

Defending the Bible

Defending the Bible CONTEMPORARY APOLOGETICS AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH¹

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Part I: Human Limitations in Apologetics

A Work of God at Princeton University

My personal experience with Christian apologetics began in February, 1943, when I accepted Jesus Christ as my Saviour and Lord as a student at Princeton University. It had not been my privilege to be raised in a Christian home nor to attend a Bible-teaching church. But God, in His grace, used a couple of Christian students at the university to invite me time and time again to attend a weekly Bible class being taught in the student center by a Princeton alumnus and former missionary to India. The Gospel message was skillfully and graciously presented, and after several months of such teaching, I surrendered to the claims and the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As far as I could tell, there were no other Christians in the dormitory where I resided at that time. But I had made several good friends, one of whom was a sophisticated intellectual from a wealthy home. I was convinced that the conversion of such a man could bring great changes in the dormitory and university, so one day I invited him to attend our Bible class. My hopes were high, because I was prepared to convince him that no one else could match this Bible teacher who had led me to the Lord.

The conversation, as I recall over the years, proceeded as follows. "Harry, here is a teacher who can really make the message of the Bible clear and convincing. Why not come with me Sunday afternoon and see for yourself." "The Bible? Why should I take time to study a religious book that is already nearly two thousand years out of date? You know yourself that there isn't a single science prof here at Princeton who takes the Bible seriously on the origin of the world. The idea of creation by divine fiat is no longer held by intelligent people. I really have no interest in the Bible."

Stung by this flat rejection of God's Word on the basis of a scientific consensus, I retreated to my Christian friends. Weren't there any publications of a scholarly nature, I asked, that could help my friend see the weaknesses of evolutionism and thus the possibility of supernatural creation? Except for a few small booklets, nothing came to hand; but armed with these I approached Harry again. He was surprisingly gracious. "Thanks for going to all the trouble of collecting these booklets for me. I really didn't know anyone who could write took Genesis literally any more. I'll tell you what I'll do. Some day, if I ever have the time, I'll look into it." And that was it. A polite but final brush-off.

I was deeply dismayed at this and similar failures to convert my friends to Christianity,

and discussed the problem with my Bible teacher. "What's wrong with me? Is it my personality, or do I need more time to collect better arguments?" Instead of lecturing his new disciple on the intricacies of Biblical apologetics, he very wisely invited me first to join him in a brief visitation program in one of the other dormitories where a freshman five months earlier had somewhat rashly indicated on a survey card his interest in attending our Bible study class. As the door swung open in response to our knocking, pipe smoke poured out into the hallway. "I'm John Whitcomb and this is the Bible teacher of the Princeton Evangelical Fellowship. Is Tom Smith here?" Suddenly, a trampling of feet and the crash of a table lamp were heard as various figures in the semi-darkness fled in terror, leaving our victim to fend for himself against these unwanted intruders. "The Princeton Evangelical Fellowship? Oh, yes, I guess I did sign a card last fall; but I'm not interested in the Bible any more. I used to think it was true, but five months of study here has been enough to convince me it is full of errors."

"I'm fascinated to hear you say that," my teacher quietly commented. "Tell me, what particular errors did you discover in the Bible that convinced you it is not true?" This was unexpected. Wasn't one firm rebuff sufficient to end this uncomfortable conversation? Wasn't the general consensus of this great university sufficient to silence anyone who still believed the Bible to be true? Tom thought for a moment and answered. "Jonah and the whale. There's your proof. No educated person today could believe for one moment that a whale could have swallowed a man and then spit him out on the shore alive three days later!"

Here was the crisis for me. How could we handle this direct challenge to the historicity of the Book of Jonah? Perhaps we could find in the University Library some books on whales that would demonstrate their ability to swallow men alive. Perhaps we could even find historical evidence of men who had actually survived such an ordeal.² That would convince him that the Book of Jonah is as infallible as the rest of the Bible!

Providentially, it was my teacher who answered him first. "Tom, I'm frankly very thankful that it is the Book of Jonah you seem to be struggling with. There is no more fascinating book in the Old Testament than Jonah. Some day, if we have time, I would like to discuss with you the entire message of that book which was alluded to by Christ Himself for a very important reason. In the meantime, however, would you mind if I explained to you why I have come to believe that the Bible is the Word of God and therefore true in all its parts?"

Impressed with the irresistible graciousness and confidence of this man who seemed to know from personal experience the God of whom he spoke, Tom gave his cautious consent. What he heard was not a scientific, historical, or philosophical defense of Christianity, but a Gospel-saturated testimony directed prayerfully to his heart. "Tom, I really felt the way you do about God's Word when I was a student here thirty years ago. I thought I had all the answers I needed concerning life. But I was wrong. In His infinite love, God reached down to me in my deep personal need and showed me through the familiar words of His matchless Book that my root problem was sin--deliberate alienation from God Himself. For this I deserved destruction, eternal destruction from His presence. But Christ, God's unique Son, died one day upon a cross to pay in His own person the full penalty of my sin, and He rose from the dead three days later to confirm the infinite price He had come to pay. Tom, it wasn't my efforts to reach God or my superiority to other people that brought me peace with God. It was simply my acceptance of His gift of love, His eternal Son, by faith in the truth of His promise. And Tom, this great gift is for

you, too. You may have Him as your eternal Saviour from sin's penalty today."

As I recall the conversation, Tom did raise some questions about Christianity and the Bible. The questions were not totally ignored, but the answers were always amplified by new perspectives on the Gospel and fresh appeals for surrender to Christ. At the end of an hour I saw something I had not dreamed possible--a proud university student kneeling beside his bed with this God-honoring missionary, acknowledging the Lordship of Jesus Christ in his life. There had been no great arguments, no rushing to the library for documentation on this or that Christian evidence, no appeal to human authorities. What had we really done to prove to this young intellectual that the Book of Jonah records completely historical events? And yet now he had no insuperable problem with this portion of the Bible. He didn't know any more than he had known before about the details, but he did have a totally new perspective on the authority of Scripture because he had now for the first time met personally the true Author of this unique Book.

This was not the only time I saw this happen during my years at Princeton University, and it is still happening today through the intensively Biblical witness of the present directors of the Princeton Evangelical Fellowship. Literally hundreds of students have come to know Christ on that campus through Donald Fullerton and his successors, and many are now serving Him in pastorates and in the mission fields of the world.³

All of this forced me to take a new look at some basic factors of Christian apologetics that I had seriously neglected. I have come to believe that my initial ignorance concerning these Biblical principles also characterizes many frustrated and fruitless Christian workers today.⁴

My problem was basically twofold. I had underestimated the depth of man's rebellion against God, and I was unaware of the absolutely crucial part which the Word of God must have, through the convicting and illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, in bringing sinful men to Christ. It will be my purpose in this series of studies to examine biblical revelation concerning man's spiritual inability, God's method of reaching lost men, major proof texts for rationalistic apologetics, and the part which Christian evidences may have in our ministry of witnessing today.

Christian Apologetics, Human Depravity and Satan

In our efforts to make the Bible and Christianity attractive and acceptable to men we find ourselves immediately confronted with two stupendous obstacles: man's fallen nature and the Satanic forces which surround him. Though these facts should come as no great surprise to one who is even superficially acquainted with Biblical Christianity, it is astonishing to me how few of the better known evangelical works on Christian apologetics today give them serious consideration. One is almost led to believe, when reading such books, that what we *really* need to win intellectuals to Christ (in addition to the Gospel) is an arsenal of carefully developed arguments against the various false religious and philosophical systems we may confront today⁵ and/or an impressive array of evidences from, say, archaeology and history, that the Bible and Christianity are true.⁶ If this were really so, one might be pardoned for wondering why Christianity has not long since made a clean sweep of the religious world, since it is uniquely possessed of infallible proofs of its claims (cf. Acts 1:3, 26:26).

But if we are to be truly honest with the Biblical perspectives on this question, we must admit that we have too often been guilty of building our systems of apologetics upon other foundations than the one set forth in Scripture. Instead of giving us the impression that men are eagerly waiting for proof that Christianity is true, we find the Bible exposing men's hearts as sealed shut against any and all finite pressures for conversion. The basic problem of the non-Christian is not merely academic and intellectual. It is moral and spiritual. The Bible indicates that *all* unbelievers (including so-called honest doubters) are enemies of God, under divine judgment because of their deliberate distortion of all reality to fit into their own spiritual frame of reference.⁷ There is not the slightest desire in the natural man to seek Him, find Him, and acknowledge Him for who He is. "The wicked, in the haughtiness of his countenance, does not seek Him. All his thoughts are, There is no God" (Psa. 10:4). On another occasion, the Holy Spirit informs us by the pen of David, God "looked down from heaven upon the sons of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God" (Psa. 14:2). But what did he discover? A significant minority of God seekers? Consider His answer! "They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one" (also quoted in Romans 3:10-12).

Not only does the unbeliever not seek and practice truth, he consistently suppresses whatever truth he does receive: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness . . . they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:18-20). In fact, the Scriptures make it clear that fallen men, so far from being open to arguments about God's claims upon them are in a state of enmity against Him. "The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so" (Rom. 8:7). "While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son" (Rom. 5:10).

Christian apologetics has been traditionally concerned with giving rational answers to the challenges of unbelievers concerning God's special revelation in Scripture. But what kind of minds are we appealing to? To what extent have sin and spiritual rebellion against God affected man's rational capacities? Ponder these statements: "You were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world . . . indulging the desires of the flesh *and of the mind*, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest" (Eph. 2:1-3). "The Gentiles . . . walk in the futility of their *mind*, being darkened *in their understanding*, excluded from the life of God, because of the *ignorance* that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart" (Eph. 4:17-18).

But is the human "mind" not capable of detaching itself from the so-called "heart" and of drawing its own conclusions about God independent of the downward direction of the fallen nature? The answer is *no*. Mark our Lord's explanation of the unbreakable relationship between the mind and the heart: "out of the heart come *evil thoughts*" (Matt. 15:19; cf. Mark 7:31). He later asked his disciples: "why do *doubts* arise in your hearts?" (Luke 24:38). The Scriptures offer us no hope of bringing about a fundamental change in a man's thinking about God apart from a profound change in his "heart," the moral/spiritual center of his personal being.⁸ This is a basic reality that no Christian apologist can afford to ignore.

In addition to the obstacle of the human heart/mind being in utter opposition to the truth of God, there is the obstacle of Satan, "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4), and his demonic forces. When I speak to an unbeliever about Christ, I am not really speaking to one person but to two or more persons, all but one of whom are invisible. The Apostle

Paul spoke of this astounding fact several times. He explained that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). He knew that Christians "formerly walked according to . . . the prince of the power of the air, of that spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2). He fully recognized that "if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4). In the parable of the sower, our Lord also spoke of this obstacle to the reception of His Word when he identified the birds that devoured the seed: "When any one hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road" (Matt. 13:19).

A system of Christian apologetics that underestimates the power of Satan in the minds of unbelievers may not exactly be guilty of reviling angelic majesties as Jude warns us (vs. 8). But by ignoring to some extent the enormity of Satan's power, it is to that same extent unable to follow Michael's example and to say effectively: "The Lord rebuke you" (Jude 9; cf. Zech. 3:2). What we desperately need today is an apologetic with power!

Part II: Christian Apologetics and the Divine Solution

If the Biblical picture of man's enmity against God and control by Satan is correct, then how can Christians ever persuade men to turn from sin and Satan to the true and living God? The Biblical answer, of course, is that they cannot. The Scriptures do not say that it is difficult for the unbeliever to accept spiritual truth. They say that it is impossible. "A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" (1 Cor. 2:14). When our Lord once made a similar pronouncement concerning an entire segment of society, His disciples "were very astonished and said, 'Then who can be saved?'" His answer provides for us the key to all truly effective Christian apologetics today: "With men this is impossible, *but with God all things are possible*" (Mt. 19:26).

It seems quite obvious, then, that God never intended that Christians should win the lost through purely philosophical and academic arguments or even that they should by this means remove the mental/spiritual obstacles within unbelievers so that the Word of God might penetrate their hearts.⁹ If this had been His plan, the vast majority of Christians would have been automatically disqualified from effective witness, for they would not be able to meet highly educated unbelievers on their own level in intellectual debate. "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise . . . that no man should boast before God" (1 Cor. 1:26-29).

The Biblical method of winning men to Christ (including the intellectuals of our day) is to lovingly, patiently and prayerfully present the true Gospel "according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4) from the context of a godly life (1 Thess. 1:5, 2:3-12). Only the "living and powerful" Word of God can penetrate the unbeliever's shield of defense and pierce into his heart (Heb. 4:12), and thus only God may receive the glory for the genuine conversion of sinful men. Once converted by God's Holy Spirit, a man for the first time in his life enjoys the proper perspective and frame of reference for analysing his intellectual

problems concerning Christian doctrines, even if he never finds the complete answers this side of heaven.¹⁰ As the Apostle John described it, "you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know . . . And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for any one to teach you . . . as His anointing teaches you about all things" (1 John 2: 20, 27).¹¹

Paul's own conversion is an instructive illustration of this divine dynamic. Instead of presenting a list of questions to the Lord Jesus when he was overwhelmed by His presence on the Damascus Road, Saul of Tarsus simply cried out, "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22:10). With his spiritual blindness thus removed, "he immediately began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God'" (Acts 9:20), and he was *not* "disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19), even though it must have required years for him to rethink everything that he had previously learned about the Scriptures in the light of this transforming new revelation. The Scripture-saturated message that God used to bring the pricks of deep conviction to Saul's heart was probably the testimony of Stephen, sealed with his own blood (Acts 7:58; 8:1). The Book of Acts contains numerous examples of such proclamations of God's revealed message, resulting in conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit and genuine conversion (cf. 2:36-38; 8:35-36; 10:42-48; 16:31).

Another important New Testament example of this approach to Christian apologetics may be found in Paul's admonition to the Corinthian church to turn from worldly wisdom and from an unwarranted glorying in certain sign-gifts in order that they might give themselves to the clear proclamation of God's Word: "But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you" (1 Cor. 14:24-25).¹² It is perfectly obvious from this remarkable passage that neither human wisdom nor empirical signs were an adequate substitute for the clear proclamation of God's Word.

But if the Christian apologist constantly appeals to God's Word in order to establish its truth in the mind of the unbeliever, is he not guilty of reasoning in a circle? If the unbeliever refuses to accept the Scriptures as divinely inspired, should not the apologist temporarily abandon the Bible until he has demonstrated its truth independently by appealing to the vast array of archaeological, historical, scientific, and other facts that tend to confirm its claims?¹³

The answer to this question is *no*. If Christianity is merely a circle of truth which is conditioned and defined and judged by other circles of truth, then it is not a "truth circle" at all; for the Scriptures boldly and consistently claim to be God's eternal, all-inclusive, unique, final, and thus absolutely authoritative Word. This is the utterly crucial, yet widely neglected, foundation of Christian apologetics. When the Christian appeals to God's Word he is appealing to the *only* ultimate circle of truth there is concerning God and spiritual realities. This circle is so vast and profound that it includes everything that exists, both within and beyond the universe, both visible and invisible--including the unbeliever himself and the very "god of this world" who blinds him!¹⁴

To turn off the light of God's Word, as it were, in order to establish first a "common ground" with the unbeliever is thus to abandon Truth in order to grope together with an unregenerate mind in the darkness that characterizes this world-system apart from God. Revealed Truth is self-authenticating and self-vindicating, like light. Peter stated that we

"do well to pay attention" to the Word of God "as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns" (2 Peter 1:19).

A humble illustration may be useful at this point. Imagine a man lost within the deep recesses of a dark cavern in utter despair of ever finding his way out. If his friend had a general idea of his location, how could he best come to his rescue? Should he rush into the cave, careless of his pathway, and sit with him in the darkness, sharing with him the common ground of being lost? Would it not be vastly wiser to take along a powerful flashlight, marking his path as he enters the cavern in order to lead him out quickly to the safety of the world above? But suppose that, in his utter despair, he refused to believe that his friend had a flashlight and that there was indeed a way out? Should the would-be rescuer sit there in the darkness and argue with him concerning the size, make, power, and previous performance of his flashlight? Since this man still has the capacity for recognizing physical light when he sees it, should not his friend immediately end the debate by *inviting him to look at the light as he presses the button?*

Man's amazing capacity to hear and to see in the physical realm did not come about by chance. "The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord has made both of them" (Prov. 20:12). Neither is man's capacity to recognize God's truth a product of chance. *Every human being has this capacity and will be judged by the Creator on the basis of his use of it.* John tells us that Christ is "the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man" (Jn. 1:9). Thus, man has an innate knowledge of his Creator. "What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them" (Rom. 1:19).

When a man is therefore confronted with Christ, the Light of the World, it is no help to him at all to take him seriously when he demands another light first. When a Christian apologist turns off the light of his Lord and begins groping in the darkness to find some other light (from the general consensus of scientific opinion, for example), he has entered into a spiritual cavern from which there is no escape. What he must do is to keep the heart and mind of his unbelieving friend exposed to God's Word in one way or another, all the time praying that the Spirit of God might bring conviction of sin and a willingness to trust the Saviour. If he does not respond to God's infallible Word, which is His *special* revelation, what assurance do we gain from the Bible that he will respond to the witness of *general* revelation, such as the various theistic proofs for God's personal existence and historical evidences for the truth of Christianity?¹⁵

The Christian who adopts such a Bible-centered apologetic, however, must prepare himself for intense criticism, even from fellow Christians. To subordinate rationalistic argumentation to the supremacy of Scripture is to cut across the grain of all our natural inclinations and invites the accusation of bigotry and obscurantism. "After all," we are being told on every side, "with so many false religions, cults, and philosophies in the world today, is it not the right and responsibility of an intelligent person to investigate carefully the validity of Christianity in comparison with other possible alternatives before making a final decision?"

Again, the answer is *no*. Christianity is not simply one of several available religious truth systems. Nor is our Lord Jesus Christ just one of several saviours we may investigate at our own leisure and on our own terms. Furthermore, our intelligent investigator is far from being neutral and unbiased in spiritual matters. He cannot sit in judgment with complete objectivity as one religion after another passes in review, waiting to find one that is logically coherent, historically and scientifically factual, and personally satisfying

before adopting it as his own.¹⁶

Quite to the contrary, men are active enemies of the one true God of revelation and redemption, in whose image and likeness we have all been created and in whom we live, move and have our being (Acts 17:28). While it is true that the divine image has been marred through the Fall, it is nevertheless very much intact (Gen. 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; Jas. 3:9). This is what totally separates mankind from beasts. And it is precisely because man *does* bear God's image that he inwardly *knows* who this God is. That is why he runs away from God and His Word and hides his face from Him (cf. Gen. 3:11; Isa. 53:3). That is why he also hinders or suppresses the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18) and "hates the light, and does not come to the light" (Jn. 3:20). Sinful men cannot innocently claim that God is an unknown entity to them, "for even though *they knew God*, they did not honor him as God, or give thanks; but became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Rom. 1:21).¹⁷

These are the reasons why sinful men actually have no right to demand "proper credentials" when the Creator says to them: "Repent! Believe my Word! Obey Me--NOW!" When the Holy Spirit says to the human heart, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," it is potential suicide to procrastinate, investigate or debate. "Behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). "God is *now* declaring to men that all everywhere should repent" (Acts 17:30). God may graciously prolong the appeal, but sinful man cannot presume upon this!

Let us look at the matter from a different perspective. If an unregenerate man actually did have the right to demand full intellectual satisfaction concerning the claims of God's Word before accepting them, he would be the greatest of fools for settling for anything less than a complete demonstration.¹⁸ But in order to have such a demonstration he would have to examine carefully *all* the pertinent facts and *every* possible alternative before receiving Christ as his Lord. Of course, he would die long before he could arrive at the place where he could make a decision on this basis. Such an approach to Christian apologetics is completely unbiblical and also leads to logical absurdities.

To give an unbeliever the impression that he has a right to demand answers to all the rational problems relating to the Bible and Christianity before he repents of his sin and turns to Christ for forgiveness is to set him up on a pedestal of intellectual and spiritual pride from which he will *never* descend. What can such endless debates actually accomplish in preparing such a person for "the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus" (Rom. 2:16)? What can be said for such rationalistic apologetics when God has commissioned us to present *the whole counsel of God* (cf. Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 20:27; 2 Tim. 2:2, 4:2)? And how do we respond to Paul's admonition to Timothy: "be kind to all, able to teach [i.e., to teach *revealed* truth, cf. 2:15], patient . . . with gentleness correcting [i.e., with *Scripture*, cf. 4:2] those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth . . . and escape from the snare of the devil" (2 Tim. 2:24-26)?

If the New Testament is our infallible guide in such matters, we must conclude that the Christian who will be most effectively used by God in winning people to Christ is not *necessarily* the one who knows the most about secular philosophy, psychology, history, archaeology, or natural science (important though these disciplines may be in their proper place in developing a comprehensive Christian world-and-life view), but rather the Christian who knows most about God's Word and who humbly seeks God's daily

strength and wisdom in obeying it. The best Christian apologist is the best student of Scripture, who, to use the Bible's own terms to describe him, is "accustomed to the word of righteousness" (Heb. 5:13), "a workman who does not need to be ashamed" because he is "handling accurately the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15), a man who, like Apollos, is "mighty in the Scriptures . . . instructed in the way of the Lord . . . speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus," and thus able by God's Word to "powerfully refute" unbelievers (Acts 18:24-28).

Part III: Proof Texts for Semi-Rationalistic Apologetics

The writer finds himself in complete agreement with those who insist that Christianity is supremely rational.¹⁹ This is not because the Christian understands everything that God has revealed, for even the Apostle Paul refused to make such a claim (1 Cor. 13:9; Rom. 11:33; cf. 2 Peter 3:16). The reason why one must insist on the essential rationality of God's inscripturated revelation (in vigorous opposition to all dialectical and existential thinkers) is that God Himself is Infinite Reason. His thoughts can be communicated to us effectively and in truth (i.e., the Bible is perspicuous - 1 Jn. 2:20, 27), even though man's finiteness will prevent him from knowing God exhaustively.²⁰ The Gospel may be foolishness "to those who are perishing" (1 Cor. 1:18), but it is *not* intrinsically foolish! To the contrary, it is perfect and infinite wisdom (1Cor. 1:20-29).

Thus, the Christian message is *ultimately rational*. But this is very far from saying that the Christian message can be communicated *rationalistically* to lost men. To be sure, there are certain passages in the New Testament which are frequently appealed to in support of such an approach; but a careful study reveals that the exact opposite is true.

1 Peter 3:15

The Apostle Peter, by the Spirit of God, commanded each believer to be ready always "to make a defense [Gk. *apologian*, an answer] to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you." Does this mean that the Christian must go outside of the sphere of revelational truth to provide intellectual and academic justification for his faith in God's Word to the unbeliever? Could Peter himself have fulfilled such a command in view of his very limited academic background?²¹ Would the Apostle Paul, who was widely known for his "great learning" (Acts 26:24; cf. 22:3), have indulged in such pursuits for the philosophically-minded Corinthians in view of his avowed determination "to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified . . . that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:2, 5)? Hardly so.

One therefore suspects from the very outset that the very popular semi-rationalistic interpretation of 1 Peter 3:15 is misguided.²² This suspicion is confirmed by an examination of the immediate context of the passage. Peter was writing to persecuted Christians who were being terrified by their pagan neighbors. They were commanded, however, not to sink into despair, but to recognize their truly "blessed" situation (cf. Mt. 5:10; Jas. 5:11). Furthermore, they were neither to fear nor to be troubled (v. 14; cf. Isa. 8:12). But why should they adopt such an attitude? Was it because they knew they could outmaneuver their enemies in intellectual debate? Definitely not. Early Christians did not

include "many wise according to the flesh" (1 Cor. 1:26) among their number. Their confidence was really based upon their spiritual resources in Christ the Lord, whom they were to "sanctify" in their hearts. It was based upon "the hope" that was in them, namely, the spiritual hope that came through Christ's resurrection from the dead (cf. 1:3, 21).

Furthermore, the words that follow Peter's command to "be ready always to make a defense" are highly significant. This defense is to be made with "gentleness and reverence" (cf. Col. 4:6) and with a "good conscience so that . . . those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame." Note carefully that these conditions have nothing to do with rationalistic debate, for a basic assumption underlying such debate is that a correct answer is effective regardless of the presence or absence of gentleness, reverence and godliness in the one giving the answer. But in a spiritual witness to the truth of God, these factors are absolutely vital.²³

It is clear from this passage, then, that no spiritually effective answers can be given to unregenerate people by Christians concerning the hope that is in them until they have learned to "sanctify Christ as Lord" in their own hearts. But what does this really mean? The term "sanctify" in this context presupposes that Christians are themselves sanctified or holy (= set apart for God; cf. 1 Pet. 1:16), "so that Christ dwells in them as His temple, and will not suffer any impurity."²⁴ The Christian must not contaminate his witness to Christ by sinful anger or non-revelational arguments in this moment of spiritual opportunity. Peter perhaps recalled such an incident beside a fire in the court of the high priest (Mk. 14:66-72).

In the immediate context, then, Peter is saying that the believer must confess *his inability* to convert men by mere human reasonings and *God's unique and sovereign ability* to do the work of converting. He must learn to pray: "Lord, you know the hearts of all men. You know how to penetrate these hearts with your own Word, as you once did to mine. Help me, *by your Spirit*, to present *your Word*, not my words, to these men. And may *you* be glorified by the results."

During the 1944 Ardennes campaign in Belgium, better known as the Battle of the Bulge, the writer served in a fire direction center in the 909th Field Artillery Battalion. It was his job to sit with two other men in a basement behind the front lines and to telephone directions to the artillerymen who handled the twelve 105mm guns. But the really dangerous job was entrusted to the forward observer, usually a lieutenant. He had to position himself in a high place near enough to the front lines to see enemy tanks approaching. When the tanks came into view, a potential crisis emerged. He could either panic or he could follow strict instructions. If he panicked and fled to the rear, the tanks would proceed unchallenged and all might be lost, including the forward observer. Or, he might rush toward the tanks and start firing on them himself. That would also prove disastrous to him, and to his military unit.

There was, however, a third alternative. That would be to "sanctify" the field artillery in his heart! In other words, he could follow instructions and phone the fire direction center, giving them the number, size, location, and apparent speed and direction of movement of the enemy tanks, confessing thereby his *inability* to handle them in his own strength, and the *ability* of the field artillery to do the job he could not do.

It hardly seems necessary to explain that once the artillery had zeroed in on these tanks, they were in desperate danger. As dozens of armor-piercing shells whistled over the head of the forward observer and penetrated these metallic monsters one by one,

exploding inside, *he was giving his greatest apologetic* to the challenge that confronted him. As God's forward observers in Satan's world of demons and fallen men, Christians must learn to call upon Christ their Lord. No other system has ever really worked, nor ever shall.

What, then, is the "answer" that each of us must be prepared to give to everyone who asks us to give an account for the hope that is in us? The answer must be basically God's Word, not our own word. God's thoughts are vastly higher than our thoughts (Isa. 55:9), and His words penetrate far deeper into men's hearts than our words. In every sincere soul-winning effort, the believer soon discovers that his words are dead, inactive and dull. But "the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

It was Christ the Lord who set the apologetic example for all believers when He thrice defeated Satan with accurate, appropriate quotations from the Word of God, and with the formula, "It is written." In His great confrontation with unbelieving Pharisees in John 8:12-59, our Lord appealed constantly to *basic spiritual realities*, such as the witness of His Father (14, 26, 28, 29, 38, 42, 49, 54), rather than to sign-miracles. It is noteworthy that "as He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him" (v. 30). When officers were sent to seize Jesus (John 7:32), they returned empty-handed. Why? Because of physical reasons? No, because of *the overpowering force of God's Word*: "Never did a man speak the way this man speaks" (v. 46).

Do modern Christians sometimes feel that they have, because of archaeological, historical, scientific, and other discoveries that shed light on the Scriptures, *a superior apologetic* to that of our Lord and His apostles, and of the early church? If so, they have not really sanctified the Lord Christ in their hearts, and their answers to lost men can bring neither conviction nor conversion in the Biblical sense of those terms. God's work must be done in God's way if it is to receive God's approval (cf. 1 Cor. 3:10-15).

Acts 17:1-34

Another prominent proof text for semi-rationalism in apologetics is Paul's message to the Athenians on Mars Hill (Gk. *Areopagus*, hill of Ares). Not only did Paul avoid giving any direct reference to Holy Scripture, he even quoted two Greek poets approvingly (Epimenides of Crete in 28a, and Aratus of Cilicia in 28b). Does this mean that he stepped outside of the realm of revealed truth to argue on the basis of human reasoning toward the God of Christianity? Many seem to think so,²⁵ but the Biblical facts point in a different direction.

It is very important to recognize that before the Mars Hill confrontation began, Paul had already been "preaching Jesus and the resurrection" day after day in the market place of Athens (Acts 17:18). Thus, his Mars Hill address was not presented in a total vacuum. These Greek thinkers wanted to know *more* about "this new doctrine" (vv. 19-20).²⁶

Furthermore, so far from proving the existence of the God of Christianity, Paul simply and authoritatively declared Him to these men (v. 23). He *declared* this God to be the Creator and the Lord of the world and of mankind (vv. 24-26). He *declared* the nearness and thus the accessibility of God to mankind (vv. 27-28), and the utter ignorance of

idolatry (vv. 29-30). And, finally, he *announced* that this great God will some day judge all men through that resurrected man whom Paul had previously named as Jesus (vv. 18, 31); and, therefore, He "is now *declaring* to men that all everywhere should repent" (v. 30).

How many of these startling assertions could the great apostle have *demonstrated* to the Athenians on a scientific, historical, or logical basis, even if he had five or ten years to spend with them? Dominated by a fallen nature, and Satanically blinded, these men shared with the apostle an epistemological "common ground" that consisted only of their mutual possession of the image and likeness of God through creation (this being vastly more significant for evangelism than their common knowledge of Greek literature and philosophy).

While it may be technically correct to say that Paul did not quote directly from the Holy Scriptures, complete with the normal introductory formulas he would have used in a synagogue presentation, it is also correct to say that he was absolutely true to the Biblical message throughout. This particular audience, after all, was not familiar with the text of the Old Testament. But it is the *message* of God's Word, not necessarily the precise Hebrew and Greek words of the original text, as such, which God uses to draw men to Himself (remembering, of course, that the only message which God will honor is the one which in turn depends upon and is ultimately derived from a true and therefore verbally inerrant text).²⁷

Many have been perplexed by Paul's quotations from two pagan poets, *Epimenides of Crete* (v. 28a; quoted also in Titus 1:12), and *Aratus of Cilicia* (v. 28b). Was this an appeal to human reasoning to prove the truth of Biblical revelation? By no means! Paul, in alluding to their own Greek authors to *illustrate points of formal agreement* with God's revealed truth, was simply being consistent with his own determination to become "as without law" when ministering in a Gentile context (1 Cor. 9:21).²⁸ Paul was doing in Athens as he had already done in a similar situation at Lystra (Acts 14: 15- 17). In other words, what we actually have here is *a model of effective Christian communication, not a model of semi-rationalistic apologetics*.²⁹

Unfortunately, it is not only the semi-rationalists who have misread Paul's message to the Athenians. Some theologians who stand in opposition to rationalism in apologetics feel that Paul was guilty of this very thing at Athens, and as a result (1) reaped no great spiritual harvest there, and (2) later acknowledged his failure by assuring the Corinthians to whom he came next in his southward journey: "I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2).³⁰

The writer is convinced that this is an inadequate approach to the Biblical record. In the light of Luke's purpose of providing representative examples of apostolic preaching at the dawn of Church history, "it is incredible that he should have reported apostolic preaching which was intended to demonstrate how the Gospel was *not* to be preached . . . Luke gives every impression of presenting Paul as a masterful orator who knew exactly how to suit his message to a distinctive and challenging situation. That Paul can have been thought of as in reality a failure can be accepted only if the most decisive proofs can be mustered in support of that hypothesis."³¹

Furthermore, if Paul's message was not honored of the Holy Spirit, why did Luke inform us that "some . . . believed, among whom also was Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them" (Acts 17:34)? As may be expected

wherever the Gospel seed is sown, some mocked and others procrastinated. But some *did* believe!³²

The Bible is quite clear on this: apart from a presentation of the true Gospel, *no one* can be saved (Acts 4:12). That this spells disaster for pure rationalism in apologetics is obvious; but it needs to be stated that semi-rationalism also fails to come to grips with the unanimous testimony of the New Testament as to how God's people must "make a defense to every one who asks" them concerning their hope in Christ the Lord.³³

Part IV: The Limitations and Values of Christian Evidences

It may be useful to distinguish between two levels of empirical evidences which God has chosen to use in reference to the unregenerate mind. The first and most powerful of these may be designated as *supernatural sign-miracles*. The second consists of *circumstantial evidences*.

On the "higher" level, God directly confronts the human mind with Himself and His Word. Such confrontations would include all the spectacular miracles recorded in Scriptures and experienced by men. Biblical testimony indicates that they were presented to human minds with such force and clarity that no one was able to deny them (cf. Ex. 8:19; 15:14-16; Jn. 2:9-11; 1 Sam. 6:6; 2 Chr. 32:23, 31; Ps. 126:2, 3; John 3:2, 11:47; Acts 4:16).

A careful study of Scripture also indicates that such high-level empirical confrontations were exceedingly rare in Bible times, being particularly abundant only in the ministries of Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and especially of our Lord. It is the writer's conviction that they are not occurring today, during what may be called the superstructure phase of post-apostolic church history.³⁴

The "lower" (and, to some extent, distorted and contaminated) level of evidence for the truth of God's revelation from the standpoint of sense experience includes reports of conversion experiences or answers to prayer as testified by true Christians, Biblical prophecies that have been fulfilled or are seemingly being fulfilled today, archaeological discoveries that pertain to certain statements in the Bible, philosophical arguments for the existence of God, logical arguments for the supernatural origin of the Bible based on its unique qualities, and historical arguments for the bodily resurrection of Christ. These evidences for the truth of God's Word are logically persuasive to some extent or other, depending upon the openness, brilliance, and patience of the investigator. But they are not sign-miracles, and therefore are incomparably less compelling to the unregenerate mind.

Limitations of Christian Evidences

It is precisely at this point that the drastic limitations of Christian Evidences, as a tool for evangelism, are revealed. The ultimate in empirical evidences, namely, the Biblical sign-miracles, *is not occurring today*. The truly astounding fact, however, is that such miracles, even when they did occur at rare occasions in human history, *did not in and of themselves change the hearts of men from sin to God*.

The Apostle John tells us that when Christ was in Jerusalem at the Passover "many believed in His name, beholding His signs which He was doing. But Jesus, for His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men and . . . knew what was in man" (John 2:23-25). This is indeed astonishing! On the one hand, *many trusted in Christ*. On the other hand, *Christ was not trusting in them*. Apparently, then, "beholding" the signs of Christ and "believing" in Him on that basis, fell far short of saving faith.³⁵ This is confirmed by our Lord's interview with one of these "believers," namely, Nicodemus. The one thing needful for this "teacher of Israel" was regeneration, apart from which he would never "see the kingdom of God," signs or no signs.

The same drastic limitation of empirical signs in reference to lost men is set forth by John in the sixth chapter of his gospel. Several months had passed, and now thousands of "Nicodemuses" were following Jesus, absolutely fascinated by His unique and undeniable sign-miracles. If any lingering doubts remained in the minds of these five thousand men and their families, they were dispelled by the miracle of the loaves and fishes. "When therefore the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, 'This is of a truth the Prophet who is come into the world'" (Jn. 6:14).

Can we say these people were true believers because they saw and accepted the validity of the divinely-wrought signs? Our Lord did not think so. "Truly, truly, I say unto you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled . . . *You have seen Me, and yet do not believe . . .* As a result of this; many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him any more" (Jn. 6:26, 36, 66).

Some have claimed that Thomas was regenerated through seeing the sign miracle of Christ's resurrected body (Jn. 20:26-28).³⁶ But it seems clear from John 13:11 that Thomas was already a genuine believer, though obviously, like Peter, he was inconsistent in his faith.³⁷ Furthermore, it is important to ponder our Lord's word to Thomas: "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? *Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed*" (Jn. 20:29). So far from being essential to saving faith, empirical signs in a sense disqualified a person from being "blessed." Although such signs were essential for confirming the claims of divine messengers in the Israelite theocracy (cf. Dt. 18:22; 1 Cor. 1:22), *they were never intended to be a substitute for genuine faith in the Word of God*. Thomas had probably heard Christ exclaim more than once: "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe" (Jn. 4:48; cf. Mt. 12:39 - "an evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign").

Even more startling, perhaps, is the account which our Lord gave of the rich man in Hades (Lk. 16:19-31).³⁸ Discovering his utterly hopeless position, the rich man begged Abraham to send Lazarus back to the land of the living, to his five brothers who had not yet believed God's Word, and who were thus moving steadily toward the same horrible fate that he himself had come to experience.

The plan was admittedly impressive. Doubtless on more than one occasion the men had seen this wretched beggar as they had come to visit their wealthy brother. Leftovers from their reunion banquets may have kept him alive a little longer. They also knew that the beggar had died. Thus the stage was set for an apologetic confrontation second to none. From the depths of Hades, the scene unfolded in the imagination of one in flames and agony.

In response to repeated knocking, a still-living brother opens his door to behold in utter astonishment the once-living and never-to-be-forgotten beggar. "I am Lazarus! I am back

from the realm of the dead! I have seen your dead brother in torment! He desperately wants to warn you to turn from sin and believe in God before it is eternally too late! Now, at last, you have the proof you have longed for. Don't delay!"

Would such a confrontation--an unanswerable sign-miracle, an overwhelming empirical evidence of divine realities--have produced a change of heart in these five brothers? Many contemporary apologists apparently think so. But Abraham did not. Residing in the full light of heaven's realities, "the friend of God" answered: "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them."

The rich man's response reveals why the gates of heaven were forever closed to him. It was not because he had no concern for his brothers. It was because he had no respect for the Word of his God. "No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!" Ponder the implications of his words: "Moses and the Prophets are utterly irrelevant to my brothers. You must understand, Father Abraham, that our family has always insisted on logical, objective, empirical demonstrations before making important commitments. Religious documents from the distant past have never really impressed us. But to see a man risen from the dead would be another matter entirely!"

In the light of contemporary trends in Christian apologetics, what should Abraham's final response have been? To be fully accepted into the semi-rationalistic circles of modern evangelicalism, he should probably have said to the rich man across the great chasm: "I didn't realize that your family rejected Moses and the Prophets. Since this is the case, it probably would be best to send someone to them from the dead, for the time is short and it certainly would be unfair to expect them to believe the Scriptures to be the Word of God on the basis of a so-called 'self-authenticating witness.' After all, there are many religious documents that claim to be the word of some god or other.³⁹ The only reasonable approach, then, in the light of their academic and philosophic background, is to confront them with something that would enable them to see that the true religion 'accounts for more empirical evidence, axiological evidence, psychological evidence, and ethical evidence, with fewer difficulties than any other hypothesis.'⁴⁰ At all costs, we want to avoid a 'cavalier attitude toward evidences,' for 'the Spirit works in conjunction with evidences.'⁴¹ And we certainly do not endorse a 'fideist' approach to religious truth, for 'some checking procedure is the only defense a person has against horrible self-delusion and a landslide of bigotry and fanaticism.'⁴² I will alert Lazarus for immediate re-entry to the land of the living and for the empirical encounter that your brothers so greatly need and deserve."

In contrast to the intricate philosophizing that is so much in vogue in Christian apologetics today,⁴³ or even the sign-miracles that were available in Christ's day, our Lord emphasized again (through the mouth of Abraham) the absolute priority of the powerful Word of God, through which the Holy Spirit has chosen to accomplish His exclusive work of spiritual illumination.⁴⁴ "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31).⁴⁵ It is this profound and fundamental revelation from God that explains the continued unbelief of a Judas Iscariot in the face of overwhelming evidence. It explains the paradox of John 12:9-19, where, on the one hand, "many of the Jews . . . were believing in Jesus" on account of Lazarus whom He raised from the dead (v. 11); and, on the other hand, the chief priests and Pharisees were, as a result, determined to kill Lazarus as well as Jesus (vv. 10, 19)!

The amazing contrast of responses to this sign can be explained by the varied responses to the Word of God that accompanied the sign. Thus, sign-miracles were never intended to convert men to God, but to attract attention to the divine message that alone could save (cf. Mt. 9:6; Acts 14:8-18). If and when the message of God's Word was believed, salvation came. But for the majority of Israel's leaders of that day, as well as for the millions of sign-seeking Israelites (and others) before and since that day, the signs they saw and "the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard" (Heb. 4:2).

The Values of Christian Evidences

What, then, are the true values of Christian evidences? At this point, great caution needs to be exercised. To the extent that such evidences are used as a substitute for, or an *essential* preparation for, the true Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, they can become a Satanic obstacle in the pathway of the Holy Spirit to the heart of man. Nowhere does Scripture indicate that the Spirit uses any instrument other than His Word to bring true conviction and conversion (Isa. 55:11; Rom. 10:8-17; Heb. 4:12-13).

If used "lawfully," however, Christian evidences can have great value. For the *believer*, they can provide a certain degree of intellectual satisfaction, deeper appreciation for the marvels and complexities of God's universe, and helpful background materials for the study of various aspects of Biblical revelation. For the *unbeliever*, they can be used to arouse interest and hold attention (somewhat like the sign-miracles during the period of the Gospels and the Book of Acts), if carefully and skillfully handled by the Christian *in conjunction with a true Gospel witness*.

But Christian evidences can neither create, sustain, nor increase true faith in God!⁴⁶ Otherwise, the greatest faith would have been exercised by the greatest Palestinian archaeologists. But it must sadly be admitted that very few of these have been giants of the faith. To the contrary, "faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17).

Furthermore, there are perfectly legitimate ways to attract and to hold the attention of the unbeliever which are available to the average Christian who may not be skilled in history, archaeology, philosophy or science. For example, man has an aesthetic aspect to his nature as well as an intellectual aspect; and some people can be attracted to the presentation of the Christian message just as effectively *by its association with beautiful music and a clean, comfortable, and attractive place of worship*, as by academic discussions.⁴⁷

On an even deeper level, the image and likeness of God in a man includes his capacity and need for friendship and love. A Christian couple, who may not have read any of the latest works on Christian evidences, can be powerfully attractive to an unsaved neighbor by inviting him to a delicious home-cooked meal in the atmosphere of a clean and well-ordered home, engaging him in conversation concerning matters of mutual interest (farming? weather? politics? sports? children?) and *demonstrating loving concern for him as a person*. Might not this be considered a form of Christian evidences in the broader sense of that term? In fact, might it not be even more effective as a means of attracting and holding the attention of this unsaved neighbor for the purpose of presenting a genuine witness to the Christ of Scripture than a more traditional form of

Christian evidences? This may well be included in our Lord's promise: "By this, all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn. 13:35).⁴⁸

Love for a neighbor, however, can never be a substitute for presenting the message of salvation to him. It is indeed important to speak to men "in love." But it is infinitely more important to speak "*the truth in love*" (Eph. 4:15). Paul made this priority crystal clear when he rejoiced in the proclamation of truth even when love was missing (Phil. 1:15-18). But to rejoice in love when truth was compromised would have been unthinkable for Paul (Gal. 1:8; cf. 4:12-16)! By the same token, scientific or other evidences for the truth of Scripture may be the area of deepest interest or concern for an unbeliever. But if all he receives is extra-Biblical evidences, he remains in spiritual darkness, *even though those evidences may be presented with marvelous clarity and force*. "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded *if someone rises from the dead*" (Lk. 16:31).

It is the writer's conclusion, then, that Christian evidences constitutes just one of the various ways God has given us to attract and to hold the attention of unbelievers while the Gospel message goes forth. Beautiful music is attractive to many people; but to be savingly effective, it must be accompanied by the saving message. Love and mercy are even more universally attractive; but the Gospel message that goes along with that love and mercy is the exclusive instrument of the Holy Spirit for bringing conviction of sin, righteousness and judgment. In like manner, the Good News concerning Christ, must be given *in company with* (not some time after) *Christian evidences*, if the desperate need of the fallen mind of man is to be met in our generation.

Using our Lord's final word to Thomas as a model, the true apologetic for post-apostolic church history may thus be summarized: "Blessed are they who have seen neither a sign-miracle nor even a providential sign (e.g., a sample of the vast array of available Christian evidences, or even better, an act of Christian love and mercy), and yet have *believed* the Gospel message by responding to the convicting and illuminating work of the Holy Spirit through the living Word of God as presented by my faithful servants." Happy indeed is the Christian worker who knows the true source of his strength as he labors together with his God in this dark world.

ENDNOTES

¹This series of four lectures constituted the W.H. Griffith Thomas Lectures of 1976/1977 delivered at Dallas Theological Seminary, February 8-11, 1977, and published in *Bibliotheca Sacra* in four consecutive issues beginning in April, 1977. Appreciation is hereby expressed by the author to Dallas Theological Seminary for permission to reproduce these lectures in the present form.

²Ambrose John Wilson claimed that James Bartley was swallowed by a sperm whale and was rescued two days later near the Falkland Islands in 1891. See his article, "The Sign of the Prophet Jonah And Its Modern Confirmation," *The Princeton Theological Review* 25:4 (October, 1927), 636; and his answers to criticisms in the same journal (26:4; October, 1928, 618-21). This claim has been carefully refuted by Edward B. Davis, "A Whale of a Tale: Fundamentalist Fish Stories," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 43:4 (December, 1991), pp. 224-36. See also the report on this article in *Christianity Today* (July 20, 1992), p. 53. The obvious conclusion to this debate is that

biblical miracles (such as Jonah's experience and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus that it prefigured) have no modern analogies or empirical confirmations. Our confidence in the veracity of biblical miracles rests upon the truthfulness of the Holy Spirit who recorded them.

³See J. C. Whitcomb, "Donald B. Fullerton: Missionary Recruiter," *Grace Seminary Spire: Bulletin of Grace Theological Seminary*, 2:1 (September-October, 1974), 4-5.

⁴Edward John Carnell described a similar frustration which ultimately led him to adopt a "verificational approach" to Christian apologetics (cf. Gordon R. Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1976], pp. 38-40, 176-283, 285-95): "I recall that when a freshman in college, certain men with whom I was dealing in street meetings succeeded in posing questions about my Christian faith which I was unable to answer. Embarrassed and frustrated, I immediately recoiled from further witnessing" ("How Every Christian Can Defend His Faith," *Moody Monthly*, 50:5 [January, 1950], 312). Cf. David A. Fraser, "A Reasonable Faith: The Apologetic of Edward J. Carnell," *Studia Biblica Et Theologica*, 5:2 (October, 1975), 55-68.

⁵Francis Schaeffer's works frequently give the impression that only highly gifted philosophers can "remove the roof" of complacency from the modern mind (cf. *The God Who Is There* [Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968], p. 120; cf. pp. 19, 90, 101, 109; but contrast with pp. 125, 133-35). A personal visit to the Schaeffers' center at L'Abri in Switzerland helps to modify this impression (cf. Edith Schaeffer, *L'Abri* [Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1969], p. 123; Thomas V. Morris, *Francis Schaeffer's Apologetics: A Critique* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1976], p. 80; and Keoneth C. Harper, "Francis A. Schaeffer: An Evaluation," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 133:530 [April-June, 1976], pp. 140-42).

⁶For example, John Warwick Montgomery boldly asserts: "Non-Christian positions must be destroyed factually and the Christian religion established factually. Any lesser procedure is the abrogation of apologetic responsibility to a fallen world" ("Once Upon An A Priori," in *Jerusalem and Athens*, ed. by E. R. Geehan [Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1971], p. 388). In his incisive critique of this superficial approach, W. Stanford Reid concludes that Montgomery "ignores completely the effect of sin on man, believing that the Christian can convince the unbeliever of the truth of the gospel by a historical argument. In so doing he rejects, at least implicitly, the need for the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit" ("Subjectivity or Objectivity in Historical Understanding," *Ibid.*, p. 419).

⁷Cf. S. Lewis Johnson, "The Universality of Sin," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 131:522 (April-June, 1974), 163-72.

⁸"A study of the Scriptures indicates that the heart, when considered figuratively, is the inner control center of the human being. Out of it flow all the issues of life (Prov. 4:23). It is the location of human character (Luke 6:45); therefore it is the aspect of man about which God is most concerned (1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Th. 2:4). The heart serves as the seat of all the spiritual (Prov. 3:5), moral (Mk. 7:20-23), intellectual (Heb. 4:12), volitional (Dan. 1:8) and emotional (Prov. 15:13) aspects of man's life" (Renald E. Showers, "The New Nature" [unpublished Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, May, 1975], p. 52).

⁹"If a man has a prejudice against the gospel it is the function of apologetics and

evidences to remove that prejudice Apologetics and Christian evidences cut down these objections to enable the gospel once again to directly confront the consciousness of a man" (Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Christian Evidences* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1953], pp. 15-16). Passages such as Acts 17:22-34 and 1 Peter 3:15, which seem to confirm Ramm's position, will be examined in the next article in this series.

¹⁰"Some difficulties, perhaps many, remain unresolved . . . The questions are often perplexing. But they are more often the questions of adoring wonder rather than the questions of painful perplexity" (John Murray, "The Attestation of Scripture," in *The Infallible Word*, ed. by Paul Woolley [Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1967], p. 7).

¹¹Among the many additional texts for the doctrine of the inward witness of the Holy Spirit (known traditionally as the *testimonium spiritus sancti*) are Psalm 119:18, 33-34, 130; 1 Cor. 2:14-15, 3:1-4; Eph. 1:17-18; and 1 John 5:20. For helpful discussions of this doctrine, see B. B. Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., reprinted 1956), pp. 31, 80-83; James I. Packer, *'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1958), pp. 110-114; Bernard Ramm, *The Witness of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959); cf. John Murray, review of *The Witness of the Spirit*, by Bernard Ramm, in *Westminster Theological Journal*, 23:2 (May, 1961), 194-197; Murray, "The Attestation of Scripture," pp. 42-55; and Greg L. Bahnsen, "Socrates or Christ: The Reformation of Christian Apologetics," in *Foundations of Christian Scholarship*, ed. by Gary North (Vallecito, Calif.: Ross House Books, 1976), p. 238. One searches almost in vain for an exegetical interaction with the above-mentioned passages in the writings of such apologists as Edward John Carnell, John Warwick Montgomery, Clark Pinnock, Gordon Lewis, and Norman Geisler.

¹²The term "prophesy" in the New Testament refers to authoritative proclamation of divine truth. True prophesying was directly from God. The equivalent today is preaching based on the authoritative and now completed Scripture.

¹³Cf. Edward John Carnell, "How Every Christian Can Defend His Faith," *Moody Monthly*, 50:5 (January, 1950), 313.

¹⁴John M. Frame, "God and Biblical Language," and "Scripture Speaks for Itself," in *God's Inerrant Word*, ed. by J. W. Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), pp. 170-72, 179.

¹⁵If theistic proofs are "formulated in a distinctively Christian way, rejecting any 'proof' based on a non-Christian epistemology," they deserve "strong endorsement" according to Van Til. Cf. John M. Frame, "The Problem of Theological Paradox," in *Foundations of Christian Scholarship*, ed. by Gary North (Vallecito, Calif.: Ross House Books, 1976), p. 301. As in the case of the law of God (cf. Rom. 8:3), however, intrinsically powerful Christian evidences are successfully resisted by depraved minds. Norman Geisler admits that some theistic proofs are invalid, but insists that "there is however a valid argument that combines both the a priori self-evident principle of existential causality and the undeniable a posteriori fact that something exists (e.g., I exist)" (*Christian Apologetics* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976], p. 258.) One must seriously question whether any sophisticated unbeliever would surrender to God after reading such an argument. For an incisive critique of all the theistic proofs in their traditional form, cf. Gordon H. Clark, "God, the Existence Of," *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed.

by Philip E. Hughes (Marshallton, Delaware: The National Foundation of Christian Education, 1972), IV, 351-55. See also John M. Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Pub., 1994), pp. 89-118.

¹⁶Edward J. Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1948), p. 178.

¹⁷Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1955), p. 109. Cf. Greg Bahnsen, "The Reformation of Christian Apologetics," pp. 211-12. See also Greg Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Pub., 1998).

¹⁸After an elaborate philosophic response to that "tissue of fallacies," namely, the rationalistic "case against miracles," Edward John Carnell weakly concluded: "It is true that this argument only established the *possibility* of miracles. That, however, should be sufficient, for a careful study of history will show their actuality" ("How Every Christian Can Defend His Faith," *Moody Monthly*, 50:7 [March, 1950], 461). For a similar conclusion, cf. Clark Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), p. 46. Servants of the Lord Christ may be thankful that they have a vastly more powerful arsenal than this!

¹⁹Cf. Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1955), p. 58; and John Frame, "The Problem of Theological Paradox," in *Foundations of Christian Scholarship*, ed. by Gary North (Vallecito, Calif.: Ross House Books, 1976), pp. 300-05.

²⁰Cf. Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), pp. 96-97; Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, pp. 57-58.

²¹F. F. Bruce comments on Acts 4:13 - "Peter and John were in fact *amme ha-aretz* - 'people of the land' in the rabbinical sense of the phrase to denote the rank and file of the population who could not be expected to know or practice the minutiae of the oral law (cf. John 7:49). The wonder then was that they showed such mastery of Biblical argument" (*Commentary on the Book of Acts*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, F. F. Bruce, gen. ed. [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955], p. 102).

²²Whereas pure rationalism in apologetics would claim that unbelievers can be argued directly into the Kingdom, semi-rationalism claims that "the purpose of apologetics is always merely to clear away the intellectual obstructions so that the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit may do their work" (Edward John Carnell, "How Every Christian Can Defend His Faith," *Moody Monthly*, 50:6 [February, 1950], 431).

²³For one reporter's negative reaction to the way Bishop Pike was handled in the Montgomery/Pike debate at McMaster University, see Wilber Sutherland, "Montgomery Versus Pike," *Christianity Today*, 12:5 (December 8, 1967), 44.

²⁴Otto Procksch, "hagiazo," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 1, ed. by Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), p. 112.

²⁵Among recent theologians who have thus appealed to Acts 17:16-34 are E. J. Carnell,

J. W. Montgomery, Clark Pinnock and Gordon Lewis.

²⁶F. F. Bruce points out that in the Athenian *agora* Paul "laid such stress on Jesus and His resurrection that some of his hearers . . . imagined that he was recommending the worship of two new deities - *Iesous* and his consort *Anastasis* (words which they perhaps interpreted as "Healing" and "Restoration")" (*The Defense of the Gospel in the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959], p. 38).

²⁷For excellent recent studies of the absolute necessity of an inerrant original text for an authoritative divine message, see Tenis C. Van Kooten, *The Bible: God's Word* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972); and Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976).

²⁸Paul's method on Mars Hill may also have been a conscious attempt to obey Christ's command: "be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves" (Matt. 10:16). Such statements, and especially Paul's determination to "become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22), must not be taken out of their N.T. context. Contrast, for example, Paul's handling of Titus, whose parents were Greek (Gal. 2:3) and Timothy, whose mother was Jewish (Acts 16:3). Cf. Richard N. Longnecker, *Paul: Apostle of Liberty* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), pp. 219, 231, 246.

²⁹The writer is in substantial agreement at this point with the analyses of F. F. Bruce, *The Defense of the Gospel in the New Testament*, pp. 38, 47; Ned B. Stonehouse, *Paul Before the Areopagus* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), pp. 24-30; Cornelius Van Til, *Paul at Athens* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Lewis J. Grotenhuis, n.d.), and Greg I. Bahnsen, "Socrates or Christ: The Reformation of Christian Apologetics," in *Foundations of Christian Scholarship*, ed. by Gary North (Vallecito, Calif: Ross House Books, 1976), pp. 218-20. See also F. F. Bruce, "Paul and the Athenians," *The Expository Times*, 88:1 (October, 1976), 11-12.

³⁰Among those holding this view have been William M. Ramsey, *St. Paul The Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1896), p. 252; George T. Purves, *Christianity in the Apostolic Age* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), p. 193; Oscar Broneer, "Athens, 'City of Idol Worship,'" *The Biblical Archaeologist*, 21:1 (February, 1958), 27-28; and Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past* (2nd ed.; Princeton University Press, 1959), p. 358.

³¹Stonehouse, *Paul Before the Areopagus*, p. 33.

³²It is not clear from history whether Paul's converts in Athens established a thriving church. "The first reference to the church in Athens comes from Melito of Sardis who states (according to Eusebius) that the emperor Antoninus Pius tried to stop the harassment of Christians which was going on there in the middle of the second century." R. E. Nixon, "Athens," in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, J. D. Douglas, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), p. 83. Even more discouraging is the fact that Paul's "firstfruits of Achaia" (1 Cor. 16:15) were in Corinth, not Athens. But this may simply mean that Paul's converts in Athens were not able to form a local church immediately.

³³Another passage frequently appealed to by rationalists is 1 John 4:1 - "do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God." Thus, we are told, all available religious options must be tested by the measuring stick of factuality, internal

consistency, ethical validity, etc., before Christianity is adopted by the "rational man." But the verse is addressed to Christians: "beloved," and their measuring stick is Holy Scripture (cf. Rev. 2:2). One of the tragic fruits of semi-rationalism may be seen in Clark Pinnock's recent suggestion that "God discerns who among the heathen truly searches for the Good" and offers them salvation after death ("Why Is Jesus the Only Way?" *Eternity*, 27:12 [December, 1976], 15).

³⁴The present writer concurs with the conclusions of Benjamin B. Warfield, *Miracles: Yesterday and Today* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965). Cf. John C. Whitcomb, *Does God Want Christians to Perform Miracles Today?* (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH Books, 1973).

³⁵"Not all faith is saving faith (cf. 6:26).... Signs are done in order to strengthen true, saving faith (20:30, 31). Of themselves, they do not create faith. The Holy Spirit must do this. Moreover, once saving faith is present, one will believe in the word of Jesus even when there is no sign" (William Hendrickson, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, Vol. I [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953], pp. 127-28). Cf. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943), pp. 449-51. Leon Morris concurs in this analysis: "We should probably not regard them as having a profound faith. They believed because they saw the 'signs' Those who had been attracted by the miracles would have been ready to try to make an earthly king of Him (cf. 6:15). But He did not trust Himself to them. He looked for genuine conversion, not enthusiasm for the spectacular" (*The Gospel According to John*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, F. F. Bruce, gen. ed [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971], pp. 205, 207; cf. pp. 684-91).

³⁶"Thomas, in spite of his contact with Jesus during His earthly ministry, had not yet become a Christian, since belief in the resurrection is an essential element in the gospel (Rom. 4:23-25; 1 Cor. 15)" (John Warwick Montgomery, "The Place of Reason," *His*, 26:6 [March, 1966], 14). This statement not only illustrates Montgomery's rationalistic bias (cf. his *The Quest for Noah's Ark* [Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1972] where those who someday hear of the discovery of the Ark "can experience genuine pre-evangelism" [p. 274]), but also reveals a surprising ignorance of God's plan of salvation. No one before Pentecost was technically a "Christian," but regeneration and justification certainly did not occur for the first time at Pentecost!

³⁷That Thomas was a justified and regenerated man *before* Calvary was stated emphatically by our Lord in the Upper Room (Jn. 13:10) and confirmed by the apostle John when he contrasted the spiritual state of the eleven and that of Judas Iscariot (vs. 11). Leon Morris comments: "Jesus goes on to affirm that the apostolic band ('ye' is plural, showing that Jesus is now looking beyond Peter) are clean in the sense meant, i.e., clean from sin (cf. 15:3)" (*The Gospel According to John*, p. 619).

³⁸For a helpful analysis of the nature and meaning of this account of the rich man and Lazarus, cf. Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, N. B. Stonehouse, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1951), pp. 424-30.

³⁹Norman Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), pp. 7, 63-64; Gordon Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), pp. 34, 290; Clark Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), p.

42. For an effective rebuttal to this objection, see John M. Frame, "Scripture Speaks for Itself," in *God's Inerrant Word*, ed. by J. W. Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), p. 179.

⁴⁰Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims*, p. 282.

⁴¹Bernard Ramm, *The Witness of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959), pp. 118- 119. Cf. Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, p. 51.

⁴²Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, p. 39. Cf. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, pp. 59-64; John W. Montgomery, "Once Upon an A Priori," in *Jerusalem and Athens*, ed. by E. R. Geehan, (n.p.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1971), p. 389, and "Clark's Philosophy of History," in *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, ed. by Ronald H. Nash (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1968), p. 388.

⁴³Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims*, pp. 32-33. Just to summarize Edward John Carnell's system of apologetics (which Lewis endorses) required over a hundred pages of his book (pp. 176-293)! One wonders where the Church would be today if its members had to master such a system before obeying the Great Commission!

⁴⁴See Note #11 for Biblical texts and theological discussions on the doctrine of illumination.

⁴⁵"These last words of the parable," observes Norval Geldenhuys, "were undoubtedly uttered by the Saviour with a view to His own resurrection. The sign for which the Jews had so often asked would be given by His resurrection, but He knew that even this would not move the worldly-minded to a saving faith in Him. And this was abundantly proved by the actual course of events" (*Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, p. 427).

⁴⁶"If the faith is faith in the Bible as God's Word, obviously the evidence upon which such faith rests must itself have the quality of divinity. For only evidence with the quality of divinity would be sufficient to ground a faith in divinity" (John Murray, "The Attestation of Scripture," in *The Infallible Word*, ed. by Paul Woolley [Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1967], pp. 46-47). Cf. Frame, "Scripture Speaks for Itself," p. 179.

⁴⁷It was not for mere show that God directed David ("in writing by His hand upon me" - 1 Chron. 28: 19) to prepare a magnificent temple with enormous choirs (the fame of which reached even to Babylon - Psalm 137:3). *All other things being equal*, it would seem appropriate, then, for pastors to devote at least some time to such instruments of aesthetic attraction.

⁴⁸Since "all men" do not have the doctrinal test that believers have (cf. 1 John 4:1), the spiritual miracle of Christian love remains as one of the most powerful evidences of the divine origin of the Church. Note that our Lord places the emphasis here on "one another" (within the body of believers). The parable of the good Samaritan broadens this love to all men whose particular need we are providentially able to meet (Luke 10:30-37; cf. Gal. 6:10, 1 Thess. 3:12). For further development of this important concept, cf. Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the 20th Century* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), pp. 133-53.