through parental training in the natural course of doing life together as a family, and by extension as a church. From the arrival of the Pilgrims to the middle of the nineteenth century, American believers valued an intellectually informed faith.²⁸ They largely sought to be consistent in their thinking, and tried to apply the Bible's teaching to all areas of life.²⁹ Life was practical theology—values and behavior were driven by theological truth. Opinions about current events and cultural change were formulated within the family and church by judging them against the standard of Scripture. Thus, culture in past generations was the creation of the biblically informed family unit. This is no longer the case. Generally speaking, the church has “failed to transmit our religious culture to the next generation.”³⁰ Today cultural values are generated by the ruling cultural ideologues and are instantly downloaded to individuals worldwide through smartphone technology. Power centers of society such as government, the public school system, the film industry, television and radio conglomerates, and the retail and advertising industry wield their influence to advance ideologies and values antagonistic to the Christian worldview. Thus with one accord they function to displace the authority of Scripture and the role of the church and home to convey morals and values.

To compound the problem, in response to ideological challenges to the Christian faith in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the church withdrew and

²⁸James Porter Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2012), loc. 148, Kindle. Moreland argues this point by observing that “the Puritans were highly educated people (the literacy rate for men in early Massachusetts and Connecticut was between 89 and 95 percent) who founded colleges, taught their children to read and write before the age of six, and studied art, science, philosophy, and other fields as a way of loving God with the mind. Scholars like Jonathan Edwards were activists who sought to be scholarly and well informed in a variety of disciplines. The minister was an intellectual, as well as spiritual, authority in the community. As Puritan Cotton Mather proclaimed, ‘Ignorance is the Mother not of Devotion but of HERESY.’”

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Gary M. Burge, “The Greatest Story Never Read: Recovering Biblical Literacy in the Church,” *Christianity Today*, August 9, 1999, 48.

assumed an anti-intellectual stance that continues to pervade much of Christendom; this response essentially privatized faith. Reason and evidence began to be conceived of as being at odds with faith rather than the basis of it. Reeling from modernist attacks, the church retreated from its God-given role as salt and light in society (Matt 5:13-14).³¹ Consequently the Christian worldview, once dominant, is no longer viewed as a legitimate option in the marketplace of ideas, and has been all but banished from public policy decisions. In its place reign the dominant cultural ideologies of naturalism and postmodernism.³²

Casualty of Captivity: The Relativizing of the Christian Sexual Ethic

The abdication of the church in this regard has had disastrous consequences for American culture. The church has since regained its intellectual footing and has produced world class scholars in philosophy, the sciences, and theology that champion the rationality of the Christian worldview with great success. Nevertheless, competing ideologies are entrenched in society and continue to control the narrative of the country. A quarter of a century ago, James Dobson warned that “nothing short of a great Civil War of Values rages today throughout North America. Two sides with vastly differing and incompatible worldviews are locked in a bitter conflict that permeates every level of society . . . the struggle now is for the hearts and minds of the people. It is a war over ideas . . . and the outcome is very much in doubt.”³³ Twenty-five years later Mohler

³¹Burge, “The Greatest Story Never Read,” 48. These intellectual challenges corresponded to wide-spread evangelism in the nineteenth century that emphasized the personal nature of faith. The church, with this massive influx of new believers, was incapable of dealing with these new challenges and so began to withdraw their cultural influence. For a classic historical analysis of the Fundamentalist movement, see George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). For an incisive historical critique of evangelical anti-intellectualism, see Mark A. Noll, *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1994), 3. Here in the opening words of the book he states flatly, “The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind Despite dynamic success at a popular level, modern American evangelicals have failed notably in sustaining serious intellectual life. They have nourished millions of believers in the simple verities of the gospel but have largely abandoned the universities, the arts, and the other realms of ‘high’ culture.”

³²The Secular Humanist worldview is built on epistemological naturalism which is the basis of its atheistic theology.

³³James C. Dobson and Gary L. Bauer, *Children at Risk: The Battle for the Hearts and Minds*

reiterates this martial allusion, likening our cultural landscape to a battlefield which on one front is waging a moral “revolution that is sweeping away a sexual morality and a definition of marriage that has existed for thousands of years.”³⁴

This battlefield in particular has been the focus of the enemy’s attacks and is illustrative of the moral decay of our culture. The denial of the biblical morality of marriage has led to the breakdown of the family. This is apparent in the oft quoted statistic that almost half of all marriages end in divorce.³⁵ Divorce was unthinkable throughout much of church history, but the philosophy of naturalism produced new values of sexual liberation that loosened legal restrictions on divorce.³⁶ Consequently the divorce rate has almost doubled since 1960.³⁷ In the same period of time the percentage of married adults in America dropped from 72 percent to only 50 percent.³⁸ Shockingly, research has found that Christian couples are just as likely to divorce as non-Christians.³⁹ As a corollary Keller cites that “in 1970, 89 percent of all births were to married parents, but today only 60 percent are.”⁴⁰ Consequently children are growing up with the pain and hardship of living in a single-parent home. The rejection of the biblical view of marriage and family removes a God-given safeguard to children’s well-being by neutralizing the influence of the home as God designed it. The emotional pain of being rejected or abandoned by a parent is overwhelming and in many cases ruinous; this in turn reinforces

of Our Kids (Dallas: Word, 1990), 19-20.

³⁴R. Albert Mohler, *We Cannot Be Silent: Speaking Truth to a Culture Redefining Sex, Marriage, and the Very Meaning of Right and Wrong* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015), xiii.

³⁵Timothy Keller and Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God* (New York: Dutton, 2011), 16.

³⁶Mohler, *We Cannot be Silent*, 22.

³⁷Keller and Keller, *Meaning of Marriage*, 14.

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹Barna Group, “Born-again Christians Just as Likely to Divorce as are Non-Christians,” Barna Group, September 2004, accessed March 30, 2016, <https://www.barna.org/component/content/article/5-barna-update/45-barna-update-sp-657/194-born-again-christians-just-as-likely-to-divorce-as-are-non-christians#.Vvwz83o4hyc>.

⁴⁰Keller and Keller, *Meaning of Marriage*, 14.

the strength of the world's grip on the lives of our children and perpetuates the breakdown of the family and hence the erosion of society.

The crumbling of the biblical foundation of marriage triggered a landslide of radical change away from biblical views on human sexuality. One generation saw a reversal of public opinion on the morality of an astounding array of sexual issues including fornication, birth control, abortion, cohabitation, same sex marriage, pornography and transgenderism.⁴¹ The speed of this change is staggering. Mohler observes,

In the United States, the twentieth century began with laws in place in virtually every community that criminalized forms of sexual behavior considered aberrant. These communities also recognized marriage between a man and a woman as the only proper context for sexual behavior, procreation, and the raising of children. Fast-forward to the end of the twentieth century, and pornography is so pervasive that it is just a click away from the nearest computer screen. The legal definition of obscenity is now almost impossible to violate, and the local newsstand offers sexually explicit material in the form of mainstream entertainment. Legal codes have been redefined so that the only operational issue in the criminalization of sexual behavior is the element of consent. In the main, the decriminalization of what had been considered aberrant sexual behaviors was virtually complete by the first years of the twenty-first century.⁴²

Amazingly, teenagers and young adults in America think that not recycling is more immoral than viewing pornography!⁴³ Where do Christians stand regarding these changes? To cite one example, in June of 2015 the U. S. Supreme Court declared same sex marriage legal in all 50 states. According to a national study by the Barna Research Group, 35 percent of practicing Christians agree with the Supreme Court ruling as well as 73 percent of non-practicing Christians.⁴⁴ These findings make it apparent that the views of the church regarding sexual morality are being informed by the false narratives of

⁴¹Mohler, *We Cannot be Silent*, 10-11.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 10.

⁴³Barna Group, "Teens and Young Adults Use Porn More Than Anyone Else," Barna Group, January 2016, accessed April 2, 2016, <https://www.barna.org/research/culture-media/research-release/teens-young-adults-use-porn-more-than-anyone-else#.VwBkl3o4hyc>.

⁴⁴Barna Group, "Year in Review: Barna's Top Ten Findings in 2015," Barna Group, December 2015, accessed April 2, 2016, <https://www.barna.org/research/culture-media/article/year-in-review-2015#.VwBh3o4hyc>.

society rather than by Scripture.

The discussion of the disintegrating sexual ethic within the church demonstrates that the moral relativism characteristic of Western civilization is mirrored in the church. In addition to the issue of sexual morality discussed above, a host of other moral indicators such as the rates of domestic abuse, credit card debt and substance abuse could be employed to further illustrate the fact that no manifest difference exists between the lifestyle of those within the church and the population in general.⁴⁵ Thus, these are not just harmless, irrelevant ideas; believing the lie can have devastating consequences for families, churches and society. Because moral values are determined by one's worldview, this provides further evidence that the church, to varying degrees, is being held captive by false worldviews. Research bears this out.

Casualty of Captivity: The Secularization of Christian Belief

Studies indicate that of those claiming to be born-again Christians in America, only 9 percent of adults and 2 percent of teenagers possessed a Christian worldview.⁴⁶ Meaning, they responded to key theological, religious, moral, and social issues as a secularist. A sampling of specific questions reveals that less than half of the born-again Christians in America believe in absolute truth, only 40 percent believe that Satan is real, over half believe that salvation can be earned by works, and just under 40 percent believe that Jesus did not live a sinless life.⁴⁷ The incredible implication of this last statistic is that “literally millions of Americans who declare themselves to be Christians contend that Jesus was just like the rest of us when it comes to temptation—fallen, guilty, impure, and

⁴⁵Philip Graham Ryken, *Christian Worldview: A Student's Guide* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 31.

⁴⁶George Barna, *Think Like Jesus: Make the Right Decision Every Time* (Nashville: Integrity, 2003), 23.

⁴⁷Barna Group, “Barna Survey Examines Changes in Worldview among Christians Over the Past 13 Years,” Barna Group, March 2009, accessed April 2, 2016, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/transformation/252-barna-survey-examines-changes-in-worldview-among-christians-over-the-past-13-years#.VwBt73o4hyc>.

Himself in need of a savior.”⁴⁸

These erroneous beliefs are indicative of widespread biblical illiteracy, which Professor Gary Burge of Wheaton College believes has reached a crisis level. Burge bases this view on annual testing of incoming freshmen. These students, who have come from all major Protestant denominations and all 50 states, are tested on their biblical and theological knowledge. Burge found that though these students were reared in Christian homes and attended church all their lives, a large percentage were ignorant of elementary Bible facts.⁴⁹ Others have confirmed Burge’s findings. The renowned Yale theologian George Lindbeck laments, “When I first arrived at Yale, even those who came from nonreligious backgrounds knew the Bible better than most of those now who come from churchgoing families.”⁵⁰ Theologian David Wells adds his voice of warning to the church: “I have watched with growing disbelief as the evangelical church has cheerfully plunged into astounding theological illiteracy.”⁵¹

Biblical and theological illiteracy starves the church of the bread of life, draining it of discernment. This renders the church incredibly vulnerable to false worldviews. The consequence, according to Barna and Hatch is that “the average born-again, baptized, churchgoing person has embraced elements of Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, Mormonism, Scientology, Unitarianism and Christian Science—without any idea they have just created their own faith.”⁵² In addition to the eternal implications

⁴⁸Barna Group, “Religious Beliefs Vary Widely by Denomination,” Barna Group, June 2001, accessed April 7, 2016, <https://www.barna.org/component/content/article/5-barna-update/45-barna-update-sp-657/53-religious-beliefs-vary-widely-by-denomination#.Vwbk2Ho4hyc>.

⁴⁹Burge, “The Greatest Story Never Read,” 45. Burge cites these examples: one-third could not put the following in order: Abraham, the Old Testament prophets, the death of Christ, and Pentecost; half could not sequence the following: Moses in Egypt, Isaac’s birth, Saul’s death, and Judah’s exile; one-third could not identify Matthew as an apostle from a list of New Testament names; when asked to locate the biblical book supplying a given story, one-third could not find Paul’s travels in Acts, half did not know that the Christmas story was in Matthew, and half did not know that the Passover story was in Exodus.

⁵⁰George A. Lindbeck, “The Church’s Mission to a Postmodern Culture,” in *Postmodern Theology: Christian Faith in a Pluralist World*, ed. Frederic B. Burnham (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 45.

⁵¹David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 4.

⁵²Barna and Hatch, *Boiling Point*, 187.

of idolatrous false teaching, the statistics above demonstrate the spiritual, social and moral destruction wrought by these ideas as they spread like shock waves through all the institutions of society.

The ideological “murder” of God in American culture has caused incalculable devastation; we are still plummeting in every direction amid the chaos of having “unchained this earth from its sun.”⁵³ Many churches, paradoxically, have become the “tombs and sepulchers of God.”⁵⁴ Mohler concludes that “none of this [moral and social devastation] would have been possible if Christianity had maintained a vital voice and the ability to speak prophetically to the larger culture.”⁵⁵ To that end, “if Christians are going to carry this life-giving message to the world, we must first understand it and live it ourselves. We must understand that God’s revelation is the source of *all* truth, a comprehensive framework for all of reality.”⁵⁶ The study of worldviews and apologetics will serve the church by restoring to the Christian faith the rightful place of the intellect, thus enabling believers to love God with all of their minds. This will ultimately serve the world by empowering believers to become that bold prophetic voice so desperately needed, and thereby push back the devastating effects of darkness with the light of truth.

This section has addressed the destructive effects of false worldviews on society in general and the church in particular. The church to a large extent has not taken seriously the biblical mandate to earnestly study and defend the Christian faith. Consequently it has struggled with the sin of unbelief in the face of competing ideologies that dominate American culture. Frame has defined apologetics as “the application of Scripture to unbelief;”⁵⁷ this includes unbelief both outside the doors of the church and

⁵³Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. and comm. Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), 181.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁵Mohler, *We Cannot be Silent*, 13.

⁵⁶Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1999), xi.

⁵⁷John M. Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*, ed. Joseph E. Torres, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015), 1.

within. Therefore, apologetics training is needed to counter the dominant cultural ideologies that undermine belief in the veracity of the Christian worldview. The next section provides a brief overview of the Christian worldview using the lens of the biblical storyline. In so doing it will be argued that only the Christian worldview successfully explains the enigma of human existence.

The Gospel: The Superior Worldview

At His trial, Jesus told Pilate that the purpose for which He came into the world was “to bear witness to the truth” (John 18:37). In saying this, Christ was not referring simply to the truth about disconnected facts, but the truth of His kingdom which encompasses all of reality and is encapsulated in the gospel.

The Gospel as Comprehensive Truth

Unlike Postmodernism, which holds the self-defeating view that the only universal truth is that there are no universal truths, the Christian worldview sourced in Scripture is a metanarrative—there is no part of creation that the story does not explain. The grand narrative of Scripture centers on the gospel of Jesus Christ; in this story believers locate their lives, and through this story they understand themselves and everything else. “A Christian worldview is not built on two types of truth (religious and philosophical or scientific) but on a universal principle and all-embracing system that shapes religion, natural and social sciences, law, history, health care, the arts, the humanities, and all disciplines of study with application for all of life.”⁵⁸ Colson argues that “the church’s singular failure in recent decades has been the failure to see Christianity as a life system, or worldview that governs every area of existence.”⁵⁹ This

⁵⁸David S. Dockery and Gregory Alan Thornbury, eds., *Shaping a Christian Worldview: The Foundations of Christian Higher Education* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2002), 2.

⁵⁹Colson and Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live*, xii. Colson argues that this failure is evident in our inability to: answer the questions our children bring home from school; prepare them for the challenges of false worldviews; provide a rational defense of our faith to our neighbors; have all aspects of our lives shaped by the Christian worldview; and see the depth of God’s beauty in all of the created order.

failure has crippled the church’s redemptive impact on the surrounding culture.⁶⁰ So it is imperative that believers understand that the gospel is a worldview—it is comprehensive—it is a view on all of reality and addresses all aspects of life. However, it must be emphasized that this universal principle and all-embracing system find their origin in God’s creative law, and thus cannot be divorced from their Source, the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 4:21). The universal truths of reality are rooted in the Person of the triune God; this is a point of paramount significance and provides the basis of the Christian view of reality.

In His conversation with Pilate, Jesus said, “Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice” (John 18:37). Jesus is not a relativist—He draws a line in the sand. Those who listen to, believe in, and live out the word of God are “of the truth”; they belong to Christ who is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Jesus does not support the notion of religious pluralism. Truth is not provincial or personal as in postmodernism or humanism but is objective—truth is what corresponds to reality, which is sourced and centered in Jesus Christ Himself.

Worldview and Worship

All people have a spiritual orientation that hinges on their acceptance or rejection of Jesus Christ. They are either worshipping the true God or something in the created order (Rom 1:25). “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 upon which to base their lives.”⁶¹ Accordingly, all people are either interpreting reality and ordering their lives based on the truth of Scripture or based on some other worldview perspective.⁶²

The connection between worldviews and worship is manifest in that all false

⁶⁰Colson and Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live*, xii.

⁶¹Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 40.

⁶²*Ibid.*

worship began with believing the lie propagated in the garden (Gen 3:1-7). Even atheists understand the central place that worship occupies in the lives of all people, and its consequences. Regarding this an influential secular novelist keenly observes,

There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And the compelling reason for maybe choosing some sort of god or spiritual-type thing to worship . . . is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. . . . But the insidious thing about these forms of worship is . . . they're unconscious. They are default settings.⁶³

The human inclination to worship supports the truth of the biblical worldview because man was created to worship God. Worship that is directed toward some aspect of creation instead of God is identified in the Bible as idolatry. The universal nature of idolatry is a core principle of Scripture, which demonstrates “that idolatry is not only one sin among many, but what is fundamentally wrong with the human heart. In other words, idolatry is always the reason we ever do anything wrong.”⁶⁴ In exchanging the worship of God for that of the created order, people suppress the truth of God’s existence that permeates creation (Rom 1:18-21). This suppression of the truth causes anxiety and unresolved tension in the heart of man. In fact, there is empirical support for the scriptural truth that even those that reject God have knowledge of Him. Research indicates that 8 percent of even *avowed* atheists cannot help but confess belief in God.⁶⁵ Atheist Elizabeth King laments her own struggle with believing in God:

I’m not sure what to do about God. If I could figure out a way to banish this figure from my psyche, I would. But psychology is not on my side . . . having a brain hard-wired for belief, I may be stuck with his shadow forever. While I remain steadfast in my (non)belief, I also feel I have no choice but to accept that I’m an atheist with a sense for God.⁶⁶

⁶³Emily Bobrow, “David Foster Wallace, in His Own Words,” accessed August 31, 2016, <http://moreintelligentlife.com/story/david-foster-wallace-in-his-own-words>.

⁶⁴Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters* (New York: Dutton, 2009), 165. For a more extensive treatment of idolatry, see Beale, *We Become What We Worship*.

⁶⁵Michael Lipka, “Ten Facts about Atheists,” *Pew Research Center* (June 2016), accessed September 9, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/01/10-facts-about-atheists/>.

⁶⁶Elizabeth King, “I’m an Atheist. So Why Can’t I Shake God?” *The Washington Post* (February 2016), accessed September 9, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/02/04/im-an-atheist-so-why-cant-i-shake-god/?utm_term=.3931c8befd4e.

Why does mankind have this irresistible compulsion for worship? Why do people need a ruling principle by which they can understand and order their lives? Why does worshipping the things of this world “eat people alive”? Why do even people who determine not to believe in God have difficulty denying Him? Why do people seek answers to these questions? A worldview must answer all the ultimate questions such as these that arise from human experience—it must be comprehensive.⁶⁷ And it must account for our experience in a coherent manner that unifies all these divergent elements.⁶⁸

Seeing the World through the Lens of the Gospel

Embedded in the fabric of the universe is God’s “creation law” or “the totality of God’s sovereign activity toward the created cosmos. . . . [this] law of creation is revelatory: it imparts knowledge” (Ps 19; Rom 1:19-20).⁶⁹ Because God has revealed Himself in the created order, a fundamental attribute of creation is that it is knowable; “this is the basis of all human understanding, both in science and in everyday life.”⁷⁰ Because this is the case, man’s capacity to know his Creator, himself, and his world is contingent on God. Thus, all truth finds its source in Him. The accidental universe posited by naturalism, however, would not be knowable; chaos can produce neither exquisitely designed sense organs nor an ordered, perceptible universe, and is helpless to account for the perfect correspondence evident between them.

God in His kindness and grace has revealed Himself to us through creation but principally through the story of Scripture—the gospel. This story is revealed in the four main acts of the biblical story: creation, fall, redemption and consummation. Each act

⁶⁷Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 52.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 54.

⁶⁹Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 27.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 33.

answers one of life's ultimate questions: *Where did we come from/what is human? What is wrong with us/with the world? How do we fix it? What is the destiny of humanity/Where are we going?* These questions are universal—all people search for answers to these questions.⁷¹ So a good way to understand different worldviews is to understand how each one answers them. A worldview is true only if it answers life's big questions in a way that corresponds to human experience.

Each act of the biblical storyline will now be briefly considered. The purpose here is not to be comprehensive but to summarily demonstrate that it is only when we realize the cosmic scope of this biblical framework and understand life through its grid that life is coherent. On this matter Carson has rightly testified that “at the end of the day God is not merely an inference, the end of an argument, the conclusion after we have cleverly aligned the evidence. But if you begin with this God, the testimony to his greatness in what we see all around us is heart stopping.”⁷² Thus a proper understanding of the world must begin with God. Without God, and based “on humanist assumptions, life leads to nothing, and every pretense that it does not is a deceit.”⁷³ For only in Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3).

Creation

In order for a worldview to explain what it proposes it must begin by postulating *the* foundational principle of reality. In fact, this is where the Bible begins in Genesis 1:1, with these four words: “In the beginning, God.” In so doing, the Bible begins by answering perhaps the most important question a worldview must answer: *What is ultimate reality?* The answer: *God*. That is not to say that the universe is God, as in pantheism, but rather, God is the self-existent, transcendent and eternal Creator and

⁷¹William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 71.

⁷²D. A. Carson, *The God Who Is There: Finding Your Place in God's Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 17.

⁷³H. J. Blackham, *Objections to Humanism* (London: Constable, 1963), 119.

Sustainer of everything that exists. In this regard Frame insists that “God is ‘absolute’ in the sense that he is the Creator of all things and thus the ground of all other reality.”⁷⁴

God: the ultimate Reality. God spoke the world into existence through Christ the eternal *Logos*, the living Word who is the Source of the rational structure of the entire cosmos (John 1:1-3).⁷⁵ Only this *Logos*—this rational, intelligent, and orderly God—can explain a universe exhibiting astonishing order, complexity and interdependency on every level, from the sub-atomic to the galactic. “For by [Jesus Christ] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.” And at this very moment, through Christ “all things are held together” (Col 1:16-17). The existence of everything in the created order is contingent on the self-existent God. For this reason, nothing in the universe can be rightly understood apart from its creator and sustainer Jesus Christ. Further, there is no sphere of creation in which Christ is not supreme and supremely relevant. The creative law of God sustains and governs all of creation; it is in the study of such disciplines as the natural and social sciences that mankind discovers this law.⁷⁶ Everything that exists is not only from Christ but for Christ, as John Piper proclaims:

All that came into being exists for Christ—that is, everything exists to display the greatness of Christ. Nothing—nothing!—in the universe exists for its own sake. Everything—from the bottom of the oceans to the top of the mountains, from the smallest particle to the biggest star . . . everything that exists, exists to make the greatness of Christ more fully known.⁷⁷

Therefore a true understanding of reality necessarily begins with Jesus Christ. So as believers order their understanding of the world, God needs to be at the center. This

⁷⁴Frame, *Apologetics*, 34.

⁷⁵James Strong, *The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 1213.

⁷⁶Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 16.

⁷⁷John Piper, *Spectacular Sins and Their Global Purpose in the Glory of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 33.

stands in sharp contrast to many false worldviews, such as humanism, that place man at the center of the universe. Man, however, fails miserably as an organizing principle; he is insufficient even to explain his own existence let alone all reality. All reality, and every aspect of our lives, must be understood in relation to God.

Other worldviews may contain elements of truth about God, but the Bible alone reveals the true nature of God, who is holy. Meaning he is in a category of one—perfect in all his attributes. He is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.”⁷⁸ God has revealed himself in Scripture as “the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty” (Exod 34:6-7).

Of all the ways of understanding reality, the Christian worldview stands alone as being supremely personal; this is because God is personal. He is not an impersonal force as in New Age belief and many Eastern religions. An impersonal force cannot give rise to personal beings—the effect cannot be greater than the cause. Creation was not the automatic and necessary effect of a force void of volition. Instead, creation is the result of a divine fiat issued by God who possesses all the characteristics of personhood including a mind, a will, and emotions. God freely chose to act in creating the cosmos, and rejoiced in His masterpiece (Gen 1:31; Prov 8:31-32). Thus God is a person, but He is also a God of relationship. Contrary to the doctrines of Judaism and Islam, the other monotheistic faiths, God is a Trinity—one God, eternally coexisting in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He has enjoyed perfect love and happiness within the Trinity from all eternity, and has created the universe to reflect the glorious unity and diversity of His own nature.

⁷⁸G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Shorter Catechism: For Study Classes*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 16.

The image of God: Solving the human enigma. God's glorious nature is reflected chiefly in human beings, who were created in the very image of God Himself (Gen 1:26-27). Man is not the product of random, chance, material processes, as naturalism insists; death cannot create life, nor matter produce mind. Man is a divine creation that shares with his Creator the characteristics of personhood such as intelligence, morality, volition, personality, emotion, relationality and creativity.⁷⁹ The creation of man in the image of God endows all mankind with a meaning and purpose that corresponds perfectly with the world God created him to inhabit.⁸⁰ All people sense a need for such a purpose; they cannot escape the reality of their creative design. So ironically even atheistic nihilists pursue meaning in life by attempting to prove life has no meaning.

How do we account for this desperation for meaning and structure in our lives? Human beings are the sons of Adam and daughters of Eve; as such we name, we classify, we order. In the exercise of our dominion we orient our lives to the world in a systematic way that helps us make sense of it. We are utterly incapable of interacting with the world and making decisions in a purely arbitrary way—we need a guiding belief or perspective; we need life to make sense.⁸¹ This fundamental aspect of human nature supports the truth of the Christian worldview; because we were created for a purpose, it makes sense that seeking meaning and purpose is intrinsic to being human. All humanity bears the image of an orderly, rational, purposeful God.

God created man and woman to bring him glory by loving and enjoying God supremely, and rejoicing in His provision. God created marriage, and by extension, family, church and community, because like God, man and woman were created to be in relationship—to be a unity in diversity—like God Himself. And only the true nature of

⁷⁹Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 32.

⁸⁰Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 86.

⁸¹Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 5.

God as a Trinity explains life as we experience it. “For in the Trinity we find the philosophical basis for love at the highest order possible and the key to explaining the human propensity toward and need for loving relationships.”⁸²

Human beings possess a common desire for the security and joy of a love that will never end. The airwaves burst with lyrics praising the beauty of love and we all like stories where “they all lived happily ever after.” So in a grand gesture the world can join hands and sing, “All you need is love,” but apart from the Christian worldview, they have no rational warrant for doing so. Dominant worldviews such as materialism or pantheism posit “loveless” impersonal forces as “the ultimate reality, thus rendering love either a cosmic accident (naturalism) or an illusion (pantheism).”⁸³ Nevertheless, human efforts to attain the unity of love will not be reasoned into oblivion. In them is found a “tragic grandeur. The echo of God’s original design is still to be heard in them.”⁸⁴

According to the Christian worldview, however, “there is nothing deeper than personal love. That is the foundation for the universe.”⁸⁵ Therefore when Jesus summarized the law and the prophets as loving God and others He was clarifying what it meant to be created in the “image of God.”⁸⁶ God’s image bearers are to love because “love is from God” for “God is love” (1 John 4:7-8).⁸⁷ Only the Trinitarian God of the Christian worldview explains *the* central element in the human drama.

Mankind was to display God’s glory by having dominion over the world, by ruling in God’s stead. They were to cultivate the earth by realizing its potential through endeavors such as the arts and sciences. God’s creative work of forming and filling the

⁸²Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 84.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ranald Macaulay and Jerram Barrs, *Being Human: The Nature of Spiritual Experience* (Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 1998), 23.

⁸⁵Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 84.

⁸⁶Macaulay and Barrs, *Being Human*, 15.

⁸⁷Ibid.

world and developing it for human flourishing is to be continued by His image bearers.⁸⁸ All humanity is “called to participate in the ongoing creational work of God, to be God’s helper in executing to the end the blueprint for his masterpiece.”⁸⁹ The biblical movement from a garden in Genesis to a city in Revelation reveals God’s good pleasure in the continued development of the earth’s resources. The creation mandate has implications for all of God’s good earth; it was instituted before the fall and is part of God’s good creation. Mankind glorifies God with the things of earth when their enjoyment of those things draws them to thankful worship of the Giver of every good gift, who is mankind’s ultimate satisfaction. This is part of what it means to have dominion rather than being dominated or controlled by the world. The biblical worldview provides the only robust rationale for the vast array of human endeavors aimed at the development of culture and civilization. The fruitful development of earth’s resources exhibits the nature and mandate of God reflected in His image bearers.

By virtue of creation man belongs to God and is morally responsible to obey Him. In God’s command to Adam and Eve, as in all of God’s commands, He gives protection from harm and provision for human flourishing—to live by God’s commands is to live according to God’s creative design. Thus, “subjection to [God’s] law is not a restriction upon God’s creatures, particularly men and women, but rather it makes possible their free and healthy functioning.”⁹⁰ This leads to happiness in life that can be experienced to varying degrees by both believers and unbelievers. Moral absolutes, sourced in the nature and character of God, provide the absolute standard for goodness, righteousness and holiness.⁹¹ As an image bearer of God, this standard answers the witness of man’s own conscience and is impossible to escape. For those who deny the

⁸⁸Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 41.

⁸⁹Ibid., 44.

⁹⁰Ibid., 50.

⁹¹Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 31.

existence of God, “here is where the most blatant inconsistencies occur . . . atheistic humanists are totally inconsistent in affirming the traditional values of love and brotherhood. . . . Indeed, one will probably never find an atheist who lives consistently with his system. For a universe without moral accountability and devoid of value is unimaginably terrible.”⁹² Whether acknowledged or not, mankind inescapably finds itself in a moral universe that is consistent with the reality of the transcendent, holy God of the Christian worldview.

In creation we see that the biblical answer for mankind’s origin, purpose, identity, joy, fulfillment, morality and love is found in God Himself. Man was created to worship God, and as Augustine said, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they can find rest in you.”⁹³ The power of the Christian worldview to explain all the created goodness of human existence commends its truthfulness. Atheistic worldviews inevitably deny the reality of these gifts, “but man cannot live consistently and happily knowing that life is meaningless; so in order to be happy he pretends that life has meaning. But this is, of course, entirely inconsistent—for without God, man and the universe are without any real significance.”⁹⁴ Consistently lived, atheistic worldviews lead inevitably to meaninglessness, loneliness and despair.⁹⁵

God’s creation was perfect, and when God finished he pronounced it all very good. This fact counters the human inclination to divide the world into the sacred and the secular, “to single out some feature of the created order as the cause of the human predicament.” Mankind does so because “deeply ingrained in the children of Adam is the

⁹²Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 79, 82.

⁹³Augustine, *Confessions*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2006), 1.

⁹⁴Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 79.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 78. For a lucid and ironically eloquent description of the meaninglessness and despair that is the lot of man without God, see Bertrand Russell, “A Free Man’s Worship,” in *Why I am Not a Christian*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 107. In it Russell confesses that “all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man’s achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins . . . only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul’s habitation henceforth be safely built.”

tendency to blame some aspect of creation (and by implication the Creator) rather than their own rebellion for the misery of their condition.”⁹⁶ The biblical condemnation of worldliness is not a condemnation of any aspect of God’s creation but rather its distortion by sin. The error of every other false religion and worldview is the failure to maintain a distinction between creation and the fall; this error continues to pose a danger to Christian thought.⁹⁷ Evil ought never to be blamed on or identified with God’s good creation. This truth is underscored by Paul who asserts, “Everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving” (1 Tim 4:4). This very good creation explains everything that is beautiful and wonderful in the world, from sunsets to sea otters, from sandwiches to the smiles on our children’s faces. The Christian worldview alone accounts for this wonder and beauty that makes glad the heart of man.

Fall

The created goodness of man and his terrestrial home is not the only word on the human condition. From our human experience we also know that something has gone terribly wrong with the world. Theologians call it “the fall.” Adam and Eve, the first humans, committed cosmic treason by disobeying the clear command of God. They rebelled against their Creator and in their pride chose to ascribe greater worth to themselves and world than to God (Gen 3: Rom 1:18-25). This first sin had a disastrous effect on the entire universe (Gen 3; Rom 8:18-26). As God had warned, Adam and Eve died that day—they experienced spiritual separation from God, who is life itself. Their bodies began the process of physical death, where in a sad irony, they would finally return to the ground as God had said, subdued by the earth they were meant to rule (Gen 3:19).⁹⁸

Sin and death spread like a plague over the entire human race: “Therefore, just

⁹⁶Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 50.

⁹⁷Ibid., 61.

⁹⁸Ryken, *Christian Worldview*, 73.

as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all have sinned” (Rom 5:12). Consequently, the harmonious relationships that man experienced on all levels became corrupted. Man became disintegrated—alienated from God, and consequently from others, himself and the world; man was alone. Because man was created to know and love God supremely, he strives in vain to find true and lasting satisfaction, love and community apart from Him. The sin nature inherited from Adam has produced evil within the heart of man that plagues the entire human race, resulting in guilt, shame and fear.

Adam’s response to his own sin has proved to be universal as well. Human beings experience fear because of their sin and continually cover it up in order to hide who they really are, lest they be discovered and known (Gen 3:7-10). In a tragic irony man both desperately wants to be known so he can experience deep love and intimacy, yet he desperately fears the unbearable scrutiny, knowing the darkness of his own soul. Mirroring the pride of their first parents, human beings excuse their sin by shifting the blame to God and others; they insist the problem is outside themselves (Gen 3:7-13). But in fact, each person participates in the rebellion of Adam and its consequences every day. As children of Adam, we rebel against God’s commands, exalt ourselves, make an idol of this world, and experience the pain and disintegration wrought by our sin. Secular psychologies to the contrary, people everywhere have feelings of guilt, fear and shame because they are *actually* guilty before God for their sin. People have an intuitive sense that this is abnormal. Consequently, psychology has identified an amazing range of phobias, neuroses and pathologies; all of them, directly or indirectly, find their source in the sin nature that plagues the human race. Only the biblical doctrine of original sin enables a person to understand the turmoil of his own soul. As Blaise Pascal has astutely remarked, “Certainly nothing jolts us more rudely than this doctrine, and yet, but for this mystery, the most incomprehensible of all, we remain incomprehensible to ourselves.”⁹⁹

⁹⁹Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2005), 36.

The human race is justly condemned for their sin by the righteous Judge of the Universe, with no resources to save themselves. The penalty for sin is death (Rom 6:23). This encompasses not only spiritual separation from God, and the physical death of the body, but eternal separation from God in the lake of fire (Rev 20:13-15). Death is an irreconcilable problem for worldviews such as secular and cosmic humanism, which ascribe a godlike status to mankind. As Ryken contends, “Nothing is more un-godlike than death, which strips away every last pretension to deity.”¹⁰⁰

The curse of sin also spread to the natural world which experiences death, decay, and the law of entropy. Sin has corrupted God’s perfect creation—evil, guilt, alienation, fear, pain, suffering, sickness and death—human sin is the source of all the miseries on this earth. The Christian worldview alone explains the puzzling condition of the world and man upon it: we see the world’s splendor, yet we know it is corrupted; we desire goodness and truth yet we perpetuate evil and falsehood; we yearn for love yet we provoke conflict; we crave peace yet wage war; we want to live yet we die. Man perpetually longs for that which is beyond his experience. What is the origin of this longing and what makes its realization impossible? Only the biblical doctrines of creation and the fall account for this conflict in the heart of man; as creation explains the beauty of humanity, so the fall explains its tragedy.¹⁰¹ As G. K. Chesterton has observed, the happiness we crave is “in some strange manner a memory; we are all Kings in exile.”¹⁰² We all ache for paradise lost.

The biblical doctrine of the fall correctly diagnoses the problem of the human race; the Christian worldview is unique in its distinctive teaching that man’s nature has been corrupted by sin and is the source of all the evil, disintegration and suffering in the world. Thus, the scope of the fall must be understood as universal. But if a worldview

¹⁰⁰Ryken, *Christian Worldview*, 73.

¹⁰¹Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 57.

¹⁰²G. K. Chesterton, *As I Was Saying*, ed. Robert Knille (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 160.

starts with the wrong problem—if it limits the scope of the fall—then it will arrive at the wrong solution. If a worldview identifies the problem as anything less than being spiritually dead and estranged from God, than the solution will be something less than God Himself on a bloody cross. For example, if the problem is limited to individual sins, as in Islam, then good works will provide salvation. If the problem is limited to economics, as in Marxism, then the redistribution of wealth is the answer. If the problem is limited to society, then social/political engineering becomes the savior. False worldviews all limit the extent of the fall. This is why religion and politics will never save humanity—they have missed the problem. Depravity does not lie outside the human heart but within it. The royal grandeur of the Creator’s image is in ruins. Because we have been born spiritually dead, we need to be born again to spiritual life. The only answer to death is the resurrection. The only hope for this fallen world must come from beyond it.

Redemption

When Adam and Eve rebelled against God in the garden, God did not abandon them. In his infinite grace God pursued them. He made provision for their sin by covering their nakedness with a sacrifice and gave them a promise that one day, a deliverer would be born who would destroy the curse of sin and death that their rebellion brought upon the world (Gen 3:15). This promise grew in the writings of the Old Testament prophets and created a heightened messianic expectation; the Messiah would be from the seed of Abraham, the tribe of Judah, family line of David. He would rule forever as King and restore God’s blessing to the world.

In the fullness of time, “God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4:4-5). Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, entered into all the pain and misery of human experience to redeem humanity from their bondage to sin. He accomplished this redemption by His sinless life and substitutionary death on the cross,

bearing in our stead the just judgement of God. On the third day after His crucifixion Christ rose bodily from the grave, proving that His sacrifice was accepted by God and providing assurance that His followers would likewise participate in this resurrection. In Jesus' words, "God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Thus people are restored to relationship with God and regenerated to new spiritual life by the Holy Spirit when they trust in the sacrifice of Christ alone for the forgiveness of their sins, and the only basis for their acceptance before God. As Paul declares, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:12).

This brief summary has highlighted God's sovereign control over world history, orchestrated to fulfill His eternal plan of redemption in Jesus of Nazareth (Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 1:20). Redemption, like creation and fall, is cosmic in its scope. The light of God's re-creative power has shined in the hearts of His children who are being recreated in the likeness of the second Adam (2 Cor 4:6); this redemption of the children of God will ultimately restore the entire cosmos (Rom 8:18-25). The cosmic scope of redemption in Christ has implications for everything in existence, but chiefly for His image bearers.

Because believers trust the written and incarnate Word of God for salvation, they can form a thoroughly Christian worldview. In his talk with Pilate Jesus said, "For this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth" (John 18:37). The ultimate testimony of truth concerning the world, the human race, and God was made on the cross. The cross declares that the world is fallen, but it also reaffirms the goodness of creation through God's intention to redeem it. The line between good and evil is not drawn through God's good earth but through the human heart.¹⁰³ The cross declares that mankind is so loved and valued by God that He would die for us, yet so desperately wicked, that He would have to. While other worldviews like Hinduism and Postmodernism hold the supremely counterintuitive view that objective evil and moral

¹⁰³Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 85.

absolutes do not exist, the Christian worldview not only acknowledges the reality of evil but denounces it directly and defeats it decisively in the cross of Christ.

The cross is the greatest revelation of ultimate reality—God Himself. And in the cross God’s glorious perfections converge—His love and justice, His mercy and righteousness, His kindness and holiness, His power, knowledge and sovereignty, all radiate with unmatched brilliance from the cross.

The indwelling Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to transform the thoughts and desires of believers to the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:9-16). Thus, a believer’s view of the world, himself, and God that had been corrupted by the fall is conformed to the truth of reality by the cross of Christ. Because God is the Source and Sustainer of all things, believers are to think truth about all things by learning to view all reality and every field of knowledge through the lens of the gospel.

All that is wrong with the world because of the fall is conquered in the cross of Christ. Those who receive the atoning sacrifice of Christ are no longer estranged from their Creator but are reconciled to God and adopted as His own children (Rom 5:10; 8:15; Gal 4:4-5; Eph 1:5). In this believers are restored to loving relationship with God; this is the relationship for which we were created and the source of unspeakable joy. Because God has reconciled believers to Himself at the cross, they can be reconciled to one another. Loving, grace-filled relationships with others are amply empowered and properly ordered by the soul-satisfying love of Christ. As believers are united with Christ by faith, in Christ they are united to each other. The cross restores the image of God in man, fractured and disconnected in the fall, to a true unity in community. This restoration in Christ transforms the God-ordained institutions of family, church and state into His glorious image. The restoration of true and satisfying relationship is possible because believers are freed from sin, guilt and shame by Christ who bore it Himself in their place on the cross. They no longer have to hide their true selves for fear of being exposed, because they are clothed in the love and acceptance of God. Thus, believers can humbly

and freely confess their sin to God and each other; this freedom and transparency nurtures true and satisfying intimacy and reflects the oneness of the Trinity.

The cross of Christ sets believers free to fulfill God's creative design for their lives. God's commands are not arbitrary but rather correspond to His nature and the created structure of the universe. Human beings were created to flourish precisely by living in accordance with God's creation law. To live by God's commandments is to act consistent with one's nature as an image bearer of God. In this believers are set free to live according to their true identity.¹⁰⁴ Jesus therefore declares, "If you continue in my word . . . you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31-32).

In redemption believers are set free to fulfill their created identity by obeying God's creation mandate to cultivate and subdue the earth. This mandate encompasses the full spectrum of legitimate vocations and enlists the diverse gifts and talents of each person to realize all the latent potentialities of God's good creation. The cosmic scope of redemption elevates all lawful work and human endeavor, whether in the arts, sciences, services or other fields because in such pursuits people participate in the creative work of God Himself. In the great commission, God enlists all His followers to extend His worship to the ends of the world by sharing the message of redemption to every language, tribe and nation. Thus redemption gives abundant meaning and purpose to every human life and encourages the unique expression and contribution of each person. God skillfully weaves together these varicolored strands of individual expression to form the rich tapestry of human culture, to the praise of His glory.

The cross conquers the root sin of humanity—the sin of idolatry, because it reveals a God infinitely more glorious than any of the idols of this world. Worshipping the things of earth, as is characteristic of Humanism, will consume the worshipper because the idol can never provide complete satisfaction and demands ever greater sacrifices to appease it. The good things of earth that believers are drawn to worship can

¹⁰⁴Macaulay and Barrs, *Being Human*, 20.

only be fully loved and enjoyed when it is understood that these things were created by God to display *His* glory; this realization draws one's heart to thankful worship of the God of infinite splendor and delight. C. S. Lewis profoundly conveys this reality:

The faint, far-off results of those energies which God's creative rapture implanted in matter when He made the worlds are what we now call physical pleasures; and even thus filtered, they are too much for our present management. What would it be to taste at the fountainhead that stream of which even these lower reaches prove so intoxicating? Yet that, I believe, is what lies before us. The whole man is to drink joy from the fountain of joy.¹⁰⁵

As believers behold God's matchless glory in the cross they are freed from idolatry and progressively restored to God's image (2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10). Hence, believers are set free to worship the Creator by thoroughly enjoying His creation. The redemption of the cross enables the renewal of one's total worldview by re-centering it on God and restructuring it by His Word.

The cross not only answers the pleasures of this life but also its pain. The greatest evil perpetrated by the human race was inflicted on the incarnate Son of God. Bearing the guilt of our sin and rejected by His Father, Christ endured the lowest depths of human agony. Yet in this greatest of all suffering God accomplished the greatest of all good—our redemption. In this respect, God's sovereign intention for the evils of life is paradigmatic. Thus, in the cross is found the hope that all the lesser pain and suffering believers experience is brimming with redemptive purpose. In fact, God assures believers this is so. In discussing the sufferings endured in this life, Paul assures believers "that all things work together for good for those who love God, for those who are the called according to His purpose . . . [namely,] to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom 8:28-29). In suffering believers experience solidarity with their King who suffered for them and suffers with them (Rom 8:17; Heb 4:15-16). Believers are comforted in their trials by the faithful love and nearness of their heavenly Father (Ps 119:67, 71, 75), who through the power of the cross will ultimately destroy all suffering (Rev 21:3-5). God

¹⁰⁵C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2001), 44.

graciously grants us a glimpse of our present struggles in their true perspective; through the veil, the momentary sufferings of this life will give way to an eternal joy and glory beyond our comprehension (Rom 8:18; 2 Cor 4:17). By contrast, other worldviews fail to adequately account for both the pleasure and pain of human life. For example, naturalism must deny any meaning to these vivid human experiences, and pantheism asserts that pleasure and pain (as well as good and evil) are ultimately one.

Consummation

Even the great enemy—death itself falls before the crucified and risen Christ (1 Cor 15:55-56). Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:25-26). Paul therefore concludes, “For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38-39). Believers will be united with God and loved ones, and experience the overflowing fullness of this relationship forever. As far as metanarratives go, this is incontrovertibly the happiest of endings, and perfectly answers the created longing in the human heart. The realization that the greatest conceivable formulation of reality is in fact *true* ought to overwhelm believers with wonder and kindle within them the fire of wholehearted worship.

Conclusion

Only the Christian worldview adequately explains the enigma of mankind and the world in which he lives. The overarching biblical storyline of creation, fall, redemption and consummation encapsulated in the gospel holds the greatest explanatory power because it represents a perfect correspondence between the world as God created it, our experience of it, and the revealed Word of God. Seen together, the acts of redemptive history provide a multilayered lens through which to view the complexities of

the world, integrating its created perfection, subsequent corruption, and redemptive restoration. Thus the Christian worldview provides a lucid and honest view of reality that accounts for its pleasure and its pain, its beauty and its ugliness, and does so in a way that is unassailably hopeful, because it is founded upon the reality of our gracious and sovereign God. Thus, the knowledge of the Christian worldview amply rewards all who seek it, from the poet to the philosopher, because in it romance and reason are seamlessly wed. As C. S. Lewis once wrote, “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it, I see everything else.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 140.

CHAPTER 4
THE PREPARATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE APOLOGETICS TRAINING COURSE

Project Synopsis

This ministry research project entailed the development of an eight-week apologetics training curriculum that was reviewed and approved by an expert panel. The panel critiqued the material based on several criteria such as biblical and theological soundness, factual accuracy, relevance to the cultural milieu, practicality and other categories. The effectiveness of this curriculum was measured by administering the WVAS as identical pre-course and post-course surveys, and by evaluating the participant's ability to defend the Christian worldview in a role playing exercise.

These elements were essential in order to have a defined means of measuring the success of the four stated goals of the project: (1) to assess the apologetic knowledge of FBC members, (2) to develop an eight-week instructional curriculum on Christian apologetics, (3) to increase the apologetic knowledge of FBC members by teaching the apologetic curriculum, and (4) to equip members of FBC to defend the truth of the gospel using apologetics. The accomplishment of these project goals would serve to instill within our members an unshakable confidence in the Word of God as well as to provide for them additional warrants for its truth. It is hoped that this increased faith in the truth of the gospel would become manifest in a greater investment in the church body and an increased boldness in personal evangelistic outreach.

Project Rationale

The rationale for this project was provided by the biblical examples and imperatives to defend the truth of the gospel, the theoretical and sociological factors

described in chapter three, a careful consideration of the needs of our church body, and a strong desire to have our members sanctify Christ in their hearts by seeing the supremacy of the truth and glory of the gospel over any rival. The preparation and implementation of the project was undertaken to this end.

Course Preparation

Generating Interest

To stimulate interest in the worldview and apologetic training course I preached a message entitled *The Gospel and Worldviews*.¹ This message was preached approximately five weeks prior to the start of the apologetics classes. Because it was crucial to generate interest for the class, the first two weeks of the project was given to the preparation for this message; this also served as the beginning stage of my research for the curriculum.

In order to accomplish this objective, there were several vital elements included in the sermon. These elements included: an explanation of worldviews and the foundational role they play in human thought, relevant examples of the prevalence and dangers of false worldviews, the connection between worldviews and worship, the gospel as a comprehensive worldview, the biblical imperative that our worldview be shaped by the Word of God, and the superior explanatory power of the gospel as evident in the creation, fall, redemption paradigm. The research done for chapters two and three of this project and the preparation for this introductory sermon provided the foundation for the development of the training course.

Enlisting Members

On Sunday morning after preaching *The Gospel and Worldviews*, the first announcement for the upcoming worldview and apologetic training course was given to

¹See appendix 4 for the outline of this message.

the congregation. After the service several members expressed an interest in the apologetics course and inquired about some of the specifics of the curriculum; the message had succeeded in generating both an interest in apologetics and an awareness of the need for training among several FBC members.

For the next five weeks until the start of the apologetics training course there were weekly announcements to the congregation encouraging members to sign up for the class. There was a sign-up sheet placed in the foyer and the contact information provided by interested members was used to create an email list that afforded another means of ongoing communication and encouragement to participate. The class information was also put in the bulletin each week prior to the start of the course. Given the age range of the members and their communication preferences, it was important to use a variety of means to communicate with potential class members including emails, phone calls, announcements and personal conversations. The five weeks prior to the start of the apologetics training course was also dedicated to finalizing the scope and sequence of the course as well as outlining the basic content of each lesson and organizing research materials for each lesson's topic.

Apologetics Curriculum Development

Evaluating Needs

Worldviews and apologetics is a massive theme that encompasses many approaches and many areas of specialization. The resources in this field are vast, therefore the parameters of my project required being very selective of the material chosen. The spiritual condition of FBC members, as described in the historical and spiritual contexts in chapter one, was a main consideration in the selection of the curriculum. The demographics of the class in terms of age and education were diverse, providing a good representation of the church as a whole. The ages of class members ranged from sixteen to seventy-four, with educational backgrounds that ranged from secondary to the doctoral level. Despite this diversity, the class shared two points of

commonality that were significant. First, their knowledge of Christian apologetics and its biblical basis was very limited. Therefore it was important to ensure that the course material provided a strong biblical rationale. The content also needed to be at an introductory level, and care was needed to patiently lay a proper foundation by carefully defining terms and explaining new concepts. The second commonality shared by class members was that even though their individual life contexts varied greatly, all of them were acutely aware of their need to understand and defend their Christian faith. Understanding this unity among these disparate class members underscored the applicability of this project to any church context, and helped me to strike the proper balance between extensive and intensive coverage of the apologetic curriculum.

As described in chapter 1, the faith of FBC members in the truth of the Word of God had been undermined. It was important to be sensitive to this and allow it to inform the content emphasis for the course. As a result, the course material laid a strong biblical foundation by not only including biblical imperatives and examples for the apologetic task, but also by communicating the rational, evidential nature of Scripture and Christian faith. Thus, arguments from natural theology including rational, scientific and experiential arguments were not used to warrant belief in the Bible, but rather were sourced in it. In this way the lines of argumentation used during the class were not in competition with Scripture but flowed from it as our only true and infallible source of faith and practice.

Comprehensive Truth

It was important to instill the understanding that Scripture-based thinking is not private, subjective thinking divorced from reality; it is holistic, objective, rational, true thinking. It was essential in this regard to provide internal evidence for the divine inspiration of Scripture. Fundamental to this purpose was highlighting the exquisite unity of the biblical metanarrative, centered on the person and work of the Messiah revealed in the gospel. External evidence was used to corroborate the self-authenticating witness of

Scripture and to provide further insight to the objective unity of truth. In presenting the apologetic rationale and arguments as sourced in Scripture, either explicitly or in principle, FBC members were provided with an unshakeable, comprehensive worldview foundation centered on the truth of the gospel.

Cultural Challenges

In determining the curriculum it was important to bear in mind that the needs of FBC members also correspond with the needs of the American church at large. When belief in the truth of the gospel is undermined by the false worldviews and ideologies of our culture, believers can become captive to varying degrees by those views; consequently the course material needed to include instruction on the concept of worldviews, the prevailing worldviews of our society, and how to deconstruct them by exposing their inadequacies.

Teaching Techniques

Another example of how the training course was tailored to the needs of the class members was the selection of teaching techniques. Practically speaking, a set amount of material needed to be covered, so the lecture method had to be the primary teaching technique. Nevertheless, a principal concern in the beginning stages of curriculum development was accommodating the varied learning styles of the class participants. There is an old teaching adage that the more senses involved in the learning process the better. With these considerations in mind, the instruction incorporated a variety of teaching methods including lecture, discussion, question and answer, visual aids including handouts, PowerPoints, and white-board presentations, and homework consisting of reading and writing assignments.

I tried to focus on using the methods that the class enjoyed and found most helpful. I have found anecdotally that when a student “discovers” the answers for himself he tends to personalize those truths, and as a result remember them much better than if he

had merely been told the answers. This class proved to be very verbal and enjoyed thinking through new ideas using the Socratic Method. So in critiquing false worldviews for example, I used a lot of logically constructed, leading questions to facilitate that discovery. This also taught the students how to do this type of careful worldview analysis in their own lives.

Scope and Sequence

Organizing Principle

After considering the needs of FBC members and consulting a number of helpful resources in the areas of worldviews and apologetics, I determined to structure the class around a comparative worldview analysis centered on the five major metaphysical views: postmodernism (this is strictly not a metaphysical view or worldview, but was a necessary category because of the cultural challenges it presents), polytheism, pantheism, atheism and theism.² Since theology is *the* foundational worldview presupposition, understanding the dizzying array of religions and worldviews was greatly simplified by grouping them within these theological categories.

Biblical Rationale and Course Overview

The rationale for this comparative analysis was provided by the biblical imperatives to give an answer to unbelievers for our faith (1 Pet 3:15), to contend for the faith (Jude 3), and to tear down deceptive and captivating ideologies (2 Cor 10:3-5). The biblical imperatives to fight falsehood with the truth of the gospel are indicative of a dualism ubiquitous in Scripture. This dualism presented in the first lesson provided a fitting introduction to a discussion of the nature of truth and worldviews. Following these preliminary matters, the five major metaphysical categories were analyzed by evaluating

²Some resources I found helpful in this part of the process included Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976); Douglas Groothuis *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011); James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 5th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009); Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basis for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).

their answers to ultimate questions presented in the creation, fall, redemption paradigm.³ They were also critiqued by their correspondence to the data of reality such as historical and scientific fact, reason and logic, and human experience. A helpful guide in this regard is provided by Douglas Groothuis, who provides eight objective criteria for worldview evaluation.⁴

Each of the worldview alternatives were surveyed in turn and each failed under thorough scrutiny. This left only the theistic worldview as a legitimate metaphysical explanation for reality. Classical and evidential apologetics were then used to present several rational and scientific arguments for the existence of God. The theistic alternatives to the Christian worldview were then evaluated, being subjected to the same scrutiny. The focus of presenting theistic alternatives was on refuting Islam, which is a growing challenge in American culture. Some of the criticisms leveled against Christianity by Islam provided an opportunity to introduce external and internal evidence for the reliability of Scripture. Evidence was then marshalled for Christ's identity and self-understanding as God in the flesh, and for His resurrection.⁵

Theoretical Approach

It is important to note that concluding the truthfulness of the Christian worldview was not merely the result of building a cumulative case for Christianity using evidence and reason. The backdrop for this course was the introductory message, *The Gospel and Worldviews*, which demonstrated the superiority of the Christian worldview to answer the puzzle of human existence by considering it through the lens of the

³The worldview questions correspond to each part of the paradigm. Creation: Where did we come from/What is ultimate reality? Fall: What is wrong with us/with the world? Redemption: How do we fix it?

⁴Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 52-59. The truth of a worldview is supported if it: explains what it proposes to explain, has internal logical consistency, has coherence, is factually accurate, is existentially viable, leads to intellectual and cultural fecundity, does not alter its essential claims in light of counterevidence, and does not appeal to extraneous entities or be more complex than is required to explain what it proposes to establish.

⁵For lesson outlines for the 8-week worldviews and apologetics curriculum see appendix 5.

creation, fall, and redemption paradigm. This served as a continual point of comparison with competing worldviews throughout the curriculum that highlighted the truth of the gospel.

The class member's homework required them to read the book *Christian Worldview: A Student's Guide*, by Philip Ryken. The class was assigned a chapter each week, which we discussed at the beginning of each class. This book does not argue for the Christian worldview per se but rather explains it using this paradigm. My goal in including these elements of the course was that the students would reflect on the self-evident truth of the Christian worldview as experienced in their own lives. Further, that the students would continually renew their minds in the truth of the gospel, and that they would develop a pattern of thinking that intentionally viewed competing ideologies and all of reality through the lens of the gospel. In this regard, the instruction each week was presuppositional. Overall the apologetic approach taken was eclectic, employing a combination of presuppositional, classical and evidential approaches.

Curriculum Review

Once I created the outline for the curriculum (described above) and established my general approach, it was reviewed and discussed informally by the members of the expert panel.⁶ This process involved a personal discussion with panel members in which I presented my ideas and rationale. The informal discussion with each panel member took

⁶The members of the expert panel consisted of an FBC elder, a Ph.D. in New Testament, an apologetics professor, and two local church pastors. In addition to the qualification of being mature believers whose beliefs and practices were continually informed and shaped by a Christian worldview, the rationale for the composition of the panel was directed by several considerations. First, an FBC elder was chosen because it was useful for one member of the panel to know my class members personally; he could therefore judge the course content in light of the class members' level of spiritual development. The Ph.D. in New Testament was chosen to provide a critical perspective that would help to ensure the curriculum's biblical and theological fidelity. An apologetics professor was selected to serve on the panel in order to insure that the curriculum contained a clear and accurate treatment of the theoretical content of the course, such as descriptions of opposing worldview perspectives. It was also critical to have local church pastors on the panel because they were able to offer a solid biblical and theological critique of the course material, an understanding of false worldviews and their impact on the lives of church members, and extensive experience evaluating the effectiveness of training curriculum for use in the local church. The make-up of the panel was designed to guarantee that the standards set forth in the evaluation criteria were met. The panel members were enlisted by informally presenting to them the goal and rationale for the project. Because they realized the project's value for the church, they graciously agreed to serve as panel members.

place roughly two weeks before the start of the apologetics course. The overall format and outline was given enthusiastic approval by the panel members. It was agreed upon that I would provide each lesson successively to the panel the week prior to instruction. At that time the lessons would be reviewed and critiqued formally using a rubric provided to the panel. Necessary adjustments, additions or deletions would then be made as needed.

The feedback on the course curriculum given by the expert panel was overwhelmingly positive. Accordingly, there were not many changes suggested by panel members. However, preliminary discussions with the members of the panel concerning the church context yielded a helpful agreement about the apologetic approach that was incorporated into the curriculum at the outset. As described in Chapter 1, the faith of FBC members in the authority of Scripture had been undermined. With this contextual factor in mind, it was concluded that the apologetic approach of the course should not be based on a particular apologetic school but rather should focus on scriptural imperatives and examples relating to the defense of the faith. Therefore the text of Scripture itself informed the apologetic approach of the course and clarified the value and role of apologetics for both believers and unbelievers.

.A curricular change that was made in response to advice from the expert panel was to include greater clarification for unfamiliar concepts. This included not only expanding explanations, but also illustrating the ramifications of various worldview presuppositions in real life scenarios and teaching students to apply relevant biblical truth to answer various worldview challenges.

Preliminary Logistics

The weeks prior to the start of class were perhaps the busiest. In addition to completing lesson 1, time was spent on preparing materials such as the pre-course and post-course surveys and handouts for the first lesson. Time was also spent ordering course books, planning homework and emailing encouraging reminders to the class

members. Other mundane but necessary tasks included making arrangements for refreshments for each class session as well as enlisting help to provide child care for the children of class members.

Course Implementation

The Apologetics training course was taught on Wednesday evenings in a church classroom. Each class lasted approximately 90 minutes. The class consisted of fewer than twenty members; this limit was by design in order to facilitate group interaction and discussion. At the start of the course, each class member was given a copy of the class text, *Christian Worldview: A Student's Guide*, by Philip Ryken. This provided the students with an accessible introduction to the Christian worldview. Each class began with prayer, a review of the previous week's lesson content and a discussion of the weekly reading assignment in the class text. The students were informed at the outset that the class atmosphere was intended to be rigorous yet informal, and the class members were encouraged to freely ask questions and initiate content related discussions.

At the conclusion of each week's training session, the presentation of the lesson was evaluated by comparing the actual content taught during the class period with the lesson objectives and content approved by the expert panel. If there was a deficiency in the content such that the objectives for that lesson were not thoroughly achieved, those elements were included in the following lesson. This review and analysis was particularly helpful with this group of students, whose interest in the subject matter led to many lively and edifying yet tangential discussions.

Lesson 1: Introduction to Apologetics

The first class began with some administrative necessities. The group had been informed that their participation in the class would entail providing survey data for use in a doctoral research project. The class then completed the pre-course WVAS. After completing the survey the course objectives were then presented to the class. The

objectives set for the course were that class members would gain: (1) an unshakeable faith in the truth of the gospel; (2) an understanding of the meaning and importance of apologetics and worldviews; (3) a higher level of confidence in answering challenges to the Christian faith; (4) a conviction that the Christian worldview has greater explanatory power than competing views; (5) a commitment to study to develop their understanding of the Christian worldview and their ability to defend it.

The scope and sequence of the course as described above was also provided to the class so that they would understand how the individual lessons fit together and contributed to the course as a whole. The class text was also handed out at this time and the class was challenged to commit themselves not only to attending the class but to completing the homework assignments as well.

The objective for the first lesson was to define apologetics, explain its value for the church, and provide a biblical rationale for its study and practice. Additionally, the biblical dualism of truth and falsehood evident in the passages studied served to introduce the topic of the nature of truth. So this first lesson also covered the correspondence theory of truth and basic laws of logic. It was essential to provide this foundational understanding prior to the lesson on worldviews.

The class began by defining apologetics and surveying its scriptural origin and practice. God himself not only mandates but models the defense of His truth. This practice was continued by the apostles and writers of the New Testament, as well as believers throughout church history. After defining apologetics and surveying its use, three key biblical mandates for apologetics were discussed in detail in order to understand the value of apologetics for the church. The passages discussed were 1 Peter 3:15, Jude 3, and 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. In summary, God has sovereignly chosen to use the study of Scripture and its rational, evidential approach to defending its truth claims, in concert with the witness of general revelation, in order to promote steadfast faith in the objective truth of the gospel and to break the chains of falsehood that hold believers

captive. Contending for the faith protects the spiritual life of the church by guarding the purity of apostolic doctrine that was delivered in its complete and finished form to the church.

The apologetic task dispels the clouds of unbelief, granting believers a clearer view of the glory of Christ; this renewed vision fuels a love for the body of Christ and the lost, and enables believers to engage the world rather than retreating from it or being conformed to it. The call to defend the faith is as urgent today as it was for the early church. The church today finds itself immersed in a relativistic culture not unlike that in first century Palestine. Because religious truth is broadly conceived of in our culture as a personal choice, it was important to address the nature of truth at the start of the course. The dualism between truth and falsehood presented in Scripture provided the needed introduction for analyzing and refuting false worldviews.

Lesson 2: Introduction to Worldviews

This lesson began with a review of the previous class that introduced the discipline of apologetics and its source in the Word of God. It was emphasized that Scripture must always be our primary source for apologetics because it alone is inspired and has the power to convict and convert the soul, and provides us the only infallible view of reality. This truth lends itself to a presuppositional approach and was emphasized repeatedly to the class in order to train their thinking to evaluate everything by the lens of Scripture. The idea of viewing life through the lens of Scripture introduced the concept of worldviews and the universal need for a structured understanding of reality; this need can only be explained by the Christian worldview. Additionally, in light of the powerful influence exerted by false worldviews (2 Cor 10:3-5), it was critical that the class understood the concept of worldviews, their significance, and the dangers that false worldviews pose to one's spiritual life.

After defining worldviews, their vital role in human thought was emphasized. Worldviews provide a necessary framework for understanding reality. Rather than being

purely theoretical and irrelevant to life, the basic human capacity of reason is dependent on the framework a worldview provides. It was also crucial to emphasize that no matter what worldview one holds, one's reason functions within the sphere of one's metaphysical presuppositions and thus is built upon the foundation of one's prior faith commitments.

Worldviews were also depicted as presenting alternative realities. These realities inform our values, drive our purpose, and shape our lives. One of the tests of the truth of a worldview is if it is livable—if its adherents can consistently live out the implications of their beliefs in their daily lives. Though many fail to live out their worldview because it is untrue, Christians that fail to do so are casualties of a cosmic battle. The captivity of the church to false worldviews was then discussed, as well as a brief history of the cultural factors that led to the church's acquiescence to secular ideologies.

Lesson 3: Assessing Postmodernism

Since each worldview proposes an alternative universe or scheme of reality, the worldview that best fits the comprehensive data of reality is likely true. Though there are hundreds of religions, generally speaking there are only a few metaphysical conceptions of reality. Therefore an understanding of these major categories would provide the students with an understanding of the basic presuppositions of the vast majority of the world's religions. The first view to be evaluated was postmodernism.

To introduce postmodernism, evidence was presented to establish it as the *zeitgeist* of contemporary American culture. In light of this fact, our culture cannot be rightly understood or engaged without a firm grasp of this view. A historical overview of the pre-modern, modern, and post-modern eras was then presented in order to help the students grasp the historical and cultural factors that precipitated the rise of this view.

Postmodernism was explained in this lesson as a view skeptical of all claims of knowledge. It cannot rightly be called a worldview since it rejects all universal truth

claims. According to postmodernism truth and reality are merely social constructs. Meaning can only be derived from one's cultural context or interpretive community. However, this view is itself a contradiction: the only universal truth is that there are no universal truths. Because its central claim is self-contradictory it is therefore false. Moreover, because it proposes no universal explanations it is not comprehensive and so fails the test of a worldview. It was important to not only expose the contradictions inherent in this view and its inability to answer the ultimate questions of life, but also to help the students realize that this view of reality is entirely counterintuitive and cannot be lived out consistently. Further, it was important to bring to the students attention the intellectual dishonesty in some of postmodernism's key thinkers. Since the influence of postmodernism is pervasive, it was important to conclude the class with dialogue exercises to help students identify and graciously expose self-contradictory postmodern assertions when they encounter them.

Lesson 4: Assessing Polytheism and Pantheism

This class began with a review of the nature of worldviews and the conclusions of our study of postmodernism. It is helpful to note that in addition to the above mentioned criteria for analysis, each worldview was examined concerning its view of ultimate reality or its metaphysic. This was the organizing principle for the worldview categories presented in class. A key observation made concerning postmodernism that was successively applied to the other non-Christian worldviews (except Judaism and Islam) was that according to these views man was central and preeminent, determining truth, morals, meaning, purpose, and even God.

Relatively little time was devoted to the worldview of polytheism because it is not prevalent in the West and contained obvious deficiencies. Polytheism is the view that there are many finite gods. The main divisions within polytheism acknowledge the close relationship between the spiritual and physical realms, and believe the material world is

animated by spiritual forces. In many cases, these spiritual forces are malevolent and threaten human survival and so must be appeased. Though polytheism holds to metaphysical dualism, recognizing both the physical and spiritual realms of existence, it posits no transcendent Creator. Thus, it has no explanatory power because it is not comprehensive; the gods are finite, live within the natural universe, and are limited by its laws; polytheism offers no answer for the origin of the cosmos or of the gods, and fails to account for many universal aspects of reality.

The worldview of pantheism is a much more influential view and accordingly was given more focused attention during this class. Pantheism is the belief that all of reality is of one essence—all is one and all is god. Thus, it is a monistic view that conceives of all reality as spiritual in nature. There are many religions that hold to a pantheistic worldview including Buddhism, Hinduism (non-dualistic), New Age, Cosmic Humanism and others.

It was important to help students discover the self-contradictory nature of pantheism evident in such nonsensical concepts as a self-created universe, the impersonal god of pantheism giving rise to personal beings, and the unconscious god-force somehow requiring consciousness of Godhood by humanity, only to then forever lose that consciousness in the impersonal oneness of all things. Other important points to discuss were pantheism's view of human godhood and the limitless human potential realized in enlightenment (as modeled by Jesus Christ), contradictions inherent in the system of reincarnation, the purported illusory nature of the physical universe, and the unavoidable moral relativism implicit in the oneness of evil and good.

Lesson 5: Assessing Atheism

An entire class was devoted to the worldview of atheism due to its prevalent influence in the American culture and educational system. Atheism is a worldview that rejects the existence of God or any spiritual aspect of reality including the human soul, angels, miracles, etc. More specifically, it is a monistic view postulating the universe as

strictly material in essence. This material universe encompasses both matter and energy; it is a totally closed system—there is nothing outside of it and nothing within that is not composed of or explained by matter and energy. Its epistemology therefore is empiricism.

It was important to demonstrate the circularity and self-defeating nature of this position. The scientific method by definition only tests physical phenomenon—it can neither prove nor disprove anything outside the physical realm. It cannot prove scientifically that matter is all that exists and that science can be the only source of knowledge—therefore it fails its own test.

It was also important to demonstrate from the writings of atheistic scientists that they unapologetically admit to a religious commitment to naturalism that is prior to any evidence, and which heavily influences or determines their findings. The terms “science” and “scientism” have been conflated in much of atheistic writing, which has served to coopt science itself. Thus the objective discipline of science has become the illegitimate champion of atheistic materialism. This deception perpetuates the allusion of atheism being rational, factual, objective truth, when in fact presupposing the cosmic accident conjectured by atheism would not have produced the scientific method. Rather, it was the presuppositions of the Christian worldview that gave birth to the scientific method.

There were several other deficiencies to the atheistic worldview that were vital for the class to recognize. Atheistic cosmology theorizes either eternal matter or a material universe that sprang into existence without a cause. Both of these options are untenable and insufficient to answer the origin of the universe. Further, blind, random, material processes do not adequately explain the exquisite order, design, law, and beauty evident throughout the cosmos. Another difficulty implicit in atheism is that trust in human senses and cognitive faculties to provide true knowledge of the world is simply not warranted given the assumptions of atheism. Yet, the truth of our ability to perceive the world accurately with our senses is universal, intuitive human knowledge.

Also discussed in this lesson was the bankruptcy of evolutionary theory to account for the marvel of the human race as well as the amazing diversity of complex life on earth. Along this line, atheistic materialism is utterly incapable of explaining non-material aspects of every day human life by purely materialistic causes; these include the most compelling facets of human experience such as love, joy, morality, worship, meaning, logic, aesthetics, spiritual experience and human freedom. Given atheistic materialism, humans are merely biological machines that respond to the stimulus of their environment in ways that are totally determined—this view, held consistently, leads inevitably to nihilism, and renders the atheistic worldview entirely unlivable.

Lesson 6: Theistic Arguments

The proposition for this lesson was that the theistic worldview alone can answer the evidence of science, reason, and human experience, and thus best fits the data of reality. It had already been demonstrated to class members that competing worldviews lacked coherence and failed to explain various aspects of reality. Together we had examined the presuppositions of these worldviews and found them to be flawed and self-contradictory. The objective for this class was to provide additional warrant for the truth of the Christian faith by demonstrating the perfect correspondence between the theistic worldview, specifically Christianity, and reality.

The class was presented with three rational arguments for God's existence: the ontological argument, the cosmological argument, and the teleological argument. These rational arguments were supplemented with scientific evidence that corroborated their conclusions. For example, the cosmological argument rationally demonstrates the existence of a personal, transcendent, self-existent Cause of the universe. This argument was supported by Big Bang cosmology and the laws of thermodynamics. The teleological argument demonstrates that the evident design in the universe is the result of a divine designer. This argument was supported by three lines of scientific evidence: the fine tuning of the universe, irreducibly complex organisms, and genetic information.

Two additional arguments presented in favor of the theistic worldview were the moral argument and the anthropological argument. Theistic worldviews are unique in that they hold to objective moral standards. Moral objectivism was contrasted with the three types of moral relativism: cultural relativism, conventionalism, and subjectivism, which were found to be insufficient. Similar to the cosmological and teleological arguments, the moral argument employs a syllogism; in this case, to infer the existence of a transcendent moral lawgiver. Many lines of evidence were presented in class that confirmed universal moral laws exist. Since it is true that all moral laws require a moral lawgiver, and it is likewise true that universal moral laws exist, it must be concluded that there is a transcendent moral Lawgiver.

The anthropological argument demonstrates from two major lines of experiential evidence the reality of the biblical doctrines of creation and the fall. These two lines of evidence form a paradox: the profound beauty and glory of the human race and its tragic corruption. This is a powerful argument because it connects directly with daily human experience; all people desperately seek to understand this tension plaguing humanity and disquieting their own souls.

Lesson 7: Refuting Islam

Following the opening review, the class began with some introductory statistics about the religion of Islam. For example, Islam is the world's fastest growing religion and the second largest in the world, claiming 1.3 billion followers. There has been an ideological war being waged through the media outlets that have left Americans confused as to the true nature of Islam and what their stance should be toward it. What is clear is that as believers, our first allegiance is to Christ. Furthermore on a personal level, Muslims are not the enemy but rather are held captive by the enemy. In the darkness of their captivity they need the light of the gospel. The amazing growth of Islam in our country and around the world demands that Christians understand Islam and its flaws, and be prepared to defend the veracity of the Christian worldview.

The introduction was followed by a brief history of Islam as well as a historical contrast between the spread of Islam by the edge of the sword, and the spread of Christianity under threat of the sword. The discussion then moved to the beliefs and practices of Islam. This section covered doctrines such as: theology proper and the absolute unity of Allah, Islamic prophets and the denial of Christ's divinity, Islamic holy books and the alleged corruption of the Old and New Testament manuscripts, Islamic anthropology, the day of judgement and soteriology, and the five (or six) pillars of Islam.

Following the description of their beliefs and practices, Islam was then critiqued. This began by undermining their foundational belief in the infallibility of the Koran. Ample evidence was provided to demonstrate that the Koran was not inspired: it contained many contradictions, it was not uniquely preserved, it contained no valid prophecies and it in no way exhibited a supernatural nature. All of Islamic theology crumbles with the refutation of the Koran. In addition, arguments were given to defend alleged corruptions of the biblical manuscripts. This was followed by a contrast between Christ and Mohammed, which led to the conclusion that Mohammed did nothing to validate his claim to the prophetic office, while Christ's perfections and miracle working power are evident even in the Koran.

Evidence was also provided to demonstrate that while the unity and diversity evident in creation perfectly reflects the Trinitarian God of the Christian worldview, the utter unity of the god of Islam is not reflected in the created order. Discussed at length were Islamic anthropology and soteriology, and the inadequacy of these doctrines to both account for human depravity and to resolve human guilt and alienation. A strategic line of argument was to demonstrate the deity of Christ from Scripture to refute the Islamic denial of His divinity. To build bridges to Muslims, the supernatural nature of Christ can also be shown from the Koran. The Koranic admonitions to heed the teachings of Jesus may be used to convince Muslims to investigate the teachings of Christ in the Bible.

Lesson 8: The Case for the Christian Worldview

At this point in the course, a cumulative case has been built for the truth of the Christian worldview. This case has been reinforced continually through refuting false worldviews and exposing their weaknesses. It has been emphasized by highlighting the superiority of the Christian worldview to answer all the data of reality including science, reason, and human experience, and by comparing each worldview in light of the creation, fall, redemption paradigm. The case for the truth of the Christian worldview has been strengthened through continual reference to Scripture and its supernatural ability to perfectly exegete the human soul.

This last class utilized standard arguments for the truth of the Christian worldview such as manuscript evidence, the unity of the Bible, biblical prophecy, archaeological and historical verification, Christ's claims to deity and scriptural evidence to support his identity, and biblical and extra-biblical evidence for the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. These arguments were meant to function within the course as the climax of a sustained, eclectic apologetic. The last class closed with a final review of the progressive argumentation of each lesson, some time for questions, and the completion of the post-course WVAS. An extra 20 to 30 minutes were allotted for this final class. This extended class time was communicated to the class members in the weeks leading up to the final class by both class announcements and email. The final element of measurement was the completion of a role-playing exercise in which the ability of class members to defend the Christian worldview from various false worldviews was tested.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the methodology for the development and implementation of a worldview and apologetics training curriculum for use within a local church. The next chapter provides an evaluation of the success of this project in meeting its stated goals. It will further identify any perceived strengths or shortcomings in the preparation, administration, content, or design of the program in the hopes of improving

the process and outcome for those wishing to teach worldviews and apologetics in their local church. The project will conclude with some theological and personal reflections.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT EVALUATION

Introduction

The previous chapter detailed the preparation and implementation of a worldview and apologetics training curriculum at First Baptist Church in Watertown, Wisconsin. This concluding chapter will provide an evaluation of this project to determine its overall effectiveness. Specifically, this evaluation will assess the results of the project in order to measure its success in achieving its purpose and accomplishing its stated goals. The project had several notable strengths as well as some planning and logistical difficulties that necessitated some adjustments; these strengths and weaknesses are detailed in this chapter, as well as some closing theological and personal reflections relevant to the project.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The historical, spiritual and cultural context of FBC members as described in chapter one convinced FBC elders of the need for apologetic training. Several other factors contributed to this rationale, including (1) the abundance of biblical imperatives and examples for the practice of apologetics, (2) the lack of apologetic training in the past, (3) the pervasiveness of attacks against the Christian worldview by our culture, (4) the New Testament record of the debilitating influence of false ideas on the spiritual life and growth of the church, (5) and the scriptural role of apologetics in strengthening the believer's faith in the truth of the gospel.

Additionally, it was hoped that apologetic training would result in renewed faith in the truth of the gospel which would in turn contribute to fulfilling our church's mission to bring glory to Christ by extending His love both inward to our church

community and outward to the community of Watertown. Though this benefit may prove to be an outgrowth of achieving the project's purpose, it was not a stated goal so consequently it was not subject to measurement by the testing instruments.

The purpose of this project was to train church members in Christian apologetics at First Baptist Church in Watertown, Wisconsin. Accordingly a testing instrument was required to measure the success of the project's purpose. The t-test was selected for this analysis as it compares the means of the scores from the pretest and posttest which measured apologetic knowledge among the select group of median adults.¹ Based on the results of the t-test it can be concluded that the teaching of apologetics to the members of FBC made a statistically significant difference resulting in the increase of their apologetic knowledge ($t_{(6)}=4.908, p<.003$).² Therefore the project was successful in accomplishing its stated purpose.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

The first goal of this project was to assess the apologetic knowledge of 10-15 members of FBC. This number was chosen in order to facilitate discussion and interaction during the training sessions. Before the start of the training, the WVAS was developed to measure each member's level of apologetic knowledge. This survey was designed as a self-assessment based principally on a six-point Likert scale. The WVAS measured each participant's knowledge of topics such as worldviews, rational and evidential arguments for God's existence, the authority of Scripture, scriptural evidence for the deity and resurrection of Christ and others.³ This goal was successfully completed when 15 members of FBC enrolled in the apologetics course, completed the pre-course WVAS, and the results were recorded for analysis. The results of the pre-course WVAS

¹Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 189.

²See appendix 6, table A2.

³See appendix 1.

confirmed the need for growth in apologetics knowledge and competence, and provided further validation that the choice of developing a worldview and apologetics training course would meet an urgent need in the lives of church members.

The second goal of this project was to develop an eight-week instructional curriculum on Christian apologetics. The curriculum was fashioned using a wide range of worldview and apologetic sources.⁴ The content covered basic worldviews and epistemology, analysis of the five dominant worldviews using the creation, fall, redemption paradigm, rational and evidential arguments for God's existence, a defense of the biblical Christian worldview against its theistic contenders, the authority of the Bible, and biblical and historical evidences for the deity of Christ and the resurrection.

An expert panel consisting of an FBC elder, a Ph.D. in New Testament, an apologetics professor, and two local church pastors was utilized to determine the success of this goal. The panel members employed a rubric to measure the biblical and theological fidelity, factual accuracy, clarity, relevance, practicality, thoroughness, argumentation and scope of the apologetics curriculum.⁵ In order for this goal to be successfully accomplished, 90 percent of the rubric's evaluation criteria must have reached or exceeded the sufficient grade level.

This second goal was successfully achieved when the expert panel indicated that the curriculum received a perfect score, meaning that the curriculum was graded at the sufficient or exemplary level in 100 percent of the evaluation criteria. Though the lessons received exemplary grades in most of the criteria, the panel members provided valuable insights and suggestions that were incorporated into the lessons; these insights will be discussed in the following sections of this evaluation.

The third goal of this project was to increase the apologetic knowledge of FBC members by teaching the eight-week apologetics curriculum. The success of this goal

⁴See bibliography.

⁵See appendix 2.

was measured by re-administering the WVAS as a post-course survey (See Appendix 1). The results were then compared to determine if there was a positive statistical difference between the pre and post-course surveys. The t-test for dependent samples measured the increase in mean score to be 43.714 (see appendix 6, table A2). In other words, the collective mean increase for the class moved from 208.857 in the pre-course survey to 252.571 in the post-course survey. This increase demonstrates a substantial increase the student’s perceived knowledge of worldviews and apologetics as well as increased confidence in their aptitude to engage others and defend the Christian faith. The detailed results of the pre and post-course survey scores are illustrated in table 1.

Table 1. Pre and post-course survey scores

Participant	Pre Test	Post Test
1	225	260
2	178	264
3	222	259
4	218	243
5	229	250
6	177	243
7	213	249

The fourth goal of this project was to equip members of FBC to defend the truth of the gospel using apologetics. At the conclusion of the training each class member was asked to apply what they learned in the apologetics course by demonstrating their ability to defend the Christian faith against various challenges in a role-playing exercise. During the exercise I observed the class members’ use of apologetics and determined

their level of competency utilizing an evaluation rubric.⁶ This goal was realized when the class average for the evaluation criteria scored above the sufficient level. The class results for the apologetics role-playing evaluation are detailed in table 2.

Table 2. Apologetics role playing exercise class scoring results

Member	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	Total	Avg.
1	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	4	24	3
2	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	32	4
3	3	3	3	2	3	3	2	4	23	2.86
4	2	3	3	3	2	2	2	4	21	2.63
5	3	4	4	4	3	4	3	4	29	3.63
6	4	3	3	4	4	3	3	3	27	3.38
7	4	4	4	3	4	4	3	3	29	3.63
Total	23	24	24	23	22	23	20	26	185	Class
Average	3.29	3.43	3.43	3.29	3.14	3.29	2.86	3.71	26.44	Avg.: 3.3

The four goals of the project had clearly defined standards of success that were measured by approved testing instruments. Based on these standards, the research data proves conclusively that the project was successful in achieving its four goals. In summary, the project has successfully assessed the apologetic knowledge of select FBC members, developed a worldview and apologetic curriculum, increased the apologetic knowledge of the class members, and equipped them to defend the truth of the gospel. The strengths of the project will be discussed in the next section.

⁶See appendix 3.

Strengths of the Project

This project had several notable strengths. A major strength of the project was the biblical emphasis of the curriculum. Throughout the eight lessons of the apologetics training course Scripture was presented as the foundational rationale and primary content of Christian apologetics. Not only were the apologetic imperatives and examples presented as the impetus for the course, but the scriptural metanarrative was portrayed as God's living witness to the truth of reality encapsulated in the gospel; this approach enabled students to see the revelatory power of the gospel and the apologetic nature of Scripture. It also helped them understand more fully the role of apologetics in the Christian life. This methodology also entailed training the students in worldview analysis using the lens of Scripture.

The second strength of the project was the accurate analysis of the need for an apologetic training program for FBC members. It became quickly apparent that the apologetics course was relevant to many of the difficulties class members were experiencing in their Christian lives. Though the cultural challenges to their Christian faith were well known, the discipline of apologetics, which effectively handles these challenges, was foreign to many of the class members. Consequently, the cultural assault on Christianity had become the source of doubt, which bred unbelief. On the other hand, those who had heard of apologetics had a negative impression of it because they equated it with religious conflict; viewed this way, apologetics was thought to engender strife and divisions and so was deemed contrary to Christian character. This is an example of how class discussions exposed the subtle ways in which class members embraced elements of false worldviews. Class members had unwittingly acquiesced to the postmodernist notion that a rational, amicable argument for an objective truth claim is offensive and intolerant. In the course of the training program the class came to realize and embrace both the objective nature of truth and the virtue of presenting a prepared apologetic for the Christian faith.

A third strength of the project was the lively class discussions. As noted above,

the students were informed at the beginning of the first lesson that the class was intended to be rigorous yet informal, and the class members were encouraged to freely ask questions and initiate content related discussions. The class members did not need to be prompted a second time; they had no hesitation to ask questions and initiate discussions throughout the course. They enjoyed discussion and the Socratic Method which yielded many practical applications of the truths being discussed. The class members acknowledged that this teaching method helped them to internalize and remember what was taught; this was apparent as the post-course WVAS and apologetics role-playing exercise confirmed that class members had good retention of the course content. Though this method is effective and fun, its use can pose difficulties to completing a lesson plan and maintaining the course schedule. This will be discussed further in the next section.

The fourth strength of the project was the scope and sequence of the worldview and apologetic curriculum as described in chapter 4. The scope was extensive enough to provide a comprehensive introduction to the major concepts, worldviews, and arguments of a Christian apologetic. Yet the scope was sufficiently intensive to instill within the class members increased confidence in their competence to defend the Christian faith. The sequence was logical and progressive and provided objective tests by which to measure the legitimacy of alternative worldview assumptions. But the structure of the course was presuppositional, and centered on the Christian worldview summarized in the gospel as providing *the* foundational orientation essential for interpreting life. This gospel standard provided a continual point of comparison throughout the program which exposed the inadequacies of its competitors.

The class members' apprehension of the superiority of the Christian worldview was enriched and reinforced each week by the course text *Christian Worldview: A Student's Guide* by Philip Graham Ryken. Another helpful resource was *Tactics* by Gregory Koukl.⁷ This practical book guides readers to identify and navigate logical

⁷Gregory Koukl, *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

fallacies when they encounter them in conversation. Tips from this book were helpful in teaching the difference between possessing apologetic knowledge and developing the tactical skills necessary to adapt that knowledge in daily interactions with others in a manner that is both winsome and effective.

Weaknesses of the Project

As a whole, the project proved to be very successful in accomplishing its stated goals. However, there were some weaknesses. The most prominent weakness was the delimitation imposed by the eight-week course duration. Though the scope and sequence of the course was a notable strength, the curriculum proved to be too much material to cover in eight class sessions. Consequently, by the end of the eighth session, there were still several topics yet to be addressed; two extra class sessions needed to be added which put the total at ten class sessions for the course. Even with ten class sessions of 90 minutes, there was pressure to keep moving in order to cover all the material. As described above, the questions and discussions generated during the class sessions were extremely productive and valuable. It was important to provide ample time for these discussions, however they slowed the pace of the class; this dilemma created tension that would not have been present without the eight-week delimitation.

The second weakness of the project was the sporadic attendance of some members of the class. Though on the average there were between 10 to 15 members in attendance with a high of 17, only 7 class members were faithful in attending every class. There were various reasons for the inconsistent attendance. Scheduling conflicts, family and work obligations, and a sudden prolonged illness prevented some participants from attending several of the weekly class sessions. As a result, though these members praised the class and insisted the sessions they attended were very helpful, they did not feel they could complete the post-course survey or the role-playing exercise because of the material they missed. Course notes were offered to make up this deficiency, but scheduling conflicts and other obligations prevented them from following through on

their commitment to the apologetics course.

The participants' level of commitment to the training course was a limitation that was recognized at the outset of the project. The failure of some class members to prioritize their commitment to the training course was anticipated, and measures were taken to mitigate that potentiality (see chap. 1); perhaps those measures were helpful in strengthening the commitment of the seven faithful class members. One logistical detail that facilitated the faithful attendance of class members was the provision of childcare. This also provided a good opportunity for FBC members not attending the apologetics training course to serve the needs of other families within the church.

The third weakness of the project was a consequence of the eight-week course delimitation. In the last few training sessions, time constraints necessitated summarizing some of the course material; as a result there was insufficient time to thoroughly explain, illustrate, discuss and apply the concepts presented. Teaching to the level of the student is an elementary educational concept that I was conscious of during the preparation of the curriculum. Accordingly, in the curriculum there were numerous notes to define unfamiliar, technical terms and to explain or illustrate new concepts. A helpful reminder to do so was also brought to my attention by the expert panel. They advised taking the necessary time to clarify difficult concepts and unfamiliar terminology, and to reinforce abstract ideas with concrete applications and illustrations. This was good advice that sustained my own intention. However, time constraints were a limiting factor. So at times the goal of carefully explaining, illustrating and applying new concepts was sacrificed for the sake of finishing the course material. This predicament can be attributed to assigning the delimitation of an eight-week course duration without fully realizing how long it would take to complete the curriculum.

What I Would Do Differently

The main change I would make in this project would be to ensure a generous amount of time to complete the curriculum. Although the number of topics could have

been limited to ensure adequate time, I believe the chosen scope was essential to provide a comprehensive introduction to worldviews and apologetics. The decision of the scope and sequence was ultimately made with future courses in mind that would not be bound by this delimitation. Because the curriculum was not fully developed when the eight-week delimitation was set, it was necessary to estimate the number of class periods needed to complete the course. In making this decision, enough weight was not given to the human factor. Ample time must be provided to accommodate all questions and an in-depth discussion of the course content. Additional time needs to be factored in for thoroughly explaining, illustrating, and applying the material. The most valuable class sessions were the ones in which there was enough time for these essential elements; these sessions proved to be the most memorable for the class members. In retrospect, to comfortably accommodate the prescribed curriculum the delimitation should have been set at twelve class sessions minimum.

Another variable to consider in this discussion is the personality of the class members. Some classes may be reticent and refuse to engage in discussion and dialogue because they feel inadequate. As a result, they may be threatened by this approach. My class thrived on it. Therefore knowing the class members in advance and factoring in their proclivity in this area can be helpful in determining the amount of time necessary to complete the course. However it would be wise to err on the side of providing additional class periods because the time can be profitably utilized by repetition, review, evaluation, application, practical exercises, and summary of the course content.

Theological Reflections

The role of apologetics in the Christian faith is largely misunderstood by the church. This project has served to clarify the relationship between God's self-revelation, and the faith and subsequent righteousness His revelation is intended to elicit. God's revelation necessarily entails evidence, reason and experience. These elements are not in conflict with faith but rather are the basis of it. Further, God's revelation speaks with a

singular voice. Its many streams converge and flood his image bearers with steadfast love and grace. It is truly God's amazing grace to reveal his glory in such a remarkable variety of ways, and preeminently in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Observing this harmonious witness throughout this project has proved to be a comfort and joy to the soul, as it reveals the heart of our good God who desires that we know Him.

Throughout this study of apologetics, the self-authenticating nature of Scripture was clearly manifest; this was particularly apparent when juxtaposed with other religious writings such as the Koran. This realization had a profound impact on the teacher as well as the students. Scripture alone speaks with God's authoritative and compelling voice that exposes and lays bare the human heart. In this regard, the creation, fall, redemption paradigm showcased the vast superiority of the Christian worldview to answer the enigma of human existence.

By God's design, in the common pursuit of truth we were all encouraged and strengthened by grasping in a richer way the robust warrant to belief provided by Scripture. In this warrant we not only arrive at truth, but we are ushered into the presence of a Person—Jesus Christ, who is the way the truth and the life; here we find the One we were created to know and in whose presence we find fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore. In the words of the psalmist, such knowledge is too wonderful for me!

Personal Reflections

I have believed that if an ideology or worldview is true, it should be able to withstand the most intense scrutiny, and not only endure, but shine all the brighter for it; this has certainly been the case in examining the Christian worldview. In the course of the project, the Word of God was repeatedly tested and proven by the most difficult and challenging questions in life. In this regard, the preparation and presentation of the apologetics curriculum has confirmed the vital role that apologetics plays in the development and maintenance of faith. It has also reaffirmed my desire to utilize my gifts to equip the body of Christ through the ministry of teaching. Though it was hard work, I

thoroughly enjoyed both studying and teaching worldviews and apologetics.

The project likewise reaffirmed the need for believers to be trained in Christian apologetics. It was encouraging to see the class member's interest in the curriculum and their commitment to study the material required for class. Class members understood that the cultural challenges to the Christian faith are immense, and so were very thankful for the course. The response of the class helped me realize more fully that there are undoubtedly many other members of FBC acutely aware of their need for training in this area; many on the other hand are oblivious. Both groups call for a commitment to meet this need through ongoing worldview and apologetic training. Relatedly, this project has made me aware that I still have much to learn in the fields addressed in the curriculum, and has confirmed my resolve to continual study and growth in these areas.

Conclusion

It has been a joy to witness the power of God's revelation to elicit faith in the hearts of His children and through His Spirit to begin to produce within them a clarity of vision that sees all reality through the lens of the gospel. This impression of the project's effectiveness on my part is corroborated by the research data. A comparison of the research data from the pre-course and post course surveys as well as the apologetics role playing exercise support the conclusion that participants grew in their faith and understanding of the Christian worldview and their confidence in defending it. Additionally, the apologetics training course received positive feedback and anecdotal testimony to its effectiveness. At the conclusion of the course most class members expressed a desire for further training in worldviews and apologetics.

Chapters 2 and 3 of this project have demonstrated that Biblical and cultural rationales provide abundant warrant for the conclusion that apologetic training is vital for the spiritual life and outreach of the church. Therefore this curriculum will be expanded and modified as described above and will continue serve as an introductory course in worldviews and apologetics for FBC members. Successive courses will focus on specific

areas of apologetics and worldview studies. This project provides a useful guide for churches that desire to train their members in worldviews and apologetics. It can be adapted for use by any church regardless of size or demographic because it trains believers to structure their understanding of life and reality around the worldview of the gospel.

I am very thankful for the blessing this project has been in my life. The process has been difficult but full of benefits both spiritually and academically. It has enabled me to understand God, His Word, and His world more fully and to that degree has equipped me to serve Him and His church more effectively. More significantly, God's revelation has done its work, and drawn my heart to worship the God of infinite beauty and grace. So with a profound love for the Lord Jesus Christ and a deep longing to make His glory known in a world captivated by the lie, my prayer is that this project would serve the King's purpose to liberate the captives and bear eternal fruit to the praise of His matchless grace.

APPENDIX 1

WORLDVIEW AND APOLOGETIC SURVEY

The following instrument is the Worldview and Apologetic Survey. After gathering some basic information in section 1, section 2 of the WVAS will measure the participant's apologetic knowledge and perceived aptitude in defending the Christian faith. The third section assesses the participant's understanding of their own worldview and the worldviews that shape our culture. The final section gathers information on the spiritual disciplines and habits of the participants.

WORLDVIEW AND APOLOGETIC SURVEY (WVAS)

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess your current level of understanding of worldviews and Christian apologetics. Roger Curtis Olson is conducting this research for the purpose of collecting data for a doctoral research project. In this research, you will answer a duplicate set of questions at the beginning and conclusion of the ministry project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Section I

The first section of the WVAS will obtain some demographic information about project participants.

1. Please provide *only* the last 3 numbers of your Social Security Number: _____
3. How many years has it been since you came to faith in Christ? _____
3. Circle the range of your current age: 15-20 20-30 30-40 40-50 50-60 60+
4. How many of the eight apologetics training classes have you attended? _____
This question is only to be answered in the post-course survey

Section II

The second section of the WVAS deals with your knowledge of apologetics as well as your perceived aptitude in defending the Christian faith.

1. Have you ever received training in Christian apologetics? Yes No

If you answered yes, what type of training have you received? _____

2. Please circle the answer that best indicates how often you dialogue with others about ultimate beliefs and the truth of the gospel:

2+ times a week 1 time a week once a month once a year almost never

3. Please circle the answer that best indicates how often you try to analyze media sources to identify wrong views and philosophies as you encounter them (This includes the mediums like newspapers, radio, television, internet, social media, and includes such things as songs, movies, television dramas, etc.).

2+ times a week 1 time a week once a month once a year almost never

Using the following scale, please write the number that best corresponds to your beliefs in response to the following statements:

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

- ___ 1. I feel equipped to give a defense for the existence of God.
- ___ 2. I sometimes question the truthfulness of the Bible.
- ___ 3. Evolution is the only scientific theory of origins.
- ___ 4. I have a clear understanding of the different kinds of apologetics.
- ___ 5. To believe in creationism is unscientific and merely an act of faith.
- ___ 6. I do not know the design argument for God’s existence.
- ___ 7. God will accept people of other religions as long as they believe in God.
- ___ 8. I feel confident to provide unbelievers with evidences for Christianity.
- ___ 9. I am able to defend my faith.
- ___ 10. I sometimes wonder if the Bible is inspired and without mistakes.
- ___ 11. I feel comfortable sharing Christ with someone who expresses serious doubts about the truthfulness of Christianity.
- ___ 12. I understand the moral argument for God’s existence.
- ___ 13. Other religions besides Christianity are equally true.
- ___ 14. There are many contradictions in the Bible, so how could it be from God.
- ___ 15. There is no such thing as absolute truth.

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

- ___ **16.** It is wrong to oppress others with your views.
- ___ **17.** I am confident in initiating spiritual conversations.
- ___ **18.** I feel equipped to answer difficult questions that may arise when sharing the gospel.
- ___ **19.** Different beliefs can be true for different people.
- ___ **20.** I feel prepared to give a biblical defense for the meaning of life.
- ___ **21.** I am fearful of how people will respond when I share my faith.
- ___ **22.** I have a clear understanding of what constitutes truth.
- ___ **23.** Many religious writings claim to be from God, what makes the Bible any different?
- ___ **24.** I am able to identify false views when I encounter them.
- ___ **25.** I am confident that I can defend the supernatural nature of the Bible to skeptics.
- ___ **26.** Jesus is the only way a person can be saved.
- ___ **27.** The Bible contains errors.
- ___ **28.** I am confident in my ability to defend the resurrection of Christ from Scripture, evidence and reason.
- ___ **29.** I can give a biblical response as to why a loving God allows pain and suffering.
- ___ **30.** Every Christian should be able to give a defense for their faith.
- ___ **31.** If God was good and all-powerful then there would not be evil in the world.
- ___ **32.** All the evil and pain in the world makes it difficult for me to believe in God.
- ___ **33.** Apologetics should be left to pastors and theologians.

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

___ 34. With all the religions in the world, I sometimes question if what I believe is right.

___ 35. I feel confident in defending the superiority of Christianity over other religions.

___ 36. God used evolution to create mankind.

___ 37. I do not feel capable of identifying fallacious (contradictory or misleading) arguments.

___ 38. All religions lead to God.

___ 39. Science has disproved the Bible.

___ 40. I feel incapable of defending the deity of Christ from the Bible.

___ 41. Jesus bodily and literally resurrected from the grave.

___ 42. Arguments for God's existence are logical and reasonable.

___ 43. Truth is subjective.

___ 44. Believers are commanded by God to defend the Christian faith.

Section III

The third section of the WVAS deals with your worldview and how well you understand the worldviews that shape our culture.

1. Can you define *worldview*? Yes No

If yes, briefly define the term *worldview*. _____

2. What are the dominant worldviews in our culture? _____

3. How do people's worldviews influence the way they see the world? _____

4. Explain how your worldview shapes the way you live. _____

5. Explain how people should determine their worldview. _____

6. How do we discern the worldviews of others? _____

7. Do people always live out their stated worldview? Yes No

Explain: _____

Section IV

**The fourth section of the WVAS concerns spiritual disciplines and personal habits.
Check the blank that corresponds to the most accurate answer.**

1. I read my Bible (check only one)

- A. more than once per day
- B. once per day
- C. several times per week
- D. once per week
- E. several times per month
- F. once per month
- G. several times per year
- H. not at all

2. I meditate on Scripture (check only one)

- A. more than once per day
- B. once per day
- C. several times per week
- D. once per week
- E. several times per month
- F. once per month
- G. several times per year
- H. not at all

3. I pray (check only one)

- A. more than once per day
- B. once per day
- C. several times per week
- D. once per week
- E. several times per month
- F. once per month
- G. several times per year
- H. not at all

4. I have a specific time set aside for prayer.

- A. Yes
- B. No

5. I view television and electronic media (check only one)

- A. 20+ hours a week
- B. 15+ hours a week
- C. 10+ hours a week
- D. 5+ hours a week
- E. almost never

APPENDIX 2

APOLOGETIC CURRICULUM ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

The assessment rubric on the following page was given to an expert panel consisting of an FBC elder, a Ph.D. in New Testament, an apologetics professor, and two local church pastors. The panel will use the rubric to measure the biblical fidelity, factual accuracy, clarity, thoroughness, and practicality of the curriculum.

Apologetic Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
Lesson One Evaluation					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The curriculum is relevant to the ideological challenges facing believers today.					
The curriculum is faithful to the Bible's teaching on apologetics.					
The curriculum is theologically sound.					
The thesis of the lesson is clearly stated.					
The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.					
The curriculum contains points of practical application.					
The curriculum is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.					
Overall, the lesson is factually accurate and clearly presented.					

Additional Comments:

APPENDIX 3

PARTICIPANT EVALUATION RUBRIC

The participant evaluation rubric on the following page was used to measure the effectiveness of the course to equip FBC members to defend the truth of the gospel using apologetics. The rubric measured the participants' ability to make a defense for attacks against scriptural truth, the rationality of God's existence, and the deity and resurrection of Christ. It also measured their ability to answer common objections such as the problem of evil, and those presented by naturalists and relativists, and to identify weaknesses in competing theistic worldviews.

Participant Evaluation Tool					
Apologetic Role-play Exercise					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Demonstrates a working understanding of the nature of truth					
Able to make a rational defense for the existence of God.					
Effective in making a scriptural, rational and evidential defense for the inspiration of Scripture and the deity and resurrection of Christ.					
Can successfully answer the problem of evil.					
Able to explain clearly the weaknesses and inconsistencies of naturalism and postmodernism					
Has a clear understanding of worldviews and can demonstrate the superiority of the Christian worldview.					
Demonstrates clear and persuasive argumentation and tactical adaptability.					
Has a winsome manner that demonstrates the love and grace of Christ.					

Additional Comments:

APPENDIX 4

GOSPEL AND WORLDVIEWS SERMON OUTLINE

Title: The Gospel and Worldviews

Text: John 18:33-38

Introduction: Our Worship Exposes our Worldview

Proposition: God commands believers that their thought structure, their worldview, is to be intentionally shaped by the gospel, which provides *the* superior framework for understanding life and reality.

I. The Necessity of Understanding Worldviews

- A. Worldviews Defined
- B. Worldviews: Structure for Understanding Reality
- C. Worldviews: Foundation for Living
- D. Worldviews: Alternative Universes

II. The Danger of not Developing Our Christian Worldview

- A. False Worldviews Hold Believers Captive
- B. False Worldviews have Consequences
- C. False Worldviews Appeal to our Sinful Natures
- D. False Worldviews Diminish the Gospel: The Sacred/Secular Split

III. Developing Our Christian Worldview by Understanding the Gospel

- A. God: The Ultimate Reality.
- B. The Bible's Big Story: Creation
- C. The Bible's Big Story: Fall

D. The Bible's Big Story: Redemption

IV. Conclusion/Summary

A. The Reality of Spiritual Battle

B. Christ's Decisive Victory on the Cross

C. Our Place in God's Big Story

D. Our Victory through the Spirit and the Word

APPENDIX 5

LESSON OUTLINES FOR AN EIGHT-WEEK COURSE IN WORLDVIEWS AND APOLOGETICS

Lesson 1: Introduction to Apologetics

- I. Definition of Apologetics
- II. Biblical Rationale for Apologetics
- III. Value of Apologetics for Believers
- IV. The Nature of Truth

Lesson 2: Introduction to Worldviews

- I. Worldviews Defined
- II. Worldviews: Structure for Understanding Reality
- III. Worldviews: Foundation for Living
- IV. Worldviews: Alternative Universes
- V. Worldviews: A Faith Commitment
- VI. The Captivating Power of False Worldviews

Lesson 3: Assessing Postmodernism

- I. Postmodernism Defined
- II. Postmodernism: The Spirit of the Age
- III. Postmodernism through the Lens of the Creation, Fall, Redemption Paradigm
- IV. Postmodernism: The Contradictions
- V. Preparation for Daily Encounters with Postmodernism

Lesson 4: Assessing Polytheism and Pantheism

- I. Polytheism Defined
- II. Polytheism through the Lens of the Creation, Fall, Redemption Paradigm
- III. Deficiencies and Contradictions of Polytheism
- IV. Pantheism Defined
- V. The Extent of Pantheistic Belief Today
- VI. Pantheism through the Lens of the Creation, Fall, Redemption Paradigm
- VII. Weaknesses and Contradictions of the Pantheistic Worldview

Lesson 5: Assessing Atheism

- I. Atheism Defined
- II. The Influence of Atheism in the West
- III. Atheism through the Lens of the Creation, Fall, Redemption Paradigm
- IV. Inadequacies and Contradictions of the Atheistic Worldview
- V. The Bankruptcy of Evolutionary Theory
- VI. The Religious Nature of the Atheistic Worldview

Lesson 6: Theistic Arguments

- I. Theism Defined
- II. Rational Arguments for God's Existence
 - A. The Ontological Argument
 - B. The Cosmological Argument
 - C. The Teleological Argument
- III. The Moral Argument for God's Existence
- IV. The Anthropological Argument for God's Existence
- V. The Cumulative Case for Theism: Empirical, Rational and Experiential Evidences

Lesson 7: Refuting Islam

- I. Introduction to Islam
- II. History of Islam
- III. Beliefs and Practices of Islam
- IV. Islam through the Lens of the Creation, Fall, Redemption Paradigm
- V. Critique of Islam
 - A. Flaws and Contradictions in the Koran
 - B. Flaws and Contradictions in Islamic Doctrine
 - C. Mohammed: The Prophet of Islam as Witness Against its Truth Claim
- VI. Witnessing to your Muslim Neighbor

Lesson 8: The Case for the Christian Worldview

- I. Introduction: Using the Creation, Fall, Redemption Paradigm
- II. Arguments for the Christian Worldview
 - A. Manuscript Evidence
 - B. Archeological and Historical Evidence
 - C. Unity of the Bible
 - D. Biblical Prophecy
 - E. Scriptural Support for Christ's Identity and Claim to Deity
 - F. Scriptural Support for the Death, Burial and Resurrection of Christ
 - G. Historical Corroboration for Christ's Passion
- III. Review and Summary of the Course's Sustained Argument

APPENDIX 6
STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF T-TEST FOR
DEPENDENT SAMPLES

Table A1. Raw data of pre and post-test scores

Participant	Pre Test	Post Test
1	225	260
2	178	264
3	222	259
4	218	243
5	229	250
6	177	243
7	213	249

Table A2. T-test for pre and post-test scores for all students

	<i>Variable 1</i>	<i>Variable 2</i>
Mean	208.857	252.571
Variance	484.4761905	71.61904762
Observations	7	7
Pearson Correlation	0.002300767	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	6	
t Stat	-4.908318979	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.00134412	
t Critical one-tail	1.943180281	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.002688241	
t Critical two-tail	2.446911851	

APPENDIX 7

APOLOGETICS ROLE PLAY EXERCISE PARTICIPANT RESULTS

The participant evaluation rubric (Appendix 3) was used to measure the effectiveness of the course to equip FBC member's to defend the truth of the gospel using apologetics. The rubric has eight criteria that measured the participant's ability to defend the nature of truth as found in Scripture, the rationality of God's existence, and the deity and resurrection of Christ. It also measured participant's ability to answer common objections such as the problem of evil, and those presented by naturalists and relativists, and to identify weaknesses in competing theistic worldviews. The final two criteria measured the clarity of participant's argumentation and tactical adaptability, as well as the degree to which their manner reflected the love and grace of Christ.

The table on the following page illustrates each class member's score for each criterion, the average score of each class member, the average score of the class for each criterion, and the class average for all the criteria. The number for each criterion (C1, C2, etc.) corresponds to the order in the rubric. The point values are as follows:

1=insufficient; 2=requires attention; 3=sufficient; 4=exemplary.

Table A3. Apologetics role playing exercise class scoring data

Member	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	Total	Avg.
1	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	4	24	3
2	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	32	4
3	3	3	3	2	3	3	2	4	23	2.86
4	2	3	3	3	2	2	2	4	21	2.63
5	3	4	4	4	3	4	3	4	29	3.63
6	4	3	3	4	4	3	3	3	27	3.38
7	4	4	4	3	4	4	3	3	29	3.63
Total	23	24	24	23	22	23	20	26	185	Class
Average	3.29	3.43	3.43	3.29	3.14	3.29	2.86	3.71	26.44	Avg.: 3.3

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ABSTRACT

TRAINING CHURCH MEMBERS IN CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IN WATERTOWN, WISCONSIN

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Oren R. Martin

The purpose of this project is to train church members in Christian apologetics at First Baptist Church in Watertown, Wisconsin. This will entail evaluating the current apologetic knowledge of FBC members, developing and implementing an apologetics curriculum, and measuring the effectiveness of that curriculum.

The first chapter provides the foundational information, including the history, ministry context, rationale, purpose and goals for the project. Chapter 2 advances the biblical and theological basis for the project. A study of several scriptural imperatives and examples (Isa 44-45; Acts 17:16-34; 2 Cor 10:3-5; 1 Pet 3:15; Jude 1:3-4; various gospel texts) provide abundant support for apologetics training. Chapter 3 develops the need for apologetic training by examining the growing darkness of our culture and its dimming effect on the light of the church. Chapter 4 reviews the application of the project and details the development and implementation of the apologetics curriculum. Chapter 5 evaluates the effectiveness of the apologetics curriculum and suggests changes for improving future training sessions. It is hoped that this project will help FBC members to see and embrace the truth of the glory of Jesus Christ.

VITA

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ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Senior High Bible and Theology Teacher, Hanalani Schools, Mililani, Hawaii,
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Youth Leader, Calvary Baptist Church, Watertown, Wisconsin, 1990-1997

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