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DEVELOPING AN APOLOGETICS MINISTRY AT LIFEPOINT
CHURCH INDY IN INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

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APPROVAL SHEET

DEVELOPING AN APOLOGETICS MINISTRY AT LIFEPOINT
CHURCH INDY IN INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

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I dedicate this project to the elders, staff, and members of LifePoint Church Indy, who have made it possible for me to pursue academics while serving as a pastor.

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PREFACE

My desire to complete the project within these pages is born out of a joy in seeing believers trained and equipped to defend the gospel of Jesus Christ. I have had the privilege of serving as a pastor at LifePoint Church Indy for almost eight years at the time of this writing. In that time, I have seen a love for the gospel demonstrated by many of its members and watched them grow in their desire to defend it against skeptics and false teachers. I am thankful for their steadfast example of loving others by sharing a faith once for all delivered to the saints, and doing it with grace and charity.

I am profoundly thankful for my wife, Dedra, who has been a constant companion to me during my ministry and studies, and to our daughters, Hannah and Jordan, and now son-in-law, Ethan, grandson, Declan, and granddaughter Darcy, for bringing me so much joy and fulfillment in life, helping make my days of reading and study days of peace and contentment. I am also thankful for David Denny, who assisted me with my project implementation. Finally, I wish to thank Dr. Ted Cabal, my faculty supervisor, for both his patience and guidance throughout this project.

I am grateful to resume my studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary after fifteen years of pursuing missions and ministry in the intervening years since my graduation with the M.Div. degree. My goal is to pursue Christ not only with my body, but with my mind as well, and studying here has made that a joyful possibility.

Jym Gregory

Indianapolis, Indiana

December 2018

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The vision of LifePoint Church Indy is “Growing TOGETHER in our relationship with Jesus Christ.” The emphasis on “together” is intentional. The church body is a community of redeemed people who believe that the primary task God has given the church universal is “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ . . . so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:12-14).¹ To demonstrate obedience to this vital task, there exists a need to train members to be able to identify false teaching and address the beliefs and ideas that undergird those teachings, while at the same time equipping them to defend the doctrines of the faith in an informed, biblical, and winsome manner.

Context

LifePoint Church Indy (LPCI) is a non-denominational, independent church located on the south side of the city of Indianapolis. The church was planted in 1985, by a pastor who had a desire to build a community of believers that demonstrated not only the love of God in their lives, but the knowledge of God as well. He was known for his frequently stated tagline, “God accepted you as you were, but does not plan to leave you as you are.” He believed in discipleship and training. The church is a community of believers who have been led by only two lead pastors in its entire history, the founding pastor having retired in 2009. It is an elder-led body, with strong and godly leadership coming from the ministry of those elders. Discipleship is a main ingredient of the church,

¹ All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

with healthy discipling relationships taking place across the age spectrum. The children's ministry utilizes a solid teaching curriculum that includes both large and small group interaction with adult leaders. The youth ministry is a teaching rather than event-focused ministry. Middle school students walk through an overview of the entire Bible three times during their tenure in that ministry, and the high school ministry focuses on breaking down the Sunday message delivered during worship in a way that challenges the students to apply the truths of the message to their daily lives. Small group accountability and discipleship takes place in both ministries. Almost thirty high school students wake up at 6:00 a.m. every Tuesday during the school year to meet with small group leaders at a local coffeehouse for discipleship training.

The adults at LPCI are also engaged in discipleship and training through a variety of opportunities, starting with a program entitled "Plan and Promise," which takes participants through the entire Bible thematically over a four-year period. LPCI also provides a Fellows Program for adults, a 35-week intensive discipleship program that equips participants in the areas of biblical theology, systematic theology, Christology, soteriology, hermeneutics, church history, and worldview and cultural issues.² Approximately one-half of the adult members at LPCI are also involved in small home groups that practice ministry around the church's Five Priorities—worship, grow, connect, serve, and share. These "Life Groups" are not merely fellowship groups but are also engaged in teaching and equipping in the host homes. A great deal of one-on-one and small group discipleship is also generated from this ministry. It is not unusual to see multiple groups of men and women gathered together at the same local coffeehouse where the youth gather, participating in one-on-one discipleship, small group accountability, or book studies just about any day of the week.

² A sixteen-week concentration in hermeneutics was added as well.

Worship at LPCI is vertical in its approach and Trinitarian in its application. During corporate worship, the community of believers gather together to proclaim the excellencies of God and to be equipped for ministry through music, prayer, and exegetical exposition of God's Word. There exists a good mixture of ages within the church family, and although the church is primarily Anglo in its racial makeup, there are multiple families of color and ethnic diversity present as well. The team that leads in worship each Sunday morning over two services exists to invite the gathered body of believers into the presence of God, bringing to him an offering of sacrifice and praise by knowing who he has revealed himself to be, using that knowledge to exalt and treasure him above all things, and serve him and others in such a way that brings a deep and abiding satisfaction. The worship team does not perform; rather, it leads the congregation corporately before the throne of God. The sermons that anchor worship are expository in nature and focused on the believers who have gathered, while understanding that non-believers are also present. The goal is teaching, equipping, and edification, but the gospel is often presented in such a way that is accessible to a culture that is by and large biblically illiterate. Due to these factors, there is both an emotional and intellectual aspect to the church's corporate worship. Much of the preaching at LPCI would itself be considered discipling, and there are frequent times when there is an apologetic nature to the sermons as well.

Weaknesses at LifePoint Church Indy

There is much good taking place in the life and ministry of LPCI. There appears to be an eagerness overall to know God and to make him known. Believers are being trained and equipped for works of ministry both within and without the church. However, there is still much work to be done. Although many pursue their relationship with Christ, working out their salvation with fear and trembling, as it were, some do not. Like many churches in the west, there remains a "flabbiness" at times to the body of Christ at LPCI. Some remain entrenched in a works righteousness approach to salvation, if not in word, then certainly in deed. At the opposite extreme, some put their hope in the

“grace alone” camp, trusting that all that really needs to be done to find salvation is to hear about Jesus and accept him as Savior from their sins, praying a prayer acknowledging their need for him, and then moving on with life as if nothing of any genuine importance ever really took place. For every person who takes advantage of the equipping and teaching opportunities the church provides, there is another who does not. Finally, there remains for some the malaise of a “mere Christianity” approach to their faith, an “all we need is Jesus” idea that keeps them from cultivating the desire to know God better and from sharing the gospel with their friends and neighbors because, in their estimation, these friends and neighbors are doing just fine with their own approach to God. The competing teachings of Christian leaders that are so accessible through social media outlets confuse them, and the false teaching also permeating the airwaves and world-wide-web only add to the disequilibrium. Some of the church’s young people are being led astray by the lure of teachers and professors who can enjoy their lives as intellectually fulfilled atheists, while enjoying their fill of worldly pleasures to boot. This teaching is intoxicating to those not grounded in the faith, and it has proven true for some who call LPCI their home.

As a result of one or more of these trends in the American culture, multiple parents in the church family currently grieve over a son or daughter who has come out as either atheists, agnostics, gay or lesbian, or simply disenchanted with Christianity and the institutional church. Despite the church leadership’s regular pleas to parents to train up their children in the home, practicing family worship and devotions and communicating the gospel regularly to their children, some refuse to follow through due to other commitments or the sense of a lack of ability to lead in such a manner. Many feel as if they do not possess the biblical or scientific knowledge to combat the false hermeneutic coming out of the gay Christian movement, the naturalistic evolutionary movement, or several other counter-Christian expressions rampant in culture today. Although traditional pressures remain at LPCI that weaken a church body (e.g., gossip, laziness,

rudeness, self-centeredness), the attack upon the intellectual aspects of the faith have dealt the strongest blow.

Apologetics at LifePoint Church Indy

The Fellows Ministry currently in place at LPCI does a cursory job of introducing the concept of apologetics to those enrolled in the study.³ However, the glaring weakness in the discipleship ministry remains Christian apologetics, particularly as it relates to individuals within the church body being equipped to defend their own faith against attacks from both self-proclaimed atheists and self-proclaimed believers. Although a related weakness includes believers within the church body who are ill-equipped to share their faith, primarily due to their fear of being challenged with a question or statement that they cannot address adequately, the concern lies first with the defense of their own faith.

One might suppose that an atheistic worldview creates havoc for the church today, yet it appears it is less about atheists and more about those who make a claim to be Christ followers—the misinformed and mistaken at best—the false teachers at worst. The trend at LPCI does not lean toward people abandoning the faith altogether, although as previously mentioned that has happened in some instances; instead, it leans toward believers giving up on the true doctrines of the faith, some of them essential and first order doctrines, because a “Christian” writer or apologist has convinced them that those so-called truths are either no longer true, or never were. Orthodoxy is clearly under attack, and that attack has shaken the foundation of more than one individual within the church family. The church’s youth are particularly vulnerable, as are new believers within the fellowship. This should not surprise believers as it has been the primary target group

³ In the past two years at LPCI, a few stand-alone apologetics classes have been offered by the church leadership, dealing specifically with teachings related to Islam and Mormonism. These classes have been well attended, demonstrating a desire among the membership to be equipped in the area of apologetics.

false teachers have attacked since the first century (2 Pet 2:18). Overall, the church leadership's efforts at LPCI to build a solid biblical foundation for those willing to apply themselves to the task have been well received. However, because apologetic studies are not developed and available at this time, there remains a void in the overall discipleship process within the church's teaching ministry.

To combat this area of weakness within the church, a discipleship track program needed to be developed and established that would address the lack of teachings related to apologetics. Specifically, a study in apologetics that addressed the current teachings in culture generated by both non-believers and believers was needed. LPCI must tackle the ever-expanding ideas within the church (catholic) that doctrine does not matter, that truth is subjective, and the "chronological snobbery" (as C. S. Lewis described it) that proclaims the mystifying concept that ancient truths were only held sacred because ancient and ignorant Christians held them. The idea that men and women can be free of biblical teaching because educated and forward-thinking Christians have now liberated modern people from the poor understanding of Koine Greek prevalent in the medieval church and the archaic and backward view of pre-scientific Christians has become damning.

The undermining of orthodoxy from inside the church is generally based on falsehoods and half-truths that have been passed off as wisdom based on the results of groundbreaking research and scholarship. These new ideas rarely prove to be true—the proverbial Emperor has no clothes. Nevertheless, they must be addressed and demonstrated to be found wanting in light of the truth of God's revelation made known not only in Scripture, but in nature itself. At the same time, attacks from outside the church must also be addressed. Atheistic naturalism and the Darwinian evolutionary ideas that are inherent to it have captured the minds of many young believers, including young believers at LPCI. Although the attacks from outside the church are at times extremely challenging, they must be confronted, and believers need to be equipped to do so.

In summary, there remained a decided lack of ability for many believers at LPCI to defend the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. There was a strong need for a ministry to be developed that would address this inability to intellectually hold fast to the faith and defend it against attacks both obvious and subtle. This ministry had to be developed in a way from which both adults and young people, particularly late high school aged students who would likely soon be embarking on a college career, could benefit. Too many believers within the church family are having their faith shaken, and sometimes shattered, needlessly. These challenges had to be taken seriously and addressed in a way that believers at LPCI were provided every opportunity to become not only conversant in their faith, but steadfast and able to teach and defend the doctrines that have held the church together for 2,000 years.

Rationale

The issues related above demonstrated both a need and a desire for in-depth training in biblical apologetics at LPCI. The atmosphere was ripe for such a study demonstrated by the fact that over 150 believers at LPCI had already completed a thirty-five week Fellows Ministry that demanded intensive reading and a weekly class meeting that dealt with many of the deeper matters of the faith. In addition, nearly 200 members crowded into two classrooms at the onset of an adult Bible survey class (Plan and Promise), demonstrating their desire to drink deeply from the Word of God. LPCI has experienced the pain of watching both youth and adults walk away from the faith, either explicitly by denying it outright, or implicitly by rejecting the foundational truths and teachings that have constituted orthodoxy for almost two millennia, for teachings that better suit their lifestyles and the greater culture around them. A well-conceived study in Christian apologetics helped to solidify a biblical foundation and worldview for those believers at LPCI willing to participate.

In a larger context, the Bible teaches Christian leaders to train and equip believers for works of service. Apologetics can be understood in many ways as a subset

of discipleship training. Although the purpose of biblical apologetics is to provide a defense for the faith, training in apologetics equips the believer not only for verbal jousting and debating (hopefully in a winsome and loving manner), but also prepares the believer mentally to deal with his own self talk, doubt, and intellectual questioning. Apologetics is therefore important not only as a tool to help win others to the faith, but as a tool to keep oneself in it as well. Apologetics are important, and they have been since the time the apostle Peter wrote to the church: “But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for the reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15). Most people at LPCI have that hope, and they needed to be prepared to make that defense, for their sake and the sake of others.

This project sought to meet both the desire and need at LPCI for quality training in apologetics by offering a comprehensive study in biblical apologetics that addressed questions commonly raised concerning the validity of the faith, as well as outright attacks upon Christianity and the Christian Scriptures. The project sought to measure not only the level of competence participants possessed in the area of biblical apologetics prior to and after completion of the course of study, but also their level of confidence in the faith and in their ability to defend it, both in conversations with others and in conversations with themselves. Participants were trained not only to help others see the truth that God exists and the possibility of salvation is real, but to develop deep and abiding roots of their own in the faith. The project focused on gaining intellectual and relational prowess as it related to apologetics, knowing the faith, and having the ability to “flesh it out” in a way that it not only makes sense, but is persuasive and challenging to those who doubt. In addition, teaching and training was provided relating to how one might approach discussions revolving around the faith in terms of language and behavior.

How does one accomplish what Peter asks his readers to consider as they give a defense for the faith: “Yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be

put to shame” (1 Pet 3:15-16)? How does one defend an idea with good behavior? Concerns related to these questions were addressed and steps were taken to provide project participants with the tools necessary to gird themselves in such a way that they would be prepared to be slandered, and yet to receive such treatment as a good servant of Jesus Christ should.

To accomplish these desired outcomes for this project and the goals, a twenty-six-week curriculum was developed and facilitated with an initial participant group covering introductory information as a foundation for apologetics. The information included thinking clearly about God, biblical worldview essentials, essential Christian teachings and why Christians believe those teachings, the reliability and sufficiency of Scripture, issues related to contemporary science and religion, a closer look at cults and unorthodox offshoots of Christianity (e.g., Mormonism, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society), major world religions, and tactics related to communicating with skeptics in a winsome and persuasive manner.

Finally, project participants were challenged to use the information and training as a tool for teaching and evangelism. Future LPCI leaders were developed who are not only able to teach about the faith but to defend it as well. The gospel witness will go forth from individuals in the church family and, Lord willing, believers will gain joy and confidence in their own faith.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop a basic apologetics teaching ministry at LifePoint Church Indy that would adequately equip participants with information necessary to provide a positive rationale for the Christian faith, to understand it better themselves, and to defend it against skeptics.

Goals

Three goals reflect what this project was intended to provide for the participants who chose (and will choose in the future) to enroll in the Apologetics Ministry at LPCI. The first goal relates to the level of understanding each participant possesses related to the field of apologetics and their own faith prior to taking the Apologetics Ministry course. The second goal relates to the curriculum developed as the foundation for the ministry. The third goal represents building blocks that were (and will be for future participants) attained progressively as the participants interacted with both the reading and small group discussion that constitutes the project. The goals are listed as follows:

1. The first goal was to assess the current knowledge base of each participant in relation to biblical concepts that impact Christian apologetics.
2. The second goal was to develop a twenty-six-session curriculum designed to equip participants in the course of study with information to engage more effectively with skeptics in apologetic encounters.
3. The third goal was to equip participants with a tactical approach to dealing with skeptics and those from different faith backgrounds.

To determine whether these goals were met, research methodologies were developed as a tool for measurement. That methodology, including the instruments utilized, are detailed in the following section.

Research Methodology

Three goals were utilized to determine the effectiveness of the Apologetics Ministry at LPCI. The first goal was to assess the current knowledge base of each participant in relation to biblical concepts that impact Christian apologetics. I measured this goal by the administration of the Apologetics Assessment Survey (AAS) to each participant in the Apologetics Ministry, yielding a clearer picture of the current knowledge base of each participant.⁴ The AAS gauged the participants' current level of

⁴ See appendix 1. Due to the small-group format of the Apologetics Ministry at LPCI, the sample group was relatively small at first, but grows with each subsequent course offered. The first

understanding as it related to questions concerning the Christian faith that are often debated in apologetic encounters. The survey also gauged the level of Bible knowledge related to apologetics possessed by each participant. I considered this goal successfully met when ten participants completed the AAS and results were compiled to provide a base-line of competency in Christian apologetics and Bible knowledge for each participant. I also ran a t-test for dependent samples to determine if a positive statistically significant difference was found in the pre and post-course surveys.

The second goal was to develop a curriculum designed to equip participants in the course of study with information to engage more effectively with skeptics in apologetic encounters. The curriculum was facilitated over a 26-week course in a small group format with one and a half hours of interactive teaching allocated per group meeting time.⁵ The curriculum covered basic issues related to apologetics, including biblical worldview issues, the reliability of Scripture, evidences for God's existence, and an overview of cults and major religions. I assigned reading to each participant and expected it to be completed each week to promote robust and focused group discussion. I measured this goal utilizing a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum after each session.⁶ A rubric was also administered as a final evaluation of the curriculum as a whole at the completion of the apologetics study.⁷ I considered this goal successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level.

assessment consisted of a group of ten participants and a facilitator being trained for future leadership.

⁵ Having no more than ten participants allows for and encourages discussion.

⁶ See appendix 2. All 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.

⁷ See appendix 3.

The third goal of this project was to equip participants with a tactical approach to dealing with skeptics and those from different faith backgrounds. Because the goal of this ministry project was not simply to increase knowledge but the application of that knowledge to the participant's personal faith and their ability to utilize Christian apologetics in real world settings, it was important that participants understood how to take what they learned and apply it in such a way as to impact the lives of others with whom they have opportunity to engage in gospel witness. I measured this goal with a pre-course survey developed to determine the level of comfort and confidence each participant possessed related to apologetics at the onset of the course. The goal was considered successfully met when 90 percent of the participants believed they were better equipped to engage with skeptics and people from different faith backgrounds after completing the course than they did prior to completion, based on the final Curriculum Evaluation Rubric and discussion during the final session. Participants that did not feel better equipped to engage with skeptics at the end of the course helped to reevaluate the curriculum to better achieve the goal in future courses.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

Because some of the terms utilized in this project can be broadly defined, and others are unique to the Christian experience, pertinent terms are delineated in this section to both more narrowly define them and to assist the reader's comprehension of how the terms were understood by the participants and facilitator during the course of the project.

Apology. The term *apology* is derived from the Greek word *apologia*. In the days of the Greek academy, *apologia* referred to a courtroom defense. Defendants in court could refute accusations with a reply, known in Greek as the *apologia*.⁸

⁸ Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons: An Integrative Approach to Defending Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 1.

Apologist. An *apologist* is anyone who presents an apology or gives a defense for a position or person under question or consideration. An apologist may give a defense for certain aspects of a given religious faith (the context in view within this project), or for a myriad of other concepts related to science, philosophy, ethics, and cultural issues.⁹

Apologetics. *Apologetics*, generally defined, describes an apology that formulates arguments and provides reasons for those arguments.¹⁰ As such, *apologetics* may be more narrowly defined as the attempt to persuade people that one's views are correct and, therefore, those with opposing views should reconsider them in light of the correct information.

Christian apologetics. James Taylor defines *Christian apologetics* as the “vindication of the Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of life.”¹¹ It is grounded in the reality that the Christian God exists and is therefore rooted in theism. Three basic themes are associated specifically with Christian apologetics. The first theme involves defending the faith against counter-claims, whereby the apologist sets out to address the barriers to faith in the Christian God and his truth claims. A second theme involves translating the core ideas of the faith that are often unfamiliar to many audiences through logic, familiar images, stories, and terms. Once a defense is made and core ideas translated, the third theme comes into play, in which the faith is commended to the audience in a way that sets out to persuade them of the truth and relevance of Christianity.¹²

⁹ Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 4.

¹⁰ James E. Taylor, *Introducing Apologetics: Cultivating Christian Commitment* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 18. It is common to attribute the origin of apologetics to Plato's *Apology*, where he recounts the defense Socrates utilized during his trial before his fellow citizens in Athens. In his defense, Socrates provided reasonable arguments to support his claim to innocence in the hope that his fellow Athenians would find him justified and the accusations leveled against him unreasonable.

¹¹ Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 17.

¹² Alister E. McGrath, *Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers & Skeptics Find Faith* (Grand

Reformed apologetics. *Reformed apologetics* is a Christian apologetic methodology in which revelation is emphasized as the key to how Christianity is to be understood. It stresses the authority of God’s Word and its descriptions of God’s revelation (Jesus Christ, the Trinity, sin, evil, etc.). It bases the reality of Christianity on the absolute truth that God has revealed to humanity about himself and his world through Scripture.¹³ This approach, in conjunction with classical apologetics, was utilized in the teaching philosophy for this project.

Classical apologetics. *Classical apologetics* is an apologetic approach that emphasizes reason and the utilization of logical criteria (e.g., the law of noncontradiction, coherence, self-consistency) as a means for coming to conclusions concerning truth claims proposed by religious approaches and philosophies that stand in opposition to Christianity.¹⁴ In addition to the Reformed approach, this approach was utilized as a teaching component for this project.

Skeptic. For the purposes of this project, *skeptic* is a person who is not convinced by the truth claims of Christianity. It is not intended as a pejorative term, but simply a descriptor of any person who is not a follower of Jesus Christ.

Apologetics encounter. As it relates to this project, an *apologetic encounter* is any sustained conversation with a skeptic of the faith where questions concerning the truth claims of Christianity are discussed from philosophical, scientific, historical, or moral perspectives.

Rapids: Baker, 2012), 17-20.

¹³ Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 221. This approach is commonly referred to as presuppositional apologetics. However, because “Reformed apologetics” is more inclusive of the different systems related to this approach, this will be the working title for this project. Notable apologists associated with this approach include John Calvin, James White, and Cornelius Van Til.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 34. Notable apologists associated with this approach include C. S. Lewis, R. C. Sproul, Norman Geisler, and William Lane Craig.

Two limitations applied to this project. First, the relative accuracy of the pre- and post-course questionnaires were dependent upon the willingness of the participants to be honest concerning how confident and comfortable they were related to their skill and knowledge when conversing with skeptics. This aspect was most important with the pre-course questionnaire, when concerns with appearing unprepared or cowardly may have tainted the responses of the participants. To mitigate this limitation, participants were encouraged to be honest with their self-assessments and reassured that one of the goals of the project was to help alleviate these types of concerns which virtually every believer owns. Second, the effectiveness of the project was dependent upon the participants reading the required books and articles, then participating in discussion and extrapolating ideas from those discussions. To address this limitation, the first participant group was selected based upon prior demonstrations of willingness to participate in long-term study, to read more advanced writing, and to engage with others in gospel centered conversations.

Two delimitations were also placed upon this project. First, the initial project consisted of only ten participants and one facilitator-in-training. The reasons for limiting the project to this number have been addressed previously in this proposal. The anticipated result of this project was the foundation of a course of study that can be duplicated many times over within the church family at LPCI. Therefore, although the initial project had a limited number of participants, eventually many people who are active participants and members at LPCI will be included. Second, this project was condensed into a twenty-six-week course. While the basic concepts related to Christian apologetics can be covered in this time period, participants may need additional teaching and training to experience a level of expertise in the field. Additional courses dealing with advanced apologetic teaching and methodologies may evolve from this project.

Conclusion

One of the most apparent realities in Scripture is the truth that God exists and speaks only what is true. Christians must be able to see this in Scripture for themselves, and to defend the claim, if only at the most fundamental level. These arguments must be made biblically, with humility, in an understandable manner, and with a winsome tone. The following chapters demonstrate how this is possible for believers who are inclined to seek depth in their faith.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR THE BASIS AND PURPOSE OF THE APOLOGETIC TASK

The Scriptures call all believers to be prepared to give a reasonable defense for the faith, and provide the information necessary to do so. Five passages, while not exhausting the biblical texts related to the topic, clearly demonstrate God's mind on the matter of Christian apologetics and the manner in which believers are to engage with others as his followers.

The Norm and Pattern of Apologetics (1 Pet 3:15-17)

The apostle Peter's first epistle is a letter directed to persecuted believers residing in the regions of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia; Roman provinces where some sporadic persecutions have broken out against followers of Jesus Christ in Peter's day. As it relates to this study of apologetics, Peter lays out for these early believers a pattern of apologetics that has become the norm for believers since the first century.

Suffering and Defending the Faith

In 1 Peter 3, Peter draws out an approach to apologetics based on the reality that believers do indeed suffer for their faith, particularly when they share that faith with non-believers. Peter opens his statement in verse 13 by asking what appears to be a rhetorical question: "Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?" The question is asked in such a way as to elicit a clear answer of "no one, of course." The καί with which this verse opens links verse 13 with the verse that precedes it, in which Peter's readers are encouraged by the idea that God is ever watchful over the faithful, and

ever ready to punish those who do evil. Peter's plain sense of the statement, followed by what appears to be an immediate corrective in verse 14 ("But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled"), is that very few, even under pagan codes of conduct, will harm good people without cause. However, even if such is true generally, the reality that both Peter and his audience know from experience is that persecution and suffering are real for Christ-followers. The first audience to read this letter from the apostle have already been targeted by false accusations (2:12), ignorant talk (2:15), insults (3:9), fear-mongering (3:14) and malicious talk (3:16).¹ Peter hopes to minimize his readers' sufferings by encouraging virtue, but he will confirm his teaching that, even when suffering occurs despite virtuous behavior, one must learn how to behave in all circumstances.²

Good Conduct and No Fear

Considering Peter's lead-in to verses 15-17, Christ-followers are to practice good conduct among their pagan neighbors with the promise that God's eye and his blessing is upon them. Their good behavior will oftentimes spare them undue suffering, and yet, suffering will surely come to the righteous. This concept is abundantly clear not only in Peter's teaching, but in the teaching of Jesus and the apostle Paul.³ Nevertheless, those who proclaim the name of Jesus are not to fear or be unduly frightened. The Psalmist shared a similar thought as it related to fear for the man of God: "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Ps 27:1; see also 56:4; 118:6). Of the circumstances that

¹ Karen Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 227.

² Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 130.

³ For example, Jesus' words in Matt 5:11; Luke 21:12 and John 15:12. Also, Paul's exhortations in Rom 8:18; 1 Thess 3:4 and 2 Tim 3:12.

accompany their walk of faith, Peter's audience is not to fear persecutors, but instead to honor the Lord Jesus as holy in their own hearts. In verse 14, Peter quotes from the prophecy of Isaiah: "Their fear do not fear" (Isa 8:12). Here Peter utilizes a translation from the LXX, where he reproduces the quote accurately while employing a minor change from a singular pronoun to a plural, thus changing the context from Isaiah's call for the people of Judah not to be overwhelmed by a fear of their political enemies (namely, Israel and Aram) to Peter's exhortation for his readers not to fear the threats of their own non-believing neighbors.⁴ Peter's audience, rather, are to fear (or revere) only God.⁵

This teaching reaches out to believers even in the twenty-first century when considering how, when, and in what manner they make a defense for their faith. Christians are explicitly called to exchange fear of men for a healthier, and understandable, fear of God. Jesus said in Peter's own hearing, "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt 10:28). Peter can share this exhortation as a man who has experienced this truth first-hand, as one who has learned through the failure of having denied his Christ, born out of this very fear he calls his readers to avoid (Mark 14:66-72).

Setting Jesus Apart

As the text transitions to verse 15, a second quote from Isaiah is utilized by Peter, this time from Isaiah 8:13, and once again from the LXX. Here, Peter inserts the phrase "in your hearts" and the word "Christ." Thus, rather than Isaiah's command to "Set apart [or sanctify] the Lord himself, and fear him," Peter is able to say, "but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy."⁶ A minority of translators and commentators

⁴ Jobes, *I Peter*, 229.

⁵ Paul J. Achtemeier, *I Peter*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), 232.

⁶ Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 131.

insist here that the construction should be “set apart the Lord, namely, Christ.”⁷ If this translation is correct, then Peter is here insisting that what he has said about Yahweh in the Old Testament is now true of Jesus. However, in the original, “Lord” lacks the article, yet “Christ” retains it. It would seem more natural if either both nouns retained the article, or both did not.⁸ Therefore, in context it appears that Peter was not so much concerned that his hearers would come to understand that Jesus is Lord—they already believed that. It is important to him that they go about setting Jesus apart in their own hearts and treat him like he is Lord.⁹

Being Prepared

Verse 15b is the Scripture’s definitive statement on Christian apologetics. Here, Peter reminds his first readers and (by extension via the work of the Spirit in the preservation of the text) believers today that an acknowledgment of Jesus Christ is to take place through an intentional act of preparation that will allow for a defense of the gospel always and in every situation, including those that bring persecution. The forensic connotation of the word ἀπολογία (defense) accompanied by Peter’s use of the phrase “always being prepared” make it possible that he has in mind situations where Christ-followers may be hailed to stand before the Roman courts in judicial action, as can be seen in texts such as Acts 25:16 and Philippians 1:16.¹⁰ However, it is more likely that Peter simply has in mind any situation, public or private, where Christ-followers must respond to the demands of non-believers to justify both their actions and

⁷ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude*, New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: B & H, 2003), 173.

⁸ Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 232.

⁹ Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude*, 173.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 233.

beliefs as it relates to their failure to follow normal cultural expectations and to account for their faith (1 Cor 9:3; 2 Cor 7:11).

There can be little question that some believers did indeed face legal action as it related to their apologetics; the apostle Paul certainly did (Acts 16:19-24), and the threat was held over others as well (Acts 19:38). The exhortation here, however, simply cannot be restricted to imperial courtroom appearances only.¹¹ Far too many instances in everyday life where Christ-followers are called to speak to the reality of their faith demonstrate that it is not only in court appearances where Christians must testify. In short, all believers are to be prepared to make a defense for the gospel to “anyone” who asks them to justify their rationale for the hope in Christ that they carry with them, whether in times of trouble or in times of peace, and regardless of the setting in which they find themselves. Here, Peter is simply paraphrasing words he heard from the lips of Jesus himself, recorded in Luke 12:4-12, where he exhorts his disciples saying, “Do not fear those who kill the body... but I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who . . . has authority to cast into hell. . . . The Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”¹²

The question might rightly be asked at this point in Peter’s exhortation why he uses the word *hope* (ἐλπίς) in this context, when the word *faith* seems to fit better. In Peter’s epistle, the two words are tightly knit together, and *hope* is a frequent word from his lips, with an eye toward the eschatological expectations to which believers should be looking.¹³ Here, *hope* is not the opposite of faith, nor even a substitute for the word.¹⁴ The *hope* of the believer is that which is born out of faith—it is faith in action. The

¹¹ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 174.

¹² Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 132.

¹³ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 175.

¹⁴ Edmund P. Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1988), 148.

believer's hope is in the final consummation of all things. It is a hope which is living, kept in the sure confines of heaven, where it will never perish, fade, or spoil, and is in fact guarded by faith, a faith that leads to salvation that is ready even now to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet 1:3-5). Therefore, *hope* is more than appropriate here, because it provides the courage for one's witness and the content of one's message, and is grounded in a living faith.¹⁵

It is also appropriate here to address Peter's use of the word φόβου in verse 15b. There is a common misunderstanding of this text, due in large measure to the rendering of this masculine noun as "respect" in modern translations, that assumes Peter is calling on his audience to demonstrate respect for their questioner. Older translations, including the King James Version and the Revised Standard Version, are closer to the intended meaning with their translation of φόβου here as "fear" and "reverence" respectively. Although respecting the person who asks for a defense of the faith is both wise and in keeping with overall biblical teaching concerning interactions with non-believers, Peter is surely making a distinction here between showing gentleness toward the questioner and maintaining a healthy reverence for God as one speaks about matters of the faith. Christian amiableness is to be directed toward human friend or foe who has asked a direct question, but fear and trepidation must always be employed when speaking about weighty matters of the faith in view of the reality that God is also part of the listening audience. Christ-followers must never fear men, but must always fear God.

In verse 16, Peter reminds his audience that good words and solid hope count for very little in their apology if decent conduct does not accompany them. In this world, the reality remains that Christ-followers will be slandered when they live out their faith in plain sight. In even greater ways, believers will be both slandered and reviled when they share the gospel of their salvation, which is foolishness to a dying world. After

¹⁵ Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, 148.

making his own apologia before the Roman governor, Felix, on charges of having desecrated the Jewish temple and leading a false faith, the apostle Paul is able to say confidently, “So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man” (Acts 24:16). It is this type of “good conscience” to which Peter refers here. When Christ-followers employ gentleness toward their questioners, and appropriate fear toward God as they make their defense, a good conscience is a natural result. Any accusations laid against them in such a case will be proven groundless, bringing shame on the accusers. It is in fact behaviors that Peter has in mind here, since he clarifies the statement further in the latter half of verse 16: “Those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.” The world is watching, not just listening, and the adage remains as true today as it did then, “actions speak louder than words.”

As sad as it is to say, there are times in the course of life when even a good faith response to a question, accompanied by gentleness toward others, fear toward God, and good behavior, will result in suffering. Peter reminds his audience that suffering may be the will of God for such a time. And so, in verse 17, he simply encourages his Christian brothers and sisters with the truth that it is always better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. The key words for Peter here in the context of this conclusion to his exhortation is the prepositional phrase “in Christ.” This phrase is well known in the Pauline corpus, yet employed outside of his writings only in Peter’s first epistle.¹⁶ Believers are “in Christ” because he is their representative, and that representation is bound up in his death and resurrection.¹⁷ For Peter, behavior “in Christ” simply means all behavior as followers of Christ. In this sense, every action for the believer is “Christian” behavior. Behavior that does not accord with Christ, whom believers represent, is not commended. However, behavior that does accord with him, particularly

¹⁶ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 177.

¹⁷ Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, 153.

behavior which accompanies a verbal witness and defense that describes why believers have hope in Christ, will shame detractors—if not in this world, certainly in the next (Matt 6:19-20).

In summary, the warp and woof of Christian apologia revolves around the Christian apologist's actions. Apologists are to honor the Lord Jesus in their own hearts as holy. They are to be prepared always to give a good defense for the hope that necessarily accompanies true faith in Christ. Finally, they are to be gentle in their response to all inquiries while maintaining a healthy fear of God in the process. Such behavior will lead to a good conscience before God and humankind and will often spare the believer unwanted injury and injustice in this world. However, on some occasions it may be the will of God to allow unjust accusations or words to be directed toward the believer, and that may lead to suffering. Although never invited, it is always commendable to defend the faith in these trying situations. If sufferings do in fact accompany such an apologia, God will be honored, and the believer will be vindicated.

God Exists as the Only God and Reveals Himself (Isa 45:18-19)

The Lord speaks to the people of Israel through his prophet Isaiah and declares that he is the only God, who demonstrates his unique qualification as God by creating and filling both the heavens and the earth. God has no equal, and he has chosen to reveal himself in spoken words to his people so that seeking him may not be demonstrated to be act of vanity. He reveals himself in ways that can be known, and his revelation is always true.

The Creator God

The modern complaint that God does not reveal himself plainly enough to be believed upon by humankind is not so “modern” after all. Earlier in Isaiah's prophecy (Isa 45:15) the people of Israel are aghast at the hiddenness of God. “Truly, you are a

God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior” is their declaration. God rebukes this false claim here in verse 19, but not before he establishes some basic facts.

The connection to the preceding verses, which speak of the pagans and idol makers being confused and shamed while Israel is granted everlasting salvation, is made plain by the introductory “for, because” (כִּי) employed by the author in verse 18.¹⁸ All who reject the God of Israel, who make for themselves “wooden idols . . . that cannot save” (v. 20), will continue to be shamed and confounded while those who recognize him will know everlasting salvation. God exists. He has created the heavens and formed the earth, establishing it in an inhabitable condition. The idols of the nations are nothing, but the Lord God is the creator of the heavens and earth, and he has spoken. In fact, the author is emphatic here, declaring that “the creator of the heavens, he is *the* God,” with the personal pronoun picking up on “who created the heavens” and serving as a predicate to *the* God (v. 18). Thus, the context of this verse and the very clear statement that ends it—“I am the Lord, and there is no other”—leave the reader with no doubt as to who is the creator of all things.¹⁹ Here the author reiterates what God has already declared to be true in verses 5 and 6 of this chapter.

If God is to bring about his promise of saving Israel everlastingly, which he declares to be true in verse 17, he must demonstrate that he is a God who can accomplish what he has purposed. The proof is in the pudding, as they say, when God declares that he created not only the earth, but the heavens in which it exists, forming it by himself without the assistance of any other. The land beneath Israel’s feet indicates that something powerful and great established the firmament, and God proclaims that he is that “something.” It should be no surprise to non-believers and idol worshippers when the

¹⁸ John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 217.

¹⁹ Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1972), 211.

system fails them. Their gods are not causal but derivative, and they therefore have no purpose for a world which they did not create (this is especially true if their “god” is a phantom, as in the case of agnostics and, to some extent, atheists).²⁰

God did not go to all the trouble of creating, forming, making, and establishing for no reason. The earth was formed to be inhabited, as so many advocates in the intelligent design community have noted. It is a “fine-tuned” universe made specifically for the flourishing of life, born out most notably on this planet, where a million major and minor elements and “tweaks” make life not only possible, but sustainable.²¹ Since God created the earth to support life, and if human life is the apex of his creation, then he, in fact, does have a purpose for humans. That purpose has already been made known. He will save his people everlastingly and will see to it that they do not suffer shame or confusion in that eternal state.

God’s purpose in his creation is also emphasized in verse 18 when he declares that the earth was not created to be “empty” (תֵּהוֹ). The word that Isaiah chose here is the same word utilized in Genesis 1:2, where it describes a void, or a place that is without form and a desolation. Isaiah does not deny that the earth was once תֵּהוֹ, but it was not created to remain that way. Although God’s creation began as תֵּהוֹ, the purpose he always intended for it was to be an “inhabited place” (יָשׁוּב).²² If it did not turn out to be full and inhabited, God’s purpose would be thwarted, and that is an impossibility.

What is seen here is the design purpose for the cosmos. God created the heavens and placed the earth within it. He had a clear purpose in doing so—that his creation might be filled and not just a desolate wasteland. The Scriptures declare that God was under no compulsion to create, but did so for his own pleasure and purpose,

²⁰ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 218.

²¹ Andrew Davis, *Exalting Jesus in Isaiah*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville: B & H, 2017), 268-69.

²² Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 211.

placing human beings on its surface for the glory of his own great name (Isa 43:7; Ps 8, 19:1). Sin entered his creation and spoiled (for a time) the original design intent, separating from himself those whom he stamped with his own image. Now God's purpose in salvation is not merely the redemption of a smattering of people from one nation, but to call out a numberless race who will return to God and bring praise and honor to his name.²³ The following verse tells how he went about doing just that.

God Does Not Speak in Secret

Verse 19 makes clear that the nation of Israel (the offspring of Jacob) did not come to know her God by seeking soothsayers in the dark caves where they practiced their hidden arts. Rather, God revealed himself to Israel in plain speech, through the voice of his prophets.²⁴ The clearness of God's voice is the subject of this verse. God never has spoken in secret, from some dark place where his word could not be clearly understood. God does not mislead his people, nor does he pass on teachings that lead into a maze of misunderstanding and misapplication of his word. His word is not הוּלָהּ (“empty”).²⁵ In fact, the word “empty” or “vain” has no connection to God in any way. His glory fills the whole earth (Num 14:21). He fills the world with unfailing love (Ps 33:5). His Son, who radiates his glory and is his exact representation, came full of grace and truth (John 1:14), and fills all things in every way (Eph 1:23). “Empty” and “vain” are oxymoronic when connected to the character and voice of God. The fullness of

²³ Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 211.

²⁴ The Old Testament teaches emphatically that Israel heard God's voice in the voice of his prophets (cf. 2 Kgs 17:13; Jer 7:25, 26:5, 19, 35:15, 44:4; Ezek 38:17; Zech 1:6). In Hos 6:5 he says plainly that the prophets spoke the words from his mouth, and in Amos 3:7 the Lord does nothing without revealing it first to his prophets.

²⁵ J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1993), 364-65.

God's method of revelation is found in the coming of his Son, through whom God has spoken finally and conclusively (Heb 1:1-2).

As the Incarnate Son of God, Jesus declared in John 18:20: "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in the synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret."²⁶ Thus, when God speaks, he does so plainly and openly, never in secret. He speaks so that he may be known. Viewed in a negative manner, his method of revelation is a direct rebuke to the necromancers and mediums of Isaiah's day (Isa 8:19; 29:4), the Gnostics of the New Testament era (2 Cor 4:2; Rev 2:24), and the self-described prophets and preachers of prosperity today. Viewed positively, it brings hope to sinners seeking salvation, that they might truly know what God expects of them and how they might genuinely find rest for their weary souls.

We Do Not Seek God in Vain

Because God speaks plainly (through his prophets in the Old Testament context and his apostolic word in the New), humans do not seek God in vain. On the contrary, God has declared that if they seek him in righteousness, with all their heart, they will surely find him, as both Moses and Jeremiah make clear (Deut 4:29; Jer 29:13). Like his creation, God's revelation reveals his purpose. It was never intended to be empty or in vain but was always designed to reveal not only his nature, but his glory. When he calls worshippers to seek him, they may expect to find him. In this sense, the term "seek" in verse 19 may be a cultic term, denoting the coming before him in worship.²⁷

When the people of Israel sought their God in repentance and humility, they found him. Repeatedly, the Old Testament reveals a God who speaks clearly his love for his people, and his abhorrence of their covenant-breaking sin. When the people seek him, they find him to be not only accessible, but willing to forgive and reestablish his covenant-

²⁶ Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 213.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

love toward them. This type of relationship with the Lord was clearly understood by his prophets. In the book that bears his name, Nehemiah prays to the Lord seeking a renewed relationship between Israel and her God. In Nehemiah 1:8-9, he prays,

Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, “If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.”

In an even wider scope, God is willing to be found even by pagans who genuinely seek his face, which is the overarching theme for the entire prophecy of Jonah. Although the people of Israel enjoy a special, covenantal relationship with God, the nations are not left out when it comes to the purposes of God. God did not say to the Jews, “Seek me in vain.” To them belong the covenants, the prophets, and the unique interaction with God that set them apart as his own possession. As the apostle Paul makes clear in the New Testament, there are advantages to being a Jew in almost every way. And what does he declare to be the most prominent advantage? “The Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God” (Rom 3:2). They never had to seek God in vain because God spoke to them, and not in secret, as Isaiah has made clear, but openly and not with empty words.

How then does God’s speaking benefit the pagan? It benefits the pagan because salvation is from the Jews, as Jesus himself so clearly iterated to the woman seeking answers at the well (John 4:22). The Jews have always worshipped what they know, Jesus told the woman, while pagans worship what they do not know. The Jews “know” God, because he spoke to them through the prophets. They understand God (to the extent that he has revealed himself and can be known) because he has told them about himself. He is a God who has revealed himself, first to the Jews, but now through Christ, to the world. Therefore, neither the Jews nor the Gentiles seek God in vain today. All those who seek God will find God because he has not said, “Seek me in vain.”

The God of Truth

It is one thing to declare that God does not speak in secret, or in the dark recesses of some conjurer's cave. It is another thing to say that when he does speak he tells true things about humans and himself. If God speaks plainly, yet is known to be untrustworthy with his speech, or an outright liar, then humans are availed very little. However, Isaiah sets minds at ease by reminding in the final stanza of his prophecy that God has declared himself to be truthful: "I the LORD speak the truth; I declare what is right" (Isa 45:19).

In Isaiah's day, the mediums and false prophets did not speak in such a way as to enhance human nature or encourage toward righteousness. They sought answers from the dead on behalf of the living. They spoke words that led not to light, but to darkness, leaving men and women hungry for the true word of the Lord. They spoke contemptuously against God and king. Because of this, God declared that they would be "thrust into thick darkness" (Isa 8:22). In Jeremiah's day, false prophets were known to be liars and perjurers. Concerning these prophets, God said through Jeremiah: "The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds" (14:14).

Such is the word of those who seek God in vain, who claim to know him but do not. In stark contrast, God announces that he is always truthful, declaring only what is right. Such speech must always then tend toward goodness and righteousness.

When humans seek God, they find him, and when humans find him, they find a God of truth and righteousness. J. Alec Motyer reminds that God's word is a "plain word and not intrinsically puzzling."²⁸ As such, it does not mislead, as all lies are intended to do. By following the true word of the Lord, which is spoken clearly and not in secret,

²⁸ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 364.

true seekers are not led into a maze of hopeless and meaningless mutterings and intentionally misleading gibberish. As Motyer states,

The Lord's word is not shifting sand but solid ground. He speaks truth/righteousness and what is right/plain/straightforward things. The former is the content of the divine word (truth in conformity to an absolute norm); the latter is the expression of the truth plainly and without duplicity. The verbal link with verse 15 makes all this refer in particular to the truth of Gentile hope.²⁹

A God Who Can Be Known

It is to this “truth of . . . hope” that we now turn in conclusion to this section on Isaiah's prophecy. The God that believers declare to those who are skeptical is a God who is not hidden, but can be found. When Christians share the hope of the gospel, or defend the faith in response to questions, and even accusations (by those genuinely seeking and skeptics alike), they may do so confident that the God they are proclaiming, and the truths they are defending, are known. All conversations about God and the universe he has created cannot justifiably be cut short with the statement “we cannot know God or his works.” God has already spoken through the prophet Isaiah and declared this to be untrue. Do questions persist about God that remain unanswered? Without question, this is true. Are all questions about God answered with equal ease and with the same amount of background information? No, certainly not. But God can be known in a saving way.

Humans know God in his two “books,” the book of nature and the Scriptures. Nature can reveal much about both the presence and power of God. The great bishop and theologian Augustine observes,

Some people, in order to discover God, read books. But there is a great book: the very appearance of created things. Look above you! Look below you! Read it. God, whom you want to discover, never wrote that book with ink. Instead, He set before your eyes the things that He had made. Can you ask for a louder voice than that?³⁰

²⁹ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 365.

³⁰ Aurelius Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), Book XVI.

However, nature cannot reveal God in a saving manner. God's Word is needed to reveal a saving God, and in particular, the Word of God who revealed the Father in his fullest manner, and presents the saving power of the gospel. That Word of God, Jesus the Messiah, was prophesied in the Old Testament and revealed in the New. As the apostle Paul informs, "The sacred writings . . . are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ" (2 Tim 3:15).

When Christians engage in the task of apologetics, they engage with an ability to reveal God to the world. Believers can do that because the God who created the heavens and the earth and placed human beings in his created order, who has no equal, has not spoken in secret but openly, plainly, and truthfully.

Ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor 5:16-20)

Believers in the Lord Jesus have been reconciled to God through Christ's work on the cross. Having thus been reconciled, these believers in turn become ministers of reconciliation as ambassadors for God. God is, as it were, making his appeal to seekers and skeptics alike through those who have already been convinced of the truth of the gospel. This ministry of reconciliation that has been received is a God-given task.

According to the Flesh

The verses under consideration in this section are contextually located amid an argument by the apostle Paul defending his (and possibly his associates') ministry. It is a ministry, Paul tells them, in which he labors not to commend himself, but so that the Corinthian believers may be able to answer those itinerant preachers who boast about themselves and others according to outward appearances. Apparently, some have ministered in Corinth and called into question Paul's credentials and his physical appearance as a preacher of the gospel.

Paul has just concluded in verse 10 that everyone who has ever lived will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. He goes on to conclude in verse 11 that, because he

has a healthy fear of the Lord, it is his desire to persuade others. God knows Paul's intent, and even if others might accuse him of physical deficiencies and even mental illness (v. 13), he knows that the love of Christ is what compels him. Paul has concluded that Christ died for all, and as a result, those who have come to place their faith in Christ are also dead (to sin and to this world). Believers now live not for themselves but for Christ, who died on their behalf and was raised in power and glory.

It is here, in verse 16, that the text under consideration is picked up, as Paul concludes, "From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer."

The "therefore" (ὥστε) that begins this verse takes its conclusions from verses 14-15. Paul is summing up what has now become his response to the reality that Christ demonstrated his love for Paul by dying for him. The phrase "from now on" appears to have eschatological overtones and points beyond Paul's conversion when his life was changed and he surrendered his entire being to Christ. Christ's death and resurrection becomes the turning point of all the ages, revealing that this world in its present form is now passing away, and all attachments not anchored in Christ must fade into the background of Christian lives.³¹

Paul now admits in verse 16 that there was a time (in his pre-conversion days) when he regarded Christ "according to the flesh" (κατὰ σάρκα). There was a time when Paul knew about Jesus, but did not *know* Jesus in any saving manner. Paul is not saying that he was disinterested in Jesus prior to his conversion. It appears he was very interested in him, so much so that he made it his aim to track down Jews who were worshipping Jesus, that he might violently throw them into prison (see Acts 8:3, 9:1-2). Instead, Paul seems to be saying that κατὰ σάρκα was the rule by which he judged all others. He judged

³¹ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, New American Commentary, vol. 29 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 281.

by unspiritual and worldly standards rather than by the standard of Christ's love, which is the standard he now encourages the Corinthians to employ and which he employs for himself.³²

Here lies a valuable standard for modern believers engaged in the task of apologetics. How will believers consider others—from a worldly point of view or from a view in which Christ's love compels them? Christ-followers are encouraged by this text to consider no one according to the flesh. Believers too, at one time in the past, regarded Christ in this manner. Believers too were enemies of God and objects of his wrath, considering Christ with unspiritual eyes. But they do so no longer, and rightfully so. Those who follow Jesus must see others through the eyes of Jesus. However quaint or trite that might sound, the truth lies in Paul's statement. Those with whom believers engage in apologetics must be seen for who they are—men and women in need of salvation as badly as all believers once were, and men and women who are loved by Christ.

A New Creation

The goal in apologetics is the transformation of sinners into saints. Believers do not try to persuade for the sake of persuasion. Apologists do not engage in a game, but in a profoundly serious dialogue in which the stakes could not be higher. Eternal life hangs in the balance. Nothing less than the sinner's transformation into a "new creation" will do.

Where Paul made his points in verse 16 from a negative perspective, he turns to the positive in verse 17.³³ He again begins his new thought in verse 17 with a "therefore" or "so that" (ὥστε). This consequence flows from the death and resurrection

³² Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 283.

³³ Frank J. Matera, *II Corinthians*, The New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 135.

(spiritually) of those who were once regarded as to the flesh, but have now been made alive in Christ. Here Paul reverts to one of his favorite expressions, ἐν Χριστῷ (“in Christ”).³⁴ Paul states, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation (lit. ‘so that, if anyone in Christ, a new creation’).”³⁵ Paul seems to be saying that when a person finds himself “in Christ,” a new order has begun. The plan of salvation revealed by God in the Scripture focuses on humankind, but it is not necessarily limited to humans—it encompasses all of God’s creation (Rom 8:19-22). When new believers step into a relationship with God through Christ, they become a part of a new created order. In this way, the “old” life is now quite literally “passed away” and all things become new, as will be true for creation itself in the Parousia (Rom 8:21). This reality is expressed in the new believer by a turning away from sin and a pursuit of holiness, culminating in a renewal of mind and spirit that finds its final fulfillment at the resurrection, and in life in the new heavens and new earth.³⁶

The Ministry of Reconciliation

This gift of new life, the regeneration that accompanies it, and the hope for life in a new creation—in fact, “all of this,” comes from God, Paul assures in verse 18. The new has come by a gift of God through the work of Christ, a “newness” that was foretold by the prophet Isaiah.³⁷ The reconciling work that makes all this newness possible is the work of God in Christ. Once reconciled, all new creations in Christ join in this ministry

³⁴ Paul’s meaning in his frequent use of the phrase “in Christ” is somewhat hard to pin down. Although he uses the phrase in some manner over 80 times in his letters, the meanings vary from one who belongs to Christ, to one who lives under Christ’s dominion or reign, to be influenced by Christ’s power, or to be in union with Christ. At the very least, it means to have come under the influence of Christ in a life-changing manner. See Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 286-87.

³⁵ Colin G. Kruse, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1987), 125.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 125-26.

³⁷ Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 287. See Isa 42:9; 43:16-21; 48:6; 65:17; 66:22.

of reconciliation. Contextually, Paul does appear to be relating this “ministry of reconciliation” to himself in a unique manner. This passage fits into a larger context in which Paul defends his apostolic ministry before the Corinthian believers. The Corinthians will see Paul’s apostolic credentials best when they understand Paul’s ministry as part of God’s work to bring fallen humans back into a right relationship with him.³⁸ This entire section of apologia (2 Cor 2:17-7:4) has been forced upon Paul by the Corinthian believers due to their newfound doubts concerning Paul’s right to be called an apostle. It appears that Paul has a fear for them, that their doubts concerning him may result in doubts concerning the work of Christ. Hence, Paul’s admonitions in this apologia for the Corinthians to “be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20), not to “receive the grace of God in vain” (2 Cor 6:1), and to recognize that “now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2) are meant to set them squarely amid the eschatological purposes of God by accepting Paul as a true apostle and minister of the gospel.³⁹

It is important to note that, although Paul (and indirectly believers, as new creations in Christ) is active in God’s work of reconciling the world to himself, it is truly God’s work from beginning to end. In fact, whenever the language of reconciliation is utilized in the New Testament, God is always the subject of that reconciling ministry.⁴⁰ Although Paul relates this work to his apostolic call and ministry, it does not negate every believer’s work in this endeavor. Just as Christ has reconciled “us” (ἐγώ) to himself, he has also given “us” the ministry of reconciliation. It is a unique apostolic call in the life of Paul, but also a general call to ministry for all Christ-followers. David Garland explains,

³⁸ Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 288.

³⁹ Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 301.

⁴⁰ Kruse, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 126.

This unit contains three key assertions. (1) God is the driving force behind the redemption of humankind. Reconciliation comes solely at God's initiative. (2) God acted through Christ's death, and Christ alone is the means of reconciliation. (3) God continues to act through those who have been reconciled.⁴¹

It is important for believers to see this distinction clearly. Christ-followers collaborate with God as ambassadors, not as initiators. Their work in apologetics is part of their role as God's servants who have been called to share the good news of his reconciling work with a skeptical world. Apologists give a defense for a faith inaugurated and completed by God through Christ. It is not the believer's faith, but a faith given to the believer, and therefore it is no insult to her when it is challenged by skeptics and even defied by them. The dishonor is directed toward God (see 1 Sam 8:7; Luke 10:16; John 7:7, 15:18).

A Gospel Ministry

As verse 19 begins, the message that is the core teaching of the ministry of reconciliation is heard. Such is the foundation of the gospel itself, "that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them." Once again, God is both the subject and the source of this great work.⁴² It is God who is in Christ, and it is God who has set about the task of reconciling the world to himself. Verses 18-19 are among the most important in the entire Pauline corpus for understanding Paul's thoughts as they relate to the concept of reconciliation.⁴³

The phrase "ὡς ὅτι" ("that is") which opens this verse has engendered no little debate among scholars. Barnett believes it introduces a quotation of traditional material,⁴⁴ although others, contra Barnett, believe it is Paul's unique material. Garland states his case: "The *hos* ("as") makes a transition and the *hoti* introduces a quotation: "As it is said."

⁴¹ Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 288-89.

⁴² Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 305.

⁴³ Matera, *II Corinthians*, 137.

⁴⁴ Kruse, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 305.

It is strange, however, that Paul would quote a supposed tradition that does not surface elsewhere in the New Testament, since the image of reconciliation is uniquely Pauline.”⁴⁵ The best evidence seems to point to the fact that Paul is quoting himself. If this is the correct solution to the unusual phraseology Paul employs here, then the opening phrase should be translated, “as you should know.” Thus, Paul is reiterating to the Corinthians a teaching that he has previously passed on to them either in writing or in person, or both.⁴⁶ It appears the primary difference among scholars past and present is whether ἐν (“was”) is relating to ἐν Χριστῷ (“in Christ”) or to καταλλάσσω (“reconciling”). Luther and Calvin both rendered this verse “God was in Christ,” a translation which has the best weight of evidence and the majority of scholarship behind it.⁴⁷

There is a subtle shift here for Paul away from his own call to ministry and his own experience of reconciliation to that which he proclaims as the message of his ministry. That message is one of reconciliation; a great work that again takes place ἐν Χριστῷ, and brings together humankind and their God. The object of that work also shifts in verse 19 from what it was in verse 18: from “us” to “the world.”⁴⁸ The obstacle thwarting that reconciliation is here defined as “their trespasses.” As it turns out, trespasses were the same obstacle thwarting reconciliation for Paul (1 Tim 1:13) and all believers (Rom 3:23) prior to their coming to faith. The Psalmist expresses this same act of reconciliation as the great blessing for all those who find peace with God, saying in Psalm 32:2, “Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.” The blessing of reconciliation is not restricted to one group of people,

⁴⁵ Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 292.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Charles Hodge, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, Geneva Series of Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 520.

⁴⁸ Kruse, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 127.

not even to the Jews, God's elected people. It is available to the whole world, denoting all people without exception rather than all people inclusively, since Paul has already made clear that those who do not know Christ through faith will be held responsible for their trespasses (see Rom 1:18-32, 2:5-11).⁴⁹

Therefore, Paul has received a gospel ministry, as have all those who have come to know Jesus Christ, since God is "entrusting to us the message of reconciliation." This is the great privilege of the apologetic task. Those who have been reconciled to God, whose trespasses God no longer counts against them, who are new creations in Christ—the old order having passed away while all things have been made new in them and for them - may now pass on this hope of reconciliation to others. However, not everyone wants to hear this news, since it is accompanied by the sour note that speaks of the necessity for reconciliation: every believer's life in sin. Furthermore, some may be so opposed to the call for reconciliation that they take on the role of the skeptic, advocating against the truth of this gospel message. Others, while not skeptics proper, have been either so blinded by their sin that they cannot see the truth, or have never heard that they are sinners. Thus, they make necessary the work of apologetics, employed as a valuable tool in this great ministry of reconciliation. This message has been "entrusted" to Paul and to all believers, indicating that it is a treasure worth not only preserving, but also passing on in the most effective manner possible to those who have not yet received it by grace.

Be Reconciled to God

Paul, although admitting a great love for the Corinthian believers (2 Cor 2:1-4), is not beholden to them. He is an ambassador for Christ, commissioned by the one who sends him, not those who receive him.⁵⁰ Paul does not speak on his own authority, but on the authority of God, who is reconciling the world to himself. Such is true for all

⁴⁹ Kruse, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 127.

⁵⁰ Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 295.

Christ-followers. God is making his appeal to a world in rebellion through them, and that message is the same message Paul delivered to the Corinthian believers (both real and imagined). “Be reconciled to God” is this gospel message of hope, delivered with all the heart and energy of one who pleads on behalf of Christ himself.

This verse exists within an extended section wherein Paul lays out a defense for his calling as an apostle of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 2:14-7:4). As has been stated previously, the Corinthians owe to Paul the reality that some of them have been included in God’s eschatological purpose to reconcile the world to himself, putting behind him the trespasses of those who receive Christ by faith. Therefore, they must be subject to Paul’s authority as a way of confirming God’s good work in them.⁵¹

Paul’s main point here is that God, who is the great reconciler, is appealing to the world to accept the reconciliation he offers. He chooses to do so, not directly, but through the work of ambassadors who carry his appeal with them to those who will listen. The verb Paul utilizes for “we are ambassadors” (πρεσβεύω), was employed most frequently in Greek to designate “one who is older” or “the eldest.”⁵² In the world of politics it designated an ambassador who represents a nation or emperor. Barnett says that such delegates, “Jewish or Greco-Roman—came with the authority of the sender, in his place, to secure his interests.”⁵³ Then, as is true in today, to reject the envoy was to reject the authority of the one who sent him, thus incurring the retribution that would surely follow such disobedience.

Paul loves these Corinthians. Although ancient ambassadors frequently represented their king or governor at their own expense and under pressure to serve, there is no hint of dissatisfaction in Paul’s words in verse 20. He does not complain about his

⁵¹ Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 309.

⁵² Kruse, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 127-28.

⁵³ Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 310.

trials or his dangers, except as an example of his own heart for the gospel and the message of hope it proclaims. He does not seek glory or reward for himself, only the honor of pleading with sinners on behalf of Christ: “be reconciled to God.”⁵⁴

Herein lies the great honor of ambassadorship laid upon all believers. God would make his appeal through them if they will but demonstrate a willingness to cooperate. Believers have received much by way of the cross. In Christ, they have been made new, exchanging garments of corruption for linens whitened by the blood of Jesus. Those who were once rebels have now been reconciled to their king. The great work of redemption that God has completed in his Son is now extended to the world through his ambassadors. Christians are called to participate; to implore lost sinners in the name of Christ to return to their sovereign and know his mercy and grace. It is a great privilege and honor, and one that no believer should lay aside thoughtlessly.

Guidelines for Advancing the Gospel (Col 4:5-6)

The call to be ambassadors for Christ necessitates a general demeanor toward non-believers that is winsome and wise. Time is short in this life, and eternity awaits. Therefore, apologists make the best use of time when they graciously interact with those outside of Christ in such a way that commends the gospel to them. To do this, believers must be prepared to share the gospel in a way that presents God in Christ accurately, and answers the basic questions related to God’s dealings with humankind.

Buying Up Time

As the first new thought in Colossians 4 begins, the apostle Paul sums up his letter to the church in Colossae. He does so by asking for prayer that his evangelistic efforts, and those of his companions, may have avenues for expression. His desire is that

⁵⁴ Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 297.

a great mystery (Col 1:27, “Christ in you, the hope of glory”) may be made clear, which Paul believes is the general manner in which he should always speak.

In verse 5, Paul makes a transition to speak of a general pattern of evangelistic approach that all believers should employ. Here, he encourages the Colossians to “walk in wisdom toward outsiders.” The adage that “actions speak louder than words” can be applied to Paul’s statement. Although the message of the gospel is expressed in words (it is a proclamation), people often look with their eyes before they open their ears.⁵⁵ Outsiders may miss the hope of the gospel because they are put off by the rancor and lack of humility demonstrated by Christ’s followers. Paul knows that non-believers have their eye on believers, which is why he encourages believers to watch their words and actions closely so that the message of the gospel is not discredited (1 Cor 10:32-11:1; 1 Thess 4:11-12; 1 Tim 3:7, 6:1).⁵⁶ In this sense, to be wise is not so much about what is known, but how one acts out what is known. Paul does not imply that wisdom has nothing to do with knowledge here—he ties in that part of the equation in verse 6b—but he is clearly exhorting the Colossian believers to act properly when relating to “outsiders.”

The term *outsiders* here is not pejorative but a term of simple demarcation. It refers to those who live life outside of Christian fellowship and the community of believers who have placed their faith in Christ. Hence the translation in the NLT: “those who are not believers.”⁵⁷ In respect to Paul’s use of this term for non-believers in verse 5, Calvin writes, “For the church is like a city of which all believers are the inhabitants, connected with each other by a mutual relationship, while unbelievers are strangers.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ David E. Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 285.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Douglas Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 326.

⁵⁸ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians*, *Calvin’s Commentaries*

Attention must now be directed to Paul's exhortation in verse 5b: "Making the best use of the time." The participle ἐξαγοραζόμενοι (to buy up; redeem) could be taken in the modal sense, thus "walk in wisdom toward outsiders *by snapping up every opportunity that comes your way.*" Most scholars, however, translate it in the temporary mode: "As you buy up."⁵⁹ In this sense, time is of the essence for Christ-followers, and they should make the very best use of the time presented to them to make a favorable impression for Christ. Murray Harris indicates that the phrase employed by Paul for "the time" (τὸν καιρὸν) "often denotes critical or unique time, a moment of destiny, a fitting season. Here it refers to each opportunity or all the opportunities afforded by time."⁶⁰ Believers are exhorted to redeem their time by making the most of every opportunity provided to them by God to share the faith with those who do not yet know him. They are to be wise about how they go about doing that, but time is of the essence, and it must not be wasted.

Here, modern apologists need to be alert. Every day and age has presented believers with distractions and time-wasters that eat up valuable opportunities to engage with skeptics and seekers alike. In the not so distant past, simply living day-to-day took much more time than is necessary to accomplish the same activities in today (e.g., food preparation, cleaning, travel). However, it is generally understood that most cultures valued personal interaction and time spent in community more in the past than is valued today. After the many hours working both inside and outside the home, individuals and families in past generations spent the remaining hours of their wakeful day in social interaction. Today, many time-wasters are individually pursued, and the importance of interpersonal interaction and community involvement has waned precipitously. Whereas

(Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 225.

⁵⁹ Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, B & H Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B & H, 2013), 170.

⁶⁰ Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, 169.

most cultures valued time shared in the home and with family and friends after the day's work was finished, many cultures today value time alone in the comfort of a closed environment, which does not lend itself to interaction with "outsiders." In the past, social interaction was how most people entertained themselves. Today, one can find plenty to do to stay both busy and preoccupied without having to leave the comfort of their own home, or even their own room for that matter. Modern apologists need to be not only versed in biblical wisdom, but willing to step outside the confines of their churches and homes to engage a culture that is content to interact with strangers rarely, and even then, preferably at a safe distance through social media.

Gracious and Seasoned

Verse 6 begins with Paul enjoining his fellow believers in Colossae to practice the same clear and gracious approach to apologetics that he practices. They will have occasion to share their faith with outsiders, whether privately in personal conversations, or publicly when they may be forced to make a defense for their faith, as Jesus forewarned.⁶¹ In Luke 21:12-15, Jesus encouraged his disciples with the following prediction:

They will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.

With his words "seasoned with salt" in verse 6, Paul simply exhorts the Colossian believers to put winsome apologetics into practice when these times arrive for them. Jesus also called his disciples "the salt of the earth" (Matt 5:13). Believers, therefore, should demonstrate some savor not only by their actions, but by their speech.⁶²

⁶¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 174.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 175.

Many martyrs for the faith have put this verse to good use, testifying to their faith with both grace and saltiness, as in the case of Justin Martyr, who said to his interrogators, “No right-thinking person turns away from true belief to false.” His companions chimed in, “Do what you will, for we are Christians, and Christians do not sacrifice to idols.”⁶³

Paul draws his exhortation together as he finishes his thought in verse 6b. He has called on the Colossians to let their “speech” (λόγος) be “gracious” (χάριτι). Is he talking here about casual conversations or proclamations of the gospel? Either is possible by his use of λόγος. Furthermore, his reference to “grace” (χάρις) can lead the reader to think of the grace of God or simply human graciousness.⁶⁴ The question is up for debate, but considering the fact that Paul has used λόγος in verse 3 in a clear reference to the gospel message (a door for “the word”), and that χάρις usually refers to the grace of God in the Pauline corpus, it may safely be concluded that Paul has in mind Christians sharing the gospel with “each person” in ways that demonstrate that it is touched with divine grace and presented in an attractive manner.⁶⁵

Very few people have ever been brought to faith by an argumentative approach to apologetics. Apologetics, while defined as a “defense,” are not to be carried out in an offensive manner. Christians are to seek out opportunities to share with those outside the faith in a manner in keeping with “how you ought to answer each person,” as Paul states in verse 6b. Scripture tells how to accomplish this—with wisdom, knowing when (and when not) to talk about the gospel—and realizing that people are watching more than they are listening. Actions are important, and will bear witness against the apologist’s speech if he is not careful. Skeptics must not be led into confusion by an apologist who defends God’s grace and mercy while demonstrating rudeness and

⁶³ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 175.

⁶⁴ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 329.

⁶⁵ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians*, 173.

inconsideration. When believers are acting wisely, all speech (both gospel-centered and every day) will be seasoned with salt and will promote grace and winsomeness in the process. Time is of the essence and must not be squandered. Today is the day of salvation. Outsiders must hear, and the voice of skeptics must be answered, but all must be done in love.

A Christian Leader's Responsibility (Titus 1:9)

To engage in Christian apologetics is a serious task. As such, it requires that the believer who practices apologetics be trained in the Word of God as it has come down to the Christian community through the preaching and teaching of Christ's apostles. Many desire to subvert the truth of God and even deceive those who would seek that truth. The apostle Paul declared, "For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ" (Phil 3:18). Although apologists have a clear command to be loving and to practice winsomeness in their defense of the faith, they are also called to be prepared to hold fast to clear doctrines and to refute false teaching, even to the point of rebuke when necessary.

The Trustworthy Word

The passage under consideration is contextually amid the apostle Paul's exhortation to Titus concerning the qualifications for church elders. However, it appears that at verse 9 the list of requirements for elders, although included in this verse, morphs into a final exhortation that applies to ministry in general and thus must be obeyed by all who engage in the ministry of the word.⁶⁶

It is known from chapter 1 of this letter that Titus was left on the island of Crete by Paul for the express purpose of establishing elders in the newly founded church that existed there (v. 5). Paul calls on Titus to consider multiple moral issues when

⁶⁶ Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 691.

considering men for the role of elder. Verse 9 adds a theological dimension to this list, calling on elders and those engaged in gospel ministry to “hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught.”⁶⁷ It is important to note here that the word that the ministers are to hold to is described as “trustworthy” (πιστός). The shepherds of God’s community are to consider confidently the Word of God to be πιστοῦ λόγου (a “trustworthy message”). This word came to them through the preaching and teaching of the apostles, which was “faithful,” “trustworthy,” or “sound.”⁶⁸ The message that they heard is considered reliable when it is in “accord with the teaching” (κατὰ τὴν διδαχὴν). This phrase invites the question, what teaching? Paul himself helps here, because he uses the same related words διδασκαλία and διδάσχω in 1 Timothy 4:6 and 2 Thessalonians 2:15 to refer to traditions passed on by Paul and the apostles and the doctrines learned in the process.⁶⁹ George Knight comments on this pattern in the Pauline corpus: “Since what ‘has been heard’ from the apostle is to be entrusted to ‘faithful men,’ whose task is to teach it to others (2 Tim 2:2), Paul here designates as ‘faithful’ proclamation that which is in accord with apostolic teaching.”⁷⁰

Holding firm to the faithful word of God is paramount, not only for church leaders, but clearly for all who would presume to speak about the things of God. Christian apologists must be those who not only “preach” faithfully that which has been received from the apostles, but they must abide by it as well. Hence, the goal as apologists for the faith is both verbal and demonstrable. Calvin expresses his opinion on this matter by stating in reference to Titus 1:9a that

⁶⁷ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 391.

⁶⁸ George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 293.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

this is the chief gift in a bishop, who is elected principally for the sake of teaching; for the Church cannot be governed in any other way than by the word. “The faithful word” is the appellation which he gives to that doctrine which is pure, and which has proceeded from the mouth of God. He wishes that a bishop should hold it fast so as not only to be well instructed in it, but to be constant in maintaining it. . . . Paul therefore enjoins that those persons shall be chosen who, having cordially embraced the truth of God, and holding it firmly, never allow it to be wrested from them, or can be torn from it.⁷¹

This “chief gift” to which Calvin refers is essentially faithfulness to God. When the apologist holds the Lord in high esteem, and when they value his word and the teachings and doctrines that flow from it, not only speaking those words but living by them, the gospel of Jesus Christ is honored. Such conduct in word and deed is mandatory for leaders in God’s household, and every apologist must conform to the same standard. This standard does not imply, of course, that a new believer cannot defend the faith—they can and should. Being faithful to the “trustworthy word” does not require profound intelligence nor years of Christian experience; it requires a diligence to stick to the word and to the apostolic teaching that has been preserved for the church’s use. It is unlikely that the elders on the island of Crete had been believers for multiple years, given the relative infancy of the church there. Nevertheless, they were to be men who held fast to the trustworthy word as it had been taught. Such is the requirement for apologists today, whether new or experienced in the faith.

Instruction and Rebuke

Verse 9b gives the reason why the elder or Christ-follower (in the context of this chapter, the apologist) must be one who holds firmly to the trustworthy word as taught. Two teaching tasks are enumerated here and the ministry context in which they are to be practiced are laid out. One task is positive while the other is negative. The tasks are described as “to encourage” and “to rebuke.”⁷²

⁷¹ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to Titus, Calvin’s Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 295.

⁷² Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 692.

The task of encouraging is accomplished when sound doctrine is taught, such that others are influenced not only to believe the teaching, but to implement that teaching into their lives. Sound doctrine goes beyond words and teaching to the application of good ethics.⁷³ Those being challenged to know Christ are also, by virtue of the nature of Christ, being challenged to live like him. Jesus himself asked the important question: “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” (Luke 6:46). The role of the encourager is a positive one, but it includes presenting Christ’s command to live out the faith in a manner that calls for action.

The second, negative task is to rebuke those who proclaim a false doctrine of God. Those who “oppose” the true message of the gospel in context here are most likely false teachers who claim to know Christ, although those engaged in the task of apologetics often find strong opposition and resistance from those who are self-professed unbelievers as well. The objective of the Christian leader and apologist in such settings where the faith is under attack is to rebuke such tactics by revealing the false teaching and correcting it with sound doctrine.⁷⁴

Some need instruction in the doctrines of the faith, and others who purposefully contradict those doctrines need to be rebuked. As readers continue into Titus 2, they find that Paul knows that many are insubordinate to the teachings of the apostles. Their insubordination upsets families by teaching strange myths and doctrines that turn people not to the faith, but away from it (vv. 10-14). That familiar pattern continues into the twenty-first century.

People need to be instructed correctly. The apologist or Christian leader who has been instructed properly, who has accepted the truth of the gospel and has been transformed by that truth, is now in a position to instruct others out of personal conviction,

⁷³ Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 693.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

to teach sound doctrine, and to confront errors related to it.⁷⁵ Again, Paul is likely referring here to false teachers who claim to be teaching apostolic principles but in fact are perverting the truth. False teachers abound in the church of Jesus Christ to this day, and part of the task involved in Christian apologetics is to refute, and if necessary, rebuke, these false teachers. Non-believers will also bring accusations against the faith and must also be confronted. The “battle” is waged on multiple fronts, and individual circumstances will dictate what approach the apologist needs to take. At times winsomeness and love are called for, at other times sharp rebuke (v. 13) is necessary. Wisdom and tact are essential in the apologetic task and must be employed by the apologist always.

Conclusion

It is clear from the exposition of these five passages of Scripture that Christian apologists, in order to be effective in their defense of the faith, must first be those who have been transformed by the gospel truth they are proclaiming to the world. After their hearts and lives have been impacted by that gospel, apologists must then be found always ready to defend the faith and their reason for holding it—even amid life’s trials, and even in times when persecution is purposely brought against them.

Training in apologetic methodologies, philosophy, science, and other disciplines can prove to be helpful in the apologetic task. Those with whom the apologist interacts may not always value or place trust in Scripture. In such cases, a point of reference must be found so that conversations can be entered and information exchanged. Wisdom, and even shrewdness, must be employed in such scenarios (Matt 10:16: Luke 16:8). However, God has spoken of himself and revealed his nature in his Word (the Scriptures). That Word is the primary tool that must be utilized in the apologetic task. God has not spoken in secret, but openly to the world, and in a way he can be known. Christian apologists now take up that Word and serve as ambassadors for Christ, by which God makes his

⁷⁵ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 392.

appeal to an unbelieving world. The behavior and speech of the apologist must be in accord with the truth of the Scriptures they have come to know, and in keeping with the behavior of Jesus whom they proclaim. Kindness, winsomeness, tact, understanding, and honesty are called for, and must be the order of the day for the apologist.

Nevertheless, skeptics who refuse to practice honesty, or who claim to speak on behalf of God while proclaiming false doctrine and unsound teaching, must be confronted and refuted. The well-prepared and trained apologist will prudently navigate the rough waters that surround the apologetic task. A mixture of good humor, humility, a sound mind, and unabashed faith will serve the apologist well. The trustworthy Word of God, taught and applied properly, will always prove faithful and effective.

CHAPTER 3
PRACTICAL SUPPORT FOR ISSUES RELATED
TO THE APOLOGETIC TASK

Although the Word of God is the primary tool that must be utilized in the apologetic task, it is not the only tool. Contrary to the common misconception that all believers need is the Bible to argue for the faith, the reality is that apologists also benefit from good training that includes information concerning apologetic methodologies, worldview issues, good reasoning skills, and how to argue fairly and ethically.

Apologetics: A Brief Background

Christian apologetics is essentially the process of providing rational arguments for the truth of Christianity, both positively and negatively. Positively, apologists attempt to provide a compelling case for the Christian faith that both spans human cultures and is more persuasive than the philosophical and theological systems put forth by non-Christians and other religious competitors.¹ Negatively, the apologist defends the faith in the face of inquiries, including those that are inflammatory, from non-believers who question the validity of Christianity, its value, and its application and usefulness.

The apologetic task has a long history. It rests on a primary biblical command (expounded upon in the previous chapter) from 1 Peter 3:15-17, where Peter writes,

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, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

¹ R. C. Sproul, *Defending Your Faith: An Introduction to Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 16.

The early church, and the early church fathers, were all too acquainted with apologetics. In the earliest days of the church, believers had to defend the faith against four primary accusations. The first accusation was that Christians were seditionists, secretly fomenting hatred and discord toward the Roman Empire. The second was that Christ-followers were atheists who did not believe in, nor worship, the pantheon of Roman gods, not the least of which was the emperor himself, a living and visible god. Third, rumors of incest and sexual perversion among believers were rampant, due in large part to their habit of meeting in secret locations and practicing “love feasts.” Finally, Christians were accused of cannibalism. Word spread that during their secret gatherings, blood and flesh were consumed ritualistically, an obvious misunderstanding of the practice of the Eucharist.²

With these accusations and misunderstandings abounding in the minds of the society at large, Christ-followers were forced to be ready to not only share the gospel of Jesus Christ but to defend the faith against both intentional and unintentional misrepresentations. As is often true even today, some people were not willing to hear about the hope that can be found in Christ until certain misunderstandings were addressed. Who could blame them? No one wants to listen to someone expound upon their experiences regarding virtually any movement or philosophy when questions abound concerning the ethics, morality, and intentions of those who participate in the movement and practice its teachings.

Paul in Athens (Acts 17:16-34)

When the apostle Paul arrived in Athens after fleeing persecution in Thessalonica, he found a city that, although not the seat of regional power it had once been, was still a cultural, philosophical, and religious center that was virtually unparalleled in the ancient world. In some ways, it was not unlike a major university town today (e.g.,

² Sproul, *Defending Your Faith*, 14-15.

Oxford, Cambridge).³ Paul engaged in a running dialogue with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers who were having a difficult time understanding what exactly Paul was “babbling” about (Acts 17:18). Luke (the author of Acts) relates that Paul had been provoked in his spirit by the abundance of idols in the city. Hence, Paul utilized his time reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and in the marketplace each day with those who happened to be there.

It is here, in Acts 17, that the best example in the New Testament of a Christian apologist addressing non-believers who were unaware of the basic teachings of the faith is seen. Paul argues skillfully, not with biblical passages from the Jewish Scriptures, but by reasoning from creation to Creator utilizing an idol “to the unknown god” as a launching pad. He then finds points of commonality with his hearers by quoting one of their own Greek poets. Finally, Paul provides an apology for the Christian faith by declaring that the days of ignorance are over, and that God has established a judge who will call all who do not repent to account, the man Jesus Christ, whom God affirmed as his messenger when he raised him from the dead. Some refused to believe and mocked him, while others were content to hear him discourse further on the matter at a later time. A few, however, placed their hope in Christ.

Paul is a model for apologists here. In his day, both ignorance of the faith and hatred of it abounded. Such remains true today. Christ-followers are called to enter the marketplace of ideas as apologists and give a reasonable and winsome defense of the faith.⁴ In order to do so, believers must not only know the Word of God, but it will also behoove them to understand apologetic methodologies as well.

³ Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 34.

⁴ Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 36-37.

Understanding Apologetic Methodologies

As previously stated, Christian apologetics is the process of providing rational arguments for the truth of Christianity. The late Dutch Christian philosopher and theologian Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987), whose name is virtually synonymous with presuppositional apologetics (Reformed apologetics), defines Christian apologetics as “the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of life.”⁵ Although definitions of apologetics can vary, as can definitions within all the various disciplines of life, the consistent theme within all reasonable definitions of apologetics is the theme of holding the Christian worldview against the non-Christian worldview and determining which is more rational.

Although Christian apologetic methodologies vary by name and approach, it is safe to say that they generally fall into five different categories or “methods.” These five methods occasionally go by different names, but here I refer to them by their most recognized names: the classical method, evidentialism, Reformed apologetics, the cumulative case method, and fideism.

The Classical Method

Advocates of the classical method of Christian apologetics argue that this approach to defending the faith is the method most prominently utilized in the first centuries of church history. This methodology starts with natural theology to establish the basic groundwork of theism. Once God’s existence has been demonstrated to be the most reasonable rationale for the existence of all that is known and seen, historical evidences can then be discussed concerning the historicity and deity of Jesus Christ, the reliability of Scripture, and other important facets of the Christian faith.⁶ The classical apologist argues that it is easier to make the transition from a theist to a Christian than it

⁵ Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 17.

⁶ Stephen B. Cowan, introduction to *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Stephen B. Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 15.

is from any nontheistic worldview to faith in Christ. In its more modern form, this approach is characterized as the “two-step” method, in which the grounds for God’s existence must first be established with the skeptic before any evidences for the faith can be discussed. This method is known for its emphasis upon logical criteria to determine the ultimate validity and reliability of competing philosophical approaches to religion in general and Christianity specifically.⁷

Evidentialism

Where classical apologists attempt to establish a credible case for the existence of God and then argue for specifics related to the Christian faith, evidentialists opt to dispense with trying to argue for God’s existence and instead make the best case possible for the resurrection of Jesus Christ, suspecting that a person, if convinced by the credible evidence for the resurrection, will convert to Christianity in a one-step process.⁸ For the evidentialist, if sufficient proof can be garnered for the resurrection, or for another clearly supernatural event detailed in the Christian gospel (the incarnation, for example), then it is natural to suppose that a being very much like the God described in the Christian Scriptures is the cause for such an event.

Evidentialists are often criticized for maintaining a blind spot in regard to worldview and its impact on human thinking when it comes to accessing the evidence for a given argument, particularly when it comes to the supernatural. Those opposed to the evidential approach contend that presuppositions and worldview issues play a significant role in determining how skeptics interpret evidence, giving rise to the adage, “What my

⁷ Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2001), 34.

⁸ Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 69-70.

net doesn't catch ain't fish.”⁹ Others have argued that one can be convinced that there were in fact supernatural events surrounding the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, while still denying his role as Savior and Lord. In other words, they believe in the possibility of the supernatural but are unwilling or unable to connect that belief with a coherent worldview.¹⁰ Weaknesses notwithstanding, evidentialism, especially when combined with a more cumulative-case approach to evidences for the Christian faith, can be formidable in discussions with skeptics who have not considered all the available evidences for the claims of Christianity.

Reformed Apologetics

The two approaches to Christian apologetics thus far addressed in this brief overview (classical and evidential apologetics) are indebted, at least in some respects, to the rationalist tradition in Western philosophy and the empiricist tradition, respectively. While both camps would appropriately deny an overemphasis upon either tradition, there can be little doubt that the aforementioned traditions have impacted these approaches in demonstrable ways. Reformed apologists, on the other hand, reject both traditions, along with any epistemology that would attempt to combine them.¹¹

Reformed apologists believe that any epistemology that makes a case for human beings possessing the ability for gaining meaningful knowledge outside of God or bereft of a relationship with God are flawed from the start. Humans cannot gain knowledge autonomously because they are not self-sufficient beings. Some epistemologies acknowledge their dependence upon God and others do not. The latter are doomed to

⁹ Ibid., 69.

¹⁰ Ibid., 70.

¹¹ Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 260.

failure.¹² Belief in God, those in the Reformed tradition would argue, does not demand the support of rational evidence. Since humans are incapable of making such deductions outside of a revelation from God, it does not follow that positive arguments in support of the Christian faith are necessary to develop a faith that God exists or that he has acted in history.¹³ Those beliefs are generated by an encounter with God—not an encounter with an apologist. Reason has its place in apologetic encounters, but it is also possible to believe in God (and the Christian gospel) without the benefit of evidences that lead to that belief. God is perfectly capable of instilling faith in a non-believer without the benefit of an apologist assisting in the process with factual and evidential arguments.

Cumulative Case Apologetics

The term *cumulative case* is used in multiple ways by different apologists. The term was coined by Basil Mitchell, a philosopher who was a proponent of integrating different apologetic methodologies depending on the circumstances facing the apologist.¹⁴ According to Mitchell, the cumulative case method “does not conform to the ordinary pattern of deductive or inductive reasoning.”¹⁵ Generally speaking, it is an informal approach to apologetics that utilizes tactics and methodologies that run the spectrum of apologetic approaches. Rather than trying to propose proof statements for the existence of God, intelligent design, or any other argument utilized to make a positive case for Christianity, the cumulative case method is designed to approach apologetics as an inference to the best explanation. It recognizes Christian theism (along with all other

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Cowan, introduction to *Five Views on Apologetics*, 20.

¹⁴ Cowan, introduction to *Five Views on Apologetics*, 17.

¹⁵ Ibid., 18.

theistic and atheistic approaches to understanding our world) as a belief system.¹⁶

One example of an apologist who utilized the cumulative case approach, although never claiming to use the approach himself, is Francis Schaeffer. Schaeffer believed that Christian apologists should broaden their approach to apologetics beyond science, philosophy, and theology to include the arts and discussions revolving around issues related to ethics and morality.¹⁷ Over the course of his life and ministry, Schaeffer lectured, wrote books, and engaged in one-on-one and group apologetics utilizing all the best known apologetic approaches, depending on the situation at hand. However, he always insisted on cultural and theological sensitivity because he believed that doing so was the best manner by which to demonstrate the model of “speaking the truth in love” articulated by the apostle Paul and demonstrated in the life and ministry of Christ.

Although cumulative case apologetics can appear to be a “hodge-podge” approach to the apologetic task, it is not without its defining aspects. Succinctly put, cumulative case apologetics is not so much a methodology used to prove that God exists or that theism is a good starting point for discussions related to faith, as much as it is an apology for Christianity itself. The goal is to establish a Christian worldview in the skeptic, not just a theistic one.¹⁸ In attempting to reach this goal, apologists employ a variety of approaches that best fit the discussion in which they are currently engaged. For instance, if aspects of both evidentialism and classical apologetics are called for, the cumulative case proponent has no qualms about utilizing both in order to make a strong case for the faith. Ultimately, as Douglas Groothuis proposes, a “cumulative and winsome” approach is necessary if one is to succeed in an apologetic encounter. He states,

¹⁶ Ibid., 150.

¹⁷ Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 438.

¹⁸ Paul D. Feinberg, “Cumulative Case Apologetics,” in Cowan, *Five Views on Apologetics*, 152.

I will neither presuppose Christianity is true apart from the need for positive evidence (fideism, presuppositionalism or Reformed epistemology) or suppose that by amassing legions of historical facts we can convince someone of Christian truth (evidentialism). Rather, I will offer a variety of arguments that verify or confirm the Christian worldview as superior to its rival, thus showing that Christianity alone makes the most sense of the things that matter most.¹⁹

In fairness, it is unlikely that any trained apologist who cares about reaching a person who is spiritually lost and searching for answers will confine himself to one apologetic methodology to advance a conversation out of fidelity to his preferred approach. It is virtually impossible to carry on any apologetic conversation that involves questions and answers without dipping, wittingly or unwittingly, into multiple methodological approaches. Nevertheless, the cumulative case approach openly admits to such a practice and not only advocates for such an approach but thoroughly encourages it.

Fideism

Each of the methodological approaches to apologetics previously discussed consider truth to be a reality that can be known because it is factual. Although they espouse different tactics to get at that truth, explaining it to skeptics, and proving their points—truth is concrete. To practitioners of classical, evidential, Reformed, and cumulative case apologetics, truth is a concept that can be understood and approached either deductively, inductively, by empirical testing, or by an appeal to the Scriptures. For those who call themselves “fideists,” however, the truth delineated by Christianity is not a body of knowledge to be found and then comprehended, it is a person to know.²⁰

In whole, fideism is a counter to those who approach apologetics as a means to convince skeptics concerning the truth claims of Christianity utilizing only, or in large measure, logical principles and rational discourse. Of course, no Christian apologist worth her salt would claim to do so. Many fideists, however, beg to differ. Some Christians do

¹⁹ Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 72.

²⁰ Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 365-66.

not believe that the use of apologetics comports well in relation to discussions of the faith, nor with attempts to win others to Christ. Fideism is, for some, “an antidote to apologetics.”²¹ The goal for fideists engaged in an apologetic encounter is not so much to tell people about Jesus, but to help them get to “know” Jesus. To some fideists, this renders traditional apologetics useless. If a skeptic comes to know Jesus by faith, what use is there in human arguments based on science, philosophy, or even history?²²

Danish philosopher and theologian Soren Kierkegaard is considered by many to have been a fideist in his approach to faith encounters. He compared those who claim to be able to “defend” Christianity by means of logic and rational discourse to a man who professes great love for a woman and then offers “three reasons” for his beloved’s greatness. He explains,

There is an unholy inversion in all this business of having to prove everything first. I wonder if it would ever occur to anyone really in love to prove the blessedness of love with three basic reasons? But the fact is that men no longer believe—alas, and so they want to help themselves with the artificial legs of a little scientific scholarliness.²³

Contrary to this approach, Kierkegaard and many modern fideists argue that the best defense of the Christian faith has little or nothing to do with reason and everything to do with the Christian apologist’s life. The problem with disbelief is not a problem concerning a lack of knowledge, but a problem with rebellion. Doubt is not the issue; the issue lies squarely in insubordination to the truth claims of God. Only a Christian’s life, lived out in obedience to the call of God and displayed for all to see, will reduce a skeptic’s mutiny to ashes. Believing and obeying is the antidote to doubt, and skeptics must see it to believe. In such an action, Pascal’s words ring true: “The reason it is so

²¹ Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 61.

²² Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 366.

²³ Soren Kierkegaard, quoted in Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 366.

difficult to believe is that it is so difficult to obey.”²⁴ Once faith takes hold, however, questions are answered, and true reality comes to light.

Although this overview of the five primary approaches to the apologetic task has been brief, it demonstrates that there are multiple defenses to which the Christian who has engaged in a conversation with a skeptic can appeal in order to “carry the day,” as it were. As stated previously, the two approaches that will be utilized primarily in this project are Reformed and classical apologetics. Each methodology discussed has its strengths and weaknesses, but the classical and Reformed approaches are the most robust. Both recognize that faith cannot be created through rational arguments, and that God and his revelation are necessary to bring about a change in skeptical thinking. However, at the same time, it makes little sense to ask skeptics to give Christianity a free pass when it comes to logic. The Christian faith can stand up to scrutiny of the most minute nature and needs not appeal to special pleading to be proven both rational and true.

Evidentialism and cumulative case apologetics, although not as robust as the classical and Reformed approaches, are valuable assets in the apologetic task. Fideism, although making strong appeals to the sovereignty of God and the necessity of faith in conversion, misses the mark in its approach to logic. Only God’s Spirit can overcome a rebellious heart, but his Spirit never demands that skeptics believe what is absurd or irrational. Faith is paramount, but logic and rational defenses for the faith are often the means by which a skeptic is drawn to it.²⁵

Understanding Worldview Issues

As one considers Christian apologetics, it is important that one understands the reality that people think differently. This may seem like an intrinsic truth, but in practice it does not always take center stage. Too many Christians enter apologetic encounters

²⁴ Pascal, quoted in Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 367.

²⁵ Sproul, *Defending Your Faith*, 18.

with the underlying presupposition that the skeptic with whom they are engaged thinks in the same manner in which they do. In truth, such is rarely the case. People who have lived a sufficient amount of years to allow them to engage in an apologetic encounter have developed a way of seeing the world, a filter by which they make sense of the world around them. This filter is their worldview, and it is to this reality that this chapter now turns.

What Is a Worldview?

James Anderson says this about worldview:

Your worldview represents your most fundamental beliefs and assumptions about the universe you inhabit. It reflects how you would answer all the “big questions” of human existence, the fundamental questions we ask about life, the universe, and everything.²⁶

Everyone has a worldview. Not all worldviews are based in deep theology, philosophy, science, or comparative religion. Often, the people one meets and talks with in everyday life (including those with whom one engages in gospel encounters that may develop into apologetic encounters) do not know upon what they base their worldview. They may not even know what a worldview is. Nevertheless, they have one. Although their worldview may not be grounded in some profound framework, it is real to them and must be understood by the apologist. Humans think primarily out of their given worldview. As the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor has said, “All beliefs are held within a context or framework of the taken-for-granted, which usually remains tacit, and may even be as yet unacknowledged by the agent, because never before formulated.”²⁷

It is the Germans who must be thanked for the term “worldview.” It comes into English as a translation of the German *Weltanschauung*, a term (at least in German) that has the benefit of being clearly distinct from the English term “philosophy.” The

²⁶ James N. Anderson, *What's Your Worldview? An Interactive Approach to Life's Big Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 12.

²⁷ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007), 13.

Dutch neo-Calvinists preferred the longer (and more cumbersome) “world-and-life view.” It could be translated in English as “life perspective” or “confessional vision” just as readily. Marxists would call it an ideology, and social scientists label it a “system of values.”²⁸ Albert Wolters may have the best succinct definition of a worldview. He says it is “the comprehensive framework of one’s basic beliefs about things.”²⁹

What is believed makes up a worldview, and apologetics are, if nothing else, a discussion about beliefs. When speaking about worldviews, one does not speak merely of opinions or “I think this may be.” The beliefs that generally form a worldview are those that are held strongly, that one would fight for or lay out sums of money to promote. These beliefs eventually come together to form a pattern or framework of thought, which people who hold the particular worldview will now defend in order to remain consistent with their own concept of reality.³⁰

A worldview is also a commitment to a way of thinking or a system of beliefs or even a way of doing things that is held deeply by the individual. Once established, it serves as a guide to life that is not easily assailed. One might call what makes up a worldview “heart issues.” Biblically, the heart or the “bowels” of a person is where the man or woman is defined. Here, wisdom and understanding are housed (Prov 2:10), along with emotions (Exod 4:14; John 14:1), desire and will (1 Chr 29:18), spirituality (Acts 8:21), and human intellect (Rom 1:21).³¹ Because worldviews are held so deeply, they must be addressed in any apologetic encounter that goes beyond a momentary discourse. Unless an apologist understands, at least at a reasonable level, a skeptic’s

²⁸ Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 2.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 3.

³¹ James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 5th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2009), 20.

worldview, he cannot hope to make headway in a discussion that is intended to address matters of massive importance to the future of the skeptic.

Worldviews are often expressed in story form as a set of propositions. For Christians, that story includes the creation of the world by a personal God. As the story progresses through the Fall, the history of God's redemptive acts through a people called "Israel," and the coming of a long-awaited Savior and that Savior's birth, death, resurrection, and ascension into glory, a worldview develops. Christians see their lives as a fundamental part of that story and hope, during a gospel encounter, not only to share that story, but to see others transformed by it. Often that story is met with skepticism, disbelief, or even antagonism. The reason for this response is because competing worldviews are held by others in this world. In the American context, that competing worldview usually revolves around belief in a naturalistic concept of creation, evolution that led to sentient life, and termination in death. Thus ends the story. Of course, many millions hold to other theistic views of human existence that, although "religious," remain at odds with Christianity. Many presuppositions undergird the story of this world, both for Christians and non-Christians. If a person is asked about his views concerning God, humans, and the universe, one must expect that he will tell his story, and it will be expressed in propositional form. This will, by and large, reveal his worldview (at least as it relates to matters of faith).³² These are, after all, matters that are most important to the Christian apologist.

Worldviews Played Out

Over the past century in America, Christians have tended to become entangled in many side issues that have failed to consider the importance of worldview. Francis Schaeffer stated that this tendency has led Christians to view important matters in bits

³² Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 21.

and pieces rather than in totals.³³ Schaeffer believed that because Christians began to focus on side issues (albeit significant issues) such as pornography, abortion, prayer in the public schools, the breakdown of the family, and other matters, they lost sight of the totality of the problem. That “totality” was the reality that a shift had come about in worldview for many people, from what was once a “Christian” worldview, held at least nominally by the majority of Americans, to a worldview that saw final reality as something based on “impersonal matter” and “impersonal chance.”³⁴ Because these two worldviews stand in such contrast to one another, they bring about different views of reality such that an apologist attempting to make a case for Christianity will find that basic presuppositions once almost universal must now necessarily be addressed before any meaningful dialogue can ensue. Schaeffer stated,

It is not that these two world views are different only in how they understand the nature of reality and existence. They also inevitably produce totally different results. The operative word here is *inevitably*. It is not just that they happen to bring forth different results, but it is absolutely *inevitable* that they will bring forth different results.³⁵

The playing field has changed in relation to discussions about truth, reason, science, and even history in the past century in today’s culture. Worldviews have changed so drastically that such fundamental shifts in thinking must be considered by any would-be apologist. Believers now live in a “post-truth” era, which makes the task of apologetics that much more difficult. In this new millennium, what constitutes truth becomes a discussion that can be at least daunting and more often akin to the frustration of chasing a shadow. Whereas earlier societies placed a higher value on honesty in both factual matters and in discussions in general so that order and trust could be established, today both fudging facts and outright lying are commonplace. The notion that there is

³³ Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1981), 17.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

³⁵ Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto*, 18, emphasis original.

absolute truth has been largely lost.³⁶

In today's world, the question related to worldview is not so much concerned with what people believe, but what is actually believable. In this new secular age, what must be addressed is not so much what beliefs are available, but rather, what can actually be believed by a thinking, rational person.³⁷ The modern apologist is often forced to define terms such as "truth" with the help of the skeptic in a way that is acceptable to both before a conversation can truly be joined. Furthermore, an understanding of what is believable and how one concludes that it is so must also often be considered. If some of these "ground rules" are not established, conversations can not only be frustrating but ultimately unproductive and lead to both parties walking away with the assumption that the other is simply arguing in circles. What a person believes can be examined and quantified generally quite easily, but whether something can be believed is much more difficult to address, particularly when the skeptic has a working worldview based a post-modern view of truth and reality.

Things have clearly changed in culture when it comes to discussions concerning faith, politics, social justice, right and wrong, and almost every other important matter facing society. Charles Taylor recognized this change when he asked, "Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?"³⁸ A basic, underlying presupposition has changed in Western society, and it is important for apologists to not only recognize this reality but to enter into apologetic encounters prepared to deal with it.

³⁶ R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *Culture Shift: Engaging Current Issues with Timeless Truth* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2008), 97.

³⁷ James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2014), 19.

³⁸ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25.

With this understanding as a backdrop, James Sire proposes seven basic questions that must be addressed concerning worldview presuppositions when engaging in conversations with skeptics: “What is prime reality—the really real?” “What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?” “What is a human being?” “What happens to a person at death?” “Why is it possible to know anything at all?” “How do we know what is right and wrong?” “What is the meaning of human history?”³⁹ Such questions (although not exhaustive) demonstrate the reality that it is of little value to begin a conversation with a skeptic about God as he is revealed in Scripture without understanding the worldview in which the skeptic operates. There are simply too many ways in which such a question can be interpreted and filtered through the mind in culture today to assume that both the apologist and the skeptic are starting the conversation with the same presuppositions related to God and Scripture.

Christian apologists must see the totality of the problem that is faced when defending the faith. People do not think the same way they did a hundred years ago. In fact, with social constructs and ways of thinking changing so rapidly due to social media, educational opportunities being expanded through the world wide web and internationalism, and other means not available even twenty years ago, people do not think the same way they did a quarter-century ago. This is an increasingly changing world, and worldviews are evolving just as rapidly. Understanding this and adapting to it is of utmost importance to Christian apologetics.

Arguing with Reason

To argue effectively for the faith, it is necessary to do so while employing sound reasoning. The Christian faith is mind-enlarging. It is not based on irrational thinking, and therefore has no stake in credulity. It does the apologist no real good to “win” an apologetic encounter by utilizing false statements or arguments that do not

³⁹ Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 22-23.

comport with truth and sound thinking. If one must lie or rely on false history or tear down straw man arguments, no progress has been made in a discussion. Apologists are not seeking pyrrhic victories over phantom foes; they are seeking truth and attempting to introduce skeptics to that truth. Introducing truth requires the utilization of reason and sound argumentation.

Christianity and the Life of the Mind

It seems a verifiable fact that humans are always sorting information that enters the brain into categories—valuable and less valuable, usable and unusable, true or false. It is a sort of worldview triage that humans employ to rule things out. These “heuristics” are utilized almost constantly to simplify thought processes and determine what steps need to be taken next.⁴⁰ If new information coming into the brain is deemed important or interesting, further inquiry is deemed helpful, if not necessary. One of the primary factors in determining whether further inquiry is desired is based on the rationality of the information: Does it make sense? Will following up on this information be beneficial? Is further inquiry worth the time?

If the Christian faith is to be considered by skeptics as a viable option for people who think rationally and logically, then it is vital that Christians, and in particular Christian apologists, present the faith in a sensible and rational manner that is difficult to dismiss as a vestige of a pre-scientific past or an infatuation with the supernatural. It is not so much that people will turn to Christ due entirely to rational arguments and evidence, but it may very well create an avenue for a skeptic to understand that Christian belief is a reasonable proposition.⁴¹

When speaking about defending the Christian faith using reason, one does not

⁴⁰ Alan Jacobs, *How to Think: A Survival Guide for a World at Odds* (New York: Currency Publishers, 2017), 114-15.

⁴¹ William Lane Craig, *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010), 18.

need to suppose that every apologetic encounter must include deductive reasoning, universal quantification, counterfactual logic, and the utilization of conditional proofs like *reductio ad absurdum*. These are all fine approaches to logical argumentation; however, arguing with reason does not necessarily require the use of profoundly technical approaches to logic. It has been said that good philosophy is simply thinking hard about something. Christian apologists need to think hard.

Christianity, both described and demonstrated to us by Jesus, includes both simple truths and profound mysteries. Many people come to faith in Christ with little or no argumentation. They see the truth of Christianity, sense their need, and make the decision to become a Christ-follower. Such is true for most children who enter the faith. “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven,” Jesus is recorded as saying in Matthew 19:14. A simplicity to the faith defies logic. This is true enough, but it does not negate the reality that many people, primarily adults who either have not been introduced to Christianity as children or those who have and have subsequently rejected its truth claims, need to see for themselves whether it can stand up to logical scrutiny. Therefore, although arguing reasonably does not require deep forays into the worlds of logic, philosophy, science, or existentialism, it often demands hard thinking and a willingness to listen and respond to critical thinking as it relates to the faith.

The Christian faith has a wonderful capaciousness that allows many believers to see reality in a new and brighter light, and to bring about new visions of that reality.⁴² C. S. Lewis famously stated, “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.”⁴³ Because Christianity

⁴² Alister McGrath, *The Passionate Intellect: Christian Faith and the Discipleship of the Mind* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2010), 12.

⁴³ C. S. Lewis, “Is Theology Poetry?,” in *C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection*, ed. Lesley Walmsley (London: Collins, 2000), 21.

has the capacity to enlarge human vision and invigorate the mind of even the most ardent thinker, apologists must not neglect the use of reason. Certainly, as has already been addressed, no human comes to faith outside of the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, and yet often the path to regeneration and faith is paved with sound arguments and logical discourse.

Reasons for Reason

Often during apologetic encounters, the definitions of words, concepts, and ideas become roadblocks to effective communication. Here is where reasoning becomes necessary and even essential. In any discussion where two or more people are attempting to arrive at a similar conclusion (in particular one dealing with complex concepts and ideas like Christian teachings and theology), it is paramount that words are understood by each participant and carry with them like meanings for all. If such is not the case, it is nearly impossible to come to any meaningful conclusions, and one finds himself debating not rational concepts and concrete ideas and illustrations but unknown quantities and false images.

One example is the modern new atheists' concept of God. Many scientific atheists seem to believe that Christians view God to be merely another object in the universe. Therefore, Christians should be able to prove the existence of this God like one can prove the existence of Saturn's moons or a new species of amphibian in the Amazonian jungle. Not an easy task, they might grant, but still doable. If such a God cannot be proven via the scientific method, then it must be dismissed as having a very small likelihood of being real.⁴⁴

Words carry a semantic range of possible meanings and can signify different ideas and concepts. It is therefore important that an apologist come to "terms" with a skeptic about the meaning of the words being discussed. Coming to such terms is to

⁴⁴ McGrath, *The Passionate Intellect*, 110.

simply employ reason in the argument. Good thinking requires good terminology, and rather than debating endlessly over concepts that are passing by like two ships in the night for a lack of consensus, a discussion can be enhanced greatly by simply stating how each party to the discussion will think about the important words utilized as the dialogue advances.

To round off the previous example, if a new atheist understands one idea by the word “God” and an apologist understands something different, possibly even contrary to the atheist’s idea, then little or no progress can actually be made in a discussion.

Alister McGrath states,

The new atheism conducts its polemic against a notion of God that bears little relation to that of Christianity. Christians will not find their faith shaken by evidence or arguments that make assumptions they do not share and consider to be completely wrong. The atheist “critique” of Christianity at this point amounts to little more than a circular argument concerning the internal consistence of atheism, rather than a considered engagement with what Christians believe about God.⁴⁵

The apostle Paul reminded his readers in his second letter to the Corinthian church that “the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (4:4). Because this blinding has taken place, Christian apologists must not only pray for God to take the blinders off (the first and most important aspect of apologetics), but they often must also use words that have rational meaning and concepts that strike at the core of human beliefs in order to bring the gospel to light. Doing so does not diminish the primary work of God in salvation, it simply becomes one of many possible means by which God may choose to grant repentance and new life to one who was once a skeptic.

Scott Oliphant describes the reality of Paul’s words to the Corinthians:

God gives sufficient knowledge of himself to all of his human creatures. That knowledge is true knowledge; it is not a vague or imprecise feeling or a sporadic experience of something greater. It is true knowledge of God. But because of the effects of sin in our hearts, we seek, if we are in Adam, to hold that knowledge down.

⁴⁵ McGrath, *The Passionate Intellect*, 111.

In our sins, we will not acknowledge it. Instead, we deceive ourselves into thinking that there is no God, or that we cannot know him, or that we can get by on our own, or a million other falsehoods that serve only to mask the clear truth that God continually gives to us through the things he has made (Rom. 1:20).⁴⁶

Far too often in this modern age, Christianity is not taken seriously. At best, it is lumped into a pluralistic landscape as one of many options for people looking for truth, but not a truth that is built on sound principles of logic and reason. It is rather, in the minds of these skeptics, based on faith that is not verifiable and a faith that looks a whole lot more like superstition than the certainty of things hoped for.⁴⁷

Of course, the opposite is true. Scripture demonstrates that rational thinking is part of the process by which one encounters and apprehends God. Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt 22:37). Paul defended and confirmed the gospel (Phil 1:7). The apostle Peter exhorted believers to “always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15). These statements confirm that the Christian faith is rational and can be both understood and supported.⁴⁸

When properly applied to Christian apologetics, human reason is no enemy to the faith. Christianity offers a robust intellectual truth that can be grasped by those who seek to understand it and apply that understanding to their lives. Far from being a hindrance to faith, reason—if used properly and guarded from human pride and arrogance—can become a channel by which some skeptics will finally apprehend the glory of God.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles & Practice in Defense of Our Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 51.

⁴⁷ Paul E. Little, *Know Why You Believe*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2000), 20.

⁴⁸ Little, *Know Why You Believe*, 21.

⁴⁹ McGrath, *The Passionate Intellect*, 118.

Arguing Fairly and Ethically

When arguing for the Christian faith it is necessary to do so in a fair and ethical manner. Often, this is described as “winsome,” although one can be winsome while employing unethical and unfair tactics. Winsomeness is an attractive quality, but it must also be combined with good intentions for others and a willingness to speak truthfully, even if that truth is difficult to comprehend or painful to accept.

The apostle Peter exhorted believers to “gentleness and respect” when conversing with skeptics (1 Pet 3:15). This is not only biblical truth, it is practical and observably helpful. The aphorism “you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar” is merely a truism borne out by Peter’s words. Belligerence, pugnaciousness, dogmatic self-assurance, and intolerance have no place in the apologetic task. The goal in Christian apologetics is to be winsome and truthful, confident yet open-minded, honest and forthright, caring and sensitive. It behooves the apologist to consider not only Peter’s words but the words of Paul and James as well when engaged in a defense of the faith.⁵⁰

The Apologetics of Jesus Christ

If Jesus Christ is both Lord and God, as Christians contend, and apologetics is a defense of the faith established by Christ, then it stands to reason that his apologetic methodology should be accounted for as primary. Jesus did, in fact, engage in apologetics as recorded in the Gospels. A cursory look at those Gospels demonstrates that Jesus made use of his miracles, Old Testament prophecies that were being fulfilled in his ministry, basic reasoning, parabolic stories, and classical arguments for God in his defense of the faith he was proclaiming. Jesus was so effective in his argumentation that his detractors were often left with nothing more in their defense than to attack him with *ad hominem*

⁵⁰ Paul reminds believers that they should be “speaking the truth in love” in Eph 4:15, and Jas 1:19 gives the practical advice that Christ-followers should be “quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.”

arguments: “We were not born of fornication” and “Now we know that you have a demon.”⁵¹

It is worth noting that Jesus’ primary mission was to a people who had been given ample information in the form of scriptural pronouncements and prophetic announcements concerning what to expect during the time of Messiah. These people had been waiting for over a millennium for the arrival of their redeemer. The fact that almost everyone was so quick to dismiss the possibility that he could be the Messiah had to be difficult for him to countenance (humanly speaking). He could be exacting in his critiques of those who attacked both him and the faith from a self-righteous and haughty perspective, particularly those who had been well-trained in the Jewish Scriptures and who were at that time acting as religious leaders and those with influence over the people. Nevertheless, Jesus also demonstrated an amazingly gentle tone and spirit with those who struggled with doubt and with those who honestly sought to know him and ascertain his nature.

British philosopher and logician Bertrand Russell argued that Jesus was not quite the sterling character that many claim him to have been. He asserted that anyone that spent as much time as Jesus did warning people about eternal judgment and future punishments could not be a profoundly humane individual. In addition, anyone who would drown innocent pigs, as Russell contends Jesus did in the episode of the Gerasene demoniac in Mark 5, is simply unkind. Such arguments, even though they come from a noted philosopher and Nobel laureate, demonstrate a lack of genuine interaction with the scriptural accounts of Jesus’ ministry and a strange ability to care more for pigs than one does for a human being who has lived a tortuous life.⁵²

Although Jesus’ apologetic methodology is a primary example for apologetic

⁵¹ Norman Geisler and Patrick Zukeran, *The Apologetics of Jesus: A Caring Approach to Dealing with Doubters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 24.

⁵² Geisler and Zukeran, *The Apologetics of Jesus*, 24-25.

methodology to this day, it cannot be copied completely because no apologist today (indeed, no apologist ever) has commanded the authority which Jesus commanded.

There simply are no apologists who can say with Jesus:

You have heard that it was said to those of old, “you shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.” But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, “you fool!” will be liable to the hell of fire. (Matt 5:21-22)

Jesus was able to bring the law of God into sharper focus by demonstrating what the spirit of that law truly entailed and what it means for humans in a manner that no one, including Moses, was ever able to do. Jesus, as the incarnate Word, can shed light on the Scriptures like no one else.⁵³

Jesus did not expect his hearers to take blind leaps of faith or to make life-changing decisions without adequate evidence upon which to base those decisions. He made use of testimony from eyewitnesses, and he pointed to his miracles as a basis upon which to place trust in his words.⁵⁴ Apologists today can and should follow his example by answering the questions and concerns that skeptics raise carefully and considerately, and by pointing to the same miracles and eyewitness testimonies to which Jesus pointed, recorded in the biblical narrative.

Apologetic Diplomacy

The apostle Paul urged his friends in the city of Corinth to implore people to be reconciled to God as “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Cor 5:20). Although the context surrounding this text is dealing with evangelism and salvation, apologetics are simply a means by which one might get to the gospel by eliminating obstacles to it. Therefore, apologists should see themselves as ambassadors, preparing the “soil” in the hearts and

⁵³ Voddie Baucham, Jr., *Expository Apologetics: Answering Objections with the Power of the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 108.

⁵⁴ Geisler and Zukeran, *The Apologetics of Jesus*, 25.

minds of skeptics as God makes his appeal to them.

Christian apologist Greg Koukl calls this type of ambassadorship or diplomacy the “more excellent way.”⁵⁵ He suggests that apologetics have an image problem in the twenty-first century, particularly among a postmodern audience. Many feel that any “defense” of the faith must include angry words, false accusations, and personal attacks. In response to these expectations, he calls on apologists to make apologetic encounters look more like diplomatic discussions rather than military campaigns.⁵⁶

Debating, in and of itself, is not inherently negative. Jesus debated with his detractors, and they occasionally became very upset. There are, however, different manners in which one can debate. To some, any questions raised, or evidences produced against a cherished viewpoint or a leader that one admires are considered malicious. This is dangerous ground that, if consistently followed, leads to the silencing of all dissent and impinges human ability to get at the truth. Discussions involving religious views and convictions often fall into the category of taboo subjects for everyday conversation. However, if apologists can learn to discuss matters in principled ways that demonstrate more civility and graciousness and less attack-and-destroy techniques and argue in such a way that their own convictions can be challenged without angry retorts, debates involving even highly charged emotional subjects like religious convictions can be fruitful.⁵⁷

Not Quarrelsome but Kind

In Paul’s second letter to Timothy, the apostle gave Timothy this admonition:

And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to

⁵⁵ Gregory Koukl, *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 19.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Koukl, *Tactics*, 34.

their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will. (2 Tim 2:24-26)

Paul preceded this teaching by reminding Timothy that he should have nothing to do with “ignorant controversies.” Clearly, the Scriptures present a teaching here that must be heeded by the observant apologist. Argumentative and quarrelsome encounters are not only unproductive, but they also hamper the work of the Lord in the life of the skeptic. Some issues simply are not worth pursuing in conversation, qualifying as “ignorant controversies.” Even when the issue is valuable enough to necessitate a dialogue and even correction, such a conversation must be approached with gentleness. As has been previously addressed in this work, salvation is from the Lord, not from the apologist. God must do the final work in any human heart leading to a knowledge of the truth. At times, the best an apologist can do is demonstrate a kind, loving disposition toward a questioner and allow God to do what he does best.

Of course, Christian apologists must not refuse to provide honest answers to honest questions, and at times, correction is in order. Patently false statements about God, in most cases, need to be addressed and clarified. However, without a true demonstration of Christian love and reasonableness amid even heated debate, those who are blinded to the truth about God cannot be expected to give a listening ear.⁵⁸

Conclusion

There is more to apologetics than filling one’s head with facts and laying them out for the skeptic to be convinced. Apologists must enter the apologetic task with a solid understanding of the truth as it is presented in Scripture, but they must also demonstrate that they are a type of person worth listening to. Understanding the apologetic task is necessary, as is understanding the worldview frameworks from which skeptics operate and then demonstrating an ability to reason effectively within that framework. Finally, it is essential to dialogue in a manner that demonstrates kindness,

⁵⁸ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Mark of the Christian* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1970), 29.

fairness, and even love. If skeptics do not see these traits in the apologists with whom they interact, it is unlikely that they will ever believe that God exists and that he rewards those who seek him (Heb 11:6). People do not simply believe based on proper answers provided to their inquiries. Accurate answers and thoughtful presentation should not be placed in antithesis. In almost every apologetic encounter conceivable, both are indispensable.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Ibid., 31.

CHAPTER 4
THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE PROJECT CURRICULUM

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to develop a basic apologetics teaching ministry at LPCI to adequately equip participants with information necessary to provide a positive rationale for the Christian faith, to understand it better themselves, and to defend it against skeptics. The first goal was to assess the current knowledge base of each participant in the initial course in relation to biblical concepts that impact Christian apologetics. The second goal was to develop a twenty-six-session curriculum designed to equip participants in the course of study with information to engage more effectively with skeptics in apologetic encounters.¹ The third goal was to equip participants with a tactical approach to dealing with skeptics and those from different faith backgrounds. Pre-and post-course apologetics assessment surveys were provided to help determine if progress was made by the participants in respect to these goals. Evaluations were also provided after each of the twenty-six teaching sessions, along with a final course evaluation designed to help me, as the instructor, determine if the weekly curriculum was valuable, understandable, and presented in a manner that helped the participants develop a better understanding of Christian apologetics. Finally, an Apologetics Ministry Survey (AMS) was provided to the participants before the first teaching session to gauge basic information about the depth of their faith, their Christian disciplines, and their comfort level as it relates to apologetics.

¹ The curriculum was developed with the assistance of an elder at LifePoint Church Indy. Formatting and editing were provided by a ministry assistant in this congregation.

Apologetics Curriculum Development and Approval

After developing the theological support for the necessity and value of Christian apologetics in chapter 2 of this thesis, followed by the demonstration of the practical support for issues related to the apologetic task in chapter 3, I now turn to the implementation of the twenty-six-week course curriculum. The course was taught at LifePoint Church Indy (LPCI) in Indianapolis, Indiana. The course took place on Wednesday evenings from 6:30–8:00 p.m. and began on May 2, 2018, and concluded on November 7, 2018. Two week-long breaks were included in the course to account for two holidays that fell on Wednesdays.

The initial step in the implementation of this project was to seek the approval of the Ethics Committee of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Approval was granted to proceed with the course and to utilize human subjects by my advisor, Ted Cabal, on February 26, 2018, and by the Research Ethics Committee on March 2, 2018.

Curriculum Evaluation

The curriculum for the apologetics course was submitted to the “Feed the Flock” elder team at LPCI for evaluation.² This team is comprised of a Doctor of Physical Therapy at a hospital in Indiana, the Pastor for Discipleship at LPCI who holds an M.Div., The Pastor for Administration at LPCI who also holds an M.Div., the Pastor for Adult Ministry at LPCI who holds M.Div. and Doctor of Physical Therapy degrees, and another sitting elder at LPCI who makes the study of apologetics his avocation. The Feed the Flock team evaluated the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, and scope and sequence of the apologetics course curriculum.³ After receiving feedback and approval from this team to proceed with the course at LPCI, I submitted a request and

² The “Feed the Flock” team is a subset of the elders at LPCI who are tasked with overseeing the teaching ministry at the church. These men ensure that all teachers, and the curricula they utilize, are in line with Scripture and with the LifePoint Church Statement of Faith.

³ See appendix 6.

received permission from my supervisor to proceed with the project.

The Curriculum Developmental Process

The development of the curriculum for this course in Christian apologetics took approximately four weeks to accomplish. After an initial meeting in which the class co-leader and I sought to determine the best books available to develop the topics I hoped to cover in the course, we submitted the reading list to the Feed the Flock team. The team approved the reading list, which included *The Story of Reality* and *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* by Greg Koukl; *What's Your Worldview?* by James N. Anderson; *Defending Your Faith: An Introduction to Apologetics* by R. C. Sproul; *How We Got the Bible* by Timothy Paul Jones; *The Whole Story of the Bible in 16 Verses* by Chris Bruno; *Know What You Believe* and *Know Why You Believe* by Paul Little; *Evidence for God: 50 Arguments for Faith from the Bible* edited by William Dembski and Michael Licona; *Scripture Twisting: 20 Ways the Cults Misread the Bible* by James Sire; and *Christianity, Cults and Religions* by Rose Publishing. The team rejected *Christian Apologetics* by Douglas Groothuis and *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* by James K. A. Smith, not because they felt the books were unsound or of poor quality, but because they felt the readings were too advanced for an introductory course on Christian apologetics and because they believed the reading load would become too much for the participants. After some discussion, I agreed with the team, and the texts were dropped from the reading list.

After receiving approval for the reading list, discussion guides were developed for each lesson, which included questions developed from the assigned reading and, for the first ten lessons, a review of each section of LifePoint Church's Extended Statement of Faith. After the Feed the Flock team approved the discussion guides, ten participants for the initial course were contacted. The goal in selecting the participants was to find ten individuals who were already mature in the faith and committed to reading at a relatively advanced level. Since the ultimate goal of the project was to develop an ongoing

Christian apologetics ministry and course at LPCI, participants were selected who could not only handle the reading required for the course but who could also help to evaluate the course's effectiveness and its demands. Twelve people were initially called and asked to participate. Eleven of the twelve agreed to be involved in the project. However, because I was specifically looking for ten participants, I asked one person to consider following along with the reading and the course for three weeks to ensure no one would drop out of the project early and, if not needed for this particular project, to sign up for the next offering of the course at the church. The gentleman was happy to follow this plan and, after a few weeks attending the course, I told him that he could stop. He requested, however, to continue the readings and to attend the course as an observer, which I granted. He did not participate in the evaluation process.

The Project Implemented: Week-by-Week Overview

Prior to the start of the course, participants were given the books listed previously. Each participant was asked to contribute \$50.00 toward the purchase of the books. LPCI covered the remaining cost. The idea behind this fee was to ensure that the participants had some investment in the course. All books read by the participants were theirs to mark as they pleased and to retain after the completion of the course. Participants were also provided with a covenant, which they were asked to sign and return indicating that they would, to the very best of their ability, read the materials for each week and participate in the class meetings.⁴

Week 1: Course Introduction

Week 1 of the Christian Apologetics Course allowed the participants to get to know one another and to hear an overview of the course.⁵ In addition, I provided the

⁴ See appendix 7.

⁵ Most of the participants already knew each other, but because LPCI is a fairly large

Apologetics Assessment Survey (AAS)⁶ to the participants as well as the Apologetics Ministry Survey (AMS).⁷ Time was provided to each participant to take the surveys. The AAS is part of testing tool for the project. The AMS is a survey designed to provide background information on all the participants and to assess their self-described knowledge base and level of comfort with Christian apologetics. I collected course covenants from each participant and provided an overview for the course. In addition, each participant was reminded again that the course was part of a Doctor of Ministry project and that I would not only be instructing the class but would also be compiling information both for the completion of my project as well as trying to assess the best way to move forward with a Christian apologetics course to be offered each year to the larger church family at LPCI. A discussion of the most prominent contemporary approaches to apologetics was discussed, with Brian Morley's *Mapping Apologetics* and Steven B. Cowan's (general editor) *Five Views on Apologetics* as source material.⁸ The class also discussed the pre-reading assignment for the course, Greg Koukl's *The Story of Reality*. The class considered Koukl's thesis that human experience can be summed up as our experience with (1) reality, (2) God, (3) man, (4) Jesus, (5) the cross, and (6) the resurrection. In general, the participants felt that the book provided a positive introduction to how one thinks about life, God, Christianity, and truth. At the conclusion of the class, surveys were collected and prayer was offered.

congregation, there were a few new introductions to be made.

⁶ See appendix 1.

⁷ See appendix 4.

⁸ Neither of these books was required reading for the course. They were simply used by the instructor as source and guideline materials.

Week 2: Course Instruction

During week 2 (session 1 in the curriculum), the class discussed the reading assignment, James N. Anderson's *What's Your Worldview?* In addition, a review of LifePoint Church's statement on "God" from the church's Extended Statement of Faith was considered.⁹ All ten participants were in attendance. Anderson's work is unique in that it provides the reader the opportunity to consider multiple questions related to worldview via an interactive approach, selecting a "yes" or "no" response to each worldview category, which leads ultimately to a concise worldview. After reading the book, every participant ended up having selected the Christian worldview. A few participants were a bit confused at first by the formatting of the book, but all agreed that it helped them to both consider and define "worldview" better than they were able to do prior to their reading. To conclude the class, we discussed the difference between a worldview and a religion. The Curriculum Evaluation Rubric (CER) was distributed to each participant,¹⁰ and the evening was closed in prayer.

Week 3: Course Instruction

This session began with a quick recap of the topic "What Is a Worldview?" All ten participants were in attendance. The topic for the evening was a review of R. C. Sproul's *Defending Your Faith: An Introduction to Apologetics*, chapters 1-10. Before discussing Sproul's work, the class read and discussed LPCI's statement on "Jesus Christ" from the Extended Statement of Faith. Sproul's work is an excellent overview of apologetics, and the discussion this evening was lively. The discussion questions drew out a great many responses, so much so that we were unable to consider all the questions in the course curriculum. Nevertheless, each of the participants felt that the book was well-devised, although a few felt that Sproul's vocabulary and writing style were at times

⁹ See appendix 8.

¹⁰ See appendix 2.

a bit dense. The bulk of the conversation revolved around Sproul's contention that atheists attack four basic principles in their skepticism concerning the Christian faith and its claims to truth: (1) the law of non-contradiction, (2) causality, (3) sense perception, and (4) the adequacy of human language. As the class concluded, CERs from lesson 1 were collected and CERs for lesson 2 were handed out. The class closed with prayer.

Week 4: Course Instruction

Session 3 began with a brief discussion on the law of causality as it relates to God. Some participants were confused by the previous week's discussion concerning God's self-existence. The discussion then turned to chapter 11 through the conclusion of Sproul's *Defending Your Faith*. Prior to this discussion, however, the class considered LPCI's statement concerning "The Holy Spirit" in its Extended Statement of Faith. The class discussion this evening revolved almost entirely around Sproul's statement in his book that there are essentially only four possibilities for the existence of the universe and its relation (or lack thereof) to God: (1) God is an illusion, (2) the universe is actually self-created, (3) the universe is eternal having no existence, and (4) the universe was created. The class also discussed William Lane Craig's assertion (patterned after Gottfried Leibniz) that "everything that exists has an explanation of its existence."¹¹ Once again, class attendance was 100 percent, and discussion was lively with involvement from almost everyone. However, after the class concluded, I spoke with one participant who seemed upset about how certain statements he was sharing were being perceived. The problem was resolved, and the participant apologized for his response. CERs were collected from lesson 2, and CERs for lesson 3 were distributed. The class concluded in prayer.

Week 5: Course Instruction

Session 4 began with a quick verbal evaluation of the course thus far.

¹¹ William Lane Craig, *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010), 55.

Participants were generally pleased with the content and the discussion. One participant suggested that we provide examples of apologetic encounters utilizing some of the information discussed in class, which led to two participants discussing encounters they had experienced the previous week and in which they were able to utilize some of the concepts they had learned (or which had been reinforced) in our study. The discussion this evening revolved around chapters 1–4 of Timothy Paul Jones’ *How We Got the Bible*. In addition, the class discussed LPCI’s statement on “The Bible” from the Extended Statement of Faith. We discussed each question in the course curriculum, with the discussion centered most intensely on questions concerning the inerrancy of Scripture and what “sufficiency” means as it relates to God’s Word. As the session concluded, CERs from session 3 were collected, and CERs for session 4 were passed out. The class concluded with prayer.

Week 6: Course Instruction

This week’s session considered chapter 5 through the appendix of Timothy Paul Jones’ *How We Got the Bible*, along with a discussion of “Man’s Sinfulness” from the Extended Statement of Faith. In addition, the class discussed an article written by my co-leader with a summarization of the question of canon by Michael Kruger. Two participants, a husband and wife, were unable to be a part of the class this evening. The discussion this session was slightly more robust than the prior sessions due, one might suspect, to the topic under discussion. The initial question from the course curriculum may have easily covered the discussion for the entire evening: “Skeptics today claim that the existence of ‘lost Gospels’ or ‘lost scriptures’ undermines the authenticity of our canon. Early Christians, however, rejected these writings. Why?” There was much discussion concerning “gnostic gospels” and the Hollywood movie entitled *The Da Vinci Code*, based on Dan Brown’s best-selling novel of the same name from 2003. Although this discussion was balanced and engaged in by almost all participants, we were forced to move on to other questions that needed to be discussed. Unfortunately, we were unable

to make it through all the discussion questions before the end of class time. At the conclusion of the class, CERs were collected from session 4, and new CERs for session 5 were distributed. The class concluded with prayer.

Week 7: Course Instruction

Session 6 began with a quick review of some of the discussion from the previous week, and a suggestion was made by one participant (which was echoed by others) that future courses spend an additional week discussing canonicity. All participants were in attendance this week. The topic of discussion this evening was chapters 1-8 of Chris Bruno's *The Whole Story of the Bible in 16 Verses* and LPCI's statement on "Justification" from the Extended Statement of Faith. In *The Whole Story of the Bible*, Bruno walks through sixteen crucial biblical texts that fall under two main categories: "The Time Is Coming" and "The Time Has Come." The class discussed not only the texts under consideration but also whether Bruno made a compelling argument for the comprehensive nature of these sixteen verses of Scripture. The purpose behind assigning this text for the course was to help the participants see how the Scriptures tell one compelling story, beginning with the Old Testament and continuing through and concluding with the New. Although the discussion was comprehensive and engaged in by almost all the participants, the consensus of the participants was that Vaughn Roberts' work *God's Big Picture* would probably be a better read for future classes as it relates to the topic that was under consideration this evening. Because the participants had already finished the book, we were able to consider some texts that Bruno utilized in his book that were scheduled to be considered the following week. At the conclusion of the session, CERs were collected from session 5 and CERs for session 6 were distributed. The class concluded with prayer.

Week 8: Course Instruction

The seventh session included discussion concerning the final chapters of Bruno's *The Whole Story of the Bible in 16 Verses* (chapters 9-16) and a review of LPCI's

statement concerning “God’s Purpose in Grace” from the Extended Statement of Faith. Nine participants were in attendance for this session. The discussion this evening had high participation, and examples were offered by a few participants concerning how some of the texts under consideration in Bruno’s work had been helpful to them in previous apologetic encounters. One lengthier discussion revolved around the question of the promise of resurrection and eternal life as revealed in the Old Testament in passages such as Ezekiel 37:3-5, Job 19:25-27, and Psalm 16:11. The class discussed how such texts could be utilized not only in apologetic encounters with non-believers but also in discussions with new believers with questions about the basis of faith for Old Testament saints. CERs were collected from session 6 at the conclusion of the class, and session 7’s CERs were distributed. The class concluded with prayer.

Week 9: Course Instruction

Session 8 had to be postponed due to a strong storm in the Indianapolis area and was therefore moved to a different evening. However, every participant was able to attend the session at the new day and time. The topic under discussion for the evening was Paul Little’s classic apologetic work entitled *Know What You Believe*. In addition, the class read and reviewed the statement on “The Resurrection of the Dead” from LPCI’s Extended Statement of Faith. The review of this statement led to a fairly lengthy discussion of the two primary views on hell (eternal conscious torment and annihilationism). This discussion morphed into another discussion concerning how many skeptics of the Christian faith zero in on the traditional view of hell as an example of the Bible’s “preoccupation” with wrath and punishment and the view that if hell exists, it indicates that God cannot be a loving God. Our discussion then turned to chapters 1-3 of Little’s work, dealing chiefly with questions related to inspiration, God’s attributes, and Christ’s two natures. Two of the participants, while holding orthodox views on Christ’s human and divine nature, were confused on the language describing it. A discussion followed concerning the importance of precision in the use of language when dealing with such vital elements of the Christian

faith. As the session ended, CERs were collected from session 7, and session 8's CERs were handed out. The evening was closed in prayer.

Week 10: Course Instruction

Session 9 centered around discussion related to chapters 4–7 of Paul Little's *Know What You Believe*. The class also reviewed LPCI's statement on "The Church and Her Ordinances" from the Extended Statement of Faith. There was some brief discussion concerning the terms "sacrament" and "ordinance" as well as a review of the Catholic Church's teaching on her understanding of seven sacraments and the concept of grace received via participation in the sacraments. This discussion led to a discussion on the difference between primary and secondary doctrines of the faith. When we turned our attention to Little's book, we discussed the terms "atonement," "reconciliation," "propitiation," "ransom," and "substitution" as they relate to what took place at the cross of Christ. Because the conversation this evening did not allow for us to cover every question in the curriculum, we agreed to pick up a few remaining topics the following week and to stay late that evening if necessary. CERs from session 8 were collected, and session 9's CERs were distributed. We closed the session in prayer.

First Project Evaluation

At this point in the project, I met with the observer and co-leader in the course and the gentleman who assisted me with the reading list and curriculum) to discuss the course and project thus far. He was also preparing to facilitate future offerings of the apologetics course at the church. We reviewed the weekly CERs received to this point in the project and found that the overall level of satisfaction in the course was very high. We again found that some participants were looking for more practical help in the area of apologetics. He and I had been offering scenarios that we had both experienced and encountered in our reading, and occasionally during the teaching sessions participants themselves had offered up examples of experiences they had encountered in their own

conversations with skeptics. However, we decided it would be necessary to be more intentional about stopping class discussion concerning our reading in apologetics more frequently to ask questions related to how the information under discussion impacts our faith and our encounters with non-believers in practical ways. We also decided to make adjustment to the classroom due to distractions early in each session with direct sunlight coming into the room and creating issues with both heat and glare reflecting off the table we were utilizing.

Overall, at this point in the project I was pleased with both the usefulness of the curriculum questions and the participants chosen to engage in the project. Discussion each session to this point had been lively and winsome. There had been no anger or exasperation expressed concerning either the reading or topics under discussion. Participants generally demonstrated a desire to be in class and to engage in discussion.

Week 11: Course Instruction

All ten participants were in attendance for session 10, which began with a time for verbal evaluations from each participant. I inquired as to the usefulness of the course, the level of reading and time involved in completing it, and if the course was, in their estimation, beneficial to them at this point. I received positive comments from each participant. We then turned our attention to chapters 8-10 of Paul Little's *Know What You Believe* and the final statement in LPCI's Extended Statement of Faith, Of the World to Come. We considered the distinctions between "justification" and "sanctification" as Little describes them and then the Christian perspective on Satan. The participants then reminded me that we had left a few topics on the table at the conclusion of session 9, so we turned our attention to the personality and work of the Holy Spirit and to whether nonbelievers can come to a saving understanding of the gospel without the work of the Spirit. In other words, is it necessary for regeneration to precede saving faith, or can a human come to faith on his own power? We then discussed how our understanding of this topic might impact both our discussions and expectations as they relate to apologetic

encounters and how Romans 8:5-8 and 2 Corinthians 4:4 also relate to the discussion. We wrapped up the discussion by reviewing some of the major theories concerning the return of Jesus Christ to the earth. As the class concluded, CERs were collected from lesson 9, and CERs for session 10 were distributed. The class closed in prayer.

Week 12: Course Instruction

Once again, all ten participants were in attendance for this session. To this point in the project, I was very pleased with the attendance and participation in the project. Discussion for this class centered around chapters 1-4 of Paul Little's *Know Why You Believe*. The main topic of discussion this evening was the question "can the existence of God be proven scientifically?" Little addresses this topic in chapter 2 of this work. We also spent a considerable amount of time addressing the deity of Christ and C. S. Lewis' "trilemma." We concluded by considering some of the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I suggested to the participants that they consider tackling N. T. Wright's definitive work on this topic in *The Resurrection of the Son of God* at some point in the future when time allowed. As the session ended, I collected the CERs from session 10 and distributed the CERs for lesson 11. The class closed in prayer.

Week 13: Course Instruction

Eight participants were in attendance for session 12, and the topic for discussion was chapters 5-8 of Little's *Know Why You Believe*. Chapters 5-7 of this work center on the Scriptures and the question of canon. Because this topic had been discussed in some depth in sessions 4 and 5, attention turned to the three criteria Little delineates regarding how early church leaders established which documents held authority for the church and why. This led to a brief discussion on apostolicity, the role of the apostles in the early church, and whether the office of apostle is still being filled today. We then discussed archaeology and how it has confirmed biblical history as related to us in chapter 7 of Little's work. We talked about how and when such discussions might be beneficial in an

apologetic encounter, and I shared a discussion I had years before with a biological brother who was amazed to hear how many biblical sites, stories, and people had been confirmed through archaeological finds that had once been declared to be clear mistakes or contradictions in Scripture. We then moved on to chapter 8 and discussed miracles and their purpose in biblical accounts, particularly in the life and ministry of Jesus. We discussed how the concept of “miracle” can be a stumbling block for many skeptics and how to approach the issue in an apologetic encounter. The discussion this evening was the most participated in discussion of the course to this point. It may have been partly because one of the participants who was missing this evening tended to be very talkative, at times to the point of talking over other participants in the class. Although this had not been a major issue, I realized that a discussion with this participant might become necessary. At the conclusion of the session, CERs from session 11 were collected, and CERs for session 12 were distributed. The class ended with prayer.

Week 14: Course Instruction

Session 13 took under consideration the concluding chapters (9–12) of Little’s *Know Why You Believe*. Nine of ten participants were in attendance. The bulk of the discussion this evening centered around the “problem” of evil. After some discussion on different theories considered in chapter 10 of Little’s work, we discussed why this issue has become the primary concern for most skeptics of the Christian faith and how it can be approached in an apologetic encounter. We discussed sensitivity and empathy as it relates to such encounters and the reality that the Bible declares that God is indeed good, notwithstanding the pain and loss associated with living in a fallen world. We rounded out the discussion for the evening addressing how other major religions deal with the problem of pain and finally by discussing whether Christian experience is even valid and whether it can be used as a proving point in an apologetic encounter. The class concluded by collecting the CERs from session 12 and distributing the CERs for session 13. The session closed in prayer.

Week 15: Course Instruction

Session 14's reading assignment came from chapters 42-50 of *Evidence for God: 50 Arguments for Faith from the Bible, History, Philosophy and Science*, a compilation of writings on different subjects from multiple Christian apologists and edited by William Dembski and Michael Licona. We once again took up the topic of the Scriptures at the beginning of the class discussion, with all ten participants in attendance. The discussion centered primarily around the question of inerrancy as it relates to the Bible and questions concerning the "autographs" or originals of the biblical texts (or, more succinctly, the lack of these autographs). The discussion also concerned Bible translation and how one might address these topics in an apologetic encounter. Once again, we discussed the issues of catholicity, orthodoxy, and apostolicity as they relate to inerrancy and the authority of the Scriptures. Discussion during this session was not as lively as had become the norm for the class, forcing me to carry the discussion through most of the evening. The class concluded by collecting the CERs from session 13 and distributing them for session 14. We closed the evening in prayer.

Week 16: Course Instruction

Nine of ten participants were available for session 15, in which the class took under consideration its reading of chapters 1-7 in *Evidence for God*. The opening chapters of this work raise the question of philosophy. Discussion in this session was more strained due in large part to the fact that most of the participants had little background in the field. We discussed the topics of naturalism and the cosmological and teleological arguments for creation, and once again reviewed the topic of evil and suffering. Part of the discussion revolved around a concern raised by one of the participants as to how one might deal with a weakness in a certain area (such as philosophy) when engaged in an apologetic encounter. We discussed the absolute necessity for honesty and forthrightness in any encounter and the practicality of admitting that we are unable to answer all questions or defend against every statement when speaking with a skeptic. However, books like the

very one under discussion for this evening's session are wonderful tools in the arsenal for finding information and returning to the same skeptic with answers. At the conclusion of this session, the CERs for session 14 were collected, and CERs for session 15 were distributed. We concluded the evening with prayer.

Week 17: Course Instruction

The reading assignment for session 16 was *Evidence for God*, chapters 8-26. This section in the book deals with questions of science. All ten participants were in attendance. The bulk of discussion this evening dealt with intelligent design (ID), along with a few issues related to ID, including the concept of "bad design" and the negative implications such an argument attempts to place on the concept of a good, all-powerful God behind the creation of the cosmos.

The discussion was both aided and thwarted (to some extent) by one participant who holds a Ph.D. in physics from Purdue University. This participant helped everyone in the course (including me) gain greater insight into the argument from design, including issues like infinite space, string theory, the teleological argument, and even a quick overview of quantum physics. His grasp of the subject and his love for the Lord were both evident. However, due to his expertise, his was at times a voice that was too dominant in the discussion, particularly when I attempted to turn the conversation to less heady issues and speak about how one might deal with questions of science in an apologetic encounter when the skeptic clearly has a better grasp on the subject matter than the believer. This gentleman seemed to want to provide all the information his fellow participants might need in such an encounter in a fifteen-minute lecture. Nevertheless, we were able to cover every question in the curriculum and talk through some practical application points related to apologetics and questions concerning science. As the evening ended, CERs from session 15 were collected, and CERs for session 16 were distributed. The class was dismissed with prayer.

Week 18: Course Instruction

All participants were present for session 17, and the evening began with one of the participants sharing about an apologetic encounter he and his wife experienced the prior week at a local outdoor street carnival. This participant is an older gentleman who uses what most would consider outdated evangelistic techniques, yet continues to have wonderfully successful apologetic encounters. He shared with the class about one such encounter while manning an “ask any question about God” booth at the carnival. Both he and his wife were able to speak with a young university student who had questions and complaints about the problem of evil. The conversation turned to a defense of God’s omniscience and omnipotence, and this participant was able to utilize some of the information he had learned the previous week. Although the young lady did not commit her life to Christ on the spot, she did agree that the conversation had taken her a long way down the road to returning to her roots. (She was raised in a Christian home.) The ensuing discussion was very positive and helped to reinforce previous discussions concerning the challenges and encouragements related to apologetics that I had presented to the class.

The reading assignment for this session was chapters 27-41 in *Evidence for God*. This section in the book deals with questions related to the nature and character of Jesus. In this session we turned attention to both the Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormon faiths and their views concerning Jesus Christ. The class co-leader has a great deal of experience ministering to both groups, but to Mormons in particular. He led the discussion on this topic and was able to provide both some in-depth information on these groups and some practical approaches to dealing with them. We also spent some time this evening addressing questions concerning the triunity of God and collecting biblical evidence for the doctrine of the Trinity. At the conclusion of the session, CERs for session 16 were collected, and CERs for session 17 were distributed. The session closed in prayer.

Week 19: Course Instruction

Only seven of ten participants were available for session 18 due to travel plans for one couple and one individual. This was the first time during the project that more than 2 participants were not in attendance. Overall, attendance had been very good considering the length of the project and the fact that much of it ran through the summer months. The reading assignment for this week was chapters 1-6 in James Sire's *Scripture Twisting: 20 Ways the Cults Misread the Bible*. This evening we considered the following misreadings of Scripture: (1) inaccurate quotations, (2) twisted translations, (3) the biblical "hook," (4) ignoring immediate context, (5) collapsing contexts, (6) over-specification, (7) wordplay, (8) the figurative fallacy, (9) speculative readings of predictive prophecy, (10) saying but not citing, (11) selective citing, and (12) inadequate evidence. The class looked at each of these misreadings and discussed how they are employed by believers and skeptics alike. The discussion centered primarily on the responsibility of apologists to rightly handle God's Word and ways in which one might direct misreadings back into proper readings of Scripture in apologetic encounters. At the conclusion of the evening CERs from session 17 were collected, and CERs for session 18 were distributed. We closed the evening in prayer.

Week 20: Course Instruction

The participants gathered together this evening (eight of ten were in attendance.) to consider chapter 7–Appendix II of Sire's *Scripture Twisting*. Topics under discussion this week included the following misreadings of Scripture: (13) confused definition, (14) ignoring alternative explanations, (15) the obvious fallacy, (16) virtue by association, (17) esoteric interpretation, (18) supplemental biblical authority, (19) rejecting biblical authority, and (20) worldview confusion. The class also discussed the Jehovah's Witnesses' view of Jesus from John 1:1-4 and the New World Translation and its approach

to John 1:1. The discussion this evening was lively, and participation was excellent. Sire's book is concise, easy to follow, very informative, and seemed to help the participants in practical and concrete ways. The discussion ended for the evening zeroing in on Sire's statement in chapter 2 of his work where he claimed, "Jesus, in fact, is co-opted by almost everyone who wants someone from the past to confirm their own vision of the ideal future."¹² This statement was analyzed and compared with what the participants themselves had experienced in conversations and apologetic encounters with skeptics of Christianity from various sects and cults. The overall conclusion was that Sire is correct in his statement: Jesus does get "tagged" by many cults and those proposing new religious ideas as an ancient supporter or proponent of their philosophies. The class discussed different approaches to combating this attempt to co-opt Jesus in conversations with skeptics. It was also noted that many New Age types of cults are more than happy to take even the biblical version of Jesus into their fold, provided he is not allowed to controvert any of their new ideas.

It may be that the discussion on this particular book was the best participation of any session to date. Participants appeared to resonate with Sire's writing style and his approach to the topic. At the conclusion of the session, CERs were collected from session 18 and those for session 19 were distributed. The session closed with prayer.

Second Project Evaluation

On the Friday morning following session 19, the class co-leader and I met again to evaluate the progress and success of the project to that point. Once again, I was pleased with the overall progress of the project. Attendance had been steady, which had been a concern for me as I approached the start of the project due to the relatively intense reading schedule and the sheer number of times we planned to meet over a seven-month

¹² James W. Sire, *Scripture Twisting: 20 Ways the Cults Misread the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980), 22.

period. I had selected participants that I knew relatively well and trusted to be consistent, but I was pleasantly surprised at how consistent they demonstrated themselves to be. Class participation was good, and the evaluations I was receiving indicated an overall satisfaction with the class and the learning taking place. Most importantly, no one had dropped out of the project, allowing a consistent baseline to determine if the course was indeed providing the practical and educational components for which I was hoping. Some comments on the CERs indicated that some curriculum questions needed to be adjusted for clarity and some would need to be removed. The reading requirement did not seem to be overly taxing for any one individual, and it appeared that participants were arriving to the sessions prepared to engage with the reading. The issue of practical examples seemed to have been addressed adequately, although during some sessions participants did occasionally ask for practical examples that would help extrapolate some of the topics in more tangible ways.

Week 21: Course Instruction

The reading assignment for session 20 of this project was Rose Publishing's *Christianity, Cults and Religion*, pages 6–7, 10–15, and 18–56. Eight of ten participants were in attendance for this session. The first task this evening was to discuss why Christians should study other religions, then to consider some of the primary teachings of Christianity itself by exploring some of the ancient creeds and considering what the “gospel” of Jesus Christ actually is. This discussion flowed naturally, considering every participant in this project was a mature Christ-follower. The discussion then moved on to consider the primary teachings of the following religions: Unification Church, Christian Science, Unity School of Christianity, Scientology, Wicca, New Age, Baha'i Faith, Judaism, Hinduism, Hare Krishna, Transcendental Meditation, Buddhism, and Soka Gakkai International. Due to the large number of faiths under discussion, participants were forced to keep comments to a minimum as we simply elaborated on the information provided in the text. As a wrap-up to the evening, we looked at what each of these faiths

seemed to hold in common as to their view of Jesus Christ, who he was, and who he is today.

The intent behind including this publication for the course of study was to allow participants to consider the wide range of religious ideas and expressions available in the world today and to consider the question of pluralism. Neither the reading nor the class discussion provided in-depth analysis of any of the faiths under consideration, but both provided a “snapshot” or overview that appeared to be helpful for the participants. Although the concept of pluralism was raised during this session, time constraints required that we address that topic the following week. The class concluded by collecting CERs from session 19 and handing out those for session 20. The evening closed in prayer.

Week 22: Course Instruction

Attendance for session 21 was the lowest to this point in the project. Six of ten participants were available to meet. Under discussion this evening were pages 8–9, 16–17, and 58–109 of *Christianity, Cults and Religions*. The discussion centered primarily around what Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormonism, and Islam teach concerning the person and nature of Jesus Christ. Although participation was light this evening, the discussion was good, and our resident expert on Mormonism and Jehovah’s Witnesses was able to share some insights he had learned in multiple long-term encounters with apologists from each religion. In addition, another participant in the class with some good background experience with Islam and the Nation of Islam, was able to assist the rest of the class with valuable insights. Some practical ideas on how to deal with adherents and apologists from these religions were discussed, and a time for prayer was exercised on behalf of a young Mormon man a class participant and his wife had befriended and with whom they had developed a lasting relationship. The session concluded by collecting CERs from session 20 and distributing CERs for session 21. The evening ended with prayer.

Week 23: Course Instruction

Session 22 considered for discussion chapters 1–4 of Greg Koukl’s *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*. This is a work with which many of the participants were already familiar by having already read the book or by familiarity with Koukl from his weekly podcast. The discussion started by going over some of the vocabulary that is distinctive to Koukl’s apologetic approach. Terms like “ambassador,” “tactics,” and “diplomacy.” We then discussed the type of apologetic skills a modern apologist needs in order to be an effective ambassador for Christ. Koukl stresses winsomeness and arguing fairly in this work, which I was keen to stress myself in all the project sessions. Therefore, we spent a considerable amount of time discussing the difference between arguing for a concept or cause and quarreling. Some examples from my own encounters both in apologetics and pastoral ministry were offered, as were additional examples from some of the participants. Finally, we discussed Koukl’s “Columbo tactic” in which an apologist “never makes a statement, at least at first, when a question will do the job.”¹³

The discussion this evening was excellent, with 100 percent attendance and participation by the project participants. The practicality and accessibility (in terms of style and language) of Koukl’s work made for lively discussion. The session concluded by collecting CERs from session 21 and distributing those for session 22. The class closed in prayer.

Week 24: Course Instruction

The assigned reading for session 23 was chapters 5-9 of Koukl’s *Tactics*. The discussion this evening centered around the idea that, in every apologetic encounter, winning the person to Christ must always trump winning an argument. We discussed the following tactics: “Columbo,” “suicide” or “views that self-destruct,” “sibling rivalry,”

¹³ Greg Koukl, *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 47.

and “infanticide.” The consensus among the participants was that Koukl’s examples are helpful and easy to understand but that his naming schemes could use some tweaking. Nevertheless, participants continued to appreciate his writing style and the practical nature of his work. Eight participants were in attendance for this evening’s session, and their engagement in the discussion was, as I had become accustomed to, excellent. The session concluded by collecting CERs from session 22 and handing out those for session 23. We closed the evening in prayer.

Week 25: Course Instruction

All ten participants were on hand for session 24, the final session in which reading was expected for the project. The final reading assignment was chapters 10-14 of Koukl’s *Tactics*. In this session we considered the tactics “taking the roof off,” “steamroller,” “Rhodes Scholar,” “just the facts, ma’am,” and “more sweat, less blood.” The discussion this evening was a bit subdued, as we simply considered each tactic under consideration and discussed Koukl’s application of each. During discussion for each tactic I tried to provide real-life examples, with multiple participants weighing in with examples of their own. Due to a church event this particular evening, we concluded the session about twenty minutes early. I collected the CERs from session 23 and distributed CERs for session 24. We concluded the session with prayer.

Week 26: Course Wrap-Up and Verbal Evaluations

Our final session for this project was conducted with only eight of ten participants able to be attend due to a change in vacation plans. Therefore, I decided to have the participants complete the AAS online utilizing Survey Monkey so that I could maximize the opportunity to receive a final AAS from every participant.

During this session we talked about the course, and I asked for verbal feedback that would not only help me determine if the course was helpful but also if it should be duplicated (or amended in some ways) and offered annually at the church. All

participants believed the course was helpful for them and should be repeated for future participants. The most common “positive” for the participants was the assigned reading and the follow-up discussions that they felt helped them in processing some new concepts and ideas. All eight participants in attendance indicated verbally that the class was enjoyable and that the information was vital for developing an apologetic strategy and for preparing for future apologetic encounters. After some discussion regarding ideal class size that would allow for maximum opportunities for conversation and whether a class option for basic training in apologetics without reading assignments would be beneficial for those who will not take the time to read assignments, we closed the discussion. I thanked the participants again not only for their time and commitment in helping me complete the project but for their honesty in helping me assess the course’s value. I collected the CERs from session 24, distributed the final CER¹⁴ and the AMS,¹⁵ and closed the evening in prayer.

Project Follow-up

In the week following the conclusion to the project I contacted the participants and gave them directions for completing the AAS via Survey Monkey. I then met with the class co-leader to go over the CERs that had been collected since the second project evaluation meeting after week 20 of the project. We also went over the AMSs that had been taken for a second time at the conclusion of the project. We found no significant changes in attitudes among the participants concerning the course project demonstrated in the final five weeks of course instruction. I thanked the co-leader for his assistance in the project, and we set a time to meet in the future concerning the second offering of the apologetics course, which he planned to facilitate. Finally, I met with the expert panel at LPCI to discuss the course and the course evaluation rubrics that had been collected over

¹⁴ See appendix 3.

¹⁵ See appendix 4.

the twenty-six-week course. The panel reviewed the CERs as well as the final course evaluation rubric and discussed the overall satisfaction with the course as demonstrated by the participants in their rubrics. The panel's assessment was that the course had met its goals. Over the following week, all ten participants completed the AAS online and I began to compile the testing data for this thesis.

Conclusion

This project included a curriculum development period of four weeks and a project implementation of twenty-six weeks. The project was designed to develop, implement, and evaluate an apologetics preparation course at LPCI in Indianapolis, Indiana. Ten individuals participated in the project. The level of basic knowledge and comfort dealing with apologetics for each participant prior to the project course was surveyed using an Apologetics Ministry Survey. The course itself was evaluated weekly utilizing a Curriculum Evaluation Rubric, and the level of understanding of biblical topics related to the ability of an individual to engage effectively in apologetics was assessed through an Apologetics Assessment Survey as a pre-test. The same assessment survey was administered again as a post-test to determine if gains in knowledge and preparedness had been attained by the participants. After the course and testing were completed, the project was ready to be evaluated and the effectiveness measured.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

The intention behind this project was to assist Christ-followers in both preparing for and engaging in Christian apologetics. Those who have come to know Jesus Christ by faith have been called through Scripture to share the good news that led to their own salvation with those who have not yet heard or who have heard but have rejected that good news for various reasons. Often, for those who have heard and rejected the gospel, the causes for their rejection hinge on matters of faith, science, or worldview (or a combination of these factors) that can be successfully challenged by believers who have been adequately prepared. Believers should take necessary steps to prepare themselves for encounters with such skeptics.

This chapter provides a detailed analysis and evaluation of the apologetics course that made up this project at LPCI. First, the project's purpose and goals will be evaluated using the objectives and tools created for this purpose prior to the course implementation. Second, the project's strengths and weaknesses will be evaluated, along with suggestions for improving the effectiveness of the project. Finally, theological and personal reflections and analysis will be presented as gleaned from the preparation, implementation, and review of the project.

Evaluation of the Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop a basic apologetics teaching ministry at LPCI that will adequately equip participants with information necessary to provide a positive rationale for the Christian faith, to understand it better themselves, and to defend it against skeptics.

After an introductory chapter, chapter 2 of this thesis established the theological rationale and justification for this purpose. It was demonstrated that Christ-followers have indeed been called to defend the faith in the following texts: 1 Peter 3:15–17, Isaiah 45:18–19, 2 Corinthians 5:16–20, Colossians 4:5–6, and Titus 1:9. This purpose was demonstrated not only to be true, but, via the implementation of this project, to be an ongoing necessity in the lives of even mature believers at LPCI. Although each participant in this project was a mature believer, and a few were active and purposeful in evangelistic efforts, an ability to defend the Christian faith effectively when engaged in conversation with sound thinking skeptics was lacking.

In chapter 3, it was demonstrated that good training is essential for effectively engaging in Christian apologetics. It was argued that (1) understanding apologetic methodologies is necessary to argue effectively for the faith, (2) it is necessary to understand worldview issues to argue effectively for the faith, (3) to argue effectively for the faith, one must argue with reason, and (4) it is necessary to argue fairly and ethically when contending for the faith. These statements were targeted in teaching and practice during the class project and it was confirmed by the participants that each of these statements are true, albeit not easy to accomplish.

Chapter 4 of this work provided a detailed overview of the development and implementation of the apologetics course at LPCI. The chapter demonstrated that the purpose of providing such a course was shown to be appreciated by 10 participants from the church, and that there was a high level of participation in the reading and course discussion.

Evaluation of the Goals

The overall success of this project included the development of three goals and implementation strategies associated with them. The first goal was to assess the current knowledge base of each of the 10 participants in relation to biblical concepts that impact Christian apologetics. Pre-and post-tests were administered to the participants to

determine if their level of knowledge had increased. The second goal was to develop a curriculum to equip participants in the course of study with information to engage more effectively with skeptics in apologetic encounters. Weekly curriculum evaluation rubrics were provided to the participants to fill out, including a final curriculum evaluation rubric, to assess whether this goal had been accomplished. The final goal of the project was to equip participants with a tactical approach to dealing with skeptics and those from different faith backgrounds. The baseline data for this goal was measured with a pre-course survey developed to determine the level of comfort and confidence each participant possessed related to apologetics at the onset of the course. The survey was provided a second time to participants at the conclusion of the project to determine if, and in what ways, their comfort and confidence levels had increased.

Goal 1

The first goal of this project was to assess the current knowledge base of each participant in relation to biblical concepts that impact Christian apologetics. The strategy for implementing this goal was achieved by the participants taking a pre-course survey (the AAS) to gauge each participant's level of understanding as it related to questions concerning the Christian faith that are often debated in apologetic encounters. The same survey was provided after the completion of the course and a t-test for dependent samples was run to determine if a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-surveys was demonstrated. My original intent was not to run a t-test, but because I was utilizing a single group of participants which would be surveyed twice under separate conditions (before the project course and then again after), it seemed logical to utilize the t-test.¹

¹ Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2017), 232.

T-Test Data Cleaning and Preparation

Participant responses for the pre-test were converted to ordinal values. Prompt numbers 1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 10, 12, 17, 18, 19, 21, 27, 28, 29, and 30 were straight-scored on a Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Twenty-three of the 39 prompts were reverse-scored from 6 (strongly disagree) to 1 (strongly agree). Those prompts that were reverse-scored were numbers 3, 4, 7, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 20, 22, 23, 25, 26, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39 and 40. Question 24 was thrown out of the testing because it created much confusion among the participants, many of whom were aware of the additional Catholic books (Apocrypha) and felt that the question should have indicated “in the Protestant Bible.” The post-test was constructed on the SurveyMonkey website to automatically convert participant responses and provide both individual question as well as summary scores for each participant. After receiving the complete number of survey responses, the data sets were downloaded from SurveyMonkey as an Excel spreadsheet.

Some cleaning of the data set was necessary before analysis could begin. Summary scores for each participant were then calculated from the spreadsheet. The pre-and post-test summary scores for each of the 10 participants were transferred to an additional spreadsheet page and then saved as a separate file.

The Excel file containing only each participant’s name, numerical identifier, and summary scores was opened in Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software for data analysis. In addition, the data were entered into an Excel spreadsheet. Because the purpose of this study was to compare pre- and post-test scores of participants to ascertain statistically significant differences following the completion of the apologetics course project, a paired sample for means t-test was run.

Results of the paired samples t-test revealed a mean increase of 4.9 points on the post-test. The significance was recorded as $10 =$ number of samples, $2.339 =$ t-stat and $.022 =$ p value. A t-test for dependent samples indicated a significant positive change in participant knowledge concerning Christian apologetics ($t_{(10)} = 2.339, p =$

.022).²

Because the initial apologetics course developed for this project was established utilizing ten participants who were mature believers who could be trusted to stick with the twenty-six-week course, complete their reading, and participate in conversations concerning their thoughts and observations on a weekly basis, I did not anticipate significant increases in knowledge concerning issues related to Christian apologetics from them. I was therefore pleasantly surprised at the results of the testing. I hand-selected this first group of participants to help me determine whether the reading was appropriate, reasonable in volume, and helpful overall in establishing a course of training for Christian apologetics at LPCI. They were extremely helpful in that regard. Although the statistics do not bear out a massive amount of new knowledge or refined thinking, the following reviews of goals 2 and 3 indicate that the apologetics course was not just helpful to me in completing a project and preparing curriculum for future courses but was helpful to the initial group of participants as well.

Goal 2

The second goal of this project was to develop a curriculum designed to equip participants in the course of study with information to engage more effectively with skeptics in apologetic encounters. Before the start of the apologetics course, participants completed the AMS to establish a baseline for each in terms of understanding their basic assumptions concerning their faith, competence, experience, comfort level in Christian apologetics, and understanding concerning concepts related to apologetics and worldview issues. As the project carried on, I occasionally went back to some of the questions on the survey and asked if the participants' views were changing in any significant way. For instance, I would ask, "On the AMS you were asked coming into this course if you believed you were well-equipped biblically for an apologetic encounter. What do you

² See appendix 5.

believe about that question now?” Although the responses varied, overall the participants felt like they were increasing in knowledge and competency as it related to apologetics.

The curriculum itself was scrutinized after each session using the CER. Over the course of twenty-four sessions (the introductory and concluding sessions were not evaluated), I collected over 200 evaluations related to the course and the curriculum. Once again, responses to these evaluation questions³ varied, but in general the results showed that for almost every session, participants responded with scores of “sufficient” or “exemplary” to questions related to the curriculum. The reading assignments were appreciated overall by the participants and stimulated good conversation in each session. Each week I asked for verbal feedback regarding the assigned reading and found consensus that it was both stimulating and helpful. There was one instance where an assigned book (Bruno’s *The Whole Story of the Bible in 16 Verses*) was thought not to be as helpful as an alternative book might be (Roberts’ *God’s Big Picture*) based on the assessments of five or six of the participants in the project. However, participants felt overall that the reading was a positive part of the course and that the curriculum questions based primarily on the reading led to discussions that helped extrapolate what was read personally into concise class participation. The final Curriculum Evaluation Rubric⁴ also bore out these facts, with every participant except one indicating that the curriculum and course content was either “sufficient” or “exemplary.” One participant indicated “requires attention” as a response to the statements “The lessons contained points of practical application,” and “The lessons were sufficiently thorough in their coverage of the material.” I will address this issue in the section concerning the weaknesses of the project, which will follow shortly.

Over 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded the sufficient level,

³ See appendix 2.

⁴ See appendix 3.

based both on the participants' responses and the opinions of the expert panel, which was the outcome sought at the onset of the project.

Goal 3

The third and final goal of this project was to equip participants with a tactical approach to dealing with skeptics and those from different faith backgrounds. The goal of this ministry project was not simply to increase the knowledge base of the participants, although that was a goal, but also to assist participants with the application of that knowledge to the participants' personal faith and their ability to utilize Christian apologetics in real-world settings. Much of the reading assigned to this project focused on the application side of apologetics, and the sessions in which the participants gathered together were intended to provide opportunities to talk through some of those real-world scenarios and help participants find points of application between their reading and the encounters they were facing practically every day of their lives. The AMS was administered at the onset of the project to help establish a baseline related to these issues of practical application and tactics as well.

“Practicality” can be difficult to measure. Participants have a different concept of how practical a teaching or concept might be to their everyday lives or, in this case, to everyday apologetics. Once again, occasionally during sessions I would ask participants verbally if they were finding the reading and course practical. Throughout the course, the consensus was that both were practical. In terms of being equipped “tactically” for apologetic encounters, the enthusiasm was not nearly as high. As stated previously under the evaluation of goal 2, I will address the issue of the practicality of the project under the upcoming “Weaknesses” heading. Although “practical” and “tactical” are essentially birds of a feather, there does seem to be a difference between participants indicating that something they read was practical, and something that they read can now be put into practice (tactical). Over 90 percent of the participants indicated verbally that the course and reading were practical, but the number was certainly not that high when

the question came to whether they felt “tactically” equipped.

Overall Evaluation of the Project

Strengths

There were multiple strengths related to this project. First, a project of this scope had never been implemented in the over thirty-year life of LPCI. Over the past five years, a Fellows Ministry had been developed that provided in-depth teaching, training, and discipleship in the areas of church history, theology, hermeneutics, and biblical worldview, but that ministry had never been evaluated or scrutinized to the level that this project attained. Apologetics had never been taught as a course of study at the church. This endeavor was the first of its kind at LPCI, but it demonstrated that people at the church are both interested enough and disciplined enough to carry through with a project like this. This was a timely project, and it will be duplicated many times in the future at the church.

A second strength of this project was the class sessions. It is one thing to read about apologetics and consider the task theoretically; it is another to read good materials (both academic and popular), consider them individually, and then gather with nine other individuals weekly to discuss the readings and individual reactions to it, facilitated by someone who has committed a great deal of time to the study of apologetics. These sessions were well attended, indicating their value to the participants, and the discussion was often lively and animated. Participants appreciated one another and were able to learn from one another in a manner that would be nearly impossible without the opportunity to share thoughts and ideas with others engaged in the same study. Although there were times when the sessions seemed more like a lecture due to the reserved nature of some of the participants, those times were infrequent. The project would not have been a success without these participants engaging in conversation with one another the way they did.

A third strength of this project was the reading materials. Because leaders at LPCI value Christian discipleship and training, reading materials were provided at a

significantly reduced price. Each participant in the project wrote a check for fifty dollars and in return received all the reading and print materials for the course. The readings ranged from academic approaches to Christian apologetics (e.g., *Evidence for God*) to very accessible and popular titles (e.g., *The Story of Reality*). Participants in this project agreed to a sizeable amount of reading over twenty-six-weeks and left the project having read eleven books on the subject of Christian apologetics, arguably ten more than many Christians will read in their entire lives. Even if participants learned nothing through the twenty-six class sessions of the project, they could not help but learn something (much more than something) from the reading.

A fourth strength of this project was the evaluation process. As mentioned under strength 1, there has never been a project of this scope carried out at LPCI. There has also never been a program at the church so highly scrutinized and evaluated as was this project and the class associated with it. The initial request presented to the elders at LPCI for permission to run the project was met with quick approval since I serve as the Lead Pastor of the church and (ostensibly) am trusted in the area of teaching. However, as the project developed and CERs were presented to the expert panel, the elders began to see the value in being far more intentional concerning how and why classes are offered at the church. A desire to see more in-depth evaluation of not only class offerings but how those classes would be evaluated for effectiveness and overall value to the church membership was sparked. In addition, the evaluation process as it related to the project itself, when it was completed and accepted both by the Professional Doctorate program at Southern Seminary and the expert panel at LPCI, served as a guide for evaluating new class offerings at the church.

A fifth and final strength of this project was the length of the course instruction (which, as it turns out, was also a weakness) as it related to evaluating the value of the project. Because the project included a twenty-six-session course, I was able to evaluate multiple book offerings (was their depth too shallow or too deep for an introductory course

in apologetics? Were they too long for one-week reading assignments?), provide multiple topics related to apologetics for study and discussion (biblical study, worldview issues, tactics, world religions, philosophy, ethical dialogue and debate), and take the necessary time to evaluate the project multiple times during the implementation of the project and make adjustments. I will address how the length of the project was also a weakness in the next section.

Weaknesses

The project conducted at LPCI was in almost every way successful. The goals established for it were met in large measure, the participants were challenged and motivated to continue their learning in Christian apologetics, a course of study for future participants from the church was established, and the elders of the church were pleased not only with the implementation of the project but with the outcomes. Nevertheless, every such endeavor comes with its shortcomings and overall weaknesses, and this project was no exception.

The first weakness of this project was its overall length. Although the length of the project was shown to be a strength in terms of the evaluation process, the course associated with the project was approximately eight weeks too long for the participants. Evaluations, both verbal and written, indicated that, although the curriculum and associated readings were helpful, it simply became too difficult to set aside twenty-six Wednesday evenings for this type of study. It seems that future participants would be better served if the study were broken up into two different courses of approximately fifteen weeks, with the first course emphasizing basic concepts and study related to Christian apologetics and another to provide more in-depth concepts and training for participants who desire to continue in the study of apologetics. Although the participants chosen for this initial project were timely and, for the most part, consistent in their attendance, it was difficult for many to maintain that consistency over six months of study.

A second weakness of this project (related somewhat to the first) was the overall

breadth of the reading and subsequent study. Because one of the goals of the project was to equip participants with information to engage more effectively with skeptics in apologetic encounters, an attempt was made to provide a sweeping overview of the apologetic task, from building a knowledge base to preparing mentally and spiritually for tactical encounters. This proved to be a bit too much for participants new to the study of Christian apologetics. Future participants will be better served with a course dealing with basic information related to apologetics, along with both a biblical overview demonstrating the need to prepare oneself to defend the faith and practical ways to do so, followed by more theory and in-depth study in a subsequent course.

A third weakness of this project was the inability to provide more practical approaches to the study. One of the early concerns of many participants was their seeming inability to connect some of the concepts being learned in the reading with how to make them useful in a typical encounter with a non-believer who is skeptical of the Christian faith. For instance, some of the reading assigned for the course (particularly Dembski and Licona's *Evidence for God*) included quite a bit of scientific, fact-based information employed to prove the existence of God or the reality of an intellectual force associated with creation. Although the information was well-presented and factual, participants still wondered, even after reading the material, how they might take the bits of information that had been learned related to science and Christianity and utilize it in an apologetic encounter with a person who may have a Ph.D. in physics. In other words, the information was nice but simply was not enough to "win the day" against a person who had years of training and expertise in a scientific field. So, how does one practically use such information in such an encounter?

Although we utilized additional practical examples of how Christian apologetics play out in everyday life as the course progressed, and participants themselves were able to share occasionally how what they were learning was being utilized in their personal lives and encounters with non-believers, the course still could not have been called

“practical” at the end of the twenty-six-week project. One possible solution could be to provide participants in future courses opportunities to go to downtown Indianapolis to engage with skeptics and non-believers as a class (or to festivals, outreach missions, malls, etc.). However, indicating that such an event will be part of the course of study will likely cause some to refuse to sign up out of a fear associated with engaging in such activities.

The reality remains that one can never be completely prepared for any single apologetic encounter. Someone with whom we may engage in dialogue concerning Christianity will likely always know more about a few topics than we could know.

Future Adjustments

After considering both the strengths and weakness of this project, a few adjustments should be made before the study in apologetics is offered again at LPCI. First, the course of study will be reduced from twenty-six weeks to not more than sixteen weeks. Second, the reading assignments will be adjusted to deal with more of an overview approach to Christian apologetics, allowing for participants new to the field of study (which includes most believers) to ease into the topic and gain a better foundation. Third, an additional course offering (and curriculum) will be developed of the same length to provide an opportunity for those who wish for more depth of study to pursue that desire. Finally, a team will be established comprised of individuals with backgrounds in the study of apologetics to ascertain how we might offer more practical experiences in both understanding and applying Christian apologetics to our everyday lives, and the ideas generated will be implemented in both courses of study.

Theological Reflections

The Scriptures teach leaders in Christ’s church to train and equip believers for works of service. Christian apologetics can be understood in many ways as a subset of discipleship training. As disciples and ambassadors for Christ, it is imperative that believers be diligent in the study of both God’s Word and the concepts, both practical

and theoretical, born out of that study. The aim of this project was to encourage believers at LPCI to do just that. Christ-followers need to not only be trained apologetically for encounters with skeptics and those who are genuinely seeking the Lord, but must also be able to defend against their own doubts and the occasional curiosities that creep into their heads. This project confirmed again the truth that Christian apologetics are important.

In the first century, the apostle Peter wrote, “But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you the reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15). The need to honor Christ as holy remains as important today as it was almost 2,000 years ago. Followers of Christ need to remember that God has not spoken in secret (Isa 45:19). The Scriptures reveal a God who has made himself known, and therefore Christians should be (as much as is feasible according to the measure of faith God has given us) prepared to defend the reality that he not only exists but also that salvation is found in him alone. There should be some shame attached to any believer in this culture, with the resources available, who has been a Christ-follower for a reasonable amount of time and has the mental capacity to learn spiritual concepts, who does not have the desire to know God and to make him known. The New Testament Scriptures, at the disposal of almost all believers in the United States, reveal the truth of God and his plan of salvation in significantly greater depth than the Scriptures that were available to the young Timothy when Paul wrote these words to him:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (2 Tim 3:14–15)

How much more should believers today, in this country, be acquainted with the Scriptures in order to become wise, not only for their sakes, but for the sake of others as well?

The local church has a role to play in this type of preparation. If believers are to be equipped for the work of ministry, the church and her leaders must lead the way. In learning ways to defend the Christian faith and diving deep into the truths taught in the Word of God, believers can truly attain to “the measure of the stature of the fullness

of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Eph 4:13–14). The goal, of course, is Christian maturity. The means to attain that are varied, but apologetics surely must be included in the equation. This does not imply that if one knows apologetic tactics he is by default a mature Christian. There are examples of scholars who know the original languages, understand hermeneutics, and quote the Bible who do not have a saving relationship with God through Christ. Nevertheless, pursuing knowledge and strategies that help to defend the faith once for all delivered to the saints is clearly part of the picture that demonstrates what a mature believer looks like. The church is the pillar and foundation of the truth, and it plays a vital role, both universally and locally, in teaching and declaring that truth to those who have pledged allegiance to Jesus Christ so that they can not only proclaim that truth but defend it as well.

In this project I attempted to demonstrate biblically and practically not only that the local church should be engaged in teaching and training in Christian apologetics but that, with a little effort, it can engage in these tasks. This project was not perfect, nor was the course that made up the project, but hopefully it demonstrated that LPCI has the resources to engage in training Christ-followers to be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks them the reason for their hope in Christ. Not all churches in America have LPCI’s resources, but the truth is most do have competent teachers who, if trained properly, could not only engage in a defense of the faith but could teach others to do so as well.

Personal Reflections

The process of developing and implementing this project created many growth opportunities for me. I am thankful that the elders at LPCI have big hearts for discipleship and training. We believe and teach that the church of Jesus Christ is made up of followers of Jesus Christ. We believe strongly in evangelism and reaching out to the lost. We also believe that doing so requires the proper training, equipping, and encouragement of those

who have come to know Christ so that they can be about the task of sharing the gospel and defending the faith. With the support of these men, I was able to pursue not only the Doctor of Ministry degree but to implement this project at LPCI.

The participants in this process were outstanding. They are a committed group of Christ-followers who spent twenty-six weeks reading close to 2,300 pages of information related to Christian apologetics and gathering together for forty hours to discuss what they were learning and to assist me in preparing not only a doctoral project but a course that could be refined and repeated multiple times in the future at LPCI. Every participant who engaged in the project is married, and although a few participated in the course with their spouses, some did not, which means they spent that time pursuing apologetics and assisting me, when they could have been spending that time as a husband, wife, or parent. I am thankful for their participation and for the many concepts I learned from them during our hours of discussion together. In addition, multiple lay-persons from the LPCI family assisted me with proofing, statistical analysis, compiling and sorting CERs, and other assorted tasks that made both my project and writing better. I am indebted to them for their time, encouragement, and assistance.

At some point in the history of humanity, Jesus Christ will return at his second advent to gather his elect and establish an eternal kingdom. I suspect that at that point, evangelism and apologetics will no longer be a part of his followers' everyday lives. Until that day, believers are called to live out their faith in demonstrable ways, to pray for the lost and the hurting, to share their hope in Christ through his gospel, and to make a defense for the faith that he established. I am better prepared to do that as a result of this project, and my prayer is that the 10 participants who gathered with me are also, as will be those who gather in future courses as a part of the ongoing discipleship ministry at LPCI.

APPENDIX 1

APOLOGETICS ASSESSMENT SURVEY (AAS)

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the participant's current level of understanding as it relates to questions concerning apologetics and the Christian faith that are often debated in apologetic encounters. The survey will also gage the level of Bible knowledge related to apologetics currently possessed by each participant. An analysis of the data will allow the facilitator of the apologetics ministry course to observe the base-line of understanding with which each participant enters into the apologetics study.

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to gather opinions about various doctrinal issues with specific attention given to Bible knowledge as it relates to Christian apologetics. This research is being conducted by James Gregory for the purpose of obtaining information for doctoral research. In this research, you will be asked to answer several questions about your personal religious beliefs. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your full name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation in this course of study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from it at any time.

Respond to the statements below using the following scale.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

1. _____ Faith in Jesus Christ is the only way for a person to be saved (born again).
2. _____ All believers are to participate in sharing their faith and engaging with non-believers.
3. _____ Followers of Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Mormonism all believe in the same God.
4. _____ People who never hear the gospel can still be saved.
5. _____ All believers are commanded to share their faith in Christ.

6. _____ The Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20) states that believers are to “make disciples” of unbelievers through evangelization, assimilation, and education.
7. _____ There is no such concept as absolute truth.
8. _____ There is no evidence for the existence of God apart from the Bible.
9. _____ The Bible is God’s revealed word. It is therefore free from false statements.
10. _____ All Christians are called to contend for the purity of the gospel message.
11. _____ It is intolerant for Christians to make arguments for God’s existence or the truth claims of Jesus with non-Christians.
12. _____ All followers of Jesus Christ are commanded to defend the Christian faith.
13. _____ The Old Testament God is harsher than the New Testament Jesus.
14. _____ Apologetics should only be done by those who have received formal training.
15. _____ Mohammad, Buddha, Confucius, and Joseph Smith were all prophets of God.
16. _____ Believing in things like the virgin birth, the miracles of Jesus, and the resurrection of Jesus are not essential to the Christian faith.
17. _____ Christians must be prepared to answer the objections of unbelievers.
18. _____ Paul quoted pagan philosophers to make a case for the existence of God.
19. _____ The primary purpose of the church is to worship God through His Son Jesus Christ.
20. _____ Everyone eventually is saved. Hell, if it exists, is empty, or eventually will be.
21. _____ Jesus will return to receive his church at his second advent.
22. _____ All Christians believe that Jesus will return before seven years of tribulation.
23. _____ The Gospel includes the teaching that love is God’s greatest attribute.
24. _____ The Bible consists of 66 books.
25. _____ The world was created approximately 6000 years ago. This is non-negotiable.
26. _____ No one really debated about Jesus and his existence until the Enlightenment (mid 17th century).
27. _____ Although faith is necessary for salvation, good works are also necessary to demonstrate our desire to please God.
28. _____ The universe may be 14.5 billion years old or older.
29. _____ The Bible argues for God’s existence.

30. _____ Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Second Person of the Trinity.
31. _____ The Bible is a very good book, but it contains at least a few factual errors.
32. _____ The Bible must be seen as an ancient document tied to its day and age. Behaviors like fornication, homosexuality, adultery, telling lies that don't hurt people, stealing in order to help others, and abortion need to be considered through modern eyes.
33. _____ Jesus said that we should never judge another person.
34. _____ The Bible teaches that God helps those people who help themselves.
35. _____ Jehovah Witnesses are Christians.
36. _____ When good people die, they become angels.
37. _____ Many books have been discovered which are equal to Scripture. These books were discredited by those in power in the early church.
38. _____ A person's worldview does not shape much of their thinking, since they can easily think in whatever categories they choose.
39. _____ God loves everyone equally.
40. _____ Evolution is the best explanation for the origin of life on this planet.

APPENDIX 2

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC (CER)

Apologetics Ministry Course					
Lesson 1 Evaluation					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of Christian apologetics.					
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching.					
The material is theologically sound.					
The thesis of the lesson is clearly stated.					
The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.					
The lesson contains points of practical application.					
The lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.					
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.					

APPENDIX 3

FINAL CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

Apologetics Ministry Course					
Final Course Evaluation					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The curriculum was clearly relevant to the issue of Christian apologetics.					
All curriculum material was faithful to the Bible's teaching (Please discount materials utilized as examples of non-Christian teaching or to enhance knowledge concerning non-Christian thinking).					
The material was theologically sound. (Please discount materials utilized as examples of non-Christian teaching or to enhance knowledge concerning non-Christian thinking).					
The overall thesis of the course was clearly communicated.					
The points of the lessons clearly support the thesis.					
The lessons contained points of practical application.					
The lessons were sufficiently thorough in their coverage of the material.					
Overall, the course was clearly presented.					

APPENDIX 4

APOLOGETICS MINISTRY SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to gage your level of comfort and confidence when engaging skeptics in apologetic encounters. This research is being conducted by James Gregory for the purpose of collecting data for a doctoral project. In this research, you will answer questions before the course and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the course. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your full 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.

Part 1

Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice questions by placing a check next to the appropriate answer.

1. Do you consider yourself a Christian?
 A. Yes
 B. No
2. Have you placed your faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, and followed that with repentance and a desire to grow in your faith?
 A. Yes
 B. No
3. Are you married?
 A. Yes
 B. No
4. Have you ever engaged in an apologetic encounter? (For the purposes of this survey, an apologetic encounter is any sustained conversation with a skeptic of the faith where questions concerning the truth claims of Christianity are discussed from philosophical, scientific, historical, or moral perspectives).
 A. Yes
 B. No
5. What is your age in years?
 A. 18-24
 B. 25-34
 C. 35-44
 D. 45-54
 E. 55-64
 F. 65 and over

Part 2

Directions: Answer the following questions: (1) Place a check by the multiple-choice questions. (2) Some questions ask you to give your opinion using the following scale: SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, DS = disagree somewhat, AS = agree somewhat, A = agree, SA = strongly agree; please circle the appropriate answer.

- | | | | | | | |
|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 6. I consider myself to be well equipped biblically for an apologetic encounter. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. I am an effective communicator when it comes to sharing my faith. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. I desire to engage with people who are skeptical concerning Christianity. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 9. I have a good idea of what a biblical worldview is. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 10. I have a good grasp of other world religions and cults. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 11. If asked, I could articulate the gospel. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 12. I feel a strong level of comfort about engaging with a skeptic of the faith. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 13. I could instruct another person concerning the reality of God's existence. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 14. I read my Bible (check only one)
<input type="checkbox"/> A. each day
<input type="checkbox"/> B. several times per week
<input type="checkbox"/> C. several times per month
<input type="checkbox"/> D. occasionally
<input type="checkbox"/> E. not at all | | | | | | |
| 15. I read Christian books (check only one)
<input type="checkbox"/> A. every week
<input type="checkbox"/> B. a few times each month
<input type="checkbox"/> C. occasionally
<input type="checkbox"/> D. rarely
<input type="checkbox"/> E. never | | | | | | |

16. 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
17. I specifically seek out occasions to engage with non-believers in conversation (check only one)
 A. often
 B. occasionally
 C. never
18. I often pray for non-believers
 A. Yes
 B. No
19. I get very nervous when non-believers ask me questions about the faith (check only one)
 A. always
 B. sometimes
 C. rarely
20. I work on memorizing Scripture (check only one)
 A. several times per week
 B. once per week
 C. several times per month
 D. once per month
 E. several times per year
 F. not at all
21. I feel confident about my own faith. SD D DS AS A SA
22. I would like to read more concerning apologetics to increase my confidence and comfort when engaging skeptics. SD D DS AS A SA
23. Overall, I feel I have learned much concerning Christian apologetics SD D DS AS A SA
24. I feel I possess good tactics in which to engage with skeptics and non-believers SD D DS AS A SA
25. I feel comfortable around skeptics SD D DS AS A SA

APPENDIX 5

STATISTICAL RESULTS FOR THE APOLOGETICS
PROJECT AT LIFEPOINT CHURCH INDY

Table. Statistical results for apologetics project

	<i>Pre-test</i>	<i>Post-test</i>
Mean	212.2	217.1
Variance	93.95555556	35.43333333
Observations	10	10
Pearson Correlation	0.74101213	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	9	
t Stat	-2.3392345	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.02203775	
t Critical one-tail	1.83311293	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.0440755	
t Critical two-tail	2.26215716	

APPENDIX 6

APOLOGETICS COURSE SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

Purpose:

The Basic Apologetics Learning Program is designed to introduce the broad concept of apologetics to believers within the body of LifePoint Church. The aim is to prepare the body to be adequately equipped to give positive reasons for the Christian faith and to defend against skeptics.

Goals:

1. To give believers a basic understanding of a worldview and its implications.
2. To equip believers to know what they believe and why they believe it.
3. To equip believers with a reasonable case for the reliability of the Bible.
4. To equip believers with a positive case for a belief in God.
5. To equip believers to understand the most basic misuses of the Bible by Cults.
6. To equip believers with a basic foundation and understanding of other faiths and cults in order to have fruitful and effective interactions.
7. To give believers a tactical approach for dealing with skeptics and those of other faiths and worldviews.

Overview:

We begin this program by learning about a worldview and its implications on all lives. These first few weeks can be considered as preparation for what is the most important part of the program—knowing what we believe. Knowing *what* we believe then leads us to consider the question of *why* we believe. Because *what* we believe is determined by Scripture, we then spend some weeks addressing the reliability of our Bible. From here we move to exploring 50 arguments for God. Our next topic will teach us some of the most common ways in which cults misread the Bible. Next, we'll turn to exploring some major worldviews and cults, which will better prepare us to engage in conversations as ambassadors for Christ. Finally, we will study the art of *tactics* in conversing with others. This final study is aimed at helping us to use the information that we've gleaned through the program in order to have meaningful conversations with other.

Books:

The Story of Reality, Greg Koukl

What's Your Worldview? James N. Anderson

Defending Your Faith: An Introduction to Apologetics, R.C. Sproul

How We Got the Bible, Timothy Paul Jones

The Whole Story of the Bible in 16 Verses, Chris Bruno

Know What You Believe, Paul Little

Know Why You Believe, Paul Little

Evidence for God, Editors: William Dembski & Michael Licona

Scripture Twisting: 20 Ways the Cults Misread the Bible, James Sire

Christianity, Cults and Religions, Rose Publishing

Tactics, Greg Koukl

...Atheists have tremendous confidence that science will continue its record of silencing superstition. As knowledge waxes, foolishness wanes. Consequently, there's no need for sticking God in the so-called "gaps." Science will fill them soon enough.

Atheists are buoyed in their confidence by what they consider an inverse relationship between knowledge and faith. The more you have of the first, the less you need of the second. Faith is merely a filler for ignorance. As knowledge increases, silly superstitious beliefs are discarded. As science marches forward, ignorance will eventually disappear and faith will dry up. Simply put, faith and knowledge are functional opposites. The only place for faith, then, is in the shadows of ignorance.

Ironically, this same perspective has been promoted by Christians themselves. "If I know that God exists," they challenge, "or that Jesus rose from the dead, or that Heaven is real, then where is the room for faith?" Note the inverse relationship between knowledge and faith: Faith and knowledge are functional opposites.

*This view is obviously false if you pause to think about it. **The opposite of knowledge is not faith, but ignorance. And the opposite of faith is not knowledge, but unbelief.** It's certainly possible to have knowledgeable faith or ignorant unbelief. More importantly, the knowledge vs. faith equation is not what the Bible teaches. In fact, Scripture affirms just the opposite.*

...Someone once said, "The heart cannot believe what the mind rejects." If you are not confident the message of Scripture is actually true, you can't believe even if you tried.

The "I just take Christianity on (blind) faith" attitude can't be the right approach. It leaves the Bible without defense, yet Peter directs us to make a defense for the hope that is in us.

*Also, the biblical word for faith, *pistis*, doesn't mean wishing. It means active trust. And trust cannot be conjured up or manufactured. It must be earned. You can't exercise the kind of faith the Bible has in mind unless you're reasonably sure that some particular things are true.*

In fact, I suggest you completely ban the phrase "leap of faith" from your vocabulary. Biblical faith is based on knowledge, not wishing or blind leaps. Knowledge builds confidence and confidence leads to trust. The kind of faith God is interested in is not wishing. It's based on knowing, a sure confidence grounded in evidence.

...Faith is not about wishing, but about confidence, and the facts make the difference. You get a hold of the facts, you study, you learn—even a little—and you'll realize you're not just wishing on a star about eternal things. You'll realize Christianity is true.

From *Faith Is Not Wishing*, Greg Koukl (pages 7-8,12)

Mapping Apologetics

In his book, *Mapping Apologetics*, Brian Morley compares the contemporary approaches to apologetics. Most Christians are probably unaware that there are different approaches and, perhaps, may even wonder why it matters. However, it matters very much. Though the purpose of this course is not to delve into all the different approaches, nor even to necessarily determine which is best, it may be helpful to see the spectrum of these approaches. To the far left is *fideism*. *Fideism* bases its conclusion solely on faith. Faith is completely unsupported by any evidence. No reasons are necessary, only the subjective “faith” of the person. To the far right is *rationalism*. *Rationalism* bases its conclusion solely on reason, using deduction. In this approach certainty is absolute. Nothing is subjective or volitional.

Hopefully, just by reading the two extremes, one can immediately detect the inadequacies of both approaches. To conclude that faith is the sole basis of a belief, apart from any evidence, gives no place to rule out any belief, since it is all based on a subjective experience. To conclude that faith is solely based on reason assumes that “my reason” will assess all the evidence accurately, that I have no inherent bias, and also that I can actually have all the evidence needed to come to an accurate conclusion. Somewhere in between seems to be the best option, and I will list a few options placing them from left to right, depending on whether they more closely approach *fideism* or *rationalism*. This list is only four out of the ten listed by Morley, but will give a brief idea of approaches.

<u>Presuppositionalism</u>	<u>Pragmatism</u>	<u>Classical Apologetics</u>	<u>Evidentialism</u>
Starting points are necessary presuppositions unprovable by independent evidence. No independent facts as reasons.	Accepts what works: Workability!	First prove theism, then Christianity. Uses cosmos and order to prove interpretive framework (theism), then uses facts of history.	Evidence points to Christianity. Facts point to best interpretation.

Lesson 3

Defending Your Faith: An Introduction to Apologetics

Reading: *Defending Your Faith*, R.C. Sproul (chapters 11-conclusion)

Review: ***The Holy Spirit:***

We believe that the Holy Spirit has always been at work in the world, sharing in the work of creation, empowering signs and wonders and the preaching and writing of the apostles, and inaugurating a new era of the Spirit by pouring out all the promises of God on His Church. It is by the power of the Spirit that repentant sinners become a new creation and are enabled to live a godly life. The saving work of the Holy Spirit works in connection with the presentation of the gospel message, so that the work of the Father in election, the work of the Son in atonement, and the work of the Spirit in regeneration is an encouragement, not a hindrance, to the proclamation of the gospel to all people everywhere. (Gen. 1:2; Psalm 104:30; Luke 24:49; John 3:8; 7:38-39; 16:5-16; Acts 1:8; 2:33; Rom. 8:7-9; 15:18-19; 2 Cor. 3:17-18; 2 Peter 1:21; Heb. 2:3-4).

1. What are the four possibilities in the case for the existence of God? Briefly explain each.

a.

b.

c.

d.

2. Explain the causal power of *chance*.

3. What is *aseity*, and how does it relate to God?

4. Practically speaking, we have no reason to be anything but selfish. Immanuel Kant argued, however, that all of us have a sense of *oughtness*, a sense of objective justice built into us. Since there is no perfect justice here on earth he argued that perfect justice must be somewhere in the life hereafter. He then argued that for perfect justice to be dispensed after this life, there must be a judge who possesses three key qualities. Name and explain each.

a.

b.

c.

5. The author lists two distinct types of self-authentication concerning the Bible as the Word of God. List both and summarize their argument/view.

a.

b.

6. Explain why Jesus' view on Scripture matters.

Lesson 4

Reading: *How We Got the Bible*, Timothy Paul Jones (chapters 1-4)

Review: *The Bible*:

We believe that the Bible is the inspired, eternal, infallible and sufficient word of God, inerrant in the original manuscripts, and the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct. It was written by men divinely inspired. It has God for its author, salvation as its end, and truth without any mixture of error for its matter. All creeds, human conduct, and opinions must be tried by the Word of God (Num. 23:19; Psalm 12:6; 119:43; Prov. 30:5; Is. 40:8; Matt. 24:35; John 1:1-3; 14:26; 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21).

1. What is meant by infallible and inerrant?
2. What is intended by the phrase “the sufficiency of Scripture”? What is not intended?
3. Explain why the OT is a vital part of the Christian story.
4. How did the Dead Sea scrolls undermine the doubts of skeptics who suspected the OT had changed over the centuries?

Lesson 5

Reading: Article & *How We Got the Bible*, Timothy Paul Jones (Chapters 5-appendix)

Review: *Man's Sinfulness*:

We believe that Mankind was created in holiness, under the law of his Maker, but by willful transgression fell from that original place, and by consequence all are now sinners, by nature and by choice, and unable by any act of our own to attain the holiness required by God. Humankind is inclined toward evil, and is therefore under condemnation without any defense or excuse (Gen. 2:17; 3:1; 3:6-13; Ps. 14:3; 51:5; Jer. 17:9-10; Eccl. 7:29; Rom. 5:12-19; 8:20-23; Eph. 2:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:21; 2 Cor. 4:16).

The question of *canon* can be one of the most perplexing questions that Christians face when dealing with the reliability of Scripture. With nearly 6,000 Greek manuscripts, and thousands more in other languages, the *transmission* of the text seems to fairly easily promote confidence. To know exactly which books are to be included in Scripture, however, is not quite so cut and dry. Many skeptics have used, or one could say, have misused, this in an attempt to undermine our confidence in the *canon* of Scripture.

In *How We Got the Bible* the descriptions of the lost Gospels, the lists of accepted New Testament books and the recorded thoughts of early Christian leaders on certain books are given. However, it seems that there still exists much murkiness on exactly which books were considered *canon* and why. Before we simply give up on this quest, let's step back and reasonably assess what we claim as Christians and what it is we are really trying to discover.

One historian wrote, "History alone cannot answer the question of what the *canon* finally is; theology alone can do that." His point was this. What someone believes about the Bible will absolutely affect the way they assess the evidence that history provides. To someone who either already believes that God did not inspire the NT or who strongly doubts, it is understandable how they would see a lack of early lists of a *canon* or the existence of other "gospels" as pointing to a man-made NT. As an example, consider the OJ Simpson trial which took place in the mid 1990s. Though the evidence seemed to overwhelmingly point to his guilt, the jury found him not guilty. This was perplexing to much of America. However, a recently released documentary detailed the background to the trial which went back decades showing the police brutality and unfair treatment of blacks in America, specifically in LA where the events took place. This background caused many black Americans to view the LA police as untrustworthy. So when some evidence was given that one of the detectives on the case had spoken a racist statement in the past, this instantly caused all the evidence presented against Simpson to be considered untrustworthy and probably planted. To white Americans, who considered the police as generally trustworthy, the evidence was overwhelming. To black Americans, who considered the police as generally corrupt, the evidence was almost certainly unreliable. It was the same evidence with different conclusions, completely based on presuppositions. Turning back to the issue of the reliability of Scripture, presuppositions are the reason that arguments Christians find compelling often prove entirely unconvincing to the skeptic. This concept of presupposition is what Jesus was

speaking of when he said, “*If anyone’s will is to do God’s will (precondition), he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.*”
(John 7:17)

Some expect that in order to claim a *canon* there should be a complete list early on the history of the Church. Someone quipped that there should be 28 inspired books in the NT, one of them titled, “Table of Contents,” which includes the 27 books of the NT. But, of course, in order to do that we would have to have another list with those 28 inspired books listed. Then this 29th book, which contained the 28 books, including the Table of Contents book, would have to be inspired in order to be trustworthy. Do you see the absurdity? It would present a never-ending regression.

Some claim that it was the Church who gave us the *canon*. The Roman Catholic Church, for instance, claims that without the Church officially and authoritatively determining these books, we could not have a NT. The skeptic, using the same general argument, sees things a bit differently. They claim that the NT *canon* we now possess is nothing more than the books chosen by the eventual theological winner in the battle for Church power. However, as J.I. Packer stated, “The Church no more gave us the NT *canon* than Sir Isaac Newton gave us the force of gravity. God gave us gravity... Newton did not create gravity but recognized it.” This is our claim for the *canon*. God gave us the *canon*, the Church simply recognized it.

What should we expect? Now we get to the main issue. If the Bible was truly inspired by God, what should we expect to find? Do we find these things?

Following Michael Kruger’s summarization, we are going to propose three main characteristics which we should expect to find:

- (1) **Providential exposure:** If the Almighty, Sovereign LORD of the universe intended for the Church to have a New Testament, we should expect that the Church should have exposure to those books. As Kruger stated, “In order for the church to be able to recognize the books of the canon, it must first be providentially exposed to these books. The church cannot recognize a book that it does not have.” This would also rule out “lost gospels.” If they were “lost,” then they were not providentially exposed.
- (2) **Attributes of canonicity:** These attributes are basically characteristics that distinguish canonical books from all other books.
 - a. Divine qualities: bear the marks of a divine book.
 - When officers were sent to arrest Jesus, they came back empty handed. When asked why they did not bring him back, they responded, “*No one ever spoke like this man!*” **(John 7:46)** This same idea is to be seen in Scripture. “*No book has been written like this book.*”
 - b. Corporate reception: recognized by the church as a whole.
 - c. Apostolic origins: came from apostolic authority.
- (3) **Internal testimony of the Holy Spirit:** In order for believers to rightly recognize these attributes of canonicity, the Holy Spirit works to overcome the noetic effects of sin and produces belief that these books are from God. “*But you do not*

believe because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” (John 10:26-27) If this is true, what should we expect to find? Those who are Christ’s sheep *will* hear his voice!

1. Skeptics today claim that the existence of “lost Gospels” or “lost Scriptures” undermines the authenticity of our *canon*. Early Christians, however, rejected these writings. Why?
2. How does the early Christian rejection of these lost writings confirm both the *attributes of canonicity* and the *internal testimony of the Holy Spirit* listed above?
3. When were all of the New Testament Gospels written in contrast to the lost writings? How does this impact our confidence in their historical reliability and trustworthiness?
4. What is meant when we say that we believe in the inerrancy of the original autographs?
5. How does the number of manuscripts which we have today affect our ability to know what the original autographs were?

Lesson 6

The Whole Story of the Bible in 16 Verses

Reading: *The Whole Story of the Bible in 16 Verses*, Chris Bruno (chapters 1-8)

Review: ***Justification (Being made right with God)***

We believe that the great blessing of the gospel message is that all who repent and believe, placing their trust in Jesus Christ will be justified, which includes the pardon of sin and the promise of eternal life. This is based not on any righteousness (holiness) on our part, or on anything we have done or accomplished, but is given to us through the blood of Jesus Christ and imputed to us by God, bringing us to a state of favor with God, and securing for us every blessing promised by God. In short, Jesus died a vicarious death for us (He died in our place) so that the righteous wrath of God might be turned from us (propitiated) and we might know peace with God (Ps. 32:5; 49:15; Isaiah 53; John 1:29; 3:16,36; 6:36-37; Acts 13:38; Rom. 3:28; 5:18-19; 8:3-4; 1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:16; 3:13; Eph. 1:7; 1 Peter 2:24; Rev. 22:17).

Michael Horton summarizes the Christian religion into the four D's: drama, doctrine, doxology and discipleship. Each flows into the next and is dependent on the one prior. He says, "...doctrine is generated by God's unfolding drama and transforms our experience as well as our everyday lives...doctrine flows out of the biblical drama."

In this course we will be focused on doctrine. However, in order to prepare the stage for doctrine, we need to understand the basics of the *Drama*, the big Story. One way to judge whether a doctrine is orthodox is to find out if it fits into the *Drama*. For instance, "the Book of Mormon gives an account of three people groups (the Lehites, Jaredites, and Mulekites) who migrated from the Middle East and inhabited the American continents between about 2000 BC and AD 400." Laying aside the issue concerning evidence of any such events, how does this fit into the *Drama*? If it does not, we should immediately be suspicious.

This study will give us a brief picture of the whole Story of the Bible in a few selected verses.

Briefly describe each of the following verses and themes.

1. Creation (Genesis 1:31):

2. Human Beings (Genesis 1:27-28):

6. Resurrection (Romans 1:3-4):

7. Justification (Romans 3:21-26):

8. Glory (Revelation 21:1-4):

Lesson 14

Evidence for God: 50 Arguments for Faith from the Bible, History, Philosophy and Science

Reading: *Evidence for God*, William Dembski and Michael Licona (Chapters 42-50)

1. Briefly explain how we can believe in the inerrancy of Scripture when we don't have the originals.
2. What is *formal equivalence* in Bible translation? *Dynamic equivalence*?
3. What three criteria were used to determine canonical vs. non-canonical writings? (compare to question 2 in lesson 10)
4. In John 10:27, Jesus said, "*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.*" How do the three criteria above fulfill Jesus statement?

Lesson 15

Evidence for God: The Question of Philosophy

Reading: *Evidence for God*, William Dembski and Michael Licona (chapters 1-7)

1. Charles Darwin had a “horrid doubt” that since the human mind has developed from lower animals (his view), why would anyone trust it? How does this affect the atheist skepticism of the Moral argument for God’s existence?
2. What is *naturalism*? How does it fail to sustain its own truth claim?
3. What is the explanatory power of theism?
4. In light of this explanatory power, is it reasonable to exclude *theism* because of one unanswered problem? Explain.
5. In *Expository Apologetics*, Baucham exhorts “always find a way to get to the gospel.” What caution must we keep in mind when arguing for *theism* or simply “a god”?

Lesson 17

Evidence for God: The Question of Jesus

Reading: *Evidence for God*, William Dembski and Michael Licona (chapters 27-41)

1. Briefly explain the term *Son of Man* in the New Testament.
2. Jehovah's Witnesses like to say, "Jesus never claimed to be God." Is this true? Explain.
3. List some biblical evidence for the doctrine of the Trinity. Can you think of some not mentioned in the book?
4. What five lines of truth show the superiority of Jesus over all other religious leaders?

Lesson 18

Scripture Twisting: 20 Ways the Cults Misread the Bible

Reading: *Scripture Twisting*, James Sire (chapters 1-6)

Briefly describe each of the following misreadings:

1. Inaccurate Quotation:
2. Twisted Translation:
3. The Biblical Hook:
4. Ignoring the Immediate Context:
5. Collapsing Contexts:
6. Overspecification:

7. Word Play:

8. The Figurative Fallacy:

9. Speculative Readings of Predictive Prophecy:

10. Saying but Not Citing:

11. Selective Citing:

12. Inadequate Evidence:

Lesson 19
Scripture Twisting

Reading: *Scripture Twisting*, James Sire (chapters 7-Appendix II)

Briefly describe each of the following misreadings:

1. Confused Definition:

2. Ignoring Alternate Explanations:

3. The Obvious Fallacy:

4. Virtue by Association:

5. Esoteric Interpretation:

6. Supplementing Biblical Authority:

7. Rejecting Biblical Authority:

8. Worldview Confusion:

9. New cults spring up on a regular basis. Rather than learning all the particulars about each new doctrine, what is a more helpful approach?

j. Transcendental Meditation:

k. Buddhism:

l. Soka Gahhai International:

2. What do these all have in common concerning their teaching about Jesus?

3. Read Ecclesiastes 1:9. How does this correlate with what we've read this week?

Lesson 21
Christianity, Cults and Religions

Reading: *Christianity, Cults and Religions*, Rose Publishers (pages 8-9, 16-17, 58-109)

1. What do the following teach about Jesus?
 - a. Jehovah's Witnesses:

 - b. Mormonism:

 - c. Islam:

 - d. Nation of Islam:

2. What are the Five Pillars of Islam?
 - a.

 - b.

 - c.

 - d.

 - e.

3. What do Jehovah's Witnesses believe about the Holy Spirit?

4. List Mormon Scripture and describe each.

APPENDIX 7

LIFEPOINT CHURCH FELLOWS COVENANT
APOLOGETICS COURSE

I, _____, recognize that LifePoint Church is devoting substantial resources to this program, and thus I agree to complete all of the weekly reading and devote myself to this program for the next 35 weeks. I am fully aware that the reading may take two to four hours a week, but I am committed to making this program a priority in my life while I am in it. I am also committed to attending the meetings and engaging in meaningful and thoughtful dialogue as true Biblical learning best takes place in community and relationship with one another. I will also commit to praying for other members in my group.

I recognize that there may be theological stances and concepts addressed that I may not necessarily agree with and, in the case of differences, I will be respectful and recognize that there exists a broad range of perspectives in the body of Christ. Lastly, I agree to not let the reading for this program replace my personal devotional time spent daily in God's Word, or detract from the time I spend in prayer. Because this program will occupy time, it necessarily then becomes a family undertaking. We are asking that your spouse (should you be married) read and sign this covenant as well so that he/she can hold you accountable to do your reading and enter with an understanding of the time commitments.

Printed Name

Date: _____

Signed

Spouse's Printed Name

Spouse's Signed Name

APPENDIX 8

LIFEPOINT CHURCH EXTENDED STATEMENT OF FAITH

LifePoint Church Extended Statement of Faith

- From the first century (Col. 1:15-20) to the present time, Christians have been creating statements of faith and putting them in writing as a way of demonstrating what they believe and why. Although our welcome materials and website have brief statements of faith included, we make this extended statement available for those who would like a more detailed explanation of LifePoint's doctrinal positions. Although this statement is extended, it is not exhaustive, in that it does not cover every question or issue that could arise in the church. As a general statement, we resonate with Richard Baxter's statement: "In necessary things, unity: In questionable things, liberty: In all things, charity."
- The general outline of our statement of faith has been adapted primarily from the revised New Hampshire Confession of Faith from 1853.

I. God

We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He is the Maker and Supreme Ruler of heaven and earth; glorious in holiness, worthy of all honor and praise. The three Persons of the Godhead are equal in every perfection, and holding distinct offices in harmony as the great work of redeeming humankind is accomplished (Gen. 1; Deut. 6:4; Job 42:2; Is. 6:1-5; Dan. 4:34-35; Matt. 16:16, 28:19; John 1:1; Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor. 8:6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Rev. 4:6-11).

II. Jesus Christ

We believe that Jesus Christ is the eternally begotten Son of the Father. As the Incarnate Son, He is fully God and fully man. He was born of a virgin, lived a perfect human life, died a vicarious death, was buried and bodily raised from the dead, ascended to the right hand of the Father, and will return personally in power and glory (Is. 53:5; Matt. 1:23, 16:16; John 1:1-2, 18, 20:31; Acts 7:55; 2 Cor. 5:21; Col. 1:15-16, 2:9; Heb. 1:5; 4:15).

III. The Holy Spirit

We believe that the Holy Spirit has always been at work in the world, sharing in the work of creation, empowering signs and wonders and the preaching and writing of the apostles, and inaugurating a new era of the Spirit by pouring out all the promises of God on His Church. It is by the power of the Spirit that repentant sinners become a new creation and are enabled to live a godly life. The saving work of the Holy Spirit works in connection with the presentation of the gospel message, so that the work of the Father in

election, the work of the Son in atonement, and the work of the Spirit in regeneration is an encouragement, not a hindrance, to the proclamation of the gospel to all people everywhere. (Gen. 1:2; Psalm 104:30; Luke 24:49; John 3:8, 7:38-39; Acts 1:8, 2:33; Rom. 8:7-9, 15:18-19; 2 Cor. 3:17-18; 2 Peter 1:21; Heb. 2:3-4).

IV. The Bible

We believe that the Bible is the inspired, eternal, inerrant and infallible word of God; the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct. It was written by men divinely inspired. It has God for its author, salvation as its end, and truth without any mixture of error for its matter. All creeds, human conduct, and opinions must be tried by the word of God (Num. 23:19; Psalm 12:6, 119:43; Prov. 30:5; Is. 40:8; Matt. 24:35; John 1:1-3, 14:26, 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21).

V. Man's Sinfulness

We believe that humankind was created in holiness, under the law of our Maker; but by willful transgression fell from that original place, and by consequence all are now sinners, by nature and by choice, and unable by any act of our own to attain the holiness required by God. Humankind is inclined toward evil and is therefore under condemnation without any defense or excuse (Gen. 2:17, 3:1, 3:6-8, 3:6-13; Ps. 14:3, 51:5; Jer. 17:9-10; Ecclesiastes 7:29; Rom. 5:12-19, 8:20-23; Eph. 2:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:21; 2 Cor. 4:16).

VI. Justification (Being made right with God)

We believe that the great blessing of the gospel message is that all who repent and believe, placing their trust in Jesus Christ, will be justified, which includes the pardon of sin and the promise of eternal life. This is based not on any righteousness (holiness) on our part, or on anything we have done or accomplished, but is given to us through the blood of Jesus Christ and imputed to us by God, bringing us to a state of favor with God, and securing for us every blessing promised by God. In short, Jesus died a vicarious death for us (He died in our place) so that the righteous wrath of God might be turned from us (propitiated) and we might know peace with God (Ps. 32:5, 49:15; Isaiah 53; John 1:29, 3:16, 36, 6:36-37; Acts 13:38; Rom. 3:28, 5:18-19, 8:3-4; 1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:16, 3:13; Eph. 1:7; 1 Peter 2:24; Rev. 22:17).

VII. God's Purpose in Grace

We believe that what the Bible calls "election" or "predestination" is the eternal purpose of God, according to which He changes, saves, and sanctifies (makes holy) men and women who are sinners. It is perfectly consistent with the free agency of human beings, comprehending all things from beginning to end, and is a glorious display of God's goodness. Knowing salvation through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ utterly excludes boasting. God's gift of salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ Jesus alone, promoting humility, love, prayer, and praise. God, from all eternity, does freely and unchangeably ordain and foreknow everything that will come to pass (Num. 23:19; Isaiah 41:21-23, 42:8-9, 46:9-10; Matt. 10:29-30; Rom. 11:5-8, 36; Col. 1:16-17; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Tim. 1:9; Eph. 1:4-11, 2:8-9; 1 Peter 1:20; Rev. 13:8).

VIII. The Resurrection of the Dead

We believe that all people will experience a resurrection: the believer in Christ to everlasting life, the unbeliever to everlasting judgment and separation from God. There exists a radical difference between the righteous and the unrighteous; so that only through faith in Jesus Christ are those who are unrighteous made righteous (holy) in God's sight. All who continue in unbelief will know only separation from God, both in life and in death (Psalm 16:11; Dan. 12:2; Matt. 19:29, 24:30-31, 25:23, 46; Luke 21:27; John 3:16, 36; Rom. 1:18; 1 Thess. 4:15-17; 5:2-3; Titus 2:13).

IX. The Church & Her Ordinances

We believe that the church is the body of Jesus Christ, for which He will return, composed of all from every tongue, tribe, people and nation who have trusted Christ alone for their salvation. The church exercises the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in it by God's Word. Its officers are elders (pastors) and deacons, whose qualifications are defined in the letters to Timothy and Titus. The local church is a congregation of baptized believers who covenant (agree) with each other in the faith and fellowship of the gospel (good news). Its ordinances are twofold: Baptism, which is an outward expression of the inward reality of salvation in Jesus Christ, depicting the believer's spiritual death and resurrection to a new life, and The Lord's Supper, in which the members of the church, by the use of bread and wine (or juice), are to commemorate together the dying love of Christ, preceded always by self-examination (Matt. 18:15-20, 26:26-29, 28:19; Rom. 6:4, 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 11:23-26, 12:13-18; Eph. 1:21-22, 2:19-22, 3:10, 4:11-13, 4:15-16, 5:18-20; Col 1:18, 2:12; 2 Thess. 3:14-15; 1 Tim. 3:1-15; Titus 1:5-9; Heb. 10:24-25; Rev. 14:6).

X. Of the World to Come

We believe that the end of the world is a reality and is approaching. On the last day, Christ will descend from heaven and raise the dead from the grave to final judgment, and the separation of believers and non-believers will take place. This judgment will fix forever the final state of men and women in an eternal, conscience state in heaven or in hell (Matt. 24:31, 25:46; Luke 21:27; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Cor. 15:22-24; Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Thess. 4:15-17, 5:2-3; Heb. 12:22-23; Jude 24-25; Rev. 20:11-15, 21:6-8).

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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING AN APOLOGETICS MINISTRY AT LIFEPOINT CHURCH INDY IN INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

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This project was designed to develop a curriculum for apologetic training at LifePoint Church Indy (LPCI) in Indianapolis, Indiana, that allowed members and attenders to be trained in apologetics and to be more confident and comfortable in gospel encounters. The curriculum was delivered over a twenty-six-week course that included significant reading by the participants along with small group participation and discussion.

Chapter 1 introduces the ministry context at LPCI, along with the rationale, purpose, goals, research methodologies, definitions, and delimitations of the project. Chapter 2 develops the biblical and theological basis for apologetics in the local church setting. Significant to the design and implementation of the curriculum are five passages of Scripture. Together, these passages form the scriptural basis for training and real life use of apologetics. Chapter 3 addresses the need for training in apologetics, addressing the concepts of biblical worldview development, apologetic methodologies, the need for fair and ethical treatment of skeptics and non-believers, and the application of sound reasoning. Chapter 4 lays out the curriculum and lesson plans for the implementation of that curriculum. Chapter 5 concludes with an evaluation of the project, including its strengths and weaknesses and how it will be further developed based on that evaluation.

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