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EQUIPPING MEMBERS OF SUMMIT CHURCH IN NAPLES,
FLORIDA, TO ENGAGE IN CULTURAL APOLOGETICS
WITH GENTLENESS AND RESPECT

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FLORIDA, TO ENGAGE IN CULTURAL APOLOGETICS
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For the glory of God and the good of his church

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PREFACE

The completion of this doctoral project would not have been possible without the love and support of many people. In his grace, God has blessed me with an amazing wife, wonderful kids, godly parents, good friends, and a great church—all of whom have encouraged and sustained me throughout the duration of this project. Without their support, I would not be the man I am today, nor would I have completed this project.

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Naples, Florida

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The call to equip Christians in apologetics goes back to the pages of the New Testament. As two thousand years of church history have come and gone, many of the challenges facing the church have changed. Some, of course, have stayed the same. Every generation of Christians, in every cultural context in which they find themselves, must learn how to engage their culture if they want non-Christians to understand the gospel. Christians must also learn how to do this with gentleness and respect if they want non-Christians to hear the gospel. This project is my attempt to equip the members of Summit Church in Naples, Florida, to engage in cultural apologetics with gentleness and respect so that we might see non-Christians hear, understand, and embrace the gospel.

Context

Summit Church launched on the campus of Florida Gulf Coast University (Fort Myers, Florida) in September 2003. The heartbeat of the church was to make disciples of every man, woman, and child in Southwest Florida. God blessed Summit Church in numerous ways. One of these ways is that a special couple gifted to Summit Church a large plot of land that was right next to the university where Summit was currently renting space for their gatherings. Summit built a church building and began services there in September 2006 and grew quickly. In 2008, Summit Church started another Summit campus in Naples, Florida. Then, in 2012, Summit started another campus in an area of Fort Myers called Gateway. God has been incredibly faithful to us as a church these past eighteen years, and we continue to have a growing burden for the lost, not only in Southwest Florida but also throughout our state, nation, and world.

Our mission statement is “Summit Church exists to glorify God by making disciples who represent the gospel to every man, woman and child.”¹ Therefore, our ministry is built upon God-glorifying, gospel-centered, missionally driven, disciple-making activity in the hope that we might reproduce people who demonstrate the outcomes of biblical discipleship. The particular discipleship outcomes that we strive to see in our people are growing in intimacy with God, displaying the fruits of the Spirit, stewarding life faithfully, sharing our grace story, and embracing God’s mission personally.

In March 2020, Summit Church carried out a discipleship and missional living survey at all three of its campuses to evaluate how well we are making disciples (see appendix 3). Overall, the results were encouraging. However, we also discovered areas of weakness where we need to grow. What follows are some of the strengths that our survey revealed.

First, the average age of our members and attenders is forty-two years old. We have a good mix of young and old. We still have a lot of energy and are not in the “maintenance mode” of some churches, which can lead to a church’s inactivity and eventual demise. Second, there is a high level of our members with a recency of conversion. The average year that many of our people were saved is 1995. Along with this is a 13 percent conversion growth rate. This means that out of every one-hundred people who took the survey, thirteen of them said that they were converted as a result of a ministry or member of Summit Church. Third, we found that most of our people attended Summit for approximately 4.6 years, which is higher than the national average of four years. This means that people are sticking around longer here than in many other churches. Fourth, we discovered that our people believe that the doctrine we

¹ Summit Church, “Mission & Beliefs,” accessed October 21, 2021, <https://www.summitlife.com/about#mission-beliefs>.

communicate regularly is “tight and right.” In other words, our people believe that Summit and its elders embrace the key components of conservative orthodox Christianity. Fifth, 52 percent of Summit’s members and attenders regularly attend a small group, which is well above the national average of 40 percent. Sixth, the average member or attender of Summit picks up his or her Bible four times a week outside of Sunday morning. Although we would want this number to be seven times a week, we rejoice that this number is much higher than the national average. Seventh, our people self-reported that they love our Sunday gatherings and that they love serving our church and local community.

These are great things to celebrate and thank God for! Summit understands that the only reason that it has any strengths as a church and that any of its people highlighted these strengths is the grace of God. Along with these strengths that our survey discovered, we also found some weaknesses. What follows are the most significant weaknesses we discovered.

The first major weakness we discovered is that as a whole, the people of Summit generally have a low confidence in sharing their grace story with others. What we mean by “grace story” is one’s ability to share the story of how God’s grace touched down upon his or her life. One’s grace story can be a person’s testimony of when he or she trusted in Jesus Christ and was saved from his or her sins, but it can also include other times in which the grace of God has been experienced by a Christian.

The second major weakness we discovered is that our people have a low awareness of their spiritual giftedness and how God has called them personally to engage in his mission. In other words, our people, generally speaking, do not know how God has wired and gifted them personally, which means they often draw a blank when they consider how exactly they should personally get involved in representing the gospel to every man, woman, and child in the places where they live, work, and play.

The last and most significant major weakness we discovered is that there is a mission disconnect among our people. At one point in our survey, we asked the two following questions: “In the last year, how many relationships have you built with people who do not know Jesus?” and “In the last year, how many people have you shared your faith with who do not know Jesus?” A fairly large portion of our people (30 percent) answered both of those questions with a zero. Now, at the time of this survey, we had approximately 2600 people attending our three campuses. This means that 800 of our congregants said they shared the gospel zero times in an entire year and did not attempt to intentionally build a relationship with an unbeliever at all. This last weakness is the most concerning, and it was the weakness that I sought to address and to strengthen through this doctoral ministry project.

If we use the data of our recent survey and match up the results with our five discipleship outcomes, it would seem that many of our people are growing in their intimacy with God (picking up the Bible four times a week), displaying the fruit of the Spirit (they love to serve; they love being in community with other believers; they love truth), and stewardship of life (our people are incredibly generous with their time, talents, and treasure), but they are weak in the outcomes of sharing their grace story and embracing God’s mission for their life personally. This has led us to ask the question “Why?” One answer could be that we have a recency of conversion at Summit. Thirteen percent of our people have been saved by a person or ministry of Summit. We are an eighteen-year-old church. Therefore, one reason our people are not engaging with unbelievers could be that they are young in the faith and do not know how to do this. Although I do suspect that our recency of conversion is partially the cause of our missional disconnect, I do not think it is the principal reason. The fact is that 30 percent of our people did not share their faith or build a relationship with an unbeliever during the year prior to when the survey was completed. That means there are two-and-a-half times more people who are not sharing their faith than who were recently converted at our

church. Therefore, the main problem does not seem to be with our recent converts but, according to the survey data, with the rest of our people who have been walking with Jesus for a longer period of time.

If this is the case, then we must again ask “Why?” Why are our people not sharing their faith or building relationships with non-Christians? I believe that there are three main answers to this question. First, I believe that some of our members are simply lazy or apathetic when it comes to the Great Commission. I personally know how easy it is to be lazy and apathetic and come up with multiple reasons as to why I do not need to share the gospel with my neighbor. Second, from my observations of and conversations with our members, I have discovered that some of them do not believe they are adequately equipped to engage non-Christians because they do not know how to respond to the current cultural objections against Christianity. For example, many non-Christians in the United States today dislike Christianity because they believe Christians hate LGBTQ+ people and want to expand the racial divide. There are, of course, many more issues than this. Our members need to be equipped to engage non-Christians in these cultural conversations so that when opportunities arise to engage non-Christians, our members will have the confidence to do so. Third, some of our members struggle with engaging non-Christians with gentleness and respect. Sadly, there has been an upswing of political tribalism among many Christians within the US. Many Christians seem more beholden to political figures or ideologies than to the teachings of Christ. The result of this political tribalism seems to be twofold. On the one hand, some Christians choose to not engage non-Christians because they view them as their political adversaries. On the other hand, the Christians who do engage tend to prioritize arguing their political views with non-Christians instead of prioritizing building relationships and sharing the gospel with them. Sadly, I have seen the creep of political tribalism invade our church. I have seen unhelpful and rude statements made by some of our members on various social media platforms who believe they are only speaking truth. They are right. They are *only*

speaking truth. They need to learn, therefore, how to speak that truth with gentleness and respect so that they might be heard and potentially better received by non-Christians.

In summary, the most concerning weakness of Summit Church at present is that a substantial amount of our people does not attempt to build relationships or share the gospel with unbelievers. I believe that the three main reasons this phenomenon exists are that our members are either apathetic or do not feel adequately equipped to engage the cultural issues of our day or struggle with engaging non-Christians with gentleness and respect. With that said, I do not believe a ministry project is best suited to address the first reason: apathy. We need the Spirit of God to do a good work in all of us so that we would want to share our faith with others. I do believe, however, that a ministry project is perfectly suited to address the other two reasons. Therefore, this project is focused on equipping the members of Summit Church to engage in cultural apologetics with gentleness and respect.

Rationale

The reason the major weakness—mission disconnect—is so concerning is that our mission statement—the very reason our church exists—is “to glorify God by making disciples who represent the gospel to every man, woman and child.” If making disciples is *the* particular way that we, as a church, are seeking to glorify God, then there is a serious disconnect if 30 percent our people have not sought to glorify God by making disciples or by representing the gospel to every man, woman, and child for an entire year!

This could mean that contrary to what we are aiming for, we could be forming a people who love biblical community, the right preaching of God’s Word, and spending time with God, but who do not understand the necessity of sharing one’s faith with others. In other words, the disconnect could be that our people understand discipleship to be *only* about personally knowing and experiencing God in the corporate gathering, in their small groups, and in their private life. Now, discipleship is certainly about knowing

and experiencing God in these areas, but it is also about *more*. We are called to participate in the Great Commission; we are called to make disciples. This means we are called to help other Christians grow in their faith *and* evangelize non-Christians. Discipleship includes *both*. So, again, the reason I tackled this particular weakness of Summit Church is that it is the weakness that most threatens us from being the kind of church that we believe God has called us to be—a disciple-making church.

The reason that equipping our members to engage in cultural apologetics encourages them to befriend and share the gospel with unbelievers is that apologetic aptitude increases their confidence to discuss various cultural apologetic issues with non-Christians should they come up in the course of befriending or sharing the gospel with them.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to equip the members of Summit Church in Naples, Florida, to engage in cultural apologetics with gentleness and respect so that they would have greater confidence and success in befriending and sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with non-Christians.

Goals

In order to accomplish the purpose of this project, the following four goals were pursued.

1. The first goal was to assess the current level of understanding of contemporary cultural apologetic issues that are facing the church among a group of volunteer participants made up of members and attenders of Summit Church.
2. The second goal was to develop a seven-session curriculum that would equip participants to understand the contemporary cultural apologetic issues facing the church and how to engage these issues effectively and with gentleness and respect.
3. The third goal was to implement the curriculum in a small group setting and equip participants to defend the Christian faith with gentleness and respect.
4. The fourth goal was to measure the effectiveness of the curriculum by assessing the participants after they have completed the course.

A specific research methodology was created that measured the successful completion of these four goals.² This methodology is described in the following section.

Research Methodology

Successful completion of this project depended upon the completion of these four goals. The first goal was to assess the current level of understanding of contemporary cultural apologetic issues that are facing the church among a group of volunteer participants made up of members and attenders of Summit Church. This goal would be measured by administering the Cultural Apologetics Survey (pre-course survey) to all of the participants in my class (see appendix 1). This survey measures the participants' level of knowledge of current cultural apologetic issues as well as their confidence and ability in engaging non-Christians in this area. This goal would be considered successfully met when all of the class participants have completed the survey on the first day of class.

The second goal was to develop a seven-session curriculum that would equip participants to understand the contemporary cultural apologetic issues facing the church and how to engage these issues effectively and with gentleness and respect. This goal would be measured by an expert panel who would utilize a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum (see appendix 2). This goal would be considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria meet or exceed the "sufficient" level. If the 90 percent benchmark was not initially met, then the material would be revised until it met the standard.

The third goal was to implement the curriculum in a small group setting and equip participants to defend the Christian faith with gentleness and respect. This goal

² All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in this project.

would be considered successfully met when the seven-session course is completed in its entirety.

The fourth goal was to measure the effectiveness of the curriculum by assessing the participants after they have completed the course. This goal would be measured by readministering the Cultural Apologetics Survey (post-course survey) to all the participants in my class and then comparing the results to those of the pre-course survey. This goal would be considered successfully met when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-course survey scores of each participant.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following key term is used in this project:

Cultural apologetics. As defined and used in this project, cultural apologetics is the work of establishing the Christian voice, conscience, and imagination within a culture so that Christianity is seen as true and satisfying.³ Cultural apologetics is differentiated from classical apologetics. Classical apologetics engages in philosophical and historical arguments regarding God's existence, the problem of evil, the reliability of the Bible, and the like, whereas cultural apologetics seeks to address the particular phenomena of one's culture that make Christianity seem implausible.

Two limitations would apply to this project. First, I cannot control the life circumstances of those who would attend my training sessions. Childcare can fall through; people sometimes work late; cars break down; people get sick. To mitigate this limitation, Summit Church would provide dinner and childcare for participants. Doing so would cut down some of the hurdles that can stand in the way of people's attending the training sessions and getting there on time. The second limitation of this project is the

³ Paul Gould, *Cultural Apologetics: Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience, and Imagination in a Disenchanted World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 24.

commitment level of those who would participate in my training course. It is possible that some of my participants would decide either that they no longer want to attend the training sessions or that they no longer want to do the required work in preparation for the training sessions. To mitigate this limitation, I gave participants a schedule of dates, times, and a general sense of their required work prior to their commitment to participate in the training. Originally, I had also planned on mitigating this limitation by requiring participants to sign a contract to participate. I later decided against this practice.

There is one delimitation that applied to this project. I only offered the training to members and attenders of Summit Church. One reason for this delimitation is that I wanted to be able to track the growth of participants over time. I would not be able to track the growth of those who are not members or attenders of Summit Church. Another reason for this delimitation is that the participants would be encouraged to apply what they have learned by helping other members engage in cultural apologetics themselves.

Conclusion

Summit Church's mission is to glorify God by making disciples. This is the mission for all Christians. This project aims to accomplish this mission by equipping the members of Summit Church to engage in tough but necessary conversations respectfully and gently with non-Christians in the hope that they might embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ. The church cannot shrink back from declaring the whole council of God because of political tribalism or because the people with whom we are sharing the gospel make us uncomfortable. We need to pursue the lost as Christ has pursued us and show them that Jesus is the good, the truth, and the beauty that they are looking for in all of the wrong places. We must make a defense for the hope that is in us with gentleness and respect (1 Pet 3:15).

CHAPTER 2

THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE PROJECT

Christians are called to defend the Christian faith. They are also called to do this with gentleness and respect. An exegesis of 1 Peter 3:15 will support this thesis by demonstrating that God commands Christians to defend the faith with gentleness and respect. An exegesis of Acts 17 will additionally support this thesis by demonstrating that the apostle Paul defends the Christian faith with gentleness and respect in Acts 17.

1 Peter 3:15

Background

First Peter was a letter written by the apostle Peter to Christian churches that were scattered throughout Asia Minor,¹ modern-day Turkey.² The specific areas that Peter writes to are “Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Pet 1:1).³ Peter most likely wrote this letter from Rome,⁴ after Paul was released from his imprisonment in Rome, but before the Neronian persecution, around AD 62/63.⁵ If this was the case, then when Peter wrote this letter, the Emperor Nero was in power but had not yet begun

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

² Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 38.

³ Unless otherwise noted, all Bible quotations come from the *English Standard Version*.

⁴ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 37.

⁵ Edmund P. Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 23.

his state-sponsored persecution of Christians. Nero's persecution would happen in only a few short years and would lead to Peter's martyrdom.⁶

Although Nero's great persecution had not yet come in its fullness, the letter of 1 Peter makes it clear that sporadic persecutions were happening in certain parts of the empire (1 Pet 1:6-7; 2:18-20; 3:1, 13-17; 4:1-4, 12-19; 5:10).⁷ This is why the word "suffering" appears in this letter no less than sixteen times throughout the letter. Thus, one of the major themes of 1 Peter is that Christians will suffer for their commitment to Jesus Christ,⁸ and one of the major purposes of this letter is to remind Christians that as they suffer for Christ, they are called to trust God and faithfully represent him to the world (1:13-16; 2:9-12, 20-23; 3:8-9; 4:19).

Why does God want Christians to represent him to the world? The answer to this question is stated in 2 Peter 3:9: "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." God wants Christians to showcase who he is to an unbelieving world so that he might save many out of that unbelieving world. God called his people out of the darkness and into the light so that they could proclaim his excellencies to those still in darkness (1 Pet 2:9). In 1 Peter 3:15, Peter tells his readers about one significant way that they are to do this: by defending the faith with gentleness and respect.

Christians Must Defend the Christian Faith

Many commentators believe that Peter starts a new section in 1 Peter 3:13. This section specifically deals at length with the problem of Christians being persecuted

⁶ Grudem, *1 Peter*, 36.

⁷ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 38.

⁸ Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 45.

by unbelievers.⁹ Verses 13-14 state, “Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled.” Peter is telling the churches that if people do what is good and right, then they will not usually have to suffer for it. Suffering usually comes to those who are zealous for evil. Yet, Peter acknowledges that because Christians are sojourners and exiles in the world (1 Pet 2:11), the people of this world will sometimes persecute God’s people who are zealous for doing good.

This reality is unfortunate, but it makes sense in light of the sufferings of Christ, whom Christians follow. Peter tells the churches that “Christ also suffered once for sins” (3:18) and that “since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking” (4:1). Peter wants to make sure that if Christians must suffer at the hands of unbelievers, then such suffering should come about because Christians are doing good, not doing evil. When Christians suffer for doing wrong, it is a tragedy, but when Christians suffer for doing good, it is a blessing (3:14, 17; 4:15-16).

Why is suffering for doing good a blessing for Christians? Peter gives the answer in 4:12-14:

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

Christians are blessed when they suffer for doing good for two reasons. First, the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon them. Second, Christians will rejoice and be glad when Jesus’s glory is revealed. Christians will be saved. They have eschatological hope. Thus, Christians do not have to be afraid. Thomas Schreiner summarizes this point when he writes, “Since no one can ultimately harm believers and since even their

⁹ Grudem, *1 Peter*, 158-59.

suffering is a sign of God's blessing, then it follows that they should not fear what others can do to them."¹⁰

In 3:15, Peter shows that he is not only interested in how Christians respond to suffering; he is also interested in how non-Christians respond to Christians who are suffering. One of the outcomes of Christians' suffering for righteousness' sake is that such suffering uniquely makes manifest the hope that is within the hearts of Christians to the unbelievers around them. Peter says in verses 14-15, "But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, 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." Peter says that believers should be prepared to make a defense of the Christian faith because he is assuming that there will be times when unbelievers will ask Christians this question. What provokes this question by unbelievers in the context of 1 Peter is the persecution or suffering of Christians.

This does not mean, however, that the persecution or suffering of Christians are the *only* reasons why unbelievers ask Christians about their hope. First Peter 4:4 says that Christian holiness is a surprise to unbelievers. Although this surprise leads some unbelievers to malign Christians, it causes others to ask Christians about why they live so differently. Jesus says in his Sermon on the Mount that Christians are "the light of the world" and are to let their "light shine before others" so that unbelievers may see their good works and give glory to God (Matt 5:14, 16). There are some unbelievers who will see the beatitudes playing out in the lives of Christians they know, and this will eventually lead those unbelievers to glorify God. God uses various means to stir curiosity about the Christian faith in the hearts of unbelievers and to cause some of them to ask

¹⁰ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 172.

Christians about their faith. Christian persecution is *one* of those means, and it is the means that Peter highlights in 1 Peter 3:15.

The situation that Peter assumes will inevitably happen in times of Christian persecution and suffering is that unbelievers will notice that Christians are not afraid of or troubled by their persecution or suffering. Instead, unbelievers will find Christians continuing to trust God even though there is a threat against their lives or livelihood. This will cause some unbelievers to ask questions of their Christian counterparts, such as “Why do you have such hope?” and “What is the ground of your confidence?” Peter tells Christians that they need to be ready to make a defense for their hope to unbelievers when asked these kind of questions. In other words, Christians need to be able to give answers to the questions unbelievers ask them regarding their faith in God.

The Greek word Peter uses for “defense” is *ἀπολογία*. This word can be simply translated as “the act of making a defense.”¹¹ Yet the simplicity of this word has not kept hundreds of thousands of pages from being written about how Christians should make this defense and why it is important for them to do so. This act of making a defense has become a discipline in its own right—the discipline of apologetics, which John Frame defines as “the discipline that teaches Christians how to give a reason for their hope.”¹²

Peter tells his readers to make a defense for their hope by giving unbelievers a *reason* for their hope. The Greek word Peter uses for “reason” here is *λόγος*. John in his Gospel uses the word *λόγος* in reference to Jesus Christ in order to highlight that he is a person within the Godhead and that he is the one through whom the world was created and who gives life and light to the world (John 1:1-14).¹³ Yet, *λόγος* is also an extremely

¹¹ Frederick W. Danker et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 117, Logos Bible Software.

¹² John Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015), 1.

¹³ D. H. Johnson, “Logos,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 484, Logos Bible Software.

common word that can mean a word, an utterance, a book, an account (as in giving an account of something that has happened), a reflection, or a reason (as in a ground or motive).¹⁴ It is this last sense that Peter means by his use of the word in 1 Peter 3:15. In other words, Peter tells Christians to be ready to provide support or evidence for the hope that they claim to have. This is the essential task of apologetics.

One might find it interesting that Peter uses the word “hope” (ἐλπίς) here instead of “faith” (πίστις). Although these two words are semantically different, they are very closely related and in this context can be used synonymously, just as Peter uses them synonymously in 1:21. In 1:20-21, Peter says that Christ “was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.” Peter connects faith and hope together. Believers have faith *and* hope in God. To be precise, when believers hope in God, they are putting their faith in God and in his promises. Believers’ hope rests on the content of their faith.

Schreiner explains that “‘hope’ was a central word for Peter, focusing on the eschatological inheritance that awaits believers.”¹⁵ This eschatological inheritance is a reality that has been promised by God that believers receive “by faith.” Believers so trust in this promise, so believe in its future fulfillment, that they can endure suffering with joy in the present because they know that their eternal life is secure. In other words, Christians’ hope in their eschatological inheritance rests on the promise and activity of God, in whom believers have placed their faith. Faith and hope are bound together, and it is believers’ faith and hope that Peter calls Christians to defend.

It is important to notice that 1 Peter 3:15 does not only call super-Christians or Christian leaders to defend the faith. He calls *every* Christian to defend the faith. When

¹⁴ Danker et al., *Greek-English Lexicon*, 601.

¹⁵ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 175.

Peter writes, “Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you,” he does not differentiate between various types of Christians. He says “who asks *you*” and “the hope that is in *you*.” This means that every Christian in every church that Peter was writing to was expected to be prepared to defend his or her faith in God.

Additionally, the fact that Peter tells Christians to be able to defend their faith means that there are rational grounds on which Christians can do so. On this point Schreiner writes,

The exhortation here is instructive, for Peter assumed that believers have solid intellectual grounds for believing the gospel. The truth of the gospel is a public truth that can be defended in the public arena. This does not mean, of course, that every Christian is to be a highly skilled apologist for the faith. It does mean that every believer should grasp the essentials of the faith and should have the ability to explain to others why they think the Christian faith is true.¹⁶

Schreiner is exactly right. First Peter 3:15 teaches that every Christian has logical reasons for why they trust God, and it commands every Christian to be able to share what those reasons are when unbelievers ask.

At this point, one may ask, “What are the reasons that Christians have eschatological hope?” Peter supplies the answer in the first phrase of verse 15: “But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy.” Christians believe that Christ is Lord. Christians have set Jesus Christ apart as the Holy One in their hearts. There are reasons why Christians have done this, and Peter is commanding Christians to share what those reasons are. Peter shares the reasons why *he* set apart Christ as Lord in his famous sermon in Acts 2. I must quote this passage fully in order to show Peter’s argument for why he believes that Christ is Lord and what he means by this statement:

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God

¹⁶ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 174-75.

raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David says concerning him,

“I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.”

Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

“The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’”

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. (Acts 2:22-36)

Peter believes Jesus of Nazareth is Lord because God very clearly attested to Jesus’s lordship by means of Jesus’s “mighty works, wonders and signs” that he did before the people. Peter saw these with his own eyes. Peter also saw the Lord “crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.” Finally, Peter saw the Lord’s resurrection. Peter considers statements made by King David that did not come to pass for David and makes the connection that these statements were actually prophecies concerning Jesus Christ, who rose from the dead, who was David’s Lord, and who sits at the right hand of God. Peter’s conclusion, then, is that Jesus Christ is “both Lord and Christ.” And when Peter says that Jesus is Lord, he means that Jesus is God, that he is the second person of the Trinity.

In 1 Peter 3:14-15, Peter quotes from Isaiah 8:12-13 but with a minor change. He writes, “Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy.” Isaiah 8:12-13 states, “Do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy.” The Lord of hosts in the context of Isaiah is

none other than the God of heaven and earth. Peter does not hesitate to identify the Lord of hosts in Isaiah with Jesus Christ.¹⁷

Peter has very logical reasons for why he believes that Jesus Christ is the Lord of hosts. Not only did Jesus perform miracles, but also he was crucified for sin and was raised victoriously from the dead. Peter's faith is in his resurrected Lord. Therefore, he has eschatological hope for his future inheritance, which God has promised to all who place their faith in Jesus. This entire line of reasoning, I believe, is embedded in Peter's statement "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."

First Peter 3:15 commands Christians to defend the Christian faith. It also commands Christians to do so in a certain way—"with gentleness and respect."

Christians Must Defend the Christian Faith with Gentleness and Respect

Peter commands Christians to set apart Christ as Lord and to be ready to give unbelievers reasons for their hope in God. Yet, Peter does not put a period at the end of these admonitions. He adds a preposition (ἀλλὰ) to keep the sentence running just a little longer to make sure that his readers understand that their apologetic engagement with unbelievers is to be done with gentleness and respect. This point cannot be missed.

I have been a pastor for over a decade now, and, sadly, I have seen Christians argue with unbelievers in person or online with harshness and disrespect. Their arguments are often sound, but their argumentation is not. When I have rebuked Christians in the past for their harshness and disrespect, the response I have sometimes received is that the political situation is so dire that the time of respect is past and the time of straightforward truth is nigh. "I am just speaking the truth," are sometimes the words in the mouth of genuine believers who conveniently forget that we are called to speak the

¹⁷ Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, 147.

truth *in love* (Eph 4:15). Speaking the truth in love does *not* mean that Christians cannot be passionate about the truth or speak truth that might wildly offend unbelievers, but it *does* mean that when we engage unbelievers, we are to maintain a certain decorum.

What has precipitated such a lack of gentleness and respect on the part of conservative Christians in America today? I believe part of the answer is that there has arisen a brand of political conservatism that seeks to be closely aligned with evangelicals but is not interested in the fruit of the Spirit. This brand of conservatism has become hostile to its opponents on the left. An excellent example of this is a speech that Donald Trump Jr. gave to a crowd of young conservatives. Trump said,

If we get together, they cannot cancel us all. OK? They won't. . . . And this will be contrary to a lot of our beliefs because—I'd love not to have to participate in cancel culture. I'd love that it didn't exist. But as long as it does, folks, we better be playing the same game. OK? We've been playing T-ball for half a century while they're playing hardball and cheating. Right? We've turned the other cheek, and I understand, sort of, the biblical reference—I understand the mentality—but it's gotten us nothing. OK? It's gotten us nothing while we've ceded ground in every major institution in our country.¹⁸

Trump believes that the teachings of Jesus have gotten us nothing; therefore, conservatives should stop being sweet, should stop turning the other cheek, should play the same game that the left is playing. In other words, conservatives need to speak and fight for the truth and need not worry about doing so with gentleness and respect because their opponents certainly are not doing so with gentleness and respect.

It is tempting to believe that the present struggle that the American church is having in its dialogue with unbelievers is something new. However, it is not new. The same temptation to have a rancorous posture toward opponents of Christianity was present even in the early church, which is why Peter not only commands Christians who

¹⁸ Donald Trump Jr., quoted in Mark Wingfield, "Donald Trump Jr. Tells Young Conservatives That Following Jesus' Command to 'Turn the Other Cheek' Has 'Gotten Us Nothing,'" *Baptist News Global*, December 28, 2021, <https://baptistnews.com/article/donald-trump-jr-tells-young-conservatives-that-following-jesus-command-to-turn-the-other-cheek-has-gotten-us-nothing/#.Yg-rdS1h1pQ>.

were being persecuted by unbelievers to defend their faith but also commands them to do it with gentleness and respect.

What does Peter mean when he writes the word “gentleness?” The Greek word here is *πραΰτης*. This word was understood and used throughout the Bible and in Greek literature at the time to mean “the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one’s self-importance, *gentleness, humility, courtesy, considerateness, meekness.*”¹⁹ Oftentimes, this word is translated as “meekness.” The preeminent example of meekness would, of course, be Jesus. He says in Matthew 11:28-29, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle [*πραΰς*] and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” Jesus was gentle. An ancient prophecy concerning Jesus said, “A bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench” (Isa 42:3). Jesus indeed was gentle and lowly. In fact, he would be so gentle and lowly that his interaction with broken sinners would not crush them or extinguish their hope but would do quite the opposite.

Jesus demonstrated his meekness/gentleness when he stood before his accusers in the Sanhedrin. During his trial, he largely remained silent (Matt 26:63). This is interesting because Peter commands Christians to *not* stay silent but to give a defense. Yet, these two passages are not at odds. Jesus was gentle in that he did not feel the need to have to defend himself or respond to his accusers aggressively. Nevertheless, he eventually did speak up, and when he did, he spoke the truth. Jesus said, “I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matt 26:64). This “defense” of Jesus caused the Sanhedrin to lose their minds. The high priest tore his robe. They spit upon Jesus, struck him in the face, and sentenced him to death. This entire incident of Jesus shows us that when Peter exhorts Christians to be prepared to make a defense for our hope with gentleness, he does

¹⁹ Danker et al., *Greek-English Lexicon*, 861.

not mean that our words will not be hard to hear on the part of unbelievers. In fact, our words may enrage unbelievers. What Peter does mean is that when we speak and make our defense, we must do so without any thought to ourselves, without retaliation, and in a spirit of meekness. We let the truth of our words be hard but our posture be soft.

Strong's Enhanced Lexicon provides a good summary of this discussion on gentleness: "Gentleness or meekness is the opposite to self-assertiveness and self-interest. It stems from trust in God's goodness and control over the situation. The gentle person is not occupied with self at all. This is a work of the Holy Spirit, not of the human will (Gal. 5:23)."²⁰

Peter also commands Christians to make their defense with respect (1 Pet 3:15). The Greek word here is φόβου. This word is best translated as "fear." This is curious because in 1 Peter 3:14, Peter commands Christians to "have no fear of them, nor be troubled." So, in verse 14, Peter commands Christians to not fear unbelievers when they persecute them, whereas in verse 15, Peter commands Christians to respond to unbelievers who are persecuting them with "fear." What is Peter doing here?

Commentators are divided on this issue. One side argues that Peter is telling Christians to fear God when they gently make their defense to unbelievers. Edmund Clowney writes, "It seems unlikely that he [Peter] is now reversing this to ask that we fear man, even in a lesser degree. Rather, Peter is teaching us that it is our fear of the Lord that enables us to bear witness in humility."²¹ In the same vein, I. Howard Marshall writes, "Gentleness should be shown toward the antagonists and respect emphatically toward God (otherwise we would have a sharp contradiction with 3:14)."²² On the other

²⁰ James Strong, *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon* (n.p.: Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1995), s.v. "4239 πρᾶϋς," Logos Bible Software.

²¹ Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, 151.

²² I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter*, IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), commentary on 1 Pet 3:15-16.

side, Karen Jobes argues that “the phrase ‘with humility and respect’ (μετὰ πραΰτητος καὶ φόβου, *meta praiūtētos kai phobou*) qualifies the manner in which the explanation for Christian hope is to be offered, and therefore *phobou* (fear), like humility, refers to an attitude toward others that is rooted in one’s attitude toward God.”²³ Jobes highlights passages like 1 Peter 2:18 and 3:1-2 that both use this word (“fear”) in the context of believers relationships with others. First Peter 2:18 says, “Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.” This is significant because believing slaves are being commanded to “fear” their unbelieving and evil masters. Certainly, Peter does not mean fear in the normal sense of the word but in the sense of respect, as is appropriate to give to one’s superior. First Peter 3:1-2 states, “Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful [φόβῳ] and pure conduct.” In other words, believing wives are called to have a posture of “fear” toward their unbelieving husbands.

It seems that Jobes makes a better case here that maintains the logical flow of Peter’s argument. Both gentleness and fear are describing the posture that believers must have when they are making a defense of their hope to unbelievers. Additionally, the fact that Peter uses “fear” in the context of believers’ relationships with hostile unbelievers (2:18; 3:2) while also telling believers to not “fear” unbelievers in 3:14 is convincing evidence that these two uses of φόβος in 3:14 and 3:15 are not contradicting each other, if indeed, they both are referring to human relationships, as Clowney, Marshall, and others would suggest. Rather, Peter’s use of φόβος has a different meaning depending on the context. In 3:14, φόβος means “terror.” Peter tells Christians to not be terrified or afraid of unbelievers. In 3:15 however, φόβος means to afford someone with reverence or

²³ Jobes, *1 Peter*, 231. See also Grudem, *1 Peter*, 161.

respect, just as it does in 2:18 and 3:2. There is no contradiction here, only a different intended meaning of the same word.

In summary, Peter is commanding Christians to have a respectful and reverential posture toward unbelievers when they are in dialogue with them regarding their hope in Jesus. Peter is not saying anything new. Everywhere in the New Testament, believers are commanded to have this type of posture toward others. In Romans 13:7, Paul says, “Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.” This means that there is absolutely no place for snarky, impolite, offensive, or arrogant speech or attitudes on the part of Christians when they engage with non-Christians (even non-Christians who are persecuting them!).

The reasons for Peter’s admonishment for believers to be gentle and respectful toward unbelievers are many. An obvious reason is that the point of talking is not only to *say something* but to *be heard*. If believers are rude and arrogant in their presentation of the gospel, then unbelievers will largely not hear the content of the gospel but only the offensive posture of the presentation. Proverbs 25:11 says, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.” In other words, it is a beautiful thing when someone speaks to others wisely such that their words are actually heard. Gentleness and respect are helpful tools in this regard. The opposite of this would be to speak without regard for how one’s words are being received. Proverbs 18:2 says, “A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.” Believers who defend their faith foolishly should not be surprised if they rarely have a convert. Proverbs 10:19-21 says, “When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent. The tongue of the righteous is choice silver; the heart of the wicked is of little worth. The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of sense.” Believers’ lips should feed many. Believers should *want* their lips to feed many. The only way

believers' lips will feed anyone is if their lips are gentle and respectful as they present the truth.

My exegesis of 1 Peter 3:15 has supported the thesis of this chapter that Christians are commanded to defend the Christian faith with gentleness and respect. I will now turn my attention to Acts 17, which will additionally support my thesis by demonstrating that the apostle Paul defends the Christian faith with gentleness and respect in Acts 17.

Acts 17:16-34: Christians Must Defend the Christian Faith with Gentleness and Respect

The New Testament commands Christians to defend the Christian faith with gentleness and respect. A study of Acts 17 will support this thesis by demonstrating that Paul defended the Christian faith with gentleness and respect.

On his epic second missionary journey, Paul stops in Athens after a somewhat successful and somewhat disastrous experience in Thessalonica and Berea. Paul was sent to Athens by the “brothers” due to persecution he had encountered in these cities. Joseph A. Fitzmyer calls this layover in Athens the most important episode of Paul’s second journey.²⁴

Athens was the capital of ancient Attica and was located in the Roman province of Achaia.²⁵ Athens was a famous city and was well known for being “the center of classical studies in philosophy and literature in the ancient world.”²⁶ Although Athens had at one time been very prestigious, it had lost some of its former glory. John R. McRay writes that at the time of Paul, it “could only be described as a provincial

²⁴ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 31 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 600.

²⁵ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 560.

²⁶ John R. McRay, “Athens,” in *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 139, Logos Bible Software.

backwater, a small university town of about twenty-five thousand people, more concerned with ideas than commerce and living in the memories of its glorious history.”²⁷

When Paul arrived in Athens, he sent for Silas and Timothy, who were still in Berea. While Paul waited for them, he decided to take a walking tour of the city of Athens, and what he saw disturbed him greatly. Acts 17:16 recounts that Paul “saw that the city was full of idols.” McRay describes the ubiquity of idols in Athens. There was a bronze statue of Athena and several pagan temples, such as the Erechtheion (a temple to Athena), the temple of Rome and Augustus (dedicated to the goddess Roma and emperor Augustus), and the famous Parthenon. McRay writes that everywhere Paul looked, he “would have seen statues to Greek and Roman deities as well as to the deified emperors Augustus and Claudius.”²⁸

The idolatry of the Athens provoked Paul so profoundly that “he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons” (17:17). Paul also went to the marketplace. McRay explains that this “marketplace had become a virtual museum by the mid-first century, when Paul strolled its walkways. It contained such a repository of altars, statues and temples that Petronius, the Roman satirist, remarked ‘it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens’ (Petronius *Sat.* 17).”²⁹

Eventually, Paul’s strange new teaching was heard by the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers of the city. They debated among themselves as to what Paul’s teaching meant. Some of them wondered, “What does this babbler wish to say?” (17:18). Others thought he was preaching about foreign divinities. In the end, these philosophers decide to take Paul to the Areopagus in order to allow Paul to give a full account of his teaching, which he does—almost.

²⁷ McRay, “Athens,” 139.

²⁸ McRay, “Athens,” 139.

²⁹ McRay, “Athens,” 139-40.

The Areopagus to which Paul was brought was both a location *and* a council that met in that location. Though it is hard to know for sure whether Paul was brought to the council or to the locale, verse 22 seems to suggest that he is standing before a council.³⁰ Darrell Bock tells us that the Areopagus, as a council, “had great power, trying crimes and regulating, for example, city life, education, philosophical lectures, public morality, and foreign cults.”³¹ As a place, the Areopagus apparently was utilized by the Athenians to discuss various matters, such as “telling and hearing something new” (17:21). In other words, the Athenians loved to talk about philosophy and religion. Paul’s strange new teaching certainly was that! So, they wanted to converse with Paul about it, and Paul was certainly willing to oblige. At any rate, whether Paul stood before the council or not, it seems unlikely that Paul was being tried. As John Polhill observes, “Paul was not formally charged. Once finished he made an easy exit—there were no deliberations.”³²

Already, there are a couple of points of intersection between this passage and 1 Peter 3:15 that are worthy of consideration. First, in a city of idols and idolators, Paul was setting apart Jesus Christ as Lord. Rather than seeking to accommodate his teaching to the pagan culture, Paul tried to convince the people of Athens that Jesus is Lord. Acts 17:17 states that Paul “reasoned” (διελέγετο) with the Athenians. In other words, Paul, in dialoging with the Athenians, was giving them *reasons* as to why he believed the gospel. Furthermore, Paul was eventually brought to the Areopagus, where he was asked, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean” (17:19b-20). Essentially, Paul was asked to give a reason for the hope that was within him—something

³⁰ Bock, *Acts*, 562-63.

³¹ Bock, *Acts*, 563.

³² John B. Polhill, *Acts*, New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 368.

that Paul was very much *prepared* to do. Paul was doing exactly what Peter, in 1 Peter 3:15, commands all Christians to do: “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.” Now, how exactly did Paul do this?

According to Acts 17:22-24, Paul stood up in the middle of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.”

Notice that Paul begins his address by giving the Athenians a compliment: “I perceive that in *every way* you are *very religious*” (v. 22; emphasis added). I can imagine the philosophers smiling smugly at each other when Paul made this comment. They were probably thinking, “I like this guy!” Paul then shares about how he carefully studied the various artifacts of the Athenians’ worship as he walked around the city. He tells the Areopagus that he noticed an altar to “an unknown god.” Paul uses that pagan altar as his entrance to share the gospel with his pagan examiners. Genius! One should notice the upmost respect that Paul affords the Athenians. He not only starts with a compliment, but he also has done his homework. Paul respected the Athenians so much that he did his best to understand what the Athenians believed before he started talking about what he believed. He even made an entrance into the gospel through a door that the Athenians would be able to comprehend—the altar to the unknown god. Although what Paul is doing here could rightly be called contextualization (not to be confused with syncretism), one should not miss the respect that Paul has for his listeners—some of whom had earlier called him a “babbling.” Paul is defending the Christian faith with gentleness and respect.

Moreover, Paul demonstrates that one can defend the Christian faith with gentleness and respect while also bringing a considerably high degree of challenge to the unbelievers listening. Paul says, “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served

by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything” (vv. 24-25). The Athenians would have disliked and disagreed with this comment. Some of the philosophers probably rolled their eyes; others probably clinched their teeth. To say that God does not live in temples and is not served by human hands is essentially to say that the whole religious enterprise of Athens was superfluous. Of course, Paul does not directly say this, but it was an implication, and the Athenians would have taken notice.

Paul continues his speech by giving an expansive vision of the Creator in verses 26-28:

And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for “In him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said, “For we are indeed his offspring.”

Paul respectfully—but also wisely—challenges the Athenian assumption that there were many gods and goddesses who ruled over various provinces and cities of man. Paul argues that this idea is false because the Creator God, who is one (note the singular pronoun “he” in v. 26), made every *place*, *everything*, and every *human* on earth for the purpose of knowing him (“that they should seek God . . . and find him”; v. 27). Again, Paul is bringing a considerable challenge to the Athenian worldview. Now it is at this point in his argument that Paul does something remarkable to appeal to his listeners. Paul quotes from a couple of Greek philosophers, with whom the Areopagus council would have been very familiar. Paul, in verse 28, is likely quoting Epimenides either directly or indirectly when he says, “In him we live and move and have our being,”³³ and from Aratus’s third-century BC astronomical poem *Phaenomena* when he says, “For we are

³³ Craig S. Keener, *Acts*, vol. 3, *15:1-23:35* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 2658-59.

indeed his offspring.”³⁴ Paul shows his respect for the Athenians by listening to their poets and philosophers. He engages them thoughtfully. And though many of the Athenians at the Areopagus rejected Paul’s message, I strongly doubt that any of them thought Paul was disrespectful or unwilling to try and understand their perspective.

Paul concludes his oration in verses 29-31:

Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

Paul brings his greatest challenge at the end. Up until this point in his speech, Paul’s challenge was a disputation of the Athenian worldview regarding the gods. Now, however, Paul uses the word “ought” (ὀφείλομεν), meaning that Paul is now telling the Athenians how they *should* think, or, perhaps more precisely, how they *should not* think. In other words, Paul is saying, “Your worldview is incorrect, so stop thinking that way.” Furthermore, Paul raises the stakes when he invokes God as the one who is commanding “all people everywhere to repent” (v. 31). The word “repent” (μετανοέω) means to “change one’s mind” or to “feel remorse and be converted.”³⁵ This way of speaking was out of the norm for presentations at the Areopagus. Verse 21 explains that the Athenians liked to spend their time telling or hearing something new. In other words, these people liked to debate and consider various points of view and new ideas. They were open-minded, but to a fault. As G. K. Chesterton is often credited as saying, “Merely having an open mind is nothing. The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid.”

³⁴ Keener, *Acts 15:1-23:35*, 2660.

³⁵ Danker et al., *Greek-English Lexicon*, 640.

Paul is telling the Athenians to shut their minds upon the gospel. He gives them three reasons why. First, because the gospel is true. This has been Paul's argument all along. Second, because the Creator God, who commands all to repent, "has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed" (v. 31a). Third, because God has given assurance of all this by raising that man from the dead (v. 31b). Paul, who has presented his entire case with respect, is not hesitant to bring the highest degree of challenge. Paul is calling his listeners to repent because God will not overlook their ignorance any longer and will one day judge them on the basis of their repentance or lack thereof. In sum, the apostle Paul defends the Christian faith with gentleness and respect, just as the apostle Peter commands all believers to do in 1 Peter 3:15.

Paul's *defense* is evident in that he marks out the contours of the Christian faith throughout his oration in opposition to the rampant idolatry and worldview of his listeners. Paul argues that there is one God. He is the Creator of all things. He is calling all people to himself. He is calling all people to repent. He will one day judge all of humanity by the man whom he raised from the dead. Paul marks out the contours of the faith minus the name of Jesus, which he undoubtedly was going to invoke next, but he did not have the opportunity to do so because the Athenians stopped listening once he mentioned the resurrection.

Paul's *respect* for the Athenians and their culture is evident in that he compliments them, seeks to understand their culture, quotes their philosophers, and when he challenges his audience, he does so appropriately. Paul does not use any underhanded methods, such as manipulation, name-calling, or sarcasm. Additionally, Paul is not pejorative and does not use derogatory terms. Paul seems to be passionate in his presentation but self-controlled. Paul loves his listeners. His goal is their conversion to Christ. Therefore, he talks in such a way that he might be understood. I believe Paul

reasoned, “If these Athenians are going to take offense, it will not be because of me, but because of the content of the gospel.”

Finally, Paul’s *gentleness* is evident in that when he makes his defense, he does so without any thought to himself. He is not pridefully defending himself against the critics who had recently called him a babbler. Rather, he is humbly defending the Christian faith to an audience whom he cares for. The truth of Paul’s words is hard, but his posture is soft. And when Paul is ultimately rejected by the majority and openly mocked, he does not retaliate or take offense (v. 32).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that the New Testament commands Christians to defend their faith with gentleness and respect. My exegesis of 1 Peter 3:15 supported this thesis by demonstrating that God, through Peter, commands all Christians to be ready to defend their faith with gentleness and respect. Furthermore, I demonstrated that the way Paul interacts with the Athenians in Acts 17 is in keeping with Peter’s admonishment in 1 Peter 3:15—Paul is prepared, he makes a defense for his hope, and he does so with gentleness and respect. Act 17 offers Christians a model for engaging with our culture in a way that reflects God’s command in 1 Peter 3:15. In the next chapter, I will build a model of engagement with contemporary culture that utilizes the truths of 1 Peter 3:15 and is reflective of Paul’s model in Acts 17.

CHAPTER 3

PRACTICAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE PROJECT

In this chapter, I will build a model of engagement with contemporary culture that utilizes the truths of 1 Peter 3:15 and is reflective of Paul's model in Acts 17. In the last chapter, I argued that Christians are called to defend the Christian faith with gentleness and respect. In this chapter, I will provide a model to equip Christians to do just this when they are having conversations with unbelievers. It is one thing to say that Christians need to defend the faith, but it is another thing for Christians to have the confidence to do this, particularly in a culture that finds Christianity superfluous, laughable, or an impediment to human flourishing.

I will describe a model that will work best in the context of friendship between a believer and an unbeliever in which multiple conversations and follow-up conversations are happening. Although aspects of this model can certainly be useful in one-off conversations, generally speaking, it is in the context of an ongoing relationship with an unbeliever that a Christian will be able to show more convincingly the truth, goodness, and beauty of Christianity. Gregory Koukl writes that when he engages unbelievers in a conversation, he does not put pressure on himself to close the deal. Instead, he has as a goal to put a pebble in their shoe—a thought, a question, that leaves unbelievers uncomfortable once they part ways, a pebble that could be the basis for the next conversation, and the next, and, who knows, maybe even lead to faith in Jesus in God's perfect timing.¹ Koukl's pebble metaphor aptly illustrates how my model will work best.

¹ Gregory Koukl, *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 46.

Let me clear one thing up before I begin. Though I say “my model,” I am not breaking any new ground. I stand on the shoulders of giants who have shown me the way. The model I will present borrows from Joshua Chatraw’s “inside out” model² and utilizes the resources of thinkers such as Paul Gould, Timothy Keller, C. S. Lewis, and others. I will be synthesizing the available insights and resources into a more accessible format for me and, hopefully, for those whom I am seeking to equip at Summit Church.

My model of engagement has three parts. The first is “Know *The* Story.” This is where I explore Christianity as a comprehensive worldview that best explains the world we live in. The second part is “Know *Their* Stories.” This is where I consider the personal story of those we are engaging as well as other stories that have shaped and are shaping them (e.g., Where do they derive meaning or purpose? What do they believe are the origins of the world? Where do they believe everything is headed? What do they believe went wrong with this world, and how we fix it? What do they believe morality is grounded in? What do they find to be beautiful?). The third and final part is “Tell a Better Story.” This is where I show unbelievers how their “stories” do not ultimately work in explaining this world, their lives, or their values. It is also where I show them that Christianity does a better job of explaining their stories as well as how Christianity offers a better hope. I proceed to the first step in my model of engagement: “Know *The* Story.”

Part 1: Know *The* Story

The goal of this step is to help Christians understand the concept of worldview, how everyone has one, and the nature of a Christian worldview. James Sire, in his classic book *The Universe Next Door*, defines a worldview in the following way:

A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously,

² Joshua D. Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story: How to Talk about God in a Skeptical Age* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 54-72.

consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.³

Sire states that a worldview can be expressed as a “story.” This is clearly the case, for if people try to logically situate themselves in this world, then they have to understand reality in terms of what came before them and what happens after they are gone. Everyone knows this world existed before they were born; everyone also knows that this world will exist after they die. This is linear movement. And if individuals think on this movement more, it provokes questions such as How did this world come into existence in the first place? and Where is everything headed? The answers to these questions are constituent parts of one’s worldview being expressed as a story. Of course, these questions are not the only questions one’s worldview will seek to answer. Anyone who lives in this world will also have to come up with an explanation for why this world appears broken or why there is so much suffering and evil. Along with a consideration of these matters, there is another: Can anything be done to fix what is broken or to end suffering and evil? These questions along with their answers provide the foundational underpinnings of a person’s worldview—the framework from which one understands this world and lives one’s life within it. One’s worldview is the story one tells to explain everything.

It is important for Christians to understand that everyone has a worldview. Everyone, whether religious or irreligious, Republican or Democrat, rich or poor, has an overarching story (metanarrative) that has explanatory power over the areas of life or reality that one deems as most important. This metanarrative might be conscious or unconscious, but it is there. For those who are more consciously aware of their worldview, such awareness is because they have asked and answered the big questions

³ James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 17. For a nimbler definition, see Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey’s definition: worldview is the “sum total of our beliefs about the world, the “big picture” that directs our daily decisions and actions.” Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1999), 14.

just mentioned. For those who are not consciously aware of their worldview, such a lack of awareness is not because they do not have answers to these questions when asked but because they tend not to think very hard about them and just go with the cultural flow. The point is that whether our worldview is conscious or unconscious, all of us are being moved by a story. All of us have a worldview.

James Sire lists several different worldview options available in the West, such as Christian theism, deism, naturalism, nihilism, existentialism, Eastern pantheistic monism, New Ageism, and postmodernism.⁴ Joshua Chatraw, taking a slightly different approach, identifies the predominant worldviews today as the pessimistic secular story, the optimistic secular story, the pluralistic and moral therapeutic spirituality story, and the Christian story.⁵ Chatraw also points out that there are other “micro” stories that govern the lives of many people, such as the story of consumerism, the story of achievement, and the story of romance. While these micro stories are not, strictly speaking, worldviews, they do give purpose, meaning, and direction to the lives of many.⁶

When one analyzes the many different worldview options available today, one will find that all of them can be neatly placed in one of two camps: religious or irreligious, sacred or secular, those that affirm some sort of divine origin for everything and those that do not. In other words, whether someone believes in a divine being will determine what worldview options are available to him or her. This is not to suggest that there are not many other questions that need to be answered once the decision regarding the reality of the divine has been made. For example, as Richard Lints points out, if one does believe in God, then such a belief “is normally accompanied by a host of other beliefs—what that God is like, whether that God can and does communicate, how that

⁴ Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 7.

⁵ Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story*, 57-63.

⁶ Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story*, 59-60.

God is known, and what that God requires of us.”⁷ What I am suggesting, though, is that one’s belief or lack of belief in God will function as a type of controlling belief over everything else that one believes.

As Lints explains,

When I believe in God, my way of thinking about the world is bound to undergo significant change. The shape of the lens is transformed not simply because a particular belief has been added to the noetic stock but also because this belief impinges upon other regions of the noetic structure. In that sense it may be more helpful to think of this belief in God not simply as one belief among many but rather as some kind of “control belief” since it asserts a control over a vast number of other beliefs. A control belief greatly influences what kind of questions I will ask and be interested in asking; it begins to shape my priorities and govern my behavior in certain ways.⁸

Lints calls this control belief in God the “Theistic Matrix.” Atheists have a controlling belief that there is no God. I call this the “Atheistic Matrix.” Once individuals are mentally committed to one of these two controlling matrices, they will inevitably gravitate toward a particular worldview within that matrix. If one is an atheist, then perhaps he will gravitate toward Chatraw’s optimistic secular worldview (Sire’s existentialism) or pessimistic secular worldview (Sire’s nihilism). If one is a theist, then she may gravitate toward a Christian worldview, a Muslim worldview, deism, Eastern pantheism, or something else. If one holds to a very loose belief in God, then perhaps his worldview would be more in line with Chatraw’s moral therapeutic spirituality story or Sire’s New Ageism. There are lots of worldview options, but the single most determinative question for the shaping of one’s worldview is whether one believes that God does or does not exist.

Beyond that ultimate question, the question concerning the correct worldview out of all of the available worldview options lingers large. But that is a tricky question,

⁷ Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 18.

⁸ Lints, *The Fabric of Theology*, 18.

for how would one know? The answer involves an extensive dive into philosophical considerations regarding metaphysical realities and how one understands the nature of truth—ideas that this chapter will not attempt to address (and ideas that, I believe, average Christians do not need to have a handle on in order to engage non-Christians). However, I would like to highlight three questions that can steer individuals who are seeking an answer to the question concerning the correct worldview in the right direction. The first question to ask is Does this worldview correspond to reality? In other words, is it true? The objective here is to consider whether the worldview under consideration can adequately account for what we have truly discovered about the world (e.g., biology, astronomy, morality). The second question to ask is Does this worldview satisfy my deepest longings and provide a satisfactory answer to why I have them? As cultural apologist Paul Gould writes, “Cultural apologetics must demonstrate not only the *truth* of Christianity but also its *desirability*.”⁹ The objective here is to show how Christianity is truly the good and beauty for which we long.¹⁰ The third question to ask is Does this worldview demonstrably lead to flourishing? In other words, does this worldview have a proven track record in making society better?

These questions will be taken up later in this chapter. For my current purposes, I would only mention that a Christian is someone who believes that the Christian worldview corresponds best to reality, satisfies one’s deepest longings, and demonstrably leads to the flourishing of people and society. Therefore, part of the task of Christian apologetics is to help those who do not hold to a Christian worldview see how

⁹ Paul M. Gould, *Cultural Apologetics: Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience, and Imagination in a Disenchanted World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 25.

¹⁰ Additionally, Gould writes, “The cultural apologist works to resurrect relevance by showing that Christianity offers plausible answers to universal human longings. And she works to resurrect hope, creating new cultural goods and rhythms and practices that reflect the truth, beauty, and goodness of Christianity.” Gould, *Cultural Apologetics*, 24.

Christianity better answers these questions and provides a superior hope than their current worldview.

This point leads to the question What is the Christian worldview? An entire book could be written to answer this question! And, in fact, many have. However, I am not writing a book, so I will be brief. Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey describe the Christian worldview at its most basic level as the Bible’s answer to three questions: How did we get here? What went wrong? How can what went wrong be fixed?¹¹ To these three questions, I would add a fourth—the historic Christian consideration of the restoration, expressed in question form as Where is everything headed? These four fundamental questions provide a lens through which, and a story from which, Christians can understand the world and their lives within it. However, as Lints points out (quoted earlier), there is much more content that needs to be believed in order to have a Christian worldview. Yet these four questions do provide a good and fundamental starting place from which to build a thoroughly robust Christian worldview. So, I now turn to answering these questions.

Creation

Concerning the first question (How did we get here?), the historic Christian answer is that God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1). This God stands alone in the making of everything. There were no other agents involved, no other so-called gods whom God battled to make the universe. Additionally, God did not create with materials already present; he made everything from nothing through the power of his spoken word.

Genesis 1:3 declares, “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” After he created the light, God continued his creative acts through his powerful word by

¹¹ See Colson and Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?*, 14; Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 45-46.

making the skies, dry land, vegetation, sun, moon, stars, fish, birds, land animals, and then—finally and wonderfully—humans. According to Scripture, when he made humans, God made them differently than any other creature he had made, for when God made man and woman, he made them in his very own image. Genesis 1:27 states, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” After God completed his creative acts, “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (v. 31).

There are several things that must be noted from this understanding of the origins of everything. First, as already mentioned, God alone made everything. And when he made everything, he made it *ex nihilo*—that is, out of nothing. There is nothing that exists that does not have its origin in the creative act of God. Matter is not eternal. It has a starting point. Only God is eternal, for he is the everlasting God (Isa 40:28). Hence, the Creator God is omnipotent and omniscient, for only an all-powerful and all-knowing being could create such a vast universe with all of its intricacies.

Second, when God originally created our world and made humanity, he created it “very good.” In other words, creation was not broken. Adam and Eve’s bodies were not broken. Adam and Eve’s relationship with each other was not broken. And most importantly, Adam and Eve’s relationship with God was not broken. Everything was as it should be: wonderful. Thus, not only is the Creator God omnipotent and omniscient; he is also omnibenevolent, for only an all-good God would make such a wonderful world.

Third, humans were made in the image of God. This fact means that humans have a higher dignity and honor afforded to them than that which is given to any other creature. Human life is to be protected, respected, and given the honor and dignity worthy of such a representative of God.

Finally, it is God’s word that ultimately provides the structure and order of the cosmos. As Nancy Pearcey notes, “God’s creative word is the source of the laws of *physical* nature, which we study in the natural sciences. It is also the source of the laws of

human nature—the principles of morality (ethics), of justice (politics), of creative enterprise (economics), of aesthetics (the arts), and even of clear thinking (logic).”¹² In other words, everything comes from God, even one’s ability to understand this sentence.

Fall

The second question the Christian worldview must provide and answer to is What went wrong? Clearly something did. Everyone dies. Sicknesses range from annoying to excruciating. Weather systems and natural phenomena destroy and devastate communities. Human beings do incredibly cruel and evil things toward other human beings. And the reality is that none of us are okay with this. Most humans do not look at the reality of evil and suffering and think, “All of this suffering and evil is normal and good.” In fact, most humans try very hard to alleviate suffering and evil in their own lives and in the lives of the people they love.

According to the Christian worldview, what went wrong is sin. Genesis 3 describes how a fallen angel—the devil—disguised himself as a snake and entered Adam and Eve’s perfect garden home. While in the garden, the serpent tempted Adam and Eve, by suggesting that God was not trustworthy and good, to disobey the one restriction God had given to the couple. Adam and Eve listened to the word of the serpent rather than the word of God, and because of that fateful decision, the world has been reeling ever since. Just as Christians believe that everything good has its ultimate source in the word of God, so also Christians believe that everything bad (i.e., suffering and evil) has its ultimate source in the word of the serpent *and* Adam and Eve’s choice to believe it rather than the word of God. The consequences of Adam and Eve’s sin were disastrous. First, their union with God was severed. They became rebels against God, the true king of the world. This rebellion would be active not only in their bodies but also in their minds (Rom 7:23).

¹² Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 45.

Second, humanity became enslaved to the devil (Eph 2:2) and to their sin (Rom 7:14). Third, their union with each other was severed; they would sin and hurt one another from that day forward. Fourth, their union with the earth was severed. Life on earth would no longer be easy but arduous. The earth itself would turn against humanity in the form of thorns and thistles, natural disasters, and animals that would harm them. Fifth, disease and death would affect all mankind (Rom 6:23).

To summarize, what Christians believe is wrong with this world finds its origins in Genesis 3. Sin is the ultimate reason why all of us must die and have many health problems along the way. It is the ultimate reason why life is hard for all of us. It is the reason why evil exists. It is the reason why the earth itself feels like it has turned against us. It is the reason why humans do not do the things they know they should and why they do the things they know they should not do (Rom 7). And it is the reason why humans, though made in the image of God, find themselves as objects of God's wrath (Eph 2:3), destined for not only the death of our bodies but also the death of our souls eternally (Rev 20:15). This does not mean that every human is as bad as he or she could be, nor does it mean that every human action is as sinful as it could be. Rather, it means that every thought, desire, and activity that any human engages in is tainted by sin. Sin touches every aspect of life in a fallen world. Nevertheless, so does the image of God in man and the goodness of God in the world. In spite of the devastating effects of the fall, God's image in man persists. Mankind, even unbelieving and rebellious mankind, is capable of doing good and having good thoughts and ideas. Likewise, even a fallen world, with its thorns and disasters, is still a wonder to behold. Sin has not destroyed the light of God in us or in this world; it has only dimmed it. The light can still be seen.

Redemption

The third question the Christian worldview must provide an answer to is How can what went wrong be fixed? The Christian answer is redemption through the blood of

Jesus Christ. Paul tells the church in Ephesus, “In him [Jesus Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight” (Eph 1:7-8). God’s wrath was justly and necessarily pointed at those whom God made in his image because his justice demands wrath against sin, of which we are all guilty. But this reality did not sit right with God, for his heart swells with love for his image-bearers. So, the biblical narrative unfolds such that God sent his Son to earth to pay the penalty of death that sinners owed to God for their sins. God the Son willingly took the form of man—the form of a servant—and humbled himself all the way down to death on a cross in order to redeem mankind from sin and death (Phil 2:8).

Redemption means “deliverance by payment of a price.” This term is most often associated with the ransoming of slaves to set them free.¹³ Christians believe that before they began to follow Christ, they were slaves to their sin and to the devil and that the debt that they owed to God was the debt of eternal death. But because of the grace of God, the Son of God became incarnate as a man (Christ Jesus), lived, died, and rose from the dead so that we might be redeemed.

This redemption is not meant to be limited to a good feeling that resides in the heart of Christians, nor is it to be understood as only an event among many other events in the life of Christians. Instead, our redemption in Christ is meant to be understood as comprehensively as the creation and the fall are meant to be understood.¹⁴ When Christians are redeemed, they are radically made new. They are a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). From this point on, Christians understand that their path is to become more and more like Jesus Christ (Rom 8:28; 13:14). This means that not only will their actions and affections resemble those of Christ but so too will their minds (Rom 12:2). Christians

¹³ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 40, Logos Bible Software.

¹⁴ Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 46.

will increasingly become aware that Christ is Lord over every domain of life, that everything in the universe belongs to him, and that it is only in him that we live, move, and have our being (Acts 17:28). As Pearcey writes, “To talk about a Christian Worldview is simply another way of saying that when we are redeemed, our entire outlook on life is re-centered on God and re-built on His revealed truth.”¹⁵

Restoration

The fourth and final question a Christian worldview must provide an answer to is Where is everything headed? The answer is restoration, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ. Christians, though often differing on the exact details, are united in believing that history is linear and that at the end of history, Jesus Christ will return. Upon his return, he will judge the living and the dead. Some of the judged (i.e., the righteous) will be given eternal life, and some (i.e., the wicked) will be handed over to eternal death. Then, God will remake this world, and those who belong to Christ will enter this new world with resurrected and glorious bodies. This great end is the Christian hope. Throughout the Bible, hope is understood as “looking forward to something with some reason for confidence respecting fulfillment, hope, expectation.”¹⁶ Christians confidently expect that Christ will return, that they will be raised from the dead, and that the world will be made gloriously new. This firm hope gives Christians every reason to be joyful in the midst of a world marred by sin. Our joy is not mere optimism, nor is it wishful thinking—a hoping for the best. It has been made certain in Christ.

Conclusion

Everyone has a worldview—a way of seeing everything. A worldview can be expressed or understood as the story or metanarrative from which we are able to make

¹⁵ Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 46.

¹⁶ Frederick W. Danker et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 319, Logos Bible Software.

sense of the world and our lives within it. There are many different worldviews that many different people have adopted. One of the primary goals of Christian apologetics is to convince others that the Christian worldview is the best worldview available, for it best corresponds to reality, satisfies our deepest longings, and demonstrably leads to flourishing. The Christian worldview, at its most basic level, is the biblical story of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. This story is *The*—par excellence¹⁷—story of everything. Christians must know this story if they are to be able to defend the Christian faith with gentleness and respect. I now turn to look at the second part of my model of engagement: “Know *Their* Stories.”

Part 2: Know *Their* Stories

In this part of my model, I move from an understanding of the Christian worldview to a genuine attempt to understand the individuals whom Christians are trying to reach for Christ. This part can be best understood by breaking down each word of the title: “Know,” “Their,” “Stories.”

Know Their Stories

To know something is to have knowledge of something. In order to gain knowledge of something, one must begin by understanding that one does not know it, for if one assumes that one knows a lot about something when in fact one knows very little about it, then one will ultimately fail to ever truly know it. For example, my friend recently asked me if I wanted a lathe. Having never heard of such a thing, I asked what a lathe was. He told me that it is a wood-working tool. With that explanation, I assumed that I could definitely use the tool and told my friend I would take it. I spent five years of my life in construction as a form carpenter, and from that experience and from years of

¹⁷ Daniel Wallace defines the definite article “par excellence” as “the article frequently used to point out a substantive that is, in a sense, ‘in a class by itself.’ It is the only one deserving of the name.” Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 222.

doing projects and helping friends build stuff, I have learned not only how to do concrete work but also how to do plumbing, carpentry, and some electrical work. I have almost every type of saw and drill one can have in my garage. So, when my friend told me what a lathe was, I assumed that I would know how to use it and would be able to do so straightaway. However, I was wrong. Once I received said lathe from my friend and took it home, I set it on a stand and stared at it. I could not for the life of me figure out what this thing did or how it operated. At that point, I began watching YouTube videos of someone else using it and giving advice on how to do so. Now, I can honestly say that I know what a lathe is and what it does. However, I still have not used it—and until I do, I cannot claim that I know how to do so. All of this to say, one does not truly know something if one's knowledge of that something is only theoretical or assumed.

In regard to knowing human beings, the same rationale holds true. It is very easy to assume that we can know the most important things about people based on a whole set of superficial factors (e.g., how they dress, where they work, where they live, what their gender is). But looks can be deceiving. Our assumptions could be right—but also very wide of the mark. Thus, when we engage in conversations with other people, we should assume nothing and instead be genuinely interested and have a genuine curiosity about who they are. And one very good (and obvious) tool to utilize in getting to know people is the art of asking questions. A good question well answered leads to legitimate knowledge. And often, these questions and answers lead to more questions and more answers, which could even lead to the beginning of a friendship. Additionally, this knowledge will be instrumental in knowing how to potentially present the gospel to those people in the future.

Gregory Koukl shares about the importance of gathering information:

You'll need . . . information before you know the best way to proceed in any conversation. You have no idea what you're facing or what possibilities lie ahead until you get the lay of the land. Your initial probes, then, will be friendly, open-ended queries. The best way to start is with casual dialogue and general questions, drawing the person out by showing sincere interest in him and his ideas. If spiritual

issues are not on the table yet, don't jump into them immediately. Relax and take your time. The more you let your friend talk, the more genial your interaction will be. It's more pleasant for him, and it's less work for you. Your initial goal is to gather as much information from the other person as you can before you move on. You want him to talk as much as possible about his own convictions first. This approach gives you the best chance of "making the most of the opportunity," as Paul put it in Colossians 4:5.¹⁸

To "know their stories," Christians must begin by seeking to know those individuals to whom they are speaking with a genuine curiosity and interest, assuming nothing, and asking questions in friendly dialogue.

Know *Their* Stories

This point is extremely obvious yet extremely important: "their" means that Christians are speaking to human beings. Human beings are those who have been made in the image of God. In the words of C. S. Lewis, "There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendors."¹⁹ What a beautiful solemnity that Christians should have whenever we embark on a conversation with such glorious creatures of God!

Yet, it is far too easy, given the political climate of the day, to ignore the wonder of the image-bearers with whom we are speaking and reduce them down to the political or theological ideology that they represent. If they represent another camp other than our own, then we can have a knee-jerk reaction of disdain or frustration. Needless to say, these types of reactions will prevent us from having a meaningful conversation, especially if those individuals can read such reactions on our faces! Thaddeus Williams gives some helpful advice for Christians who want to engage unbelievers in the hopes of leading them to Christ:

¹⁸ Koukl, *Tactics*, 63.

¹⁹ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York: HarperOne, 1949), 46.

Take a moment to think of specific people whose ideology you disagree with most. Pick your top three. It might be a public figure, a politician, a family member, a coworker, or a neighbor. Picture someone specific who sees you as the living, breathing antithesis of everything you believe to be true and just. Picture that person, with all his or her smugness, in your mind's eye. Now think this true thought about that person. "Image-bearer." Say it again. "Image-bearer." Once more for good measure. "Image-bearer." Next time you see that person, before your blood pressure starts to rise, repeat, "Image-bearer. Image-bearer. Image-bearer." Then treat that person as an image-bearer because that is who they were long before you found yourselves on opposite sides of a culture war. Then, when it starts to set in how incredibly difficult it is to treat people as image-bearers for more than five minutes, pray for yourself what Paul once prayed for the Thessalonians: "May the Lord make [me] increase and abound in love for one another and for all."²⁰

As Christians engage in conversations with unbelievers, we must see them as God sees them—his image-bearers—and, as such, treat them with the respect due that lofty title. Additionally, we must strive to not see them as our enemies. Even if they are on the opposite side of very significant moral issues, they are not *the* enemy. As Paul writes to the Ephesians,

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Eph 6:10-12)

It is the schemes of the devil that we must stand against, for he is the "prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience" (Eph 2:2). Therefore, we need to see unbelievers as lost and in need of a savior. To the extent that they hate us and what we stand for, they have been deceived by the devil, for if they could truly see, then they would believe that Jesus is the good, the beautiful, and the truth that they need.

Finally, as Christians engage fellow image-bearers, we must keep in mind that they are complex creatures. Proverbs 20:5 states, "The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out." Every human has had a myriad of experiences, both bad and good, and possesses a mix of desires, both bad and good. We should always resist the temptation of reducing people down to an idea or belief that

²⁰ Thaddeus J. Williams, *Confronting Injustice without Compromising Truth: 12 Questions Christians Should Ask about Social Justice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 25.

they hold to, for if we do (i.e., commit such reduction), then we could find ourselves interacting with cartoonish representations of those whom we have created in our own mind rather than the real individuals. We must always take seriously people as they are, even if their beliefs are inconsistent and the “jerrymandered logic used to cobble them [i.e., those beliefs] together goes unnoticed.”²¹ Otherwise, those individuals might feel less inclined to continue engaging us in a healthy dialogue.

Know Their *Stories*

This part of my model is entitled “Know Their *Stories*”—rather than the singular “*Story*”—because there are multiple storylines that people have operating at the same time. In what follows, I will list and explain what some of these stories could be.

Metanarrative

All people are living out of a worldview or an epic-metanarrative. As already mentioned, these metanarratives could be religious (Christian theism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism), quasi-religious (New Ageism, deism, the pluralistic and moral therapeutic spirituality story), or secular (naturalism, nihilism, existentialism, postmodernism). The important thing to note is that these stories provide a lens through which people can interpret the data that this world gives to them. We often can be totally unaware that we are doing this. Nevertheless, these worldviews are the stories out of which we live our lives. Many people only have *one* of these. However, in today’s confused, pluralistic, and therapeutic culture, people can adopt a set of beliefs that internally conflict at the epic-metanarrative level, and this can go unnoticed. What is worse is that when this metanarrative inconsistency is pointed out, many people simply do not care. In other

²¹ R. Albert Mohler Jr., “The Changing Face of Apologetics in a Secular Age,” *Southern Seminary Magazine* 90, no. 1 (2022): 8.

words, it is possible today to meet people who hold two worldviews simultaneously that conflict on numerous fronts.

I am most convinced by Joshua Chatraw's thesis that for those who do not hold to a, strictly speaking, "religious" worldview (i.e., secular individuals), there are primarily three secular metanarratives available today that can be adopted: the pessimistic secular story, the optimistic secular story, and the pluralistic and moral therapeutic spirituality story.²² The pessimistic secular story is the story that everything (including human beings) came about by an accident of chance and time and that naked, unaided evolution is the reason that complex entities exist. Therefore, we live in a closed system in which there cannot be any ultimate meaning, purpose, morality, or free will. Additionally, one day, the sun will collapse upon itself, and everything living in this world will cease to exist. No one and nothing will ever be remembered, for there will be nobody to remember them. According to this story, says Chatraw, "Our lives, if we are brave enough to face the truth, must be lived under the cloud of tragedy and absurdity."²³

The optimistic secular story, like the pessimistic secular story, maintains that there is no God and that every complex organism has come about through time and chance. But unlike the pessimistic secular story, the optimistic secular story sees these facts as exciting and wonderful. Optimistic secularists glimpse into the future and wonder what exciting things this universe has in store for us. It has already produced us! Humanity, after a large march of superstition, eventually came to the place that it no longer needed to believe in gods or myths because it learned science. Now, humanity is finally free from ancient myths and superstition to create its own meaning and purpose for itself in this universe. The universe is not a closed system. Free will is real. We are actors in a play that we are all collectively writing. How exciting!

²² Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story*, 57-59.

²³ Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story*, 58.

The pluralistic and moral therapeutic spirituality story is the belief that there is some kind of divine essence or force that was essential for life. Other religions may help understand aspects of this divine force, but none of them can give us a full picture. Instead, the best parts of the various religions are those parts that lead us to a truer understanding of ourselves, that help us live more authentically, and that help us love others. As Chatraw writes,

Ultimately, we are to look inside of ourselves to listen to the unique human (or divine) spark within us and live authentic lives. God exists to help us find our true potential, feel better about ourselves, and guide us to treat others with dignity and respect. Diverse religious expressions, in their ideal forms, help us discover an inner peace and live a life that makes the world a better place.²⁴

Though this story is quasi-religious in that there is a recognition of some kind of divine force, the story does not amount to much more than what is represented by the optimistic secular story. It just baptizes the secularized spirit of the age with quasi-religious language.

As Christians get to know their unbelieving friends and discover the worldview or metanarrative out of which they are living, it will be important to take note of what they believe about the origins of the universe and how human beings landed on the map. In addition, Christians should be listening for moral claims that unbelievers make and then try to discover what those individuals ground their claims in. This will be helpful information in the last part of my model of engagement.

Micronarrative

In addition to the epic-metanarrative story or stories that people might have, there are also micronarratives that people might adopt. As introduced earlier, Chatraw mentions three kinds of micro stories: the story of consumerism, the story of

²⁴ Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story*, 59.

achievement, and the story of romance.²⁵ The story of consumerism tells us that if we buy enough things, live in the right house, drive the right car, and the like, then we can attain happiness. “Shopping will make me happy” is the motto of this story. The story of achievement tells us that if we work hard enough and achieve success or fame, then we will be satisfied. “I am what I accomplish” is the motto of this story. The story of romance tells us that if I can find my true love, then I will be happy and complete. “All I need is romantic love” is the motto of this story.

While these micro stories are, not strictly speaking, worldviews, they do give purpose, meaning, and direction to the lives of many. In other words, these micronarratives are what gets us up in the morning. These stories are where we draw happiness and purpose from. They essentially define what the good life is. This means that people may be more cognizant of their micronarrative than they are of their metanarrative. The important thing here is that Christians must try to understand where unbelievers are deriving their meaning, purpose, and happiness from. These themes will be useful later in my model of engagement.

Personal Narrative

Christians should not forget that the living, breathing, image-bearer in front of them has a life story. This story, as with every human story, involves beauty and tragedy. Tragically, every human entered this world as part of Adam’s race of sinners. He (or she) was born separated from God. This reality has led this individual to make choices that were morally wrong, whether he acknowledges it or not. This reality has produced guilt and shame. Additionally, this individual grew up in a fallen world with fallen parents, siblings, teachers, and friends. This person undoubtedly has been hurt relationally. Perhaps he has even been abused. He could have had religious experiences that were

²⁵ Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story*, 59-60.

negative because of someone misrepresenting God. This individual likely has had various needs that have gone unmet throughout his life, potentially even extending into the present.

Yet, even with the tragedy, this person has experienced beauty in various places of his life. Perhaps he has been loved well by a parent, friend, or lover. Perhaps that parent, friend, or lover was an atheist, which caused him to think that religion was superfluous, or a homosexual, which caused him to think that Christianity is uncaring. He has probably seen the sun rise or set; he may have even seen the Grand Canyon. This individual has some idea of beauty. He certainly has some good desires and good hopes, some of which have been met, and for that, he is thankful.

In addition to the beauty and tragedy of each person, there is also a massive litany of other interesting information about a person's life, such as where one was born, what college one attended, one's favorite sports team, what one does for fun, or what one is passionate about. Christians should try and learn as much as they can from the person with whom they are speaking. And as Christians listen to the personal story of the person with whom they are engaging, they should pay attention to key moments and relevant details in that individual's life that could provide opportunities for the gospel to intersect.

Spiritual Narrative

People's understanding of their own spirituality will show up in all three of the narratives considered above. If people believe themselves to be an atheist and devoid of a soul, then they will strictly eschew any kind of spirituality or spiritual language.

However, whether someone is an atheist or not, every human being *is* spiritual and cannot help but share some of one's spirituality when talking about one's meta, micro, and personal stories. Why do I believe this? Ecclesiastes 3:11 states, "He [God] has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end." God has set the reality

of eternity within the finite heart of man. According to the apostle Paul in Romans 1:18-20,

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

In addition, in Romans 2:14-16, Paul states,

For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

What these scriptural truths mean for my present purposes is that no matter how hard people try to not believe in God, the God who made them shows up in various corners of their life and subconscious. As Christians listen to the meta, micro, and personal stories of our unbelieving friends, neighbors, and family members, we must pay close attention to the places where the image of God within them is evident. We must pay attention to the religious or spiritual impulses that they have. What are some of these impulses that we should be listening for? There are at least five.

First, there is the *moral impulse*. We live in a culture that prizes and champions the cause of justice. Since this is the case, certain questions must be asked: What is justice? Whose vision of justice should be championed? Why? People often assume a morality upon which their demands for justice rest. Christians would be wise to listen for the religious impulse of morality and see where our conversation partners are attempting to ground that morality.

Second, there is the *meaning and purpose impulse*. We all derive meaning and purpose from somewhere. Even radically pessimistic atheists are living for something, which is inconsistent with their worldview. This should not surprise us because God has written his law upon and set his eternity within all people's hearts.

Third, there is the *impulse to worship* and the *impulse to be drawn to beauty*. Why is that? Why are all of us so taken aback by sunsets, skylines, oceans, and places like the Grand Canyon? Why is it that we are drawn to things that are wonderful and that make us feel small? Astrophysicist Stephen Hawking writes, “I believe the simplest explanation is, there is no God. No one created the universe and no one directs our fate. This leads me to a profound realization that there probably is no heaven and no afterlife either We have this one life to appreciate the grand design of the universe and for that, I am extremely grateful.”²⁶ Hawking believes there is no God and that everything came about by accident, yet he is extremely grateful for the opportunity to appreciate the grand design of the universe. This is a religious impulse within the heart of a man who has suppressed the truth of God for a lie. Christians should be listening for the impulse to worship and the tendency to find certain things wonderful and beautiful.

Fourth, there is the *impulse to hope*. Though believers can encounter individuals who have lost hope, more often, we will encounter people who are looking forward to the future optimistically, even in spite of having experienced massive setbacks or struggles in life. This is a curious impulse for one to have—to believe that everything will be OK in the end, that there will be a “happily ever after.” Hope and optimism are things that we should take note of; we should curiously ask what such hope and optimism are grounded in. Is there a reason for people’s hope, or are they only hoping in hope?

Fifth, there is the *impulse to love*. This impulse is ubiquitous today. The Beatles caught the spirit of the age with their classic “All You Need Is Love.” People everywhere literally believe this. Why? Much of this ground has already been covered in the discussion above concerning the micro story of romance, but it is the untaught impulse to love others that is in focus here. Why do humans have such a capacity and desire to love and be loved? If there is no personal and benevolent God who has made us

²⁶ Stephen Hawking, *Brief Answers to the Big Questions* (London: John Murray, 2018), 38.

in his image, whence does love come? Would we not *only* have sexual desires and desires to protect our mate and offspring? Yet we find countless examples of human beings’ reaching out in extraordinary ways to other humans in need. The secular metanarratives cannot adequately account for this reality.

What these five impulses have in common is that secularism cannot adequately explain why humans have these impulses within them given its framework and assumptions. Also, these impulses reveal an immense longing in the heart of every human—a longing that has ultimately gone unfulfilled throughout our lives. We are deeply longing for our hopes to be realized, to truly love and be truly loved, to feel small yet significant, to see perfect justice and peace land upon our planet with cataclysmic force. Everyone has these unfulfilled desires. In C. S. Lewis’s famous words,

The Christian says, “Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”²⁷

As Christians listen to the meta, micro, and personal stories of individuals whom we are engaging, we must listen for their religious and spiritual impulses and understand that they are pointing to the eternity and the law that God has put within their hearts—and that can only be satisfied in him. We must listen for these impulses so that we will be better equipped to show people—in the unique way that they need to be shown—that Christianity does a better job of corresponding to reality and to people’s experience and a better job of satisfying their deepest longings while also providing a satisfactory answer to why they have such longings—an answer that demonstrably leads to flourishing. This point leads to the final part of my model of engagement: “Tell a Better Story.”

²⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 136-37.

Part 3: Tell a Better Story

Christians must enter the stories of those with whom we are engaging, but we cannot stop there. We must then (1) lead them out of their stories and (2) lead them into a better one: the Christian story.²⁸

Lead Them out of Their Stories

First, as Christians listen to the stories of non-Christians, we should be listening for those things within their stories that we can easily affirm as true and right while also listening for areas where they should be challenged. From here, we can show them why their current worldview will not work. Perhaps these five words will serve as a helpful reminder of what we are to do during our conversations with unbelievers: “Yes,” “But,” and “Will Not Work.”

Yes

What are those areas of agreement that we can easily affirm? What do we agree with? For example, if those with whom we are speaking talk about the brokenness of this world, are angry about injustice, desire to be happy, long for companionship, hope for a better world, or hold to a myriad of other beliefs or longings that Christians can affirm, then we can say along with unbelievers, “Yes! I also am sad about the brokenness I see, am mad about injustice, long for companionship, desire to be happy, and hope for a better world.” Our “yes” establishes common ground with unbelievers in the sense that we share a common humanity, have similar longings, and have similar frustrations.

But

Where must we part ways with unbelievers? What are the areas of disagreement where we must say, “I agree with you here, *but* on this point, you are

²⁸ I am indebted to Chatraw (*Telling a Better Story*, 63-70) for this section of my model because I utilize much of his “inside out” model of engagement while incorporating some of my own material.

mistaken”? In other words, Christians will not be able to agree with everything non-Christians believe, and non-Christians need Christians to show them, respectfully and gently, where those places of disagreement are so that they can consider whether the Christian viewpoint is superior to their own. One may consider a pretend conversation between a Christian and an atheist as an example. During this conversation, the atheist mentions that the poor in the United States *should* be treated better. This is an excellent place for the Christian to say, “Yes, I agree! They *should* be treated better.” Yet, this is also a great place for the Christian to challenge the atheist by saying, “But, according to your view, this moral imperative of *should* is inappropriate, for according to an atheistic understanding of the origin of the universe, humans only came about by chance, and the way that species survived and evolved was by being the fittest specimens that elbowed out the unfit specimens from the gene pool. In this understanding, there is no morality. There is no *should*. There is only the instinct to survive.” This response leads to “Will Not Work.”

Will Not Work

At this point, Christians must show non-Christians why their worldview is untenable and unreliable. Chatraw articulates this idea well:

One way to help others see their blind spots is to trace where their assumptions and beliefs ultimately lead if applied consistently. Fallen cultures often contain assumptions that make Christianity seem implausible, yet those who hold these assumptions usually haven’t worked them out in their head. Those assumptions are, after all, the very air they breathe. Because of this, by asking questions and discussing the implications of certain views, we can expose these views as overly simplistic and unlivable The goal is to enter their story to challenge it on its own terms by helping them see where it’s *inconsistent* and *unlivable* in order to lay the groundwork for them to take Christianity seriously.²⁹

Recall the previous example of a conversation between a Christian and an atheist. Once the Christian points out that the atheist’s use of *should* language is suspect

²⁹ Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story*, 67.

based on his own worldview, the Christian must proceed to show him why this is the case. C. S. Lewis famously does exactly this in *Mere Christianity*:

My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of *just* and *unjust*? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it *unjust*? If the whole show was bad and senseless from A to Z, so to speak, why did I, who was supposed to be part of the show, find myself in such violent reaction against it? A man feels wet when he falls into water because man is not a water animal: a fish would not feel wet. Of course, I could have given up my idea of justice by saying that it was nothing but a private idea of my own. But if I did that, then my argument against God collapsed too—for the argument depended on saying that the world was really unjust, not simply that it did not happen to please my fancies. Thus in the very act of trying to prove that God did not exist—in other words, that the whole of reality was senseless—I found I was forced to assume that one part of reality—namely my idea of justice—was full of sense. Consequently atheism turns out to be too simple. If the whole universe has no meaning, we should never have found out that it has no meaning. Just as if there were no light in the universe and therefore no creatures with eyes, we should never know it was dark. *Dark* would be a word without meaning.³⁰

This is a very good argument that can be molded differently depending on the situation. In the case of the present example, the Christian can point out that the atheist's worldview will not work because it does not provide a sufficient basis for the atheist's claim that the United States *should* provide for the poor, nor does it provide a sufficient basis for the longing within the atheist that the poor be provided for. If atheism was true, then not only would the atheist *not* have a longing for the poor to be provided for, but also he would probably have the opposite longing, namely, that the poor *not* be provided for at all so that the fittest of society might better survive and thrive. Additionally, if atheism were true, there would be no such thing as *shoulds* and *oughts*.

“Yes,” “But,” and “Will Not Work”—these five words provide a meaningful approach that Christians can use to help unbelievers see that their current worldview does not do a good job of corresponding to reality, does not do a good job of explaining their deepest longings, and does not provide a satisfactory answer to why they have these longings in the first place. There are a number of other scenarios that could be walked

³⁰ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 38.

through here, but this is one example of how Christians can begin to show non-Christians why their worldview will not work and then build toward giving them a worldview that will—the Christian worldview.

Lead Them into a Better Story

The entire point of Christians' having conversations and building relationships with non-Christians, the ultimate goal in all of our interactions with them, and the greatest prayer of our hearts is that those with whom we are speaking would embrace Christ Jesus as Lord. Most of the time, this will take a considerable amount of time and require multiple conversations and many prayers. Once believers have shown unbelievers why their worldview will not work—once Christians have led them out of their flawed stories—it is time to build out for them the contours of a better story—the true story of the Christian worldview (creation, fall, redemption, and restoration). There are two things that Christians can do to lead their unbelieving friends into this better and true story.

Demonstrate How They Are Relying upon the Christian Worldview

If Christianity is *the* true story of the entire world—the worldview that best makes sense of our world—then it should be assumed that although many people do not hold to the Christian worldview, their adopted worldviews, by necessity, must depend upon Christianity in some way in order to make sense of the world. Christians would be wise to point out the areas in which a non-Christian worldview is assuming, borrowing, or relying upon the Christian worldview in order to explain the world and life within it. Doing this will show the explanatory power and superiority of the Christian worldview over any other worldview.

Tom Holland, in his book *Dominion*, masterfully summarizes 2000 years of church history and persuasively argues that most of the liberal values that Westerners take for granted today are the inheritance of Christianity. For example, without

Christianity, it would have never occurred to the West to enshrine human rights as non-negotiable or to promote the idea that the poor are entitled to aid. Holland shows how modern progressive liberalism is anything but neutral—ironically, it most closely reflects Christianity. In Holland’s words,

That every human being possessed an equal dignity was not remotely self-evident a truth. A Roman would have laughed at it. To campaign against discrimination on the grounds of gender or sexuality, however, was to depend on large numbers of people sharing in a common assumption: that everyone possessed an inherent worth. The origins of this principle—as Nietzsche had so contemptuously pointed out—lay not in the French Revolution, nor in the Declaration of Independence, nor in the Enlightenment, but in the Bible.³¹

Holland also wades into the current culture wars, explaining how both sides are drawing from the same source. He writes,

In reality, Evangelicals and progressives were both recognizably bred of the same matrix. If opponents of abortion were the heirs of Macrina, who had toured the rubbish tips of Cappadocia looking for abandoned infants to rescue, then those who argued against them were likewise drawing on a deeply rooted Christian supposition: that every woman’s body was her own, and to be respected as such by every man. Supporters of gay marriage were quite as influenced by the church’s enthusiasm for monogamous fidelity as those against it were by biblical condemnations of men who slept with men. To install transgender toilets might indeed seem an affront to the Lord God, who had created male and female; but to refuse kindness to the persecuted was to offend against the most fundamental teachings of Christ. In a country as saturated in Christian assumptions as the United States, there could be no escaping their influence—even for those who imagined that they had. America’s culture wars were less a war against Christianity than a civil war between Christian factions.³²

What Holland does in this book is an example of what I am suggesting: pointing out where non-Christians are borrowing from the Christian worldview to make their own claims. Christians should point out that the beauty, morality, justice, hope, love, meaning, and purpose that they *assume* their worldview is giving to them is, in actuality, being smuggled over from the Christian worldview.

³¹ Tom Holland, *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World* (New York: Basic Books, 2021), 494.

³² Holland, *Dominion*, 530-31.

*Demonstrate How the Christian Worldview
Makes Better Sense of the World*

The objective here is to show how the Christian worldview better addresses “our experiences, observations, and history.”³³ Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned that there are at least five religious and spiritual impulses that everyone displays in some way and that Christians should take note of these in their conversations with non-Christians. At some point in the conversation, if God allows, it would be wise for Christians to return to these impulses and demonstrate how Christianity actually provides a reason for why these impulses exist and is also a fulfillment of them. I briefly return to these impulses now.

First, the *moral impulse* is the impulse within so many today that demands justice, equity, the rights of others be respected, and the poor and vulnerable be cared for. The Christian worldview makes sense of this impulse. As already mentioned, why else would people have this impulse? If there is no God, then there is no concrete morality—right or wrong. Why, then, do we care so much about the poor? Why, then, do we get so angry when people are oppressed? The answer is that God made this world good and that he made every human in his image. Thus, deep down inside, we know that humans should be treated with dignity, and we try to do so, even if it does not make much sense according to our secularized view. The Christian worldview better explains the moral impulse within us.

Second, the *meaning and purpose impulse* is the impulse within all of us to live for something. To have meaning and purpose is a strong desire within all of our hearts. Christianity can explain why this is so, whereas secular worldviews ultimately cannot. Christianity explains that the reason we have this impulse is that God made us with meaning and for a purpose—to know him and glorify him. Christianity is also able to explain why we so often experience frustrations in the pursuit of finding meaning and

³³ Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story*, 70.

purpose. Because of our sin and the reality of the fall, we attempt to find meaning and purpose apart from God, the one who created us. This pursuit will inevitably end in failure and frustration because only when our lives are aligned with the Designer's *design* will we be able to find meaning and purpose, just like a car will only have meaning and fulfill its purpose if it is built according to the design of the engineer(s) who designed it. The Christian worldview better explains the search for meaning and purpose impulse within us.

Third, the *impulse to worship* and the *impulse to be drawn to beauty* screams the Creator. C. S. Lewis says that pain is God's "megaphone to rouse a deaf world."³⁴ Similarly, Paul Gould states that "beauty is a divine megaphone to rouse a disenchanted world."³⁵ Roger Scruton opines,

Art, as we have known it, stands on the threshold of the transcendental. It points beyond this world of accidental and disconnected things to another realm, in which human life is endowed with an emotional logic that makes suffering noble and love worthwhile. Nobody who is alert to beauty, therefore, is without the concept of redemption—of a final transcendence of moral disorder into a "Kingdom of ends."³⁶

Scruton here is talking specifically about the beauty of art, but his insights can be also applied to other forms of beauty, such as that of a sunset, a lover's gaze, a starry night, or the Grand Canyon. The point here to make with non-Christians is that the Christian worldview best explains this impulse within us to feel small yet significant, to be in awe of something amazing, and to be drawn to beauty. If there was not a personal, beautiful, good, and wonderful Creator of all things, then whence comes beauty, and whence comes our appreciation of it? The Christian worldview better explains the impulse within us to worship and to be drawn to beauty.

³⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 91.

³⁵ Gould, *Cultural Apologetics*, 104.

³⁶ Roger Scruton, *Beauty: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2011), 156.

Fourth, the *impulse to hope* is the impulse to be optimistic about the future, to believe that there are brighter days ahead, or—as Bob Marley sings—that “every little thing gonna be alright.” This is a area where Christians can sensitively press and ask their non-Christian interlocuters, “Why are you optimistic about the future? Are you able to control it? Can you guarantee the outcome you desire?” If they are being honest, unbelievers will admit that they cannot control the future or the outcome. They might argue that they must keep a positive attitude because a negative one will get them nowhere. However, this is not entirely true, for it depends upon whether reality actually corresponds to having a negative or a positive outlook. For example, a negative outlook, if true, could actually help people avoid potential suffering. If individuals believe bad things are ahead, then this belief will lead them to protect themselves from those bad things. Likewise, if people have a positive outlook but such an outlook is not based on reality, then they could be opening themselves up to great suffering. All that to say, non-Christians do not ultimately have a reason for optimism—but Christians do. Based on a Christian worldview, it makes sense for Christians to be optimistic about the future because Jesus is coming again and will restore this world to its God-intended glory. Christians can show that the impulse to hope—the desire for a “happily ever after”—exists in people because God has put that desire within us. The Christian worldview better explains the impulse to hope.

Fifth and finally, the *impulse to love* makes the most sense within the Christian worldview, for only the Christian worldview has an all-powerful but very personal God who willingly became a man and died for his enemies. The West’s concept of love today is vague, non-committal, and watered down. Yet, we all desire to be loved in ways that supersede our own love for others. Christianity can best explain why we all long to love and to be loved. According to the grand metanarrative of Scripture, creation explains that God made human beings to love him and to be loved by him, fall explains why we feel like we are not loved and need to find love, redemption explains how it is that we can be

reunited to the God whose love we were made to know, and restoration points to the ultimate fulfillment of this longing. Additionally, Christianity best explains why many people continue to love those who are extremely difficult to love, for the fact that the heart of the Creator, who made us in his image, is loving at its very core explains why we have the capacity, the desire, and the ability to love difficult people even when it does not benefit us. Thick and overly legalistic religions and thin secular narratives cannot account for this impulse—but Christianity can. The Christian worldview better explains the impulse within us to love.

All of these impulses that exist to varying degrees within all of us provide fertile ground for Christians to demonstrate how Christianity better corresponds to reality, better satisfies our deepest longings, better provides an answer to why we have such longing, and demonstrably leads to flourishing.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have built a model of engaging with contemporary culture that utilizes the truths of 1 Peter 3:15 and is reflective of Paul’s model in Acts 17. My model of engagement has three parts: “Know *The Story*,” “Know *Their Stories*,” and “Tell a Better Story.” If Christians want to defend the Christian faith with gentleness and respect, then they must first know the gospel story inside and out. They must understand that the gospel story is not just *a* story among many stories but *the* story that explains everything. It is the story of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. Second, Christians should try and build friendships with non-Christians in order to understand their meta, micro, personal, and spiritual stories, paying attention to particular plot lines, inconsistencies, and longings that the Christian worldview can better address. Finally, Christians must gently and respectfully show non-Christians why their non-Christian worldview will not ultimately work and why and how the Christian worldview does a better job of corresponding to reality, satisfying our deepest longings, providing a

satisfactory answer to why we have such longings, and demonstrably leading to flourishing.

CHAPTER 4

THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

The purpose of this project was to equip the members of Summit Church in Naples, Florida, to engage in cultural apologetics with gentleness and respect so that they would have greater confidence and success in befriending and sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with non-Christians. To achieve the purpose of this project, I created and pursued four goals. The first goal was to assess the current level of understanding of contemporary cultural apologetic issues among a group of members and attenders of Summit Church. The second goal was to develop a seven-session curriculum that would equip participants to understand the contemporary cultural apologetic issues facing the church and how to engage these issues effectively and with gentleness and respect. The third goal was to implement the curriculum in a small group setting and equip participants to defend the Christian faith with gentleness and respect. Finally, the fourth goal was to measure the overall effectiveness of the curriculum by assessing the participants after they have completed the course in conjunction with the pre-course survey that they would have already taken.

Preparation Phase

The preparation phase of my project took approximately four months. It began in December 2022 with my creating the content of the seven classes I was to teach. Sessions 1 and 2 were the quickest to write because they corresponded to chapters 2 and 3 of this project, which were already written. Sessions 3-7 took much longer due to the nature of the content and the research required to teach these sessions. Each of these sessions took approximately one full week for me to write. I foresaw that the time needed

to write these sessions could be an issue since I am the lead pastor and the primary communicator of my church on Sunday mornings. I would need to take several weeks off from preaching to write this content. I asked other pastors to fill the pulpit on the weeks I was writing class content. The good news is that these classes were all on topics that I have been researching, considering, and reading about for over three years now. The materials and ideas needed to create my content were already in my head, on my computer, or on my bookshelves. What I needed was time to carefully craft my lessons—a gift my church graciously gave me.

I finished writing the bulk of the seven sessions of my apologetics course by the beginning of April. I sent my curriculum to my expert panel, which consisted of three pastors of Summit Church. I gave them a rubric to fill out for each session (see appendix 2) so that they could evaluate whether my content was biblically accurate, clear, and practical as well as sufficiently addressed each topic. I was looking for a minimum mark of 90 percent from my evaluators (i.e., at least 90 percent of the evaluation criteria meeting or exceeding the “sufficient” level). I received my rubrics back by April 11 with a 94-percent average from my three evaluators. The main concern that all three of my evaluators had was that my sessions were content heavy and did not leave enough room for participants to interact with my material. I did my best to accommodate their concern throughout my course.

To promote my seven-session apologetics course, we announced the course from the stage starting at the end of February. We announced it for five weeks every Sunday. During the announcement for this course, I told congregants what we would be learning, why it was important to learn, and how to sign up for the class. Signing up for the class consisted of going out to our lobby/foyer and writing their names and contact information on a sheet of paper we provided. Additionally, we created a webpage that was connected to our website where people could learn about the course and sign up to take it. The write up for this webpage consisted of the following:

Since the inception of the church of Jesus Christ, there have been critiques and challenges against Christianity made by non-believers. These, of course, differ depending on one's culture and time, but whatever culture or time Christians have found themselves in, they have had to find a way to respond. This is the task of Cultural Apologetics. Cultural Apologetics is the church's gentle, respectful, and reasonable defense of the hope we have in Jesus Christ in our particular cultural moment.

In Summit's Cultural Apologetics class, you will be equipped to respond to some of the challenges facing the church today so that we might better represent the gospel to every man, woman, and child. The particular challenges we will address in this course are the claims that Christianity is too rigid, too racist, and too repressive. We will also learn a model of cultural engagement. We hope to see you there!

When all was said and done, 149 people had signed up for my class! This was significantly more people than I thought would have signed up. I was hoping we would have around 25, so imagine my shock when the number of those who actually signed up more than quintupled my expectations. Summit Church consists of three campuses. I am the lead pastor of the Naples congregation. Most of the people who signed up were from my campus, but there were also close to 40 people from the other two campuses that signed up.

Originally, we were going to host the class in our multipurpose room, which can comfortably hold eighty people. However, because so many people signed up for my class, I had to ask our maintenance staff to set up and tear down our sanctuary every Thursday for the duration of the class. In addition to getting our maintenance staff involved, I also had to get our kids director and ministry coordinator involved. Our staff decided that we would provide childcare and a meal for participants in order to remove any obstacle that might impede one's participation in my class on any given week. Thus, our kids director recruited volunteers to provide childcare on Thursday nights, and our ministry coordinator figured out all of the food and snacks. All of this preparation culminated on April 13, 2023, which was the first session of my apologetics course.

Implementation Phase

My apologetics course was titled “Cultural Apologetics.” It consisted of seven sessions. We met on Thursday nights beginning on April 13 and ending on June 4, 2023. We met every consecutive Thursday night except for one, May 18, due to a schedule conflict that I had. Every Thursday at 5:30 p.m., we served dinner for anyone who was interested, since we knew a lot of people would be coming straight from work. During this time, parents who were participating in the class placed their children in childcare. At 6:00 p.m. (sharp), I started teaching. I would finish teaching at 8:00 p.m. and dismiss the class. I would stick around for thirty minutes afterwards to answer any questions people had.

Throughout the course, my desire was to help participants know not only how to better respond to the cultural issues of our day but also how to have the right posture as they do so. Thus, though each session had a lot of content, throughout each session, I would demonstrate how to share this content respectfully and gently, as 1 Peter 3:15 commands. Sessions 1 and 2 were my foundational classes. They set the tone for the whole course because they provided the reasoning for why and how we should engage in cultural apologetics. Every subsequent class made reference to the ideas discussed in sessions 1 and 2.

On the first night of the course (session 1), held on April 13, I began by having participants fill out the pre-course survey. This took approximately 25 minutes to be completed. Once the survey was completed, I began teaching session 1. On June 4, after I finished teaching the last session of the apologetics course (session 7), I assigned to the class participants the post-course survey as homework with a completion deadline of one week. I did not have participants fill out the post-course survey in class because I needed to preserve as much class time as possible. Session 7 was about homosexuality and gay marriage, and I needed every minute of the allotted two hours to adequately engage this topic.

On the night of the first session, we had 100 participants show up out of the 149 who signed up. I knew that many of the people who signed up for the class would not actually commit to the class. I was very happy with 100 participants on the first night. Sessions 2 and 3 held steady in the low 90s. Sessions 4-7 had an average of 70 participants. Thus, about 30 participants dropped out of the course by the end. I knew this was to be expected. Nevertheless, I was happy with the 70 percent retention rate. One factor that caused some of the drop off in attendance was that I recorded each session with both audio and video. Some of the participants told me they liked watching the class from home.

The way I decided to teach this course was lecture style. Sessions 1 and 2 had some class participation. However, by the time we got into sessions 3-7, there was so much content to get through that I had to forego table discussions. However, I would stop throughout each of my sessions and make sure that the class understood what was just taught and ask if anyone had any questions before we moved on. This was my way of ensuring that the class was keeping up.

At the beginning of the course, participants were given a three-ring binder. In this binder were session 1's notes. At the beginning of each subsequent session, participants were handed that session's notes, which consisted of a robust outline with extensive quotes in printed format (see appendix 4).

At the end of every session, I would assign homework. The homework generally consisted of articles and chapters from books that would help prepare participants for the following week's session. Some of the homework assigned also helped participants process what they had just learned in the previous session. The only book that I required participants to purchase at the beginning of the course was Joshua Chatraw's *Telling a Better Story: How to Talk about God in a Skeptical Age*. Additionally, I recorded each session so that if a participant missed a session, he or she could either listen or watch the session and remain caught up with the rest of the class.

Participants understood that they were expected to listen or watch the missed session and complete the assigned homework before the start of the next session.

Content Overview

Session 1: What Is Apologetics?

Session 1 was an introduction to the entire Cultural Apologetics course. It served to explain why we would have a course on apologetics, what apologetics is, and how a Christian should engage in apologetics. I began by unpacking the missional living survey that Summit members and attenders took in 2020. I explained how there was a mission disconnect among our people in that for over the course of an entire year, 30 percent of our people did not share the gospel or build an intentional relationship with an unbeliever. I explained that one of the reasons for this is perhaps that our people do not feel equipped to engage unbelievers because they do not know how to respond to unbelievers' objections to Christianity. I told the class that this reality is nothing new. We then spent the majority of our time engaging the book of 1 Peter, taking most of our time looking at 1 Peter 3:15 and its surrounding context.

From 1 Peter, I taught the class that apologetics involves the defense of our faith, includes our testimony of Jesus as Lord (often in the midst of our suffering), uses reason and logic, is grounded in Christian hope, and is a practice that every Christian should be ready to engage in. I also taught that apologetics is not only something we do but also a *posture* that we have. Peter teaches that our posture is to be gentle and respectful. From the exegesis of 1 Peter 3:15, I gave the class the following definition of apologetics: "Apologetics is the church's gentle, respectful, and reasonable defense of the hope we have in Jesus Christ." I added that cultural apologetics would then simply be "the church's gentle, respectful, and reasonable defense of the hope we have in Jesus Christ *in our particular cultural moment.*"

The last section of session 1 included a study of Acts 17. The class studied Paul's interaction with the Areopagus in Athens and noticed similarities between what Paul did in Athens and what Peter taught in 1 Peter 3:15. I showed how Paul set apart Christ as Lord, reasoned with the philosophers, was prepared to give a reason for his hope, showed great respect to the Athenians and humility in his presentation of the gospel yet still gave a very high degree of challenge that was centered on the gospel of Jesus Christ. After this discussion, I assigned and explained the upcoming week's homework and dismissed the class.

Session 2: A Model for Engaging in Cultural Apologetics

In this session, I built out a model of engaging unbelievers that utilized the truths of 1 Peter 3:15 and was reflective of Paul's interaction with the Athenians in Acts 17. The goal of this session was to give participants a model of apologetic engagement that would help them have conversations with non-Christians who have questions or concerns or are hostile to Christianity. This model of engagement consisted of three parts: (1) "Know *The* Story," (2) "Know *Their* Stories," and (3) "Tell a Better Story."

Under the heading "Know *The* Story," I explained what a worldview is, how everyone has one, and why it is important to engage unbelievers on this level. I explained how a worldview can be expressed or understood as the story or metanarrative from which we are able to make sense of the world and our lives within it. I interacted with several of the worldview options available today and showed how the single most determinative question for the shaping of one's worldview is whether one believes that God does or does not exist. I taught that the Christian worldview, at its most basic level, is the biblical story of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. This story is *The*—par excellence—story of everything. A Christian must know this story if he or she is to be able to defend the Christian faith with gentleness and respect. Finally, I explained that a primary goal of Christian apologetics is to convince unbelievers that the Christian

worldview is the best worldview available, for it best corresponds to reality, satisfies our deepest longings, and demonstrably leads to flourishing.

Under the heading “Know *Their* Stories,” I spent time reminding my students that when we engage in apologetics with unbelievers, we are engaging with human beings who are made in the image of God and who each have a unique story that should be appreciated and, if possible, drawn out. Christians should ask good and thoughtful questions of the people whom they interact with and take a genuine interest in them. And if the Lord gives opportunity, then Christians should seek to build friendships with the unbelievers whom God brings into their lives. Additionally, during this section of the class, I engaged more deeply the various worldviews or stories (both macro and micro narratives) that many people hold to today.

Under the heading of “Tell a Better Story,” I taught that once Christians have listened for the stories of the individual with whom they are speaking, they are now in a position to tell that person a better story—the Christian story. I explained that there are two primary movements required to do this: leading them (1) out of their stories and (2) into a better one. To lead someone out of their story, a Christian should look for places within the unbeliever’s various narratives that can be affirmed, like Paul does in Acts 17. Additionally, a Christian must also thoughtfully consider the place where he or she needs to explain to the unbeliever how the unbeliever’s assumptions or beliefs on a given topic are ultimately unlivable, overly simplistic, or do not achieve the result that the unbeliever might think—in other words, how those assumptions or beliefs ultimately do not work. Finally, I taught the class how to lead an unbeliever into a better story. I explained that to do this, a Christian must seek to demonstrate how the non-Christian is unknowingly relying upon the Christian worldview as well as show how the Christian worldview makes better sense of the world and much of the internal framework of desires and impulses that exist within every human being—impulses like morality, seeking meaning

and purpose, to worship, to be drawn to beauty, to hope, and to love. At the end of this class, I assigned and explained the upcoming week's homework and dismissed the class.

Session 3: Christianity Is Too Rigid

In this session, I sought to equip students how to engage with an unbeliever who accuses Christianity of being a straitjacket and Christians of being too narrowminded. To do this, I explained the roots of relativism and how we got to our postmodern moment. I also defined fundamentalism and showed how, at the end of the day, every human on earth is a fundamentalist—that is, every human on earth strictly adheres to the basic principles of something, even if that something is relativism.

Throughout this session, I tackled head-on four of the primary arguments my students might encounter from one who believes that Christianity is too rigid. The first is the idea that every religion is ultimately true. I countered this claim by showing how many religions or cults are demonstrably worse than others, so this claim is false on the face of it. I also showed how all religions do not teach essentially the same thing and how they all have radical divergent ideas on what it means to be a good person, how to be “saved,” and who or what God is.

The second argument is the notion that every religion is wrong because every religion is essentially a geographical accident. That is, people believe what they believe because of the culture in which they grew up. I countered this argument by showing how this argument falls on its own sword. If all ideas about truth are socially constructed, then so is the relativist's idea about truth. Thus, why should we listen to it? I taught the class that the sociology of knowledge humbles us by helping us recognize that none of our beliefs arise in a vacuum; therefore, we should pursue truth humbly while trying to recognize our own biases.

The third argument is that every religion is blind. In other words, every religion can only see a part of the truth; therefore, religious people should not claim that

they see all of the truth. I countered this claim by simply highlighting the fact that relativists who make this claim are ironically arguing that there is such a thing as absolute truth and that they know exactly what it is. They show themselves to be fundamentalists because they believe they can see the whole truth while all of the other world's religions can only grasp a part of the truth. Additionally, relativists show themselves to be fundamentalists in that they sincerely believe and proclaim that the world would be a better place if everyone adopted their version of the truth.

The final argument is that every religion should keep to itself and not seek to convert others or tell someone that their "truth" is wrong. I countered this argument by simply pointing out its inconsistency and the implicit double standard at work. If relativists say it is wrong to tell others they are wrong, then relativists are literally telling other people their beliefs are wrong. Furthermore, it is clear that relativists themselves are trying to get Christians and other religiously minded people to convert to their way of thinking and living.

I ended by showing how relativists are themselves fundamentalists and that is because every human is a fundamentalist. Then, I taught that the problem with the world is not fundamentalism per se, but that people hold to the wrong fundamental. If one's fundamental truth is that God became a man and came to earth in order to save his enemies, a God who thought it better to die an excruciating death in order that others might live and who, though he was a king, got down on his hands and knees and washed his friends' feet, then that person has a fundamental that is humble, tolerant, peaceful, loving, and can change the world for the better. At the end of this class, I assigned and explained the upcoming week's homework and dismissed the class.

Session 4: Christianity Is Too Racist

The claim I addressed in session 4 was that Christianity has contributed to racism and the oppression of persons of color; therefore, Christianity has not been and is

not good for the world. In this session, I walked my class through six ways they could respond to this claim.

The first response is that they should acknowledge upfront how throughout history Christians have been perpetrators of racism and oppression against people of color. This is a sad reality that Christians must admit is true. However, it does not tell the whole story.

The second response is to show how Christianity has produced the world's greatest advocates for justice and equality. Here, I explained that the individuals and groups who did the most to stop racism and racist practices were Christians, such as the apostle Paul, Gregory of Nyssa, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century abolitionists, American Quakers, and leaders of the Civil Rights Movement like the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. Without Christianity's influence on these individuals and groups, these movements and changes would not have happened. This is a matter of historical record.

The third response is to show how Christianity has contributed to the cultural framework of the West that views racism and oppression as a problem. In other words, the reason why—generally speaking—most Americans have a problem with racism and mistreating people of color is because Christianity has had such an influence upon American culture that this value is simply assumed. In this section, I showed how present-day non-Western countries do not have this idea as a cultural value. I also showed how the civilizations that existed before Christianity took root within them did not have this idea as a cultural value either. Thus, the best way to push back against racism or the oppression of people of color is not to lose the resources of Christianity but to use the resources of Christianity to do so. Furthermore, when Christians err in regard to racism, the best way to critique them and bring them back into righteous living is by using the Word of God, which calls Christians to love and embrace the inherent value of every person made in the image of God.

The fourth response is to show how Christianity's founder was oppressed and died to set the oppressed free. Therefore, any claim that Christianity is a religion of oppression has to be squared with the life and the teachings of the one upon whom the entire religion was built—Jesus Christ. I taught the students that in their conversations with skeptics, they need to help them take their focus off of Christians and place it onto Christ, for Christ is the one who is making a claim upon their soul—not Christians who have gotten it wrong on race.

The fifth response is to show how Christianity is the most diverse belief system in the entire world. I showed the class that there are twice as many African Christians as North American Christians, twice as many Latin and Caribbean Christians as North American Christians, roughly the same amount of Christians in Asia as there are in North America, and roughly the same amount of Christians in Europe, Africa, and Latin America, with a rapidly growing church in Asia. All of this proves that Christianity truly is the most diverse belief system in the world.

The sixth response I addressed with the class is to help them think through why it is that the church has taken part in the oppression of people of color historically. My answer to this question was twofold. First, perhaps many of these so-called Christians were not Christians at all. Second, it is important to always remember that Jesus came to save bad people, even racist people. Of course, Jesus is not okay with his people being racist, but he is patient with his people. And over time, those who truly belong to Jesus change and grow into a little bit better representation of the one they follow. At the end of this class, I assigned and explained the upcoming week's homework and dismissed the class.

Session 5: Christianity Is Too Repressive: The Sexual Revolution

In this session, I addressed the claim that Christianity is bad for people because it is sexually repressive. In other words, Christianity is sexually prohibitive and

unnecessarily limits people's freedom to explore, experiment, and enjoy sexual pleasure in any way one sees fit. I spent 25 percent of this session explaining historically how our culture has arrived at this cultural assumption. I interacted with Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Romantics, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Wilhelm Reich, and Hugh Hefner. I also gave the class a crash course on Charles Taylor's concept of the "social imaginary."

I taught my class to respond to the claim that Christianity is too sexually repressive by showing them how it was the sexual revolution itself that has ironically repressed our society's sexual health. I did this in five ways. First, I presented how pornography is a direct result of the sexual revolution and how pornography has definitively harmed society.

Second, I argued how the sexual revolution has hurt women. An entire generation of men learned about sex and female sexuality through the prism of pornography. From here, one can draw a straight line to the #metoo movement. The porn industry and the teaching of the sexual revolution made American women writ large into sex objects. The sexual revolution created modern-day hook up culture, where there is only sex and no commitment and which overwhelmingly benefits men and not women. Additionally, I taught that the way the birth control pill and abortion have functioned in our society has been to free men from any consequences of their sexual behavior with women and to place the burden of getting pregnant, getting an abortion, or raising a child squarely upon the shoulders of women. Finally, I showed how the sexual revolution has dismantled a proper view of what it means to be a woman.

Third, I taught how the sexual revolution has harmed children by showing that ever since the sexual revolution began, there has been a dramatic increase in divorces, out-of-wedlock pregnancies, single-parent households, and cohabitating households. I explained why this is a terrible problem by pointing out that the vast majority of people who are homeless, inhabit our nation's prisons, commit suicide, and drop out of high

school are people who grew up in broken families. I also showed how broken families have created an epidemic of sadness, depression, and anxiety for our nation's children. The sexual revolution is the reason for the destruction of the family.

Fourth, I argued that the sexual revolution has harmed men. It has done this by the fact that a great many men have been and are absolutely enslaved to pornography, which has all sorts of negatives outcomes in their lives. The sexual revolution has also hurt men by the fact that a great number of men today have grown up without their father as a result of its insistence that sex can be had without any strings attached and no commitments. This reality is the underlying cause of why so many men are in prison, addicted to drugs, homeless, have had poor educational outcomes, and the like. Finally, the sexual revolution has hurt men by eroding the biblical vision of manhood and replacing it with either a chauvinistic manhood or a fragile or pathetic caricature of manhood.

Fifth, I showed my class how Christianity gives the world a better sexuality and a better sexual ethic and how it is truly good for human sexual flourishing. At the end of this class, I assigned and explained the upcoming week's homework and dismissed the class.

Session 6: Christianity Is Too Repressive: Transgender Ideology

In this session, I addressed the claim that Christianity is repressive or oppressive because Christians do not affirm transgender people's gender identity when it differs from their biological sex. I took some time upfront to define terms, unpack the various approaches to the problem and current standards of care, and help my students get a general a lay of the land with this particularly complex topic. After this, I unpacked four ways to respond to those who would make the claim stated above.

The first response is to show how transgender ideology is bad for those who have gender dysphoria. I taught my class how gender dysphoria is a real disorder and

should awaken in our hearts our deepest sympathy. Christians, above all people, should care for these suffering souls. And because that is the case, I argue that the best way to care for people with gender dysphoria is to affirm what is true—that their gender is their biological sex. The worst way to care for someone with gender dysphoria is to affirm what is not true—a gender identity that is not connected to one’s biological sex.

The second response is to show how transgender ideology is harming children. With this response, I showed how gender clinic referrals have skyrocketed in fifteen years to a tune of 6500 percent. I also showed how the growth rate of transgender individuals among the population is primarily located within the bracket of 13 to 24 year olds. Additionally, I showed how progressive cities compared to more conservative areas of the country have a far higher percentage of trans youth coming out. Furthermore, I unpacked two studies that analyzed data consisting of children and teenagers who started gender-affirming care. These studies revealed that there were underlying mental health concerns that were not addressed and that patients were rushed to medical intervention before addressing those issues. I also cited testimonies from detransitioners who regret the gender transition they made as children or young adults. From all of this, I showed how our nation’s children have been targeted to be the guinea pigs of an ideology that they are in no way mature enough to decide to participate in and how, as a result, they are suffering greatly.

The third response is to show how transgender ideology is bad for women. I showed this by highlighting how women’s sports have been affected by transgender ideology in that men are now able to compete against women in school athletic competitions, often stealing titles, trophies, and scholarships that girls and women would have otherwise received. I also showed how transgender ideology is bad for women by discussing how it has put women’s safety and sense of safety in jeopardy by allowing biological men to be in women-only spaces such as locker rooms, bathrooms, and women’s prisons.

The fourth response is that from a biblical and natural law perspective, gender is true, gender is good, and gender is beautiful. At the end of this class, I assigned and explained the upcoming week's homework and dismissed the class.

Session 7: Christianity Is Too Repressive: Homosexuality

In this session, I addressed the claim that Christianity is repressive because it teaches that homosexuality is wrong and because it rejects gay marriage. In order to do this, I spent some time unpacking the liberal Christian argument for same-sex marriage and then dismantling this argument from Scripture. I showed from the Bible how homosexuality is wrong. However, I also spent time discussing what some in the evangelical community have gotten wrong on the issue of homosexuality, namely, that many evangelicals are not in any type of relationship with homosexual men or women, that evangelicals have not properly distinguished same-sex attraction from homosexual behavior, and that evangelicals have singled out homosexuality as a sin that is worse than other sins.

I also unpacked some of the main secular arguments for why homosexual marriage is a net good for society, such as the idea that people should be able to love whomever they want, the health benefits garnered by same-sex married couples, and the notion that vulnerable children can have a safe home with homosexual married couples. I spent time engaging each of these arguments and explaining why they ultimately do not work and why, therefore, homosexual marriage is actually a net loss or negative for society. I showed how homosexual marriage is repressive because it redefines what marriage has always meant and turns it into a state-recognized romance, which means it serves no other purpose than to affirm an individual's romantic interest, and as a result of this redefinition, children and society suffer. I ended this session by laying out the Christian view of marriage and how this view of marriage is liberating and leads to true human flourishing for all.

As I ended session 7, the entire class erupted in applause, which was a huge surprise to me. A participant of the class brought my wife on stage with me, and speaking on behalf of the class, she shared with Lauren and me how thankful the class was for my apologetics course. The class gave us a gift and blessed our hearts greatly. I officially ended the session by assigning to the class participants the post-course survey as homework with a completion deadline of one week. Thus ended my apologetics course!

Conclusion

This chapter unpacked how I prepared, developed, and implemented my project with the express purpose of equipping the members of Summit Church in Naples, Florida, to engage in cultural apologetics with gentleness and respect so that they would have greater confidence and success in befriending and sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with non-Christians. The next chapter will evaluate the project's effectiveness.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

In this chapter, I will evaluate whether this project fulfilled its purpose and met the goals originally stated in chapter 1. I will also analyze the project's strengths and weaknesses. Finally, I will share some theological and personal reflections.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of my project was to equip the members of Summit Church in Naples, Florida, to engage in cultural apologetics with gentleness and respect so that they would have greater confidence and success in befriending and sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with non-Christians. The need for my project's purpose arose as a result of the data collected from the 2020 missional living survey conducted at my church, which showed that 30 percent of our members or attenders had not meaningfully engaged with a non-believer. I concluded that one of the reasons for this lack of engagement was that many congregants did not have the confidence to engage unbelievers due to the perplexing apologetic issues of our cultural moment. Thus, I set out to help my congregants grow in their confidence in befriending and sharing the gospel with non-Christians by equipping them in apologetics.

In chapter 2, I laid out the biblical warrant for this project, spending considerable time interacting with 1 Peter 3:15 and Acts 17. In chapter 3, I laid out the model of apologetic engagement with which I equipped my class participants so as to help them have greater confidence and success in befriending and sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with non-Christians. In chapter 4, I discussed how I implemented this project

in my church. Overall, I believe that I successfully fulfilled my project's purpose. To show this, I need to turn now to an evaluation of my project's goals.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

Goal 1

The first goal of my project was to assess the current level of understanding of contemporary cultural apologetic issues that are facing the church among a group of volunteer participants made up of members and attenders of Summit Church. In order to accomplish this goal, I created a Cultural Apologetics Survey (pre-course survey) for my class participants to take, which would show me their understanding of current cultural apologetic issues facing the church (see appendix 1). This survey asked general demographic questions about each participant as well as questions concerning each participant's desire, willingness, and confidence to interact with, share the gospel with, or answer the objections of unbelievers—specifically, unbelievers from the LGBTQ+ camp and political adversaries. I focused on these two categories of unbelievers because of the political tribalism of our day, which has led many Christians to mark unbelievers who fit into these camps as their enemies, causing them to avoid interaction with such people. My desire was that by the end of my course, my class participants would become more compassionate toward these groups and also more confident to share their faith and answer potential objections. This goal was successfully accomplished on April 13, 2023, the first night of my apologetics class, when I had my class participants complete the pre-course survey online. Out of the one hundred people who showed up that night, eighty-nine of them completed this survey.

Goal 2

The second goal of my project was to develop a seven-session curriculum that would equip participants to understand the contemporary cultural apologetic issues facing the church and how to engage these issues effectively and with gentleness and respect.

This goal was successfully accomplished by the start of my class for two reasons. The first reason is that I developed a course consisting of seven apologetic lessons that I would use to equip the class on current cultural issues facing the church and how to respond to such issues. The first lesson in my curriculum presented the biblical and theological basis for doing cultural apologetics. The second lesson gave the class a working model of how to engage non-believers apologetically. The rest of the lessons addressed some of the most pressing and problematic cultural issues facing the church today: postmodern relativism, the claim that Christianity is racist, homosexuality and homosexual marriage, transgender ideology, and the sexual revolution.

The second reason that my goal was accomplished is that I created an expert panel made up of three pastors who evaluated my curriculum based on a rubric that assessed my curriculum's biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability (see appendix 2). This goal would be considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded the "sufficient" level. Based on the expert panel's completion of the evaluation rubric, 94 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded the "sufficient" level, indicating the accomplishment of this goal. With this success, I moved on to implementation.

Goal 3

My third goal was to implement the curriculum in a small group setting and equip participants to defend the Christian faith with gentleness and respect. This goal would be considered successfully met when the seven-session course was completed in its entirety. Indeed, this goal was accomplished—I implemented my curriculum with a group of Summit members and attenders and completed all seven sessions of the curriculum. The first session was held on April 13, and the seventh session was held on June 4, 2023.

Yet, there was one incongruity that is worth mentioning. Whereas my third goal originally stated that I would teach the curriculum in a small group setting, I ended up teaching the curriculum in a large group setting. However, I do not believe that this means I failed to meet this goal. Instead, I believe it means that I grossly underestimated how many individuals would want to sign up for my apologetics course. I do not believe that the size of my class made a significant difference in the learning of my participants, although there is no way to be certain without teaching the same course to a smaller number of people.

Goal 4

The fourth goal of my project was to measure the effectiveness of the curriculum by assessing the participants after they have completed the course. I would do this by readministering the Cultural Apologetics Survey (post-course survey) to all of the participants in my class and then comparing the results to those of the pre-course survey. This goal would be considered successfully met when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-course survey scores of each participant.

I believe this fourth goal was partially achieved. To unpack the reason for this, I need to begin by stating that I made two significant errors when I administered both the pre- and post-course surveys. The first significant error I made was that I did not pair these surveys to each participant. The reason for this is that I misunderstood how I was to administer these surveys. I thought that “anonymous” meant not only that I would not know who completed the surveys but also that I would not have the ability to pair the results. At the time of administering the surveys, I believed that getting raw percentages based on averages would be all that was needed to see a statistical change. I now realize that I lost a significant ability to measure the growth of each of my participants because of this error.

The second significant error that I made in administering the surveys is that I did not have my participants take their post-course survey in class. I did have my participants take the pre-course survey in class, during the first class session, and of the one hundred participants present, eighty-nine took the survey. However, I did not have my participants take the post-course survey in class because I wanted to use that time expressly for teaching. So instead, I gave the post-course survey as a final homework assignment. And of the seventy participants still in my class by the end, only twenty-nine of them took the post-course survey. Thus, although the results of both surveys provided me with valuable information on statistical changes made by my course, I have to acknowledge that I lost a lot of valuable data by only having twenty-nine post-course surveys. If I had received seventy post-course survey responses, then I would have a much better picture of the impact that my project had on my class participants.

As a result of these two errors, I could not run the t-test based on paired results; instead, I had to run a t-test on unpaired samples assuming unequal variances. This does not mean that there was not useful data yielded from the survey results, only that the data was not as strong and useful as it would have been if I had conducted my surveys using paired results and had my participants take the post-course survey in class, which would have provided me with a greater number of paired samples.

Nevertheless, in spite of these errors, I can demonstrate that this goal was partly successful. There were several open-ended questions asked on the survey that generated a lot of interesting data. But for the purpose of evaluating my fourth goal, there were seven questions asked on the survey using a Likert scale in which a t-test on unpaired samples assuming unequal variances was run. This produced mixed but mostly positive results. Because I did not pair my surveys, I had to run a t-test on each question separately.

The first Likert-scale question (survey question 9) asked, “On a scale from 1-6, how willing are you to befriend a LGBTQ+ person?” The t-test for dependent samples

did not demonstrate a statistically significant difference between pre- and post-course survey scores: $t_{(59)} = -0.773, p = .221$. However, there was an overall increase in the willingness of class participants to befriend an LGBTQ+ person. The mean score of the pre-course survey was 4.93, and the mean score of the post-course survey was 5.10. I certainly hoped for a better outcome than this, though I am glad I moved the needle in the right direction. Perhaps the reason behind the limited difference is that the question I was asking was ambiguous. By this question, I was simply trying to ascertain whether class participants were willing to have a relationship with an LGBTQ+ person. It is possible however, that participants thought I was asking about whether they were willing to have a significant friendship with an LGBTQ+ person. If they perceived I was asking the latter, then perhaps they thought of Proverbs 13:20, which states, “Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.” If this was the case, then it could be a reason why people did not respond as well as I had hoped. The other consideration is that the course itself could be improved by my further highlighting the importance of building friendships with unbelievers who identify as LGBTQ+.

The second Likert-scale question (survey question 10) corresponded to the first. However, instead of asking about the participants’ willingness to befriend LGBTQ+ people, the second question asked, “In general, what word best describes what you experience internally when you interact with a LGBTQ+ person? (If you have never interacted with a LGBTQ+ person, what do you experience internally when you think about this possible interaction?)” The six possible responses that participants could have marked were (1) hate or disgust, (2) anger or anxiety, (3) indifference, (4) neutral, (5) concern, or (6) compassion. My desire was that participants would be firmly on the “concern” and “compassion” side. A t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference between pre- and post-course survey scores: $t_{(53)} = -2.325, p = .0119$. This result means that though my training only minimally increased the willingness of class participants to be friends with persons who identify as

LGBTQ+ (survey question 9), it did significantly change their posture toward them in a positive way.

The third Likert-scale question (survey question 11) asked, “On a scale from 1-6, how willing are you to be friends with a person who holds strong political views that differ from your own?” The t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-course survey scores: $t_{(87)} = -2.705, p = .004$. This result means that my training did increase the willingness of class participants to be friends with persons who hold strongly to differing political views.

The fourth Likert-scale question (survey question 12) corresponded to the third one. However, instead of asking about the participants’ willingness to befriend people who hold strongly to a differing political view, it asked, “In general, what word best describes what you experience internally when you interact with a person of a different political persuasion? (If you have never interacted with someone who is different from you politically, what do you experience internally when you think about this possible interaction?” The six possible responses that participants could have marked were (1) hate or disgust, (2) anger or anxiety, (3) indifference, (4) neutral, (5) concern, or (6) compassion. My desire was that participants would be firmly on the “concern” and “compassion” side. A t-test for dependent samples did not demonstrate a positive statistically significant difference between pre- and post-course survey scores: $t_{(49)} = -.748, p = .2287$. Although I certainly hoped for a better outcome than this, I can nevertheless demonstrate that I moved the needle in the right direction. The mean score for this question on the pre-course survey was 4.116, and the mean score on the post-course survey was 4.310. I have tried to figure out why my course did not make a greater difference in the lives of my students in this regard. I have not been able to come up with any reasons, except that my course did not adequately demonstrate God’s heart for class participants’ political rivals. This is an area where I would need to do better next time.

The fifth Likert-scale question (survey question 13) asked, “On a scale from 1-6 how confident are you in articulating your faith to non-Christians?” This question specifically targeted my project’s explicit purpose of increasing participants’ confidence in sharing their faith to non-believers. The t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-scores survey scores: $t_{(84)} = -3.300$, $p = .0007$. This results means that my training significantly increased participants’ confidence in sharing their faith to non-Christians.

The sixth Likert-scale question (survey question 14) asked, “On a scale from 1-6, how confident are you in answering the objections that non-Christians have about Christianity?” The t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-course survey scores: $t_{(71)} = -4.591$, $p < .0001$. This result means that my training significantly increased participants’ confidence in answering non-Christians’ objections to Christianity.

The seventh and final Likert-scale question (survey question 15) asked, “On a scale from 1-6, how eager are you to share the Gospel with non-Christians?” The t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-course survey scores: $t_{(62)} = -2.726$, $p = .0041$. This result means that my training significantly increased participants’ eagerness to share the gospel with non-Christians. This result encouraged me greatly because this was one of the primary motivating factors for why I created this project in the first place—I wanted the congregants of my church to engage God’s mission of reaching the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Overall, these survey results are encouraging because they show that my cultural apologetics class made a significant and positive difference in achieving my desired outcomes for my project’s purpose, which was that my class participants would have greater confidence in befriending and sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with non-Christians. However, since only five out of the seven Likert-scale survey questions

demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-course survey scores, I cannot say that my fourth goal was completely successful, only that it was partially successful. I have learned some good lessons from the implementation of this project. To those lessons, I now turn.

Strengths of the Project

My project had several strengths. First, my curriculum was thoroughly researched and included interaction with some of the best current and old thinkers from both secular and Christian perspectives on each given topic. My engagement with each topic was not superficial but deep. The participants in my class received the absolute best of what I could give them. I worked extremely hard to make sure that they would not be wasting their time if they took my course. My students were equipped to engage in cultural apologetics as a result.

Second, my lessons were not only thoroughly researched but also practical. On every topic, I gave my class participants instructions on how to respond to the claims and arguments that non-believers make against Christianity. I taught them how to turn the tables on someone, how to ask good and better questions, how to get inside someone's story, and—more importantly—how to lead them out to a better story—the Christian story. My students grew in their confidence and ability to interact with non-believers.

Third, the course was brief. As a result of the seven-week structure of the course, I had a 70-percent retention rate. I understood from other courses taught at my congregation that, generally speaking, courses that are longer than seven or eight weeks generally have a very poor retention rate. Life is busy. Work is demanding. A short course that goes deep meets the needs of my congregation much better than a longer one.

Fourth, we eliminated two significant obstacles that often keep people from coming to a class at night: we provided childcare for parents with small children who wanted to participate, and we provided food for those who would be coming straight

from work. An added benefit to providing dinner is that it created community among class participants.

Fifth, we were able to get video and audio recordings of each session and, along with the assigned homework and class notes of each session, upload them to a webpage that was specifically dedicated to my apologetics course. Doing so gave participants easy access to class assignments and homework and also kept participants caught up with the rest of the class if they had to miss any of the sessions.

Sixth and finally, out of the seven Likert-scale questions asked in the survey, five of them showed a positive statistically significant difference between pre- and post-course survey scores. For the two questions that did not show a positive statistically significant difference, they did indicate some, albeit small, growth among class participants. I am greatly encouraged by the fact that because of my training, my students feel much more confident to share their faith with non-believers, feel much more equipped to answer their objections, and are much more eager to share the gospel. Praise God.

Weaknesses of the Project

There were several weaknesses involved in my project. First, I started the project on the wrong foot by giving class participants a pre-course survey that would not be paired with their responses to the post-course survey. Second, and connected to the first, I did not have class participants complete their post-course survey in class. I did this so as to allow me more time to teach the last session. Unfortunately, because of that decision, there were far fewer post-course surveys completed. Out of the eighty-nine class participants who completed the pre-course survey, only twenty-nine completed the post course survey. Both of these mistakes together greatly reduced my ability to accurately assess the impact that my project had on my class participants.

Third, because each lesson was two hours in length and there were only seven sessions, my lectures, at multiple points, felt like a firehose of information to the participants. There were several students who told me that it was difficult at times to keep up with me because I was moving through content so fast. Fourth, and connected to the third, as a result of my content-driven lectures, there was very limited table discussion, practical exercises, and time for questions and answers. There was some time given to each of these, but not enough. There were several students who commented that they desired more class discussion. The size of the group also created an obstacle to class discussion.

Fifth, 30 percent of class participants dropped off by the end of the course. As stated earlier, I am happy overall with this result because it could have been worse. Nevertheless, 30 percent of my class decided it was not worth investing more time into it. The reasons for this could be many, such as family issues, work responsibilities, fatigue, and health issues. Some participants told me that they stopped coming to the class because they preferred watching online. Others told me that they were heading back up north because they are seasonal attenders.

Sixth and finally, seven weeks really was not enough time to fully equip my students in cultural apologetics. There was so much that I could have said and wanted to say. There were so many more topics I could have covered. There were questions that I am sure my students had that I was never able to address. I believe I made the right call on a seven-week class, but seven weeks is not enough time. My plan is to create more four-to-seven week courses in the future where I can address more topics and the questions that my congregants have on the cultural issues facing the church.

What I Would Do Differently

As I evaluate my project, I am very happy overall with the result. However, there are four specific things that I would do differently. First, I would have paired my

pre- and post-course surveys. I would have found a survey software that would have allowed me to generate a username and password for each participant so that they could sign-in again later and complete their post-course survey. Doing so would have given me a much more accurate picture of the impact my class had on my students. If I could not find a software that did this, then I would have had participants use a unique code when they took their tests so that I could have tracked and paired their responses.

Second, I would have instructed my students to complete the post-course survey in class at the end of the final class session. As a result of instructing my students to take the post-course survey at home, many of them did not take it at all. In order to make room for the survey, I would reduce my class content for that night. Another potential solution would be to find a survey software that would allow me to track who has taken and not taken the survey. If I had this information, I could have reached out to each student who had not taken the survey and asked them to take it. A little accountability goes a long way.

Third, I would have eliminated most of the open-ended questions in my survey. In their place, I would have created Likert-scale questions that tested their cultural apologetic knowledge in each area that my training would touch on. Had I done this, I would have had a way to statistically measure whether my class participants grew in their understanding of the issues.

Fourth and finally, I would have created more space for questions, table discussions, and practical exercises during each session. To do this, I would need to go through each lesson and cut out about twenty to thirty minutes of lecturing. Obviously, cutting content will remove some important information, but what good is more information if participants are less able to retain it due to a lack of meaningful interaction? Another possibility would be to lengthen each class by thirty minutes—but then childcare would become an issue because two and a half hours is a long time to watch someone's kids. Another option would be to move the classes to Saturdays.

Theological Reflections

As of this writing, approximately a month and a half has passed since I taught the last session of my course. This has given me time to reflect both theologically and personally. Theologically speaking, my apologetics course highlighted for me the importance of one's posture in defending the faith. I am convinced that one's posture is equally as important as one's grasp of any given apologetic topic. I believe that if Christians are engaging with non-Christians about transgender ideology and they do not know any of the arguments I taught them to use but do have a gentle and respectful posture during the conversation and are able to simply communicate that God made every human either male or female, then that posture will do more to convince non-believers that there might be something more to Christianity than if Christians have the right arguments in place but a poor posture. Obviously, Christians' having the right posture *and* the right arguments would be best.

I find it more and more fascinating that when the apostle Peter wrote 1 Peter 3:15, he did not put a period after he said, "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." Instead, he placed the conjunction *ἀλλὰ*, signifying that he was not finished. One cannot give a thorough defense of the faith without gentleness and respect. My hope for the American church going forward is that it will embrace the second part of 1 Peter 3:15—that we would be Christians who are gentle and respectful in all of our conversations with one another and with those outside the faith.

In addition, I have been further schooled on how much culture influences the way Christians think and interact with others. In other words, if Christians do not take great care to read the Bible regularly and, I would add, seek to learn from the insights of mature and thoughtful Christians from their culture, other cultures, and other times, than such Christians can easily find themselves uncritically being a carbon copy of the culture around them. On one level, this is, of course, unavoidable. We will all reflect our culture,

and there is nothing wrong with that. But if Christians uncritically reflect unbiblical aspects or assumptions of their culture, then that is unacceptable. For example, I was shocked to read some of the survey responses in my pre-course survey. One of the questions on my survey asked, “In as few sentences as possible, how would you respond to a non-Christian who tells you that Christianity is racist because many of the Southern slave owners were Christians and many Christian churches supported the institution of slavery?” Some of the responses consisted of statements like “I know that’s not true,” “slavery is biblical,” “cultural norms are hard to look back on,” and “there has been slavery throughout history and still applies today. Owning slaves is not the issue, but the treatment of them is.” These responses showed me that some of the members or attenders of my church are probably more influenced by conservative talks shows or media than they are from the Bible or from well-rounded, thoughtful, and mature Christian voices. In other words, it seems to me that these responses were probably a result of these respondents’ drawing from one cultural stream or existing in an echo-chamber.

Christians can be tone-deaf to the cultural issues and concerns of unbelievers around them because they are not listening to or pursuing the people whose lifestyles they disagree with or who are on the other side of their political aisle. I am not suggesting that Christians need to agree with these people, but they should care about these people profoundly. If Christians care more about their political or conservative stances than they do actual people who are lost, then this can result in an unwillingness to engage the lost gently and respectfully as was commanded by Peter and modeled by Jesus.

I believe that all of this is ultimately connected to one’s understanding of the gospel. If Christians believe that their greatest problems are their political adversaries, making America great again, or protecting their freedoms rather than their own sinful and selfish hearts, and if Christians also believe that they can fix all of these problems by some other means than the gospel of God’s grace, then such Christians will inevitably move *away from* non-Christians rather than *toward* them and will increasingly view them

with suspicion. Furthermore, if Christians forget that they themselves were once terrible enemies of God who have been dramatically saved by God’s grace in Christ, then they will inevitably become more and more self-righteous and less and less humble. They will also judge others by how closely those people align with their “values.” Not only will these Christians be less inclined to reach the lost, but the lost themselves will be even less inclined to engage with the “found.”

For these reasons and more, I believe that the American church is in desperate need of revival. In *Reappearing Church*, Mark Sayers discusses how revival often begins as a renewal movement within the church, which starts as individual Christians grow discontent with the state of the church and their own lives and cry out to God in repentance and faith. God very often responds to the pleading of his people by pouring out his presence and renewing their hearts and minds. He then sends his people back out into the world, empowered by his presence, to be ministers of the gospel and to live differently.¹ What can happen in these moments is that a renewal movement can break out beyond a single group or church and spread throughout an entire region, as is what happened during the Great Awakening. Sayers writes, “Revival is when personal renewal goes viral.”² This is the desire of my heart, and I know that I am not alone in this. The American church needs revival. Christians need personal renewal and repentance. We must contend and pray toward this end, for if God blesses us with revival, it will lead to a deeper humility, a greater understanding of our own sin, a richer appreciation for the mercy and grace of God in Christ, an enhanced ability to represent the heart of God to this world, and an eager willingness to evangelize the lost. Perhaps, it will also lead to more non-Christians asking Christians, “What is the reason for the hope that is in you?”

¹ Mark Sayers, *Reappearing Church: The Hope for Renewal in the Rise of Our Post-Christian Culture* (Chicago: Moody, 2019), 33-44.

² Sayers, *Reappearing Church*, 33.

My final theological reflection is that this course taught me how badly the church needs apologetic training. As I mentioned in the weaknesses section above, my course was too content rich and did not have enough time for interaction and questions. Nevertheless, my participants loved my class. Dozens of these participants wrote me emails and pulled me aside and told me how much they were getting out of the class and how grateful they were that I was teaching it. In fact, my class even took up a love offering for me to show me their appreciation. After I saw the post-course survey results and compared them with the pre-course survey results and recognized how one apologetics course significantly changed the way people responded, I realized that the church desperately needs this kind of equipping. May God send more laborers to this vineyard.

Personal Reflections

One of things that I personally learned from this project is that I need to reflect more seriously upon how stress and anxiety are functioning in my life. I found myself at times unable to sleep, easily agitated, and even dealing with physical symptoms stemming from anxiety during the preparation and implementation of this project. I was burning the proverbial candle at both ends for a long time. My having five kids with one of them being a one-year-old certainly did not help. This project has forced me to take a look at my anxiety—something that I have not paid much attention to before. The pressure that this project placed on my life has caused me to more adequately recognize my limitations, weaknesses, mortality, and need for Christ in every area of my life. All of these are good things! However, the pathway for me to recognize these things was difficult. Yet, I thank God for this very stressful season because I have been able to both recognize that I need help here as well as find help here. Honestly reflecting upon and seeking to change how I manage my stress *now* is much better and more fruitful than trying to pick myself up five to ten years from now when I am completely burned out or

perhaps worse—after I have a moral failing because I never adequately addressed all that was going on within my heart.

Another personal reflection I have had is how this project has made me a better pastor and communicator of God’s Word. I find myself naturally drawn to how a skeptic might respond to what I am saying and how I can say it in a way that addresses both their concern and their heart. Many members of my church throughout my DMin studies have told me how my preaching keeps getting better and better. I am really grateful for that. I can also see how God has partly designed these studies of mine to not only pursue me, show me his love, and sanctify me but also pursue others, show others his love, and sanctify others *through* me. God really does love his people. He really does love the lost. He is going after them. And wonder of all wonders, God is using me to go after and reach those whom he loves. I am greatly humbled by and deeply grateful for the privilege to participate in what God is doing in his world.

Finally, as I reflect upon the fact that I chose apologetics to be the concentration of my DMin studies, when I look at the nearly one hundred books on apologetic issues on my bookshelves, and when I consider the things I have learned from the days of the early church and how its leaders responded to the various hostilities of their surrounding culture, I truly believe God is preparing me, other Christian leaders, and his church for a time of great difficulty but also for a time of great fruit. One book that has kept coming to my mind is Alan Kreider’s *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire*. In this book, Kreider shows how early church leaders often pointed to a Christian’s *habitus*—a reflexive bodily behavior—as a way to convince skeptics that Jesus is Lord:

The sources rarely indicate that the early Christians grew in number because they won arguments; Instead, they grew because their habitual behavior (rooted in patience) was distinctive and intriguing. Their habitus . . . enabled them to address intractable problems that ordinary people faced in ways that offered hope. When challenged about their ideas, Christians pointed to their actions. They believed that their habitus, their embodied behavior, was eloquent. Their behavior said what they believed; It was in an enactment of their message. And the sources indicate that it

was their *habitus* more than their ideas that appeal to the majority of the non-Christians who came to join them.³

Along with this *habitus*, Kreider shows how the early church was patient and truly believed that Jesus was building his church in his time and in his way and that they as Christians were simply called to be faithful.

This is my desire for the church in the days ahead. I do not want us to fret if we are unable to hold onto the levers of political power or if the citizens of our country further ostracize us and relegate us to the periphery of American culture. I pray that the church in America, instead of fretting, would be patient, trusting that Jesus is building his church and that we are simply called to be faithful, and would show by our *habitus* (and apologetic engagement!) that the way of Jesus is better.

Conclusion

How do I conclude three hard years of work in only a few paragraphs? First, I would say how very grateful I am to God, my wife, and my church for giving me the opportunity to pursue this course of study. I have grown. I have learned. I look a little more like Jesus. I am a little more in tune with my weakness and limitations. I am more equipped to help others and to reach others with the truth of God's Word. I thank God for all of these things through Christ Jesus, my Lord.

It is my deep desire that this project not only would have edified and served my congregation in the past but also will continue to edify and serve it well into the future. I also sincerely desire that any future students at Southern Seminary who look at this project as an example for their own projects will be edified and find it useful within their own contexts and congregations.

I began my introduction by stating,

³ Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 2.

The call to equip Christians in apologetics goes back to the pages of the New Testament. As two thousand years of church history have come and gone, many of the challenges facing the church have changed. Some, of course, have stayed the same. Every generation of Christians, in every cultural context in which they find themselves, must learn how to engage their culture if they want non-Christians to understand the gospel. Christians must also learn how to do this with gentleness and respect if they want non-Christians to hear the gospel. This project is my attempt to equip the members of Summit Church in Naples, Florida, to engage in cultural apologetics with gentleness and respect so that we might see non-Christians hear, understand, and embrace the gospel.⁴

By God's grace and help, I have done this.

Soli Deo Gloria.

⁴ See p. 1 of this project.

APPENDIX 1

CULTURAL APOLOGETICS PRE- AND POST-COURSE SURVEYS

The following instrument is the Cultural Apologetics Survey. Part 1 gathers some basic information. Part 2 measures the participants' willingness and perceived aptitude in defending the Christian faith. Part 3 measures the participants' cultural apologetic knowledge and assesses the participants' understanding of their own worldview and the worldviews that shape our culture.

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to gage your level of comfort and confidence when engaging non-Christians in cultural apologetic encounters. This research is being conducted by Jeremiah Taylor 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 in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from this study 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 an 'X' 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. How long have you been a Christian? _____

4. To what age group do you belong?
 A. 18-24
 B. 25-34
 C. 35-44
 D. 45-54
 E. 55-64
 F. 65 and over

5. What is your gender?
- ___ A. Male
- ___ B. Female
6. How long have you been a member or attended Summit Church?
- ___ A. 0-2 years
- ___ B. 3-5 years
- ___ C. More than 5 years
7. Do you have any LGBTQ+ friends? (A friend is someone that you spend meaningful time with)
- ___ A. Yes
- ___ B. No
8. Do you have any friends who hold strong political views that differ from your own?
- ___ A. Yes
- ___ B. No

Part 2

Directions: Please circle the answer that best represents your perspective.

9. On a scale from 1-6, how willing are you to befriend a LGBTQ+ person?

| | | | | | |
|------------|-------------|------------------|------------------|---------|--------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Never Ever | Not Willing | Not Very Willing | Somewhat Willing | Willing | Very Willing |

10. In general, what word best describes what you experience internally when you interact with a LGBTQ+ person? (If you have never interacted with a LGBTQ+ person, what do you experience internally when you think about this possible interaction?)

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|------------------|--------------|---------|---------|------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Hate or Disgust | Anger or Anxiety | Indifference | Neutral | Concern | Compassion |

11. On a scale from 1-6, how willing are you to be friends with a person who holds strong political views that differ from your own?

| | | | | | |
|---------------|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------|-----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Never Ever | Not Willing | Not Very Willing | Somewhat Willing | Willing | Very Willing |

12. In general, what word best describes what you experience internally when you interact with a person of a different political persuasion? (If you have never interacted with someone who is different from you politically, what do you experience internally when you think about this possible interaction?)

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|--------------|---------|---------|------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Hate or Disgust | Anger or Anxiety | Indifference | Neutral | Concern | Compassion |

13. On a scale from 1-6 how confident are you in articulating your faith to non-Christians?

| | | | | | |
|------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Lack All Confidence | Not Confident | Not Very Confident | Somewhat Confident | Confident | Very Confident |

14. On a scale from 1-6, how confident are you in answering the objections that non-Christians have about Christianity?

| | | | | | |
|------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Lack All Confidence | Not Confident | Not Very Confident | Somewhat Confident | Confident | Very Confident |

15. On a scale from 1-6, how eager are you to share the Gospel with non-Christians?

| | | | | | |
|---------------|--------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------|------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Never Ever | Not Eager | Not Very Eager | Somewhat Eager | Eager | Very Eager |

Part 3

16. What is apologetics?

17. What is *cultural* apologetics?

18. What is a Worldview?

19. What are the predominant worldviews that an average American might have today?

20. What posture should a Christian have when engaging apologetically (defending the Christian faith) with non-Christians?

21. What are some basic steps a Christian can take in order to show a non-Christian the superiority of the Christian worldview?

22. In as few sentences as possible, how would you respond to a non-Christian who tells you that Christianity is racist because many of the Southern slave owners were Christians and many Christian churches supported the institution of slavery?

23. In as few sentences as possible, how would you respond to a non-Christian who tells you that Christianity is sexually repressive because it tries to limit people's freedom to explore, experiment, and enjoy sexual pleasure in any way one sees fit?

24. In as few sentences as possible, how would you respond to a non-Christian who tells you that Christianity is sexually oppressive and mean because it does not support Gay Marriage?

25. In as few sentences as possible, how would you respond to a non-Christian who tells you that Christianity is sexually repressive and mean because it does not affirm a transgender person's gender identity?

26. In as few sentences as possible, how would you respond to a non-Christian who tells you that all religions are equally valid, boil down to “love,” and thus, it is arrogant and wrong to insist that Christianity is superior to other religions or any person’s view of spirituality?

APPENDIX 2

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

| Curriculum Evaluation Tool | | | | | |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------|
| 1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary | | | | | |
| Criteria | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Comments |
| Biblical Accuracy | | | | | |
| Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture. | | | | | |
| Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible. | | | | | |
| Scope | | | | | |
| The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address. | | | | | |
| The curriculum sufficiently covers a biblical pedagogical methodology. | | | | | |
| Pedagogy | | | | | |
| Each lesson was clear, containing a big idea. | | | | | |
| Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material. | | | | | |
| Practicality | | | | | |
| The curriculum adequately teaches participants how to engage in cultural apologetics with gentleness and respect | | | | | |
| At the end of the course, participants will be able to better engage in cultural apologetics. | | | | | |

APPENDIX 3
MISSIONAL LIVING SURVEY RESULTS

Summit Church conducted the “Missional Living Survey” in 2020.¹ Those results are captured in the “Summit Survey Results” included on the next page. See also the “Things to Take Away from Survey” on the page after that.

¹ Ryan S. Kozey, “Missional Living Survey,” Summit Church, 2020, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55d49a3ce4b0e7c6d40b18c3/t/64b55cca1484773364f6dcfe/1689607372731/2020+Missional+Living+Survey.pdf>.

Summit Survey Results | Ryan Kozey
08.05.2020

1. Average age: 42 years old.
- Ability to mobilize people to risk or innovate is high.
2. Average person: 1995 conversion
- Recency of conversion. How are they getting saved and what does that look like?
3. Average attendance (4 yrs. is national average).
- 4.6 years is what we have (Are they are for consumption or mission?)
4. Doctrine – 80% are post conversion baptized and 90% believe in Lausanne covenant
5. Sunday – Feel challenged, formed and love it in general, but not moving them towards mission
- Mission disconnect – (5.7/10) – Average is 5.4
6. Small Groups – 52% involvement (40% national average)
- Mission disconnect (0, 0, 0)
7. Service – 36% of our people are serving in the church or community (37.5% average)
8. Monday – Saturday
- Bible – 3.8 times per week outside of Sunday morning
- Story - Confidence in sharing Christ (7/10) – We have some work to do in the articulation of grace story
- Gifts – What are they are how are you using them – (6.4/10)
- Love/Serve – Equipping to love and serve (8.2/10)
9. Presence – Ability to build relationships intentionally – 2
10. Proclamation – Sharing the Gospel – 2
11. Conversion – seeing people come to Christ – 0
- 13% conversion growth at Summit

Things to Take Away from Survey:

- 1) Avg Age Church- 42 (has gone up steadily since 2012 when first surveyed- was 36 then)
- 2) Avg person gave their life to Christ in 1995 (17 yrs old)
- 3) Avg Duration of Attendance (4.6 years)
- 4) Doctrine- Tight and Right (Trinity, Exclusivity of Christ, Bible Authoritative, Jesus can forgive all sin, Assuredness of salvation)
- 5) Sunday Morning- People like Sunday morning, and enjoy what they take from it. However, there is no correlation between what they enjoy about Sunday morning and an increased sense of sharing the gospel because of it.
- 6) Small Groups- 52% involvement overall- great number for a church of size. People are self-reporting spiritual formation through them and that they enjoy them. However, there is no demonstration that small groups are indicators of greater missional engagement right now.
- 7) Service- 36% service from people serving in the church or in the community- Average for a church of size. People are self-reporting they are being spiritually formed and enjoy what they are doing. However, there is no demonstration that service shows a greater level of missional engagement (PPC)
- 8) Personal Formation
 - a. Bible reading at 3.8 times/week
 - b. People are reporting an average level of confidence to share their story with those who don't know Christ (7/10)
 - c. People are not reporting a high response of confidence when it comes to knowing what their gifts are and using them (6.4/10)
 - d. People are self-reporting that they feel highly equipped to love and serve people in the community (8.2/10)
- 9) PPC
 - a. Presence 2 (Assume 30% of total Pop 0)
 - b. Proclamation 2 (Assume 30% of total Pop 0)
 - c. Conversion 0 (Assume 75% of total Pop 0)

Questions:

- 1) People truly enjoy what you have been able/blessed to create here. But why is it that, for the big middle of people, we don't see an increase in concern for PPC?
- 2) Average confidence in sharing their story; No confidence with gifts and using them- what can be done from leadership to help to change this?
- 3) People feel highly equipped to love and serve people in the community- are there a lot of key outlets where that can clearly channel that for good?
- 4) 800 people at 0 Presence; 800 people at 0 proclamation; 1900 people at 0 conversion- Do you think about how those numbers could/should be shaping your strategy

APPENDIX 4

CULTURAL APOLOGETICS COURSE OUTLINE

What follows is the outline for the Cultural Apologetics course I taught during this project.

SESSION 1:
WHAT IS APOLOGETICS?

I. WHY A COURSE ON APOLOGETICS?

Key Passage: ...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 (1 Pet. 3:15).

THE BACKGROUND OF 1 PETER:

- Sporadic *persecution* was happening in certain parts of the empire.
- The word "*suffering*" appears 16 times.
- Major Theme: Christians will suffer for their *commitment* to Jesus Christ.
- Key Question: How can Christian's *flourish* in a culture set against Christianity?

Outcome: Christians will flourish when they *trust* in God, *hope* in his promises, and faithfully *represent* him to an unbelieving world.

TABLE DISCUSSION:

- **Read:** 1 Peter 3:13-17
- **Answer:** What are some of the truths, key terms, or themes that you see in this passage that will help us unpack what apologetics is?

II. WHAT IS APOLOGETICS?

THE CONTEXT OF 1 PETER:

- *[13] Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? [14] But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled... (1 Pet. 3:13-14).*
- *Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul (1 Pet. 2:11).*
- *[1] Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, [2] so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God (1 Pet. 4:1-2).*
- *[12] Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. [13] But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. [14] If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you (1 Pet. 4:12–14).*

- Peter shows us that he is not just interested in how Christians respond to suffering; he is also interested in how non-Christians respond to Christians who are suffering.
 - Suffering = Opportunity to tell others about our hope.

1. KEY TERM: DEFENSE

2. KEY TERM: REASON

- *“The exhortation here is instructive, for Peter assumed that believers have solid intellectual grounds for believing the gospel. The truth of the gospel is a public truth that can be defended in the public arena. This does not mean, of course, that every Christian is to be a highly skilled apologist for the faith. It does mean that every believer should grasp the essentials of the faith and should have the ability to explain to others why they think the Christian faith is true” (Tom Schreiner).*

3. KEY TERM: HOPE

- *He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God (1 Peter 1:20-21).*

4. KEY TERM: YOU

TABLE DISCUSSION:

- **Read:** Acts 2:22-36
- **Answer:** What is the reason for Peter’s hope?

- **Question:** What type of posture should Christians have when defending their faith?

- “If we get together, they cannot cancel us all. OK? They won’t...And this will be contrary to a lot of our beliefs because—I’d love not to have to participate in cancel culture. I’d love that it didn’t exist. But as long as it does, folks, we better be playing the same game. OK? We’ve been playing T-ball for half a century while they’re playing hardball and cheating. Right? We’ve turned the other cheek, and I understand, sort of, the biblical reference—I understand the mentality—but it’s gotten us nothing. OK? It’s gotten us nothing while we’ve ceded ground in every major institution in our country” (Donald Trump Jr.).

5. KEY TERM: GENTLENESS

- “the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one’s self-importance, *gentleness, humility, courtesy, considerateness, meekness.*”
 - “*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls*” (Matt. 11:28-29).

- *A bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench (Isa. 42:3).*
 - “Gentleness or meekness is the opposite to self-assertiveness and self-interest. It stems from trust in God’s goodness and control over the situation. The gentle person is not occupied with self at all. This is a work of the Holy Spirit, not of the human will (Gal. 5:23)” (Strong’s Enhanced Lexicon).
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6. KEY TERM: RESPECT

- “It seems unlikely that he [Peter] is now reversing this to ask that we fear man, even in a lesser degree. Rather, Peter is teaching us that it is our fear of the Lord that enables us to bear witness in humility” (Edmund Clowney).
- “Gentleness should be shown toward the antagonists and respect emphatically toward God (otherwise we would have a sharp contradiction with 3:14)” (Howard Marshall).
- “...the phrase ‘with humility and respect’ qualifies the manner in which the explanation for Christian hope is to be offered, and therefore *phobou* (fear), like humility, refers to an attitude toward others that is rooted in one’s attitude toward God” (Karen Jobes).
 - *Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust (1 Pet. 2:18).*

- *Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct (1 Pet. 3:1-2).*
- *Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed (Rom. 13:7).*
- *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves (Phil. 2:3).*
- **Question:** Why is a posture of gentleness and respect critically important as we defend the faith?

- *A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver (Prov. 25:11).*
- *A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion (Prov. 18:2).*
- *When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent. The tongue of the righteous is choice silver; the heart of the wicked is of little worth. The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of sense (Prov. 10:19-21).*

DEFINING APOLOGETICS:

- What is apologetics? The church's gentle, respectful, and reasonable defense of the hope we have in Jesus Christ.

- What is cultural apologetics? The church’s gentle, respectful, and reasonable defense of the hope we have in Jesus Christ in our particular cultural moment.

TABLE DISCUSSION:

- **Read:** Acts 17:16-34
- **Answer:** How does Paul put into practice the principals of 1 Peter 3:15 as he stands before the council at the Areopagus?

1. In a city of idols and idolators, Paul set apart Jesus Christ as Lord.
 - “Paul would have seen statues to Greek and Roman deities as well as to the deified emperors Augustus and Claudius” (McRay).
 - “Petronius, the Roman satirist, remarked ‘it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens (Petronius Sat. 17).”
2. Paul reasons with the Athenians (v. 17)
3. Paul was prepared when he was asked to give a reason for his hope (vv. 19-20).
4. Paul shows respect by beginning his address by giving the Athenians a compliment (v. 22).
5. Paul shows respect for the Athenian culture by seeking to understand it (v. 23).

6. Paul showed gentleness and humility in his presentation of the gospel.
7. Paul demonstrates that one can defend the Christian faith with gentleness and respect, while also bringing a considerably high degree of challenge to the unbelievers listening (vv. 24-31).
 - *“Merely having an open mind is nothing. The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid”* (G.K Chesterton).

Paul is telling the Athenians to shut their minds upon the gospel. He gives them three reasons why:

1. Because the gospel is true. This has been Paul’s argument all along.
2. Because the Creator God, who commands all to repent, “has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed” (v. 31a).
3. Because God has given assurance of all this by raising that man from the dead (v. 31b).

UPCOMING CLASS SCHEDULE:

- April 13 - Session 1: What is Apologetics?
- April 20 - Session 2: A Model of Engagement
- April 27 - Session 3: Claim: Christianity is too Rigid
- May 4 - Session 4: Claim: Christianity is too Racist
- May 11 - Session 5: Claim: Christianity is too Repressive (Part 1)
- May 18 – No Class

- May 25 - Session 6: Claim: Christianity is too Repressive (Part 2)
- June 1 - Session 7: Claim: Christianity is too Ridiculous

HOMEWORK:

1. Read chapter 5 of *"Telling a Better Story,"* by Joshua Chatraw (*please read for understanding*).
2. Read *either* chapter 6, 7, or 8 (*just read one of these chapters. You pick which one*).

SESSION 2:

A MODEL OF ENGAGEMENT

I. KNOW THE STORY

- “A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being” (James Sire).
 - **Metanarrative:** an *overarching* account or interpretation of events and circumstances that provides a *pattern* or structure for people’s *beliefs* and gives *meaning* to their experiences (Oxford Dictionary).
 - **James Sire (2004):** Christian Theism, Deism, Naturalism, Nihilism, Existentialism, Eastern Pantheistic Monism, New Ageism, and Postmodernism.
 - **Joshua Chatraw (2020):** The pessimistic secular story, the optimistic secular story, the pluralistic and moral therapeutic spirituality story, and the Christian Story
 - “When I believe in God, my way of thinking about the world is bound to undergo significant change. The shape of the lens is transformed not simply because a particular belief has been added to the noetic stock but also because this belief impinges upon other regions of the noetic structure. In that sense it may be more helpful to think of this belief in God not simply as one belief among many but rather as some kind of “control belief” since it asserts a control over a vast number of other beliefs. A control belief greatly influences what kind of questions I will ask and be interested in asking; it begins to shape my priorities and govern my behavior in certain ways” (Richard Lints).
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3 MAIN QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN EVALUATING WORLDVIEWS:

1. Does this worldview correspond to *reality*?
2. Does this worldview satisfy my deepest *longings* and provide a satisfactory *answer* to why I have them?
3. Does this worldview demonstrably lead to *flourishing*?

The Christian worldview answers the following questions:

- How did we get *here*?
- What went *wrong*?
- How is what went wrong *fixed*?
- Where is everything *headed*?

1. CREATION: Where did everything come from?

- *God* alone made everything. And when he made everything, he made it *ex nihilo*—that is, out of nothing.

- When God originally created our world and made humanity, he created it “very good.”
 - Humans were made in the image of God.
 - God’s word provides the structure and the order of the cosmos.
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- “God’s creative word is the source of the laws of *physical* nature, which we study in the natural sciences. It is also the source of the laws of *human* nature—the principles of morality (ethics), of justice (politics), of creative enterprise (economics), of aesthetics (the arts), and even of clear thinking (logic)” (Nancy Pearcey).

2. FALL: What went wrong?

- Consequences of Adam and Eve’s Sin:
 - Humanity’s union with God was severed.
 - Humanity became enslaved to the Devil (Eph 2:2) and to their sin (Rom 7:14).
 - Humanity’s union with each other was severed.
 - Humanity’s union with the earth was severed.
 - Disease and death would affect all mankind (Rom 6:23).

3. REDEMPTION: How do we fix what went wrong?

- “To talk about a Christian Worldview is simply another way of saying that when we are redeemed, our entire outlook on life is re-centered on God and re-built on His revealed truth” (Nancy Pearcey).

4. RESTORATION: Where is everything headed?

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-
- “While other worldviews lead us to sit in the midst of life’s joys, foreseeing the coming sorrows, Christianity empowers its people to sit in the midst of this world’s sorrows, tasting the coming joy” (Tim Keller)

CONCLUSION:

- A worldview can be expressed or understood as the story or metanarrative from which we are able to make sense of the world and our lives within it.
- There are many different worldviews that a very many different people have adopted.
- The single most determinative question for the shaping of one’s worldview is whether one believes that God exists or does not exist.
- The primary goal of Christian apologetics is to convince others that the Christian worldview is the best worldview available. For it best corresponds to reality, satisfies our deepest longings, and demonstrably leads to flourishing.
- The Christian worldview at its most basic is the Biblical story of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. This story is *The*—par excellence—story of everything. A Christian must know this story if he or she would be able to defend the Christian faith with gentleness and respect.

II. KNOW THEIR STORIES

1. KNOW THEIR STORIES

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- “You’ll need... information before you know the best way to proceed in any conversation. You have no idea what you’re facing or what possibilities lie ahead until you get the lay of the land. Your initial probes, then, will be friendly, open-ended queries. The best way to start is with casual dialogue and general questions, drawing the person out by showing sincere interest in him and his ideas. If spiritual issues are not on the table yet, don't jump into them immediately. Relax and take your time. The more you let your friend talk, the more genial your interaction will be. It’s more pleasant for him, and it's less work for you. Your initial goal is to gather as much information from the other person as you can before you move on. You want him to talk as much as possible about his own convictions first. This approach gives you the best chance of ‘making the most of the opportunity’” as Paul put it in Colossians 4:5” (Koukl).

2. KNOW *THEIR* STORIES

- A human being is one who has been made in the *image* of God.
 - “There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendors” (C.S. Lewis).
 - “Take a moment to think of specific people whose ideology you disagree with most. Pick your top three. It might be a public figure, a politician, a family member, a coworker, or a neighbor. Picture someone specific who sees you as the living, breathing antithesis of everything you believe to be true and just. Picture that person, with all his or her smugness, in your mind’s eye. Now think this true thought about that person. ‘Image-bearer.’ Say it again. ‘Image-bearer.’ Once more for good measure. ‘Image-bearer.’ Next time you see that person, before your blood pressure starts to rise, repeat, ‘Image-bearer. Image-bearer. Image-bearer.’ Then treat that person as an image-bearer because that is who they were long before you found yourselves on opposite sides of a

culture war. Then, when it starts to set in how incredibly difficult it is to treat people as image-bearers for more than five minutes, pray for yourself what Paul once prayed for the Thessalonians: ‘May the Lord make [me] increase and abound in love for one another and for all’.” (Thaddeus Williams).

- We must strive to not see non-Christians as our enemy.
 - *Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:10-12).*

- Humans are complex creatures.
 - *The purpose in a man’s heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out (Prov. 20:5).*

3. KNOW THEIR STORIES

1. Metanarrative: What’s their worldview?
 - 3 Secular Metanarratives:
 - The pessimistic secular story.
 - The optimistic secular story.
 - The story of pluralistic and moral therapeutic spirituality.

- “Ultimately, we are to look inside of ourselves to listen to the unique human (or divine) spark within us and live authentic lives. God exists to help us find our true potential, feel better about ourselves, and guide us to treat others with dignity and respect. Diverse religious expressions, in their ideal forms, help us discover an inner peace and live a life that makes the world a better place” (Joshua Chatraw).

2. Micronarrative: What are they living for?

- The story of consumerism.
- The story of achievement.
- The story of romance.
- The story of self-actualization and self-fulfillment.

3. Personal Narrative: Who are they? How’d they get here?

4. Spiritual Narrative: Where is the imago-dei flexing?

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- *He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end (Eccl. 3:11).*
 - *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse (Rom. 1:18-20).*
 - *For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus (Rom. 2:14-16).*

SPIRITUAL IMPULSES:

- The Moral Impulse
 - The Meaning and Purpose Impulse
 - The Worship Impulse
 - The Hope Impulse
 - The Love Impulse
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- “I believe the simplest explanation is, there is no God. No one created the universe and no one directs our fate. This leads me to a profound realization that there probably is no heaven and no afterlife either... We have this one life to appreciate the grand design of the universe and for that, I am extremely grateful” (Stephen Hawking).
- “The Christian says, 'Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world” (C.S. Lewis).

CONCLUSION:

- We need to know the various stories that unbelievers hold to,
- We can learn this through the art of asking good questions and listening well.
- We need to listen for metanarrative.
- We need to listen for micronarrative.

- We need to listen to their personal story.
- We need to listen for spiritual impulses.
- We listen for these details so that we will be better equipped to show them—in the unique way that they need to be shown—that Christianity does a better job corresponding to reality and to their experience; a better job satisfying their deepest longings, while also providing a satisfactory answer to why they have them; and demonstrably leads to flourishing.

III. TELL A BETTER STORY

MOVEMENT 1: LEADING THEM OUT OF THEIR STORIES

1. Yes.
2. But.
3. Won't work.

- “One way to help others see their blind spots is to trace where their assumptions and beliefs ultimately lead if applied consistently. Fallen cultures often contain assumptions that make Christianity seem implausible, yet those who hold these assumptions usually haven't worked them out in their head. Those assumptions are, after all, the very air they breathe. Because of this, by asking questions and discussing the implications of certain views, we can expose these views as overly simplistic and unlivable... The goal is to enter their story to challenge it on its own terms by helping them see where it's *inconsistent* and *unlivable* in order to lay the groundwork for them to take Christianity seriously” (Joshua Chatraw).

- “My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of *just* and *unjust*? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it *unjust*? If the whole show was bad and senseless from A to Z, so to speak, why did I, who was supposed to be part of the show, find myself in such violent reaction against it? A man feels wet when he falls into water because man is not a water animal: a fish would not feel wet. Of course, I could have given up my idea of justice by saying that it was nothing but a private idea of my own. But if I did that, then my argument against God collapsed too—for the argument depended on saying that the world was really unjust, not simply that it did not happen to please my fancies. Thus in the very act of trying to prove that God did not exist—in other words, that the whole of reality was senseless—I found I was forced to assume that one part of reality—namely my idea of justice—was full of sense. Consequently atheism turns out to be too simple. If the whole universe has no meaning, we should never have found out that it has no meaning. Just as if there were no light in the universe and therefore no creatures with eyes, we should never know it was dark. *Dark* would be a word without meaning” (C.S. Lewis).

MOVEMENT 2: LEADING THEM INTO A BETTER STORY

1. Demonstrate how they are relying upon the Christian worldview.

- “That every human being possessed an equal dignity was not remotely self-evident a truth. A Roman would have laughed at it. To campaign against discrimination on the grounds of gender or sexuality, however, was to depend on large numbers of people sharing in a common assumption: that everyone

possessed an inherent worth. The origins of this principle—as Nietzsche had so contemptuously pointed out—lay not in the French Revolution, nor in the Declaration of Independence, nor in the Enlightenment, but in the Bible” (Holland).

- “In reality, Evangelicals and progressives were both recognizably bred of the same matrix. If opponents of abortion were the heirs of Macrina, who had toured the rubbish tips of Cappadocia looking for abandoned infants to rescue, then those who argued against them were likewise drawing on a deeply rooted Christian supposition: that every woman’s body was her own, and to be respected as such by every man. Supporters of gay marriage were quite as influenced by the church’s enthusiasm for monogamous fidelity as those against it were by biblical condemnations of men who slept with men. To install transgender toilets might indeed seem an affront to the Lord God, who had created male and female; but to refuse kindness to the persecuted was to offend against the most fundamental teachings of Christ. In a country as saturated in Christian assumptions as the United States, there could be no escaping their influence—even for those who imagined that they had. America's culture wars were less a war against Christianity than a civil war between Christian factions” (Holland).

2. Demonstrate how the Christian worldview makes better sense of the world.

- The Moral Impulse
- The Meaning and Purpose Impulse
- The Worship Impulse

- “Art, as we have known it, stands on the threshold of the transcendental. It points beyond this world of accidental and disconnected things to another realm, in which human life is endowed with an emotional logic that makes suffering noble and love worthwhile. Nobody who is alert to beauty, therefore, is without the concept of redemption—of a final transcendence of moral disorder into a ‘Kingdom of ends’” (Roger Scruton).
- The Hope Impulse
- The Love Impulse

CONCLUSION:

- My model of engagement has three parts: Knowing *the* Story, Knowing *their* Stories, and Tell a Better Story.
- If Christians want to defend the Christian faith with gentleness and respect, they must first know the Gospel story inside and out. They must understand that the gospel story is not just *a* story among many stories, but *the* story that explains everything. It is the story of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.
- Christians should try and build friendships with non-Christians in order to understand their meta, micro, personal, and spiritual stories, paying attention to particular plot lines, inconsistencies, and longings that the Christian worldview can better address.
- Christians must gently and respectfully show non-Christians why their non-Christian worldview won’t ultimately work and why and how the Christian worldview does a better job corresponding to reality, satisfying our deepest longings, while also providing a satisfactory answer to why we have them, and demonstrably leads to flourishing.

HOMEWORK:

- Read chapter 1 of the “*The Reason for God*” by Tim Keller.
- Complete *Apologetic Model of Engagement* practice worksheet.

SESSION 3

**CLAIM:
CHRISTIANITY IS TOO RIGID**

I. INTRODUCTION

- **Fundamentalist:** “a person who believes in the strict, literal interpretation of scripture in a religion” (Oxford Dictionary).
 - “a person who adheres strictly to the basic principles of *any* subject or discipline.”
- Outline:
 - The Roots of Relativism.
 - Arguments that relativists make.
 - Why those arguments won’t work [“yes,” “but,” “won’t work”].
 - How Christianity does a better job explaining the things that relativists think are important.

II. THE ROOTS OF RELATIVISM

- “...is usually seen as a reaction against a naïve and earnest confidence in progress, and against confidence in objective or scientific truth. In philosophy, therefore, it implies a mistrust of the *grands recits* of modernity: the large-scale justification of Western society and confidence in its progress visible in Kant, Hegel, or Marx, or arising from utopian visions of perfection achieved through evolution, social improvement, education, or the deployment of science. In its poststructuralist aspects it includes a denial of any fixed meaning, or any correspondence between language and the world, or any fixed reality or truth or fact to be the object of enquiry” (Simon Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*).

III. POSTMODERN ARGUMENTS & WHY THEY WON'T WORK

- *[3] For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. [4] For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. [5] We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ... (2 Cor. 10:3-5).*

1. EVERY RELIGION IS RIGHT

- “I maintain that every major religion of the world - Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism, Taoism, Zoroastrianism - has similar ideals of love, the same goal of benefiting humanity through spiritual practice, and the same effect of making their followers into better human beings. All religions teach moral precepts for perfecting the functions of mind, body, and speech. All teach us not to lie or steal or take others’ lives, and so on” (Tenzin Gyatso, *A Human Approach to World Peace*).
 - Some religions are demonstrable worse than others.
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- All Religions do not generally teach the same thing.
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- “Like so many of my generation I believed that, if there was a core to all religions, it was a loving God. I wanted to believe in a God of love who accepted people regardless of their beliefs and practices. I began to take courses in other major religions of the world—Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Confucianism, and Judaism. I have profited to this day from those studies. However, my explorations in other faiths proved me wrong on this particular point about the centrality of a loving God. I found no other religious text outside of the Bible that said God created the world out of love and delight. Most ancient pagan religions believed the world was created through struggles and violent battles between opposing god and supernatural forces. I turned too look more closely at Buddhism, the religion I liked best at the time. However, despite its great emphasis on selflessness and detached service to others, Buddhism did not believe in a personal God at all, and love is the action of a person...Can they look at the religious texts of the world and conclude that God is a God of love? By no means is that the dominant, ruling attribute of God as understood in any of the major faiths. I must conclude that the source of the idea that God is Love is the Bible itself” (Tim Keller).

- The position is inconsistent.
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- “The problem with this position is its inconsistency... ironically, the insistence that doctrines do not matter is really a doctrine itself. It holds a specific view of God, which is touted as superior and more enlightened than the beliefs of most major religions. So proponents of this view do the very thing they forbid in others” (Tim Keller).

2. EVERY RELIGION IS WRONG

- Sociology of Knowledge
 - The sociology of knowledge posits that all religious beliefs are believed because of the inherent plausibility structures embedded in the culture.
 - “We obtain our notions about the world originally from other human beings, and these notions continue to be plausible to us in a very large measure because others continue to affirm them” (Peter Berger, *Rumor of Angels*).
 - “One redeeming feature of sociological perspective is that relativizing analysis, in being pushed to its final consequence, bends back upon itself. The relativizers are relativized, the debunkers are debunked—indeed, relativization itself is somehow liquidated” (Peter Berger).

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- “For suppose we concede that if I had been born of Muslim parents in Morocco rather than Christian parents in Michigan, my beliefs would have been quite different. “For one thing, I probably wouldn’t believe that I was born in Michigan.” The same goes for the pluralist. Pluralism isn’t and hasn’t been widely popular in the world at large; if the pluralist had been born in Madagascar, or mid-evil France, he probably wouldn’t have been a pluralist. Does it follow that he shouldn’t be a pluralist or that his pluralist beliefs are produced in him by an unreliable belief-producing process? I doubt it” (Alvin Plantinga, *The Analytic Theist*).

 - “What follows is not, as some of the early sociologists of knowledge feared, a total paralysis of thought. Rather, it is a new freedom and flexibility in asking questions of truth” (Berger, *Rumor of Angels*).

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- *[26] From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. [27] God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. [28] For in him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:26-28).*

3. EVERY RELIGION IS BLIND

- In the famous story of the blind men and the elephant, so often quoted in the interests of religious agnosticism, the real point of the story is constantly overlooked. The story is told from the point of view of the king and his courtiers, who are not blind but can see that the blind men are unable to grasp the full reality of the elephant and are only able to get hold of part of the truth. The story is constantly told in order to neutralize the affirmations of the great religions, to suggest that they learn humility and recognize that none of them can have more than one aspect of the truth. But, of course, the real point of the story is exactly the opposite. If the king were also blind there would be no story. The story is told by the king and it is the immensely arrogant claim of ones who sees the full truth, which all the world's religions are only groping after...There is an appearance of humility in the protestation that the truth is much greater than any one of us can grasp, but if this is used to invalidate all claims to discern the truth it is in fact an arrogant claim to a kind of knowledge which is superior to the knowledge which is available to fallible human beings. We have to ask... What is the vantage ground from which you claim to be able to relativize all the absolute claims these different scriptures make?" (Leslie Newbiggin)

4. EVERY RELIGION SHOULD KEEP TO ITSELF

CONCLUSION:

- Everyone is a fundamentalist.
 - “There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship” (David Foster Wallace).
 - [36] Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” [37] Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” [38] Pilate said to him, “What is truth?” (Jhn. 18:36–38)
 - It cannot be the case that fundamentalism itself is what is wrong with this world. Rather, what matters is what one’s fundamental is.

IV. CLAIM: "A LOVING GOD WOULD NEVER SEND SOMEONE TO HELL."

1. LOVE OPPOSES EVIL AND PROTECTS WHAT IT LOVES.

- "The wrath of God is not the irritability of God. It is the love of God in friction with injustice. It is the warm, steady, patient and absolutely fair grace of God in collision with manifest selfishness" (F. Dale Bruner).

2. FORGIVENESS AND JUSTICE REQUIRE A GOD WHO JUDGES.

- "My thesis that the practice of nonviolence requires a belief in divine vengeance will be unpopular with many Christians, especially theologians in the West. To the person who is inclined to dismiss it, I suggest imagining that you are delivering a lecture in a war zone. Among your listeners are people whose cities and villages have been first plundered, then burned and leveled to the ground, whose daughters and sisters have been raped, whose fathers and brothers have had their throats slit. The topic of the lecture: a Christian attitude toward violence. The thesis: we should not retaliate since God is perfect non-coercive love. Soon you would discover that it takes the quiet of a peaceful and comfortable suburban neighborhood to come up with that idea. In a scorched land, soaked in the blood of the innocent, that idea will invariably die" (Miroslav Volf).

- *Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:19-21).*

3. GOD'S JUDGEMENT IS JUST BECAUSE HE GIVES PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANT.

- *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen (Rom. 1:18-25).*
- "The unbeliever has preferred to be by himself, without God, defying God, having God against him, and he shall have his preference. Nobody stands under the wrath of God except those who have chosen to do so. The essence of God's action in wrath is to give men what they choose, in all its implications: Nothing more, and equally nothing less. God's readiness to respect human choice to this extent may appear disconcerting and even terrifying, but it is plain that his attitude here is supremely just—and is poles apart from the wanton and irresponsible inflicting of pain which is what we mean by cruelty" (J.I. Packer).

- “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, “thy will be done,” and those to whom God says, in the end, “Thy will be done.” All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no hell” (C.S. Lewis).
 - “I willingly believe that the damned are, in one sense, successful rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the inside. I do not mean that the ghosts may not wish to come out of hell, in the vague fashion wherein an envious man ‘wishes’ to be happy: but they certainly do not will even the first preliminary stages of that self-abandonment through which alone the soul can reach any good. They enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded, and are therefore self-enslaved: Just as the blessed, forever submitting to obedience, become through all eternity more and more free” (C.S. Lewis).
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FOR FURTHER STUDY (optional):

- *The Abolition of Man* by C.S. Lewis
- *The Great Divorce* by C.S. Lewis

HOMEWORK:

- Read chapter 4 of “*Reason for God*” by Tim Keller.
- Read chapter 12 of “*Telling a Better Story*” by Joshua Chatraw.

SESSION 4

**CLAIM:
CHRISTIANITY IS TOO RACIST**

CLAIM:

“Christianity has contributed to racism and the oppression of people of color. Therefore, Christianity is not good for the world.”

I. CHRISTIANS HAVE DONE THIS

- "The war has not changed or even in the least modified our views with reference to the Scriptural lawfulness of slavery" (Rappahannock Baptist Association in Virginia, 1865).

Pro slavery arguments made by Christians pre, post, and during the Civil War:

1. BIBLICAL REASONS

- Abraham, the “father of faith,” and all the patriarchs held slaves without God’s disapproval (Gen. 21:9–10).
- Canaan, Ham’s son, was made a slave to his brothers (Gen. 9:24–27).
- The Ten Commandments mention slavery twice, showing God’s implicit acceptance of it (Ex. 20:10, 17).
- Slavery was widespread throughout the Roman world, and yet Jesus never spoke against it.
- The apostle Paul specifically commanded slaves to obey their masters (Eph. 6:5–8).
- Paul returned a runaway slave, Philemon, to his master (Philem. 12).

2. CHARITABLE AND EVANGELISTIC REASONS

- Slavery removes people from a culture that “worshipped the devil, practiced witchcraft, and sorcery” and other evils.
- Slavery brings heathens to a Christian land where they can hear the gospel. Christian masters provide religious instruction for their slaves.
- Under slavery, people are treated with kindness, as many northern visitors can attest.

- It is in slaveholders' own interest to treat their slaves well.
- Slaves are treated more benevolently than are workers in oppressive northern factories.

3. SOCIAL REASONS

- Just as women are called to play a subordinate role (Eph. 5:22; 1 Tim. 2:11–15), so slaves are stationed by God in their place.
- Slavery is God's means of protecting and providing for an inferior race (suffering the "curse of Ham" in Gen. 9:25 or even the punishment of Cain in Gen. 4:12).
- Abolition would lead to slave uprisings, bloodshed, and anarchy. Consider the mob's "rule of terror" during the French Revolution.

4. POLITICAL REASONS

- Christians are to obey civil authorities, and those authorities permit and protect slavery.
 - The church should concentrate on spiritual matters, not political ones.
 - Those who support abolition are, in James H. Thornwell's words, "atheists, socialists, communists [and] red republicans."
- "I have been so greatly disappointed with the white church and its leadership... I do not say this as one of those negative critics who can always find something wrong with the church. I say this as a minister of the gospel, who loves the church... I felt we would be supported by the white church. I felt that the white ministers, priest, and rabbis of the South would be among our strongest allies. Instead, some have been outright opponents, refusing to understand the freedom movement and misrepresenting its leaders; all too many others have been more cautious than courageous and have remained silent behind the anesthetizing security of stained-glass windows" (Martin Luther King Jr., *Letters from a Birmingham Jail*).
 - "So often the contemporary church is a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. So often it is an arch defender of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's silent—and often even vocal—sanction of things as they are" (Martin Luther King Jr., *Letters from a Birmingham Jail*).
 - "(White evangelicals) are more willing to err on the side of protecting whites from the consequences of overcorrection of our racialized society than to not provide enough correction for the racial harms done to people of color" (George Yancey, *Beyond Racial Division*).

- *“Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (Luke 12:1).*

II. CHRISTIANITY HAS PRODUCED THE WORLD’S GREATEST ADVOCATES FOR JUSTICE AND EQAULTY

1. THE APOSTLE PAUL

- *But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?” (Gal. 2:11-14)*
- *Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love’s sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus— I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to*

me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self. Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ (Phil. 1:8-20).

- “What alternatives were actually open to him? He was committed to the life, and the standards, of the new age over against the old (Col 3). But a loud protest, at that moment in social history, would have functioned simply on the level of the old age: it would have been heard only as a criticism by one part of the society (Paul, not himself a slave-owner, had nothing to lose) against another. It would, without a doubt, have done more harm than good, making life harder for Christian slaves, and drawing upon the young church exactly the wrong sort of attention from the authorities. If Paul is jailed for proclaiming another “king” (Acts 17:7), it must be clear that the kingdom in question is of a different order altogether from that of Caesar. In addition, inveighing against slavery per se would have been totally ineffective: One might as well, in modern Western Society, protest against the mortgage system” (N. T. Wright).
- *Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free (Eph. 6:5-8).*
- *Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him (Eph 6:9).*

2. GREGORY OF NYSSA

- “You condemn a person to slavery whose nature is free and independent, and you make laws opposed to God and contrary to His natural law. For you have subjected one who was made precisely to be lord of the earth, and whom the Creator intended to be a ruler, to the yoke of slavery, in resistance to and rejection of His divine precept. ...How is it that you disregard the animals which have been subjected to you as slaves under your hand, and that you should act against a free nature, bringing down one who is of the same nature of yourself, to the level of four-footed beasts or inferior creatures?”
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3. ABOLITIONISTS OF THE 18TH & 19TH CENTURIES

- “We the patrons of liberty, have dishonored the Christian name, and degraded human nature nearly to a level with the beasts” (Baptist Pastor, 1770).
- “Although there were always individual voices opposing slavery, the first group to take a stand on slavery had been the Quakers” (Louis Filler, *The Crusade against Slavery*, 1830-1860).
- “I was not more than thirteen years old, when in my loneliness and destitution I longed for some one to whom I could go, as to a father and protector. The preaching of a white Methodist minister, named Hanson, was the means of causing me to feel that in God I had such a friend. He thought that all men, great and small, bond and free, were sinners in the sight of God: that they were by nature rebels against His government; and that they must repent of their sins, and be reconciled to God through Christ. I cannot say that I had a very distinct notion of what was required of me, but one thing I did know well: I was wretched and had no means of making myself otherwise. I consulted a good old colored man named Charles Lawson, and in tones of holy affection he told me to pray, and to "cast all my care upon God." This I sought to do; and though for weeks I was a poor, broken-hearted mourner, traveling through doubts and fears, I finally found my burden lightened, and my heart relieved. I loved all mankind, slaveholders not excepted, though I abhorred slavery more than ever. I

saw the world in a new light, and my great concern was to have everybody converted. My desire to learn increased, and especially, did I want a thorough acquaintance with the contents of the Bible” (Fredrick Douglas).

- “Although it has been fashionable to deny it, anti-slavery doctrines began to appear in Christian theology soon after the decline of Rome and were accompanied by the eventual disappearance of slavery in all but the fringes of Christian Europe. When Europeans subsequently instituted slavery in the New World, they did so over strenuous papal opposition, a fact that was conveniently 'lost' from history until recently. Finally, the abolition of New World slavery was initiated and achieved by Christian activists” (Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery*).
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4. THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

- “One day the south will know that when these disinherited children of God sat down at lunch counters, they were in reality standing up for what is best in the American dream and for the most sacred values in our Judeo-Christian heritage, thereby bringing our nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the founding fathers in their formulation of the constitution and the Declaration of Independence” (Martin Luther King Jr., *Letters from a Birmingham Jail*).
 - “I hope this letter finds you strong in the faith. I also hope that circumstances will soon make it possible for me to meet each of you, not as an integrationist or a civil rights leader but as a fellow clergyman and a Christian brother” (Martin Luther King Jr., *Letters from a Birmingham Jail*).
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III. CHRISTIANITY HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THE CULTURAL FRAMEWORK OF THE WEST WHICH VIEWS RACISM AND OPPORESSION AS A PROBLEM

- According to the 2018 Global Slavery Index, the top 10 countries with the highest prevalence of modern slavery (by total number of slaves) are as follows:
 1. India - 7,989,000
 2. China - 3,864,000
 3. North Korea - 2,640,000
 4. Nigeria - 1,386,000
 5. Iran - 1,289,000
 6. Indonesia - 1,220,000
 7. Congo (Democratic Republic of) - 1,045,000
 8. Russia - 794,000
 9. Philippines - 784,000
 10. Afghanistan - 749,000

- Estimated prevalence of modern-day slavery by country:
 1. North Korea (104.6)
 2. Eritrea (93)
 3. Burundi (40)
 4. The Central African Republic (22.3)
 5. Afghanistan (22.2)
 6. Mauritania(21.4)
 7. South Sudan (20.5)
 8. Pakistan (16.8)
 9. Cambodia (16.8)
 10. Iran (16.2)

- “The enlightenment, far from repudiating Christianity wholesale, actually served as a conduit by which these Christian notions were imported into the creation of

the new Republic... thus, the dimension of continuity in the American approach was at least as important as the dimension of innovation. And the Christian element was more essential than any enlightenment inspired revolt against Christianity” (Steven D Smith, Distinguished Professor of Law at the University of San Diego).

- “The typical criticisms by secular people about the oppressiveness and injustices of the Christian church actually come from Christianity’s own resources for critique of itself” (Tim Keller).
 - “What is the answer, then, to the very fair and devastating criticisms of the record of the Christian church? The answer is not to abandon the Christian faith, because that would leave us with neither the standards nor the resources to make correction. Instead, we should move to a fuller and deeper grasp of what Christianity is” (Tim Keller).
 - “The search for a science of morality, then, is a story of a hopeful quest spanning centuries, many promising ideas, many sobering failures, cycles of dormancy and revival, overreach, and finally, a momentous but unnoticed reorientation away from the original goal and toward a radically different end” (James Hunter and Paul Nedelisky, *Science and the Good*).
 - “The science of morality is no longer about discovering how we ought to live—though it is presented as such. Rather, it is now concerned with exploiting scientific and technological know-how in order to achieve practical goals grounded in whatever social consensus we can justify” (James Hunter and Paul Nedelisky, *Science and the Good*).
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IV. CHRISTIANITIES FOUNDER WAS OPPRESSED AND DIED TO SET THE OPPRESSED FREE

- *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19).*
- *“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21).*
- Jesus welcomed, interacted with, and helped...
 - Lepers (Matt. 8:1-3)
 - Prostitutes (Luke 7:37-50)
 - The blind (Mark 10:46-52)
 - The deaf (Mark 7:32-37)
 - The dead (John 11).
- *Sell your possessions, and give to the needy (Luke 12:33).*
- *Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 14:11).*
- *“When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” (Luke 14:12-14).*
- *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).*
- *“the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).*

- In our conversation with skeptics, we need to take their focus off of Christians and place it on Christ.

V. QUESTION: WHY DID THE CHURCH TAKE PART IN THE OPPRESSION OF PEOPLE OF COLOR?

1. THEY WERE NOT CHRISTIANS.

- *“Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me” (Matt. 25:41-43).*
- *“Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?” “Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me” (Matt. 25:45).*

2. JESUS CAME TO SAVE SINNERS.

- “No person reaches perfection, and the possibility for mistakes, even grave mistakes, never goes away. The church is a hospital for the morally sick, which includes all people, even those who seem irredeemable to the common person. Think about how little sense it would make for the church to admit only those who are perfectly well, for the entire purpose of a hospital is to bring healing to those who are in need of it—and all the more for those who are sick and broken” (Joshua Chatraw).

VI. CHRISTIANITY IS THE MOST DIVERSE BELIEF SYSTEM IN THE WORLD

- **Regional Distribution of Christians (as of 2010):**
 - Europe (25.7%): 558,260,000
 - Latin American/Caribbean (24.4%): 531,280,000
 - Sub-Saharan Africa (23.8%): 517,240,000
 - Asia-Pacific (13.2%): 286,950,000
 - North America (12.3%): 266,630,000
 - Middle East/North Africa (0.6%): 12,710,000

 - **Significance:**
 - There are twice as many African Christians than American.
 - There are twice as many Latin/Caribbean Christians than American Christians.
 - There is roughly the same amount of Christians in Asia as there are in America.
 - Roughly equal amount of Christians in Europe, Africa, and Latin America, with a rapidly growing church in Asia.
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REVIEW:

Claim: Christianity is racist and has contributed to racism.

- *Yes:* What can you affirm about this claim?
- *But:* Where would you raise an objection or delineate a place of disagreement?
- *Won't Work:* How would you respectfully and gently show an unbeliever that their worldview cannot adequately account for their critique against the church if he/she is a thoroughly secular person? What if he/she is quasi-spiritual?
- How are they relying on the Christian Worldview?
- How would you demonstrate that the Christian Worldview Makes Better Sense of the World?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- *Beyond Racial Division* by George Yancey.
- *Confronting Injustice without Compromising Truth* by Thaddeus Williams.
- *The Color of Law* by Richard Rothstein.
- *Discrimination and Disparities* by Thomas Sowell.

HOMEWORK:

- Read Chapters 1-3 of *A Better Story: God, Sex & Human Flourishing* by Glynn Harrison (37 pages)
- Read one of these articles (pick one):
 - “How the Sexual Revolution Has Hurt Women” by Louis Perry (WSJ).
 - “Good Sex: Why We Need More of It and a Lot Less of the Bad Stuff” by Jennifer Roback Morse.

SESSION 5

CLAIM:
CHRISTIANITY IS TOO REPRESSIVE, PT.
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I. INTRODUCTION: IS CHRISTIANITY REPRESSIVE?

II. HOW DID WE GET HERE: THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF OUR OVERLY SEXUALIZED CULTURE.

- “You can get a large audience together for a strip-tease act—that is, to watch a girl undress on the stage. Now suppose you came to a country where you could fill a theatre by simply bringing a covered plate on to the stage and then slowly lifting the cover so as to let every one see, just before the lights went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a bit of bacon, would you not think that in that country something had gone wrong with the appetite for food? And would not anyone who had grown up in a different world think there was something equally queer about the state of the sex instinct among us?” (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*)

- **Rousseau (1712-1778) and the Romantics**

- “Man is born free, yet everywhere he is in chains” (Rousseau).
- “Climb every mountain, Ford Every Stream, follow every rainbow, till you find your dream” (*Sound of Music*, 1965).
- “It’s time to see what I can do; to test the limits and break through; no right, no wrong, no rules for me; I’m free!” (*Frozen*, 2013)

- **Marx (1818-1883)**

- “A man feels alienation because he is alienated from fruits of his labor” (Carl Trueman, *Strange New World*).

- **Nietzsche (1844-1900)**

- “God is dead.”

- **Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)**

- “Man’s discovery that sexual (genital) love afforded him the strongest experiences of satisfaction and in fact provided him with the prototype of all happiness, must have suggested to him that he should continue to seek the satisfaction of happiness in his life along the path of sexual relations and that he should make genital eroticism the central point of his life” (Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*).
 - “Human nature is at its deepest level sexual and that human beings are therefore defined in a basic way by their sexual desires” (Carl Trueman, *Strange New World*).
 - “Primitive man was better off in knowing no restrictions of instinct. To counterbalance this, his prospects of enjoying this happiness for any length of time were very slender. Civilized man has exchanged a portion of his possibilities for happiness for a portion of security” (Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*).
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- **Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957)**

- The existence of strict moral principles has invariably signified that the biological, and specifically the sexual, needs of man were not being satisfied. Every moral regulation is in itself sex-negating, and all compulsory morality is life-negating. The social revolution has no more important task than finally to enable human beings to realize their full potentialities and find gratification in life” (Wilhelm Reich, *The Sexual Revolution*).
- “We can now see that once identity is psychologized, anything that is seen to have a negative impact upon someone’s psychological identity

can potentially come to be seen as harmful, even as a weapon, that does serious damage” (Carl Trueman, *Strange New World*).

- **Hugh Hefner: (1926-2017)**

TWO THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- **The Social Imaginary (Charles Taylor)**

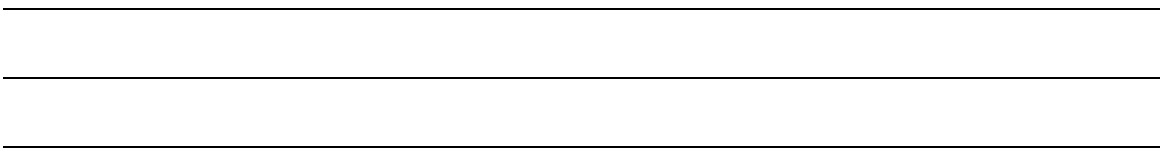
- **Two-Level Engagement**

III. SEXUAL FREEDOM IS BAD FOR HUMAN FLOURISHING

1. THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION CREATED PORNOGRAPHY AND PORNOGRAPHY HAS DEFINITELY HARMED SOCIETY.

- **The Prevalence of Porn**

- 12% of total websites contain pornography (*The Week*).
- 25% of search engine requests are pornographic (*The Week*).
- 75 million average unique visitors to adult websites between 2005 and 2008 (*The Week*).
- 28,000 internet users looking at porn every second (*The Week*).
- 266 new pornographic websites appear online, every day (*The Week*).
- Approximately 3,000 English language websites distribute child pornography (*The Guardian* and *The Internet Watch Foundation*).
- Average age of first exposure to porn is 11 years old (*The Week*).
- 7 out of 10 children inadvertently accessed internet porn (*The Washington Times*).
- Out of a sample (1,392 random adults in U.S. aged 18-73), 91.5% of men and 60.2% of women herein reported having consumed pornography in the past month (this includes written pornography which women consumed much higher than men) (*NIH*).
- Another survey finds that 44% of men and 11% of women surveyed stated they viewed porn in the past month (*Institute for Family Studies*).
- Estimated revenue generated by pornography in the U.S. is \$15 billion (*The Guardian*).
- 3-8% of adults have a porn addiction. 10% self-report as having one (*The Recovery Village*).



- **The Harm Caused by the Porn Industry**

- Women in the industry
- Addiction
 - “When a person uses pornography, two dominant chemicals are released: phenylethylamine (PEA) and adrenaline. Fused together, these two chemicals forge an intoxicating sensation which overpowers the pleasure of both oxytocin and endorphins. The neurochemical climax released during pornographic ecstasy mirrors the brain activity of a person on crack cocaine” (The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission).
 - “The problem is that PEA and adrenaline will *only* reappear as sexual experiences continue to be new, exciting, and sometimes even dangerous” (Juli Slattery and Dannah K. Gresh).
 - “Pornographic content can harm children. Exposure to pornography at a young age may lead to poor mental health, sexism and objectification, sexual violence, and other negative outcomes. Among other risks, when children view pornography that portrays abusive and misogynistic acts, they may come to view such behavior as normal and acceptable” (UNICEF).

2. THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION HAS HURT WOMEN.

- **Objectification of Women**

- "I'm not saying that they literally think these photographs of women are photographs of tools per se, or photographs of non-humans, but what the brain imaging data allow us to do is to look at it as scientific metaphor. That is, they are reacting to these photographs as people react to objects" (Dr. Susan Fiske, *Scientific American*).
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- **Hookup Culture**

- "If you're a young woman launched into a sexual culture that is fundamentally not geared toward protecting your safety or well-being, in which you are considered valuable only in a very narrow, physical sense, and if your basic options seem to be either hooking up or celibacy, then a comforting myth of 'agency' can be attractive. But this myth depends on naiveté about the nature of male sexuality. Too many young women today ignore the fact that men are generally much better suited to emotionless sex and find it much easier to regard their sexual partners as disposable. Too many fail to recognize that being desired by men is not at all the same thing as being held in high esteem" (Louise Perry).
- "A society that prioritizes the desires of the highly sociosexual is necessarily one that prioritizes the desires of men, given the natural distribution of this trait, and those men then need to call on other people—mostly young women—to satisfy their desires. The sexual playing field is not even, but it suits the interests of the powerful to pretend that it is. When we strip back all sexual morality to the bare bones, leaving only the principle of consent, we leave the way clear for some particularly predatory pikes" (Louise Perry).
- "One of the greatest frauds perpetrated during the Great Disruption was the notion that the sexual revolution was gender-neutral, benefiting women and men equally. . . . In fact the sexual revolution served the interests of men, and in the end put sharp limits on the gains that women

might otherwise have expected from their liberation from traditional roles” (Francis Fukuyama).

- **The Pill and Abortion**

- “No longer did men feel obligated to wed the women they might impregnate. And no longer did women feel the need to force them. Men evolved, or devolved, into the belief that it's the woman's responsibility to take the appropriate measures to prevent pregnancy” (Mary Eberstadt).

- **Female Identity**

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- “Paradoxically, the notion that men and women are identical works against the very equality that it tries to uphold. The same are they? The same as what? Though with some dissimulation, identicalists almost always answer, “the same as men.” Not only do men who despise women take this line. It is also taken by those so-called feminists who detest everything feminine, regard womanly women as traitors to the cause, and insist on an ideal which is supposedly indifferent to sex, but is actually masculine. From the same root spring those strange male fantasies about worlds of the future in which women lead armies, command starships, gun down enemies, and are ready for sexual intercourse at any moment. The underlying wish is that both sexes would be men, but that some of these men would look like women” (J. Budziszewski, *On the Meaning of Sex*).

3. THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION HAS HARMED CHILDREN.

- **The Breakdown of the Family**

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- Those who grew up without a dad make up:
 - 90% of the homeless.
 - 70-85% of the prison population.
 - 63% of the teenagers who commit suicide.
 - 71% of pregnant teenagers.
 - 71% of high school dropouts.

 - “According to the best available sociological evidence, children fare best on virtually every examined indicator when reared by their wedded biological parents. Studies that control for other factors, including poverty and even genetics, suggest that children reared in intact homes do best on educational achievement, emotional health, familial and sexual development, and delinquency and incarceration” (Ryan T. Anderson).

 - Faust and Manning point out 3 interesting facts:
 - **Education:** In 1970, “when the first generation born of the sexual revolution began attending school,” the government spent \$1,000 per kid for K-12 Education. (Adjusted for inflation that number would be \$5,000.) Today the government spends \$14,000 per student.

 - **Prison:** Incarceration rates grew alarmingly beginning in 1970. In 1972 there were 161 prisoners per 100,000 citizens in the U.S. In 2007, there were 767 per 100,000.

 - **Welfare:** “the growth of single parent families can account for virtually all of the increase in child poverty since 1970.”

- **The Sadness of Our Kids.**

- “What is it about today’s music, violent and disgusting though it may be, that resonates with so many American kids? ...If yesterday’s rock was the music of abandon, today’s is that of abandonment. The odd truth about contemporary teenage music — the characteristic that most separates it from what has gone before — is its compulsive insistence on the damage wrought by broken homes, family dysfunction, checked-out parents, and (especially) absent fathers. Papa Roach, Everclear, Blink-182, Good Charlotte, Eddie Vedder and Pearl Jam, Kurt Cobain and Nirvana, Tupac Shakur, Snoop Doggy Dogg, Eminem — these and other singers and bands, all of them award-winning top-40 performers who either are or were among the most popular icons in America, have their own generational answer to what ails the modern teenager. Surprising though it may be to some, that answer is: dysfunctional childhood. Moreover, and just as interesting, many bands and singers explicitly link the most deplored themes in music today — suicide, misogyny, and drugs — with that lack of a quasi-normal, intact-home personal past. ... many millions of American teenagers have enshrined a new generation of music idols whose shared generational signature in song after song is to rage about what not having had a nuclear family has done to them” (Mary Eberstadt, *“Eminem is Right”*).
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4. THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION HAS HARMED MEN.

- **Men have become enslaved to pornography.**

- **Men have grown up without their fathers.**

- **The Biblical vision of manhood has been replaced.**

- “A lot of modern men seem totally uninterested in family, commitment, virtue, or elevating themselves beyond a life of weed, casual sex, porn, and video games. What gives? How have men ended up in such a miserable and unrespectable state?” (Evie Magazine)
- “Men don’t really have to prove themselves much these days beyond making an attractive Tinder profile. Minimally, they need to be able to hold a text conversation for a few days and buy a woman a drink. They

don't have to demonstrate they're serious about committing to her and caring for her — they don't have to have a good job, demonstrate stability over time, court her with flowers, hold the door open, impress her parents, demonstrate virtue, or embody any of the other traits that used to show a man was a good choice for the long haul. Sexual liberation is essentially a culture in which we say, 'Men, we require nothing of you. Here's your reward for doing nothing'." (Eve Magazine).

- "Masculinity is largely marked by duty, discipline, and strong leadership. Masculine men are committed, self-controlled, and feel a duty to protect, provide for, and lead women and children. But a culture of casual sex absolves men of *all* of these responsibilities — and actually encourages the opposite... Sexual liberation signals to men that they no longer have to commit to one woman because they can get sex anywhere. They don't have to be disciplined around their basic urges — sexual liberation means men can use women for hedonistic pleasure and move on" (Eve Magazine).

5. SUMMARY

- "Sex is God's idea and his good gift to be properly stewarded within his design...the church should be the most pro-sex group there is. We have a message of hope and redemption in the morass of sexual confusion" (John Piper).

IV. CHRISTIANITY IS GOOD FOR HUMAN FLOURISHING

1. THE FIRST SEXUAL REVOLUTION.

- **The Roman Sexual Ethic**

- “Slaves played something like the part that masturbation has played in most cultures” (Kyle Harper, *From Shame to Sin*).
- “Prostitution was part of the official, public face of Roman life, not something hidden or in the background. Prostitution was considered a social necessity, an important safety valve. Rome in the fourth century had no fewer than 45 public brothels. It was thought that if you removed prostitutes from civic life, you would overturn the whole social order, and lust would conquer. The commodification of sex was carried out with all the ruthless efficiency of an industrial operation, the unfree body bearing the pressures of insatiable market demand. In the brothel the prostitute’s body became, little by little, ‘like a corpse’.” (Kevin DeYoung)

- **The Christian Sexual Ethic**

- Sex *only* in marriage.
- Firm opposition to divorce and remarriage with few exceptions.
- The bodies of women, slaves, girls, boys, & prostitutes (and unwanted babies) were understood to be as sacred as any free man’s or woman’s body was. Every human is image bearers of God. No human is to be sexually exploited or abused.

- Virginity was held in high esteem. In some instances, higher than marriage.
- Self-control was expected.
 - “Christian sexuality led to a new understanding of the freedom of the will. In Christian morality, humans possessed moral agency over their sexual drive. Even men, it was believed, could exert control over their erotic experiences. No one was simply at the mercy of insatiable appetites and “normal” sexual overflow” (Kevin DeYoung).
- Tim Keller:
 - The Christian view requires sex to always be *super*-consensual, only for people ready to give their whole lives to each other.
 - The pattern of God’s exclusive love for us is the pattern of our exclusive love for our spouse.
- Rodney Stark in “The Rise of Christianity” shows why women were so attracted to Christianity:
 - Christians forbade abortion and exposing of infants.
 - Christians condemned divorce, incest, marital infidelity, and polygamy.
 - Christians didn’t force widows to get remarried.
 - Christians provided for the needs of widows.
 - Christian women married later.
 - Women had higher status in the Christian church.

2. THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF SEX MAKES SENSE OF AND SATISFIES OUR LONGINGS.

- **The Christian view of sex makes sense of and satisfies our physical longings.**

- “The people who have the most sex and are happiest with their sex lives are monogamous couples” (University of Chicago).
- A 2022 study entitled “Religiosity, Sex Frequency, and Sexual Satisfaction in Britain: Evidence from the Third National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles” finds that religiosity was linked with overall higher levels of sex life satisfaction.

- **The Christian view of sex makes sense of and satisfies our relational longings.**

- **The Christian view of sex makes sense of and satisfies our spiritual longings.**

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- *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church (Eph. 5:31-32).*

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- “The Christian says, 'Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing” (C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity).

3. CHRISTIANITY’S VISION OF SEX CREATES HUMAN FLOUISHING.

- Our self-centeredness easily comes to the surface in daily life. That’s a part of our human nature. So what human impulses are universal enough and powerful enough to lure people out of themselves, and into productive interdependence? The most reliable instinct is the sexual urge. Sexual desire has a powerful ability to make selfish adults aware of other people, and has the potential to make them truly concerned about the welfare of another person” (Jennifer Roback Morse).

- “Both the woman and the man may enter the situation thinking they are freer than if they were married. They are mistaken, because the marriage commitment creates a series of obligations, benefits, and understandings for both of them. Marriage provides a context of stability in which those needs can be met, help provided, and conflicts worked out. Sex outside of marriage deprives them of the opportunity to integrate these parts of their lives” (Jennifer Roback Morse).

4. CHRISTIANITY’S VISION OF SEX COVERS OUR SEXUAL SHAME.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- *A Better Story: God, Sex & Human Flourishing* by Glynn Harrison.
- *The Case Against the Sexual Revolution* by Louis Perry.
- *On the Meaning of Sex* by J. Budziszewski.

HOMEWORK:

- Listen to podcast episode from Morning Wire.
- Read chapter 10 of *Embodied* by Preston Sprinkle.
- Read *What is Gender?* By Jeremiah Taylor.
- Read Section 2 of Summit's *Sexuality & Gender: Our Position & Posture*.

SESSION 6

CLAIM:
CHRISTIANITY IS TOO REPRESSIVE, PT.
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INTRODUCTION

Claim: "Christianity is Repressive because it doesn't affirm trans people's gender identity."

- **Expressive Individualism** (Charles Taylor): We find our meaning by giving expression to our own feelings and desires.
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- "Gender dysphoria involves a conflict between a person's physical or assigned gender and the gender with which he/she/they identify. People with gender dysphoria may be very uncomfortable with the gender they were assigned, sometimes described as being uncomfortable with their body (particularly developments during puberty) or being uncomfortable with the expected roles of their assigned gender" (American Psychiatric Association).
 - **Gender identity:** a person's internal sense of being male, female or something else (APA).
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- NYC Passed law in 2019, in which employers can be fined 250k for not formally recognizing one of these 31 gender identities:

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|-------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Bi-gendered | 10. Male-to-Female | 23. Third Sex |
| 2. Cross-dresser | 11. MTF | 24. Gender Fluid |
| 3. Drag King | 12. Non-Op | 25. Non-Binary Transgender |
| 4. Drag Queen | 13. HIJRA | 26. Androgyne |
| 5. Femme Queen | 14. Pangender | 27. Gender Gifted |
| 6. Female-to-Male | 15. Transexual/Transsexual | 28. Gender Blender |
| 7. FTM | 16. Trans Person | 29. Femme |
| 8. Gender Bender | 17. Woman | 30. Person of Transgender Experience |
| 9. Genderqueer | 18. Man | 31. Androgynous |
| | 19. Butch | |
| | 20. Two-Spirit | |
| | 21. Trans | |
| | 22. Agender | |

I. TRANSGENDER IDEOLOGY IS BAD FOR THOSE WHO HAVE GENDER DYSPHORIA.

- “No. Barack Obama nor I support redefining from a civil side what constitutes marriage. We do not support that” (Joe Biden, October 2, 2008).

- “The idea that an 8-year-old child or a 10-year-old child decides, you know ‘I decided I want to be transgender. That’s what I think I’d like to be. It would make my life a lot easier.’ There should be zero discrimination” (Joe Biden, October 15, 2020).

- “The problem at present is not the disparity, but the certainty—the spurious certainty with which an unclear issue is presented as though it was the clearest and best understood thing imaginable” (Douglas Murray).
 - Up until 2013, the American Psychiatric Association considered gender dysphoria a *disorder* (Gender Identity Disorder).

- Psychiatric Care vs. Gender Affirming Therapy
 - In the 1980’s, Kenneth Zucker and his team cared for 560 children who suffered from gender dysphoria by *not* affirming their delusional thought and instead using psychological evaluation to “unearth the undercurrent psychopathology which led to the feelings of being born in the wrong body.” He published his experience with 560 children, thus establishing a standard of care that was eminently successful, and above all, ethical.

- See both articles: Quentin L. Van Meter, “Bringing Transparency to the Treatment of Transgender Persons,” *Issues in Law & Medicine* 34, no. 2 (2019): 147-52; Kenneth J. Zucker et al., “A Developmental, Biopsychological Model for the Treatment of Children with Gender Identity Disorder,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 59, no. 3 (2012): 369-97.

- John Hopkins University Hospital “stopped doing sex-reassignment surgery, since producing a ‘satisfied’ but still troubled patient seemed an inadequate reason for surgically amputating normal organs” (Paul McHugh).
- “The long-term study—up to 30 years—followed 324 people who had sex-reassignment surgery. The study revealed that beginning about 10 years after having the surgery, the transgendered began to experience increasing mental difficulties. Most shockingly, their suicide mortality rose almost 20-fold above the comparable non-transgender population...The high suicide rate certainly challenges the surgery prescription” (Paul McHugh).
- Here’s the overall point:
 - Because psychiatrists never treat delusions of the mind by affirming them.
 - Because hormone therapies and SRS (Sex-reassignment surgery) involve permanently changing the body.
 - Because some studies have shown patients who undergo SRS have higher rates of suicide and do not report a higher level of satisfaction with life than those who did not undergo SRS.
 - Because this movement is being fueled by popular culture and not science.

- Therefore, those who are supportive of and provide Gender-Affirming Care are actually engaging in something that is harmful for those who suffer from gender dysphoria and keeps them from getting the kind of care they need.

- How should Christian’s care for individuals who struggle with Gender Dysphoria?

II. TRANSGENDER IDEOLOGY IS BAD FOR KIDS.

- The Tavistock Clinic:
 - In 2009 Tavistock received a total of 77 referrals.
 - In 2011 Tavistock received a total of 250 referrals.
 - In 2019 Tavistock received a total of 2,590 referrals.
 - In 2021 Tavistock received a total of 5,000 referrals.

- According to the APA, gender dysphoria prevalence accounts for 0.005–0.014% of the population for biological males (5-14 per 100,000 people) and 0.002–0.003% for biological females (2-3 per 100,000 people).

**See the graphs in the back of the handout.*

- What's the point?
 - If it has always been young girls that have tended to be more vulnerable to social contagions...
 - If Social Media is rapidly allowing the transference of bad ideas...
 - If our adolescent girls are more anxious, depressed, and suicidal than they have ever been...
 - And if there has been a 5,000% increase in adolescent girls who identify as trans...
 - Then we should realize that our teenage girls are hurting.
 - We SHOULD NOT AFFIRM the transgender identity that they recently gave themselves. Not because we want to be mean. But because we love them.

- There was a survey done recently of 237 detransitioners. Here's what they found:
 - The average age was 25 years.
 - 92% were assigned female at birth.
 - 65% transitioned both socially and medically, and 46% of those who medically transitioned underwent gender-affirming surgeries.
 - The average duration of transition was 4.7 years.

- The most common reason for detransitioning was the realization that their gender dysphoria was related to other issues (70%).
- The participants in this study had high rates of mental health comorbidities including depressive disorder (70%), anxiety (63%), post-traumatic stress disorder (33%), attention deficit disorder (24%), autism spectrum condition (20%), eating disorder (19%), and personality disorder (17%).
- Most respondents described their detransition as a very isolating experience in which they did not receive adequate psychological or medical support. Many lost support and friendships from the LGBT community and some experienced hostility after announcing their decision to detransition. This study has the major limitation of selection bias.

III. TRANSGENDER IDEOLOGY IS BAD FOR WOMEN.

- “Transgender athletes deserve our respect, but that respect must be mutual. Women and girls are being displaced by biologically male athletes, who have clear physical advantages. Again, it is the female athlete who is being denied a spot on the team, the pursuit of a dream, and being told to watch from the sidelines. That’s regression, not progress” (Sandra Bucha).

- [A biological male competing against women is] “insane and it’s cheating. I am happy to address a transgender woman in whatever form she prefers, but I would not be happy to compete against her. It would not be fair...Simply reducing hormone levels—the prescription most sports have adopted—does not solve the problem. A man builds up muscle and bone density, as well as a greater number of oxygen-carrying red blood cells, from childhood. Training increases the discrepancy. Indeed, if a male were to change gender in such a way as to eliminate any accumulated advantage, he would have to begin hormone treatment before puberty. For me, that is unthinkable” (Martina Navratilova).

- Examples in Women’s Sports:
 - Weightlifter Laurel Hubbard from New Zealand, who won two gold medals at the Pacific Games.
 - CeCe Telfer, a Franklin Pierce University graduate who clinched the NCAA Division II national champion in the 400-meter run.
 - In Connecticut, Andraya Yearwood and Terry Miller, clinched titles and accolades from biological girls, probably stealing significant scholarships and college placements from them.
 - Lia Thomas, won the NCAA Division 1 National Title for the women’s 500 yard freestyle event. Lia swam on the men’s team for 3 years prior to this and won no awards.
 - Fallon Fox is a transgender woman, who competed in the women’s featherweight division for MMA. Fox has competed in six pro fights and won five of these.
 - “I’ve fought a lot of women and have never felt the strength that I felt in a fight as I did that night...I can’t answer whether it’s because she was born a man or not because I’m not a doctor. I can only say, I’ve never felt so overpowered ever in my life and I am an abnormally strong female in my own right. Her grip was different, I could usually move around in the clinch against other females but couldn’t move at all in Fox’s clinch” (Tamika Brents).

- Newspaper Articles for Reference:
 - David Brown, “Seven Sex Attacks in Women’s Jails by Transgender Convicts,” The Times, May 11, 2020, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/seven-sex-attacks-in-womens-jails-by-transgender-convicts-cx9m8zqpg/>;
 - Nazia Parveen, “Transgender Prisoner Who Sexually Assaulted Inmates Jailed for Life,” The Guardian, October 11, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/oct/11/transgender-prisoner-who-sexually-assaulted-inmates-jailed-for-life/>;
 - Telegraph Reporters, “Female Prison Officers Were Raped by Inmates Claiming to Be Trans, Rory Stewart Reveals,” The Telegraph, April 4, 2020, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/04/12/female-prison-officers-raped-inmates-claiming-trans-rory-stewart/>;
 - Bruce Rushton, “Transgender Inmate Accused of Rape,” Illinois Times, February 27, 2020, <https://www.illinoistimes.com/springfield/transgender-inmate-accused-of-rape/Content?oid=11867999/>.

IV. TRANSGENDER IDEOLOGY IS BAD FOR HUMANS.

1. GENDER IS TRUE.

2. GENDER IS GOOD.

3. GENDER IS BEAUTIFUL.

CONCLUSION:

To the claim: “Christianity is Repressive because it doesn’t affirm people’s gender identities,” we can reply: “It is actually transgender ideology that turns out to be repressive.” Why? Because:

- Transgender ideology keeps people with gender dysphoria from getting the help they really need.
- It confuses and further troubles a particularly troubled subset of our society—adolescent youth, especially girls. And in many cases produces irreversible damage.
- It demolishes the gains and protections for biologically born women that took them a long time to achieve.
- Finally, not only will it not work in reality, but it is bad for the human race. It deprives humanity of what is good, true, and beautiful.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- *God and the Transgender Debate* by Andrew Walker.
- *When Harry Became Sally* by Ryan T. Anderson.
- Read the article, *The Health Effects of Legalizing Same Sex Marriage*.
- Read the article, *For Long-Term Health and Happiness, Marriage Still Matters*.

HOMEWORK:

- Read chapter 4 from *Is God Anti-Gay* by Sam Alberry.
- Read chapter 5 from *People to Be Loved* by Preston Sprinkle.
- Read Section 1 of Summit's *Sexuality & Gender: Our Position and Posture*.

SESSION 7

CLAIM:
CHRISTIANITY IS TOO REPRESSIVE, PT.
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Claim: "Christianity is repressive because it teaches that homosexuality is wrong and rejects gay marriage."

I. HOMOSEXUALITY

- *[26] For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; [27] and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error (Rom. 1:26-27).*
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THE LIBERAL CHRISTIAN ARGUMENT FOR SAME SEX RELATIONSHIPS:

- "...what the liberal theologian has retained after abandoning to the enemy one Christian doctrine after another is not Christianity at all, but a religion which is so entirely different from Christianity as to belong in a distinct category... despite the liberal use of traditional phraseology modern liberalism not only is a different religion from Christianity but belongs in a totally different class of religions" (J Gresham Machen).
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- “Paul isn’t condemning being gay as opposed to being straight. He is condemning self-seeking excess as opposed to moderation—a concern made clear by his repeated use of the term ‘lustful,’ and by his description of people ‘exchanging’ or ‘abandoning’ heterosexual sex...Committed same-sex relationships simply aren’t in view in Romans 1” (The Reformation Project).
 - “So when we are talking today about lifelong, monogamous, equal-status same-sex relationships, we are talking about something categorically different than anything that we find in the biblical world. That’s critical to understand when it comes to interpreting the six biblical passages that refer to forms of same-sex behavior” (Matthew Vines).
 - “Christians should agree with Paul that sexual behavior that is motivated by lustful self-seeking is wrong, but same-sex relationships based on long-term commitment and love must be assessed differently” (The Reformation Project).

THE LIBERAL CHRISTIAN ARGUMENT FOR SAME SEX MARRIAGE DOESN’T WORK:

1. Paul doesn’t speak of men committing shameless acts with boys but men committing shameless acts with other men.
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2. Paul says that both partners receive the due penalty in themselves.

- *[9] Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, [10] nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9–10).*

- μαλακοὶ: This term refers to the passive recipient in sex.
- ἀρσενικοῖται: This term refers to the active participant in sex.

3. Paul did not only speak about homosexual acts between men, but also women.

4. Paul says that homosexuality is “contrary to nature.”

5. If gay marriage was a proper recourse for these same-sex attracted men and women, he probably would have highlighted that fact here or at least somewhere.

- *[18] Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. [19] Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, [20] for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body (1 Cor. 6:18–20).*
- *[1] Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” [2] But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. [3] The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband (1 Cor. 7:1–3).*
- *[8] To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. [9] But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion (1 Cor. 7:8–9).*

6. Liberal theologians fail to appreciate the Jewishness of Paul.

7. Liberal theologians fail to appreciate *church history*.

8. This liberal argument starts with a bad *definition* of marriage.

- Argument 1:
 - The Bible teaches that marriage is good.
 - The Bible teaches exploitive gay sex is bad.
 - Therefore, non-exploitive gay sex within marriage is permissible.

- Argument 2:
 - The Bible teaches that marriage is good.
 - The Bible teaches exploitive sex with animals is bad. (Bestiality).
 - Therefore, non-exploitive sex with animals within marriage is permissible.

- Argument 3:
 - The Bible teaches that marriage is good.
 - The Bible teaches exploitive sex with children is bad.
 - Therefore, non-exploitive sex with children within marriage is permissible.

- [7] then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. [8] And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed...[18] Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." [19] Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. [20] The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. [21] So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. [22] And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. [23] Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." [24] Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. [25] And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed (Gen. 2:7-8,18-25).
- "*Kenegdo* is somewhat difficult to translate into English, since it is a compound word made up of *ke*, which means 'as' or 'like,' and *neged*, which means 'opposite,' 'against,' or 'in front of.' Together, the word means something like 'as opposite him' or 'like against him.' It's a complex word that captures how it is that Eve can qualify as the perfect partner for Adam...Here is the relevant point. If it were simply Eve's humanness that made her a helper, then the word *ke* ('like') would have been just fine. The verse would then read: 'I will make a helper like (*ke*) him.' But to make the point that Adam needed not just another human, but a different sort of human—a female—God used the word *kenegdo*. This word conveys similarity (*ke*) and dissimilarity (*neged*). Eve is a human and not an animal, which is why she is *ke* ('like') Adam. But she's also a female and not a male, which is why she is different than Adam, or *neged* ('opposite him')" (Preston Sprinkle).

- *[3] And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” [4] He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, [5] and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? [6] So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” [7] They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?” (Matt. 19:3–7)*

WHAT HAVE EVANGELICALS GOTTEN WRONG ON HOMOSEXUALITY?

1. Many evangelicals are not in any type of relationship with homosexual men or women.

2. Evangelicals have not properly distinguished same sex attraction from that of homosexual behavior.

3. Evangelicals have singled out homosexuality as a sin that is worse than other sins.

- *[28] And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. [29] They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, [30] slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, [31] foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. [32] Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them (Romans 1:28–32).*

II. HOMOSEXUAL MARRIAGE

ARGUMENTS FOR HOMOSEXUAL MARRIAGE:

1. People should be able to love whoever they want.

2. Health benefits.

3. Vulnerable children can have a home.

- Men and women are different.

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- Male/female representation is important:

- Early childhood educators recognize the valuable voice men bring to the profession and lament the nine to one female-to-male ration in the classrooms.
- CA passed a law in 2019 that required at least one woman to sit on the board of every company.

- The International Institute for democracy and Electoral Assistance states the approximately half of the world’s parliamentary systems mandate a quota for female representatives.
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- Mothering and fathering are crucial for child development.
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- “Parenting styles correlate to biological differences between men and women. Women, compared to men, have higher levels of oxytocin—the hormone responsible for emotional bonding—and oxytocin receptors. Oxytocin serves to calm anxiety, reduce motor activity, and foster an increase in touching... In contrast, testosterone—present in men at levels tenfold higher than women—is correlated to an increase in motor activity in infant boys and is responsible for higher levels of physical activities in men compared to women” (Scott Haltzman).
- “In other words, mothering isn’t an instinct women can simply turn off, and it’s certainly not a function men can just turn on” (Katy Faust’s and Stacy Manning).

- Regarding play:
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- “Children who roughhouse with their fathers...quickly learn that biting, kicking, and other forms of physical violence are not acceptable” (John Snarey).

- “Having a dad at home makes for less aggressive boys, fewer run-in’s with police, and more gentle treatment of women. The evidence tells us ‘toxic’ masculinity is not a result of Dad’s influence; it’s a result of Dad’s absence” (Faust).

- Regarding *discipline*:

- Regarding how kids *see* themselves and others:

- “A healthy marital bond gives our children a living example of the type of person they should strive to become and the type of person they should seek out in a potential life partner...The rule for parenting is simple: Men cannot mother, women cannot father, kids require both” (Faust and Manning).

- **Million-dollar question:** *Which parent is optional for children? The mother or the father?*

- “Would you axe the one who encourages them to take risks or the parent focused on the child’s immediate needs and emotional health? Would you do away with one encouraging them to get up and try again, or the one wiping away tears and kissing boo-boos?” (Faust and Manning)

- “Kids with same-sex parents must now make sense of their mother or father hunger, absent any legal authority. The federal government has abandoned its responsibility to children's well-being by making laws that conflict with children's deepest longing: To have a family comprised of both their mother and father.

Legalizing gay marriage is basically a nationwide gaslighting of kids with same-sex parents” (Faust).

- “The problem with gay parenting isn't the gay parents; It's the missing parent. Children raised in same sex headed homes will always be missing one adult to whom they have a natural right” (Faust and Manning).

A BETTER VIEW OF MARRIAGE:

- “Marriage is, of its essence, a comprehensive union: a union of will (by consent) and body (by sexual union); inherently ordered to procreation and thus the broad sharing of family life; and calling for permanent and exclusive commitment, whatever the spouses’ preferences. It has long been and remains, a personal and social reality, sought and prized by individuals, couples, and whole societies. But it is also a moral reality: a human good with an objective structure, which it is inherently good for us to live out” (Ryan Anderson and Sherif Girgis).

- “Marriages have always been the main and most effective means of rearing healthy, happy, and well-integrated children. The health and order of society depend upon the rearing of healthy, happy, and well-integrated children. That is why law, though it may take no notice of ordinary friendships, should recognize and support marriages” (Ryan Anderson and Sherif Girgis).

- “Marriage is the child’s best chance to have both for a lifetime” (Faust and Manning).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- *What is Marriage* by Ryan T. Anderson and Sherif Girgis.
- *People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just an Issue* by Preston Sprinkle.

HOMEWORK:

- Complete post-course survey. Link will be posted on summitlife.com/apologetics under Session 7 homework.

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ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING MEMBERS OF SUMMIT CHURCH IN NAPLES, FLORIDA, TO ENGAGE IN CULTURAL APOLOGETICS WITH GENTLENESS AND RESPECT

Jeremiah Douglas Taylor, DMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023
Faculty Supervisor: Andrew T. Walker

The purpose of this project is to equip the members of Summit Church to engage in cultural apologetics with gentleness and respect so that they can have greater confidence and success in befriending and sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with non-Christians. Chapter 1 provides foundational information, including the history, ministry context, rationale, purpose, and goals of this project. Chapter 2 advances the biblical and theological basis for the project. A study of two passages of Scripture (1 Pet 3:15; Acts 17:16-34) provides support for equipping Christians in cultural apologetics. Chapter 3 unpacks a model of cultural engagement. Chapter 4 unpacks the details of the project and describes its application. Chapter 5 evaluates the effectiveness of the apologetics curriculum and suggests changes for improving future training sessions.

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