
Chapter 5.3

Virtue Apologetics According to Christ

*The Moral Superiority of the Spiritually Reborn
Over the Fanatically Religious*

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- Christ's virtue is in sharp contrast to Muhammad, the founder of Islam.
- God's desire for supernatural virtue to be the ultimate apologetic for Christianity is the reason that the most important and repeated command in the NT (over one hundred times) is that God's people would love.
- Christ said the ultimate apologetic for Christianity is not our love for unbelievers, but for "**one another.**" .
- Christ prayed that Christians would accomplish *virtue apologetics*.
- The central theme of Christ's first sermon, was *virtue apologetics*.
- The most likely meaning to Christ's allusion to "**salt**" is that we uniquely possess and preserve the morality of the world.
- While even the most religious may *worship* God, the reborn are commanded and expected *to be like God*.
- Real love separates the Christian from the self-righteous, self-deceived, and self-serving monks and maniacs of any other religion. Some of the most committed Buddhists are known for meditating on a mountaintop which can be selfish, not spiritual. Muslims are known for martyrdom, but not mercy, exposing them as spiritual frauds.
- The reason that forgiveness is a uniquely Christian concept is because we are uniquely able to consistently and completely do it.
- It is not the power of miracles, but the virtue of the miracle-worker, that ultimately distinguishes the divine from the demonic.

A) Christ's Example of *Virtue Apologetics*

Christ certainly authenticated the truth of His messages with miracle working (cf. John 4:11; 20:20-21; Acts 2:22), but He also did it with supernatural virtue. In a context in which He is trying to convince some skeptics that He speaks for God (cf. John 8:28-30), He remarks:

Because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me! Can any of you prove Me guilty of sin? [The answer was "no"] **If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe Me?** (John 8:45-46; cf. Matt 26:59-61; Luke 23:47).

No doubt, His moral perfection, as even confirmed by His enemies, was authenticating proof that He was "**the way and the truth and the life**" (John 14:6).

Christ's innocence makes the virtue He demonstrated on the cross even more remarkable, even to those who do not revere Him as Lord and Savior. When the sinless One was tortured by sinful ones, He did not curse them, but prayed for them, saying, "**Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing**" (Luke 23:34; cf. 1 Peter 2:21-23).

Such virtue is in sharp contrast to someone like Muhammad, the founder of Islam. Norm Geisler notes:

Muhammad spent the last ten years of his life at war. As a polygamist he exceeded even the number of wives (four) he had prescribed for his religion. He also violated his own law by plundering caravans coming to Mecca, some of whom were on [Islamic religious] pilgrimage. He engaged in retaliation and revenge, contrary to his own teaching.¹

In sharp contrast, not only was Christ supernaturally moral, but His ministry had this effect on others. Matthew the money grubber became Matthew the Gospel promoter (Matt 9:9-13). Zaccheus the "**chief tax collector**" became Zaccheus a chief provider to the poor (cf. Luke 19:1-9).

Pastoral Practices

- As Christ set an example of virtue for us, so we are to set one as well for the people we lead. The Apostle Paul told Timothy: "**Set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity**" (1 Tim 4:12). The Apostle Peter told all pastors: "**Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care . . . being examples to the flock**" (1 Pet 5:2-3). This is why the

primary qualifications for Pastors are character (cf. 1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:6-9).

Evaluate your life in the five categories of virtue in 1 Tim 4:12 or the lists of pastoral qualifications and see if there are any improvements that can be made.

B) Christ's Commands for Virtue Apologetics: John 13:34-5

God's desire for supernatural virtue to be the ultimate apologetic for Christianity is the reason that the most important and repeated command in the NT (over one hundred times) is that God's people would love; love God (cf. Matt 22:37-38), love other Christians (cf. John 13:34-5), love all others (cf. Matt 22:39), and love even their persecutors and enemies (cf. Matt 5:44-47). Love is God's authenticating signature on His people, because real love only comes from the real God. This is why Christ says:

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another. (John 13:34-5).

The influential Christian apologist Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984) based his very good booklet, *The Mark of a Christian*, on this very passage and wrote:

Through the centuries men have displayed many different symbols to show that they are Christians. They have worn marks in the lapels of their coats, hung chains about their necks, even had special haircuts. Of course, there is nothing wrong with any of this, if one feels it is his calling. But there is a much better sign—a mark that has not been thought up just as a matter of expediency for use on some special occasion or in some specific era. It is a universal mark that is to last through all the ages of the church till Jesus comes back. What is this mark? ²

Dr. Schaeffer then quotes John 13:34-35 and writes:

In the midst of the world, in the midst of our present dying culture, Jesus is giving a right to the world. Upon his authority he gives the world the right to judge whether you and I are born-again Christians on the basis of our observable love toward all Christians. . . . This is the whole point [of John 13:24-5]: The world is going to judge whether Jesus has been sent by the Father on the basis of something that is open to observation. ³

Indeed, it should first be noticed that Christ *does* desire that **“all men know”** who His **“disciples”** are. He wants them to be different because He wants people to know who truly represents Him.

Why is that? Because only those who are truly following Christ are saved from the present and eternal wrath of God. **“God”** is only **“reconciling the world to Himself in Christ”** (2 Cor 5:19). Therefore, God wants the world to know who **“Christ’s ambassadors”** are because **“God . . . [is] making His appeal [only] through us”** (v. 20).

How then will the world know that Christians alone have the truth that will save? By our **“love [for] one another”** Christ says. Some may suppose that Christ intends for love to prove to the world that we are merely followers of one particular religious leader among many. However, this would fall short of God’s goal to authenticate Christ’s claim that, **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”** (John 14:6). It would seem that God knows that humans inherently know that love is the ultimate and universal authentication of any Gospel. A Gospel that truly saves from sin, will be one that saves people from it now, and love is the proof that they have been set free from its power.

It is clear here that Christ wants His **“ambassadors”** to be noticed, to be different, and we will be by our love. This is because Christian love will be unique and superior to any virtue that disciples of somebody else might muster. Christ is implying that it will be a unique love, a superior love, one that distinguishes His followers from everybody else. A love that is the same as anybody else’s love would not accomplish Christ’s goal. Christ is not only commanding His people to be superior in the virtue of love, but is expecting it, and if we are not, the whole purpose of His command is thwarted.

Secondly, notice that Christ says the ultimate apologetic for Christianity is not our love for unbelievers, but for **“one another.”** This needs to be heard loud and clear in American Christianity today which often commends itself for all their outreach and service to the lost, but cannot seem to get along with **“one another.”** There is great hypocrisy when we exercise compassion, grace, and patience toward people we hardly know, and then withhold these very things in our families and local church. The great push in American Christianity for loving unbelievers to the King will never make up for any lack of love for those who already belong to the King. In fact, it is easier to really love strangers rather than friends, and all kinds of religions are nice to people in order to attract them to their cause.

We need to ponder why the King said, **“the greatest love is shown when people lay down their lives for their friends”** (John 15:13 NLT). Wouldn’t we have expected Him to refer to enemies? ⁴ Could it be that daily loving those we are living with, or consistently loving those we are worshipping with, requires more self-sacrifice than

a kind deed to a stranger? Especially if others see us doing the latter more than the former?

The NT clearly places a much greater priority on loving Christians more than non-Christians. Just add up the commands for each if you doubt this. Whatever the reason for Christ's intentional priority of loving "**one another**" in the Church family, we will make a grave mistake if we neglect that priority, or consider ourselves to have Christian love when we are merely being kind to unbelievers, but not gladly bearing the weaknesses of those we know the best.⁵

Thirdly, do not miss what kind of love Christ is expecting. "**As I have loved you, so you must love one another.**" A merely human love will be sin. We are to love like God. Think about that for a moment. How great, awesome, and supernatural is God's love? And the King is commanding us to exercise the very same thing? From a physical perspective it is as if the King commanded us to create a whole other Universe, planets, stars, galaxies and all with just our spoken word—like God. But it is not in physical power that we are commanded to be just like God, but in virtue. We cannot even come close to God in mental or physical power, but in the highest of virtues—love—we can apparently equal Him. We can love just like God loves or Christ would not have commanded us to love as He has loved us.

Fourthly, in John 13:34-35 Christ is clearly declaring that *virtue apologetics* is not only the *ultimate* apologetic, but a *universal* apologetic, that is effective for "**all men.**" Love is the language that speaks of spiritual superiority in any language. The reason that morality is so universally and cross-culturally recognized is that all of humanity has "**the requirements of the law . . . written on their hearts**" (Rom 2:15).

Just as God gave humans eyes and a brain in order to recognize His supernatural work in Creation (cf. Rom 1:18-20), God purposely equipped all of humanity with moral reason so that they would see His supernatural work in His New Creations (cf. 2 Cor 5:17). The magnificence and intricacy of the physical Creation was intended by God to be the universal and ultimate apologetic evidence for the existence of God. Likewise, the superiority and endurance of the virtue of God's new spiritual creations was intended to be the same for the Gospel of God. Just like the phenomenon of Creation demands a supernatural explanation, so does the phenomenon of the New Creations. And both sources of God-ordained evidence leave humanity "**without excuse**" (Rom 1:20) for not believing in God and the Gospel.

Fifth, we notice in Christ's prescription for Christian apologetics that it is conditional on our obedience. He says, "**By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another**" (John 13:35). Therefore, disobedience, and a failure to live in the fruits of

the Spirit, not only disqualify us to be good ambassadors for Christ, but the world around us is cheated and deprived of the most powerful evidence available for the salvific exclusivity of Christianity.

Likewise, it was *virtue apologetics* that Christ commended when He said, **“This is to My Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples”** (John 15:8). The **“fruit”** here is the supernatural love that He commands them to live by in this very passage, and may include the **“joy”** that Christ promises as well (cf. v. 11).⁶ Along the same lines, Christ responded to His critics that Christian **“wisdom is proved right by her actions”** (Matt 11:19). As Dr. Morris comments: “The wisdom Jesus taught was not meant as a topic for debate in religious or philosophical schools - it was something to be lived out and it is proved right in the [moral] works his followers do.”⁷

Pastoral Practices

- It is commonly thought that the most important thing for influencing unbelievers is for us to love *them*. Perhaps not. According to Christ, one of the most powerful evangelistic tools in your church is to expose unbelievers to your love for one another. Many churches disparage a “holy huddle” mentality in how they are perceived, when in reality, a “holy huddle” is precisely what God commands the church to be.

Encourage people to reach out to unbelievers in groups, rather than alone. Plan outreach activities that somehow display your love for one another, rather than just a love for unbelievers.

C) Christ’s Prayer for *Virtue Apologetics*: John 17:21-23

In fact, Christ prayed for the success of *virtue apologetics*. John records Him praying:

“I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message,²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in Me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.²² I have given them the glory that You gave Me, that they may be one as We are one:²³ I in them and You in Me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me.” (John 17:20-23)

Albert Barnes (1798–1870) understood Christ’s prayer to mean:

That the world, so full of animosities and fightings, may see the power of Christian principle in overcoming the sources of contention and producing love, and may thus see that a religion that could produce this must be from heaven. This was done. Such was the attachment of the early Christians to each other, that a pagan was constrained to say, “See how these Christians love one another!”⁸

Leon Morris says that Jesus is praying for:

[A] unity of believers [that] . . . will transcend all human unity. . . while it is a spiritual unity rather than one of organization . . . yet [it] has an outward expression, for it is a unity that the world can observe, and that will influence the world.⁹

D. A. Carson writes:

The thought is breathtakingly extravagant. The unity of the disciples, as it approaches the perfection that is its goal, serves not only to convince many in the world that Christ is indeed the supreme locus of divine revelation as Christians claim, but that Christians themselves have been caught up into the love of the Father for the Son, secure and content and fulfilled because loved by the Almighty himself, with the very same love he reserves to his Son. It is hard to imagine a more compelling evangelistic appeal.¹⁰

And all of this was clearly Christ’s intention. Perhaps as Dr. Barnes suggested, the first Christians demonstrated this. However, it is the apparent *disunity* among Christians that surely challenges the value of *virtue apologetics* perhaps more than anything else in our day.

Elsewhere we offer some answers to this challenge.¹¹ Here we will only note two things. First, the standard that Jesus set for Christian unity was no less than the unity between God the Father and God the Son Themselves! That is a perfect unity, and we should not be surprised that we have fallen far short of it.

Secondly, regardless of how disunified Christians may be perceived to be, it is clear that Christ intended the virtue of unity to prove to the world that Jesus Christ was from God, and that God loves Christians in a far superior way to any others, because He loves them as much as His own Son (v. 23). Jesus wanted *virtue apologetics* to prove everything and more than what mere *intellectual apologists* hope to prove.

D) Christ's Sermon on *Virtue Apologetics*¹²

D.1) Salt & Light of the Earth

The central theme of Christ's first, and most famous sermon, was *virtue apologetics*.¹³ For example, in His Sermon on the Mount, Christ says:

You are the salt of the Earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?¹⁴ It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds¹⁵ and praise your Father in Heaven. (Matt 5:13-16)

The King says we "**are the salt of the Earth**" and we "**are the light of the world,"** not that we merely have the *potential* to be. In other words, these lofty descriptions are uniquely for the Christian, and they are not something that we *attain to*, but *are* by virtue of the fact that we alone have God Himself living inside of us. As Dr. Morris comments on Christ's statement here:

You is emphatic and restrictive: Jesus is not talking about people in general but specifically about his followers. He says, you are; he is making a statement, not giving a promise.¹⁶

The most likely meaning to Christ's allusion to "**salt**" is that we uniquely possess and preserve the morality of the world. Dr. Carson notes: "Above all, salt was used as a preservative. Rubbed into meat, a little salt would slow decay."¹⁷ As a preservative, Dr. Morris accordingly comments:

Jesus is apparently thinking of the function of salt as a preservative, as the enemy of decay. . . . What is good in society his followers keep wholesome. What is corrupt they oppose; they penetrate society for good and act as a kind of moral antiseptic.¹⁸

By saying we "**are the salt of the Earth**" He is clearly implying that true morality is only found among His followers. If we were to lose our "**saltiness**" there would be no "**salt**" or authentic morality anywhere else to replace it. This is the great tragedy of Christians not being who they are. Because a worldly Christian looks and acts no different than an unbeliever—and maybe worse—they earn the disdain of good men and are disqualified to fulfill their God-given duty.

“**Light**” obviously alludes to truth throughout the Scriptures, and to morality as well in this passage (cf. “**good deeds**” v. 16), suggesting again that we possess both truth and morality in an exclusive and superior way. And because we “**are the light of the world,**” God has made us like “**a city on a hill [that] cannot be hidden.**” Christ did not uniquely indwell us with His Spirit, thereby uniquely giving us the fruits of the Spirit, just to have us “**put . . . under a bowl**” and not seen. In fact, our God-given purpose for being in this world depends on our moral and spiritual superiority over all other followers of any other religion. While the light of some individual Christians may “**be hidden,**” as we will see below, God Himself has ensured, and will continue to ensure, that the light of His people sufficiently shines to give the world no excuse for not seeking the Source of their light.

Finally, the God-ordained effect of our “**light shin[ing] before men**” should not be missed. Christ said it would result in people recognizing that the source of our unique and superior virtue is the one true God. And in the process, the pagans would worship *our* (not their) “**Father in Heaven.**” Even unbelievers who do not accept God as their Lord, will nonetheless “**praise**” Him on account of our virtue. Such a response is significantly beyond the mere *existence* of God that *intellectual apologetics* strives to prove. Such is the power that Christ attributed to *virtue apologetics*.

Only born again Christians are equipped to be the moral and spiritual light and salt of the Earth. Others cannot fulfill such a purpose. Regarding the supernatural expectations communicated by Christ, and the necessary power to accomplish them, the popular Bible teacher John MacArthur comments:

[The] Sermon on the Mount . . . shows the absolute necessity of the new birth. Its standards are much too high and demanding to be met by human power. Only those who partake of God’s own nature through Jesus Christ can fulfill such demands. . . . [T]he sermon is perhaps the greatest scriptural resource for witnessing, for reaching others for Christ. A Christian who personifies these principles of Jesus will be a spiritual magnet, attracting others to the Lord who empowers him to live as he does. The life obedient to the principles of the Sermon on the Mount is the church’s greatest tool for evangelism.¹⁹

D.2) Reborn Superior to Even the Most Religious

Christ’s expectation of moral superiority in His followers is clearly stated as well when He remarks in His Sermon: “**For I tell you that unless your righteousness [far ²⁰] surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the Kingdom of Heaven**” (Matt 5:20).²¹ This is a remarkable

statement considering that the Jewish religious leaders were quite famous for "righteousness." No matter. The practical, observable "**righteousness**" of God's people is to exceedingly surpass that of even the most committed unregenerated religious people anywhere, so that born again Christians beat the Pharisees, Jews, monks, and mystics of the world even at their own game.

It is in such a statement that Christ also raises the standard of virtue from that expected under the Old Covenant (cf. Deut 19:21; Matt 5:38-42). This is because He knew the Spirit was coming to indwell members of the New Covenant, enabling them for greater virtue than any unregenerated OT saint could produce.

Christ then provides some examples of how real Christian morality will be superior to any other merely religious morality. While a committed religious person may not "**murder**," the Christian will not even live in anger, because to do so is to be under God's judgment and "**in danger of the fire of Hell**," a warning that does not apply to the born again Christian (cf. Matt 5:21-22). The unregenerate religious person may fulfill their spiritual duty by presenting a "**gift at the altar**," but God's people will temporarily abandon even the most sacred sacrament in order to humbly initiate and diligently pursue reconciliation with someone who, for some reason, does not like them (cf. vs. 5:23-24).

Religious people may not commit adultery, but the reborn are not to even imagine it (cf. vs. 27-28). While religious people may make "**oaths . . . to the Lord**," reborn people will not fall into such pride, but will humbly admit that apart from Christ they can do nothing and that all the credit for any righteousness belongs to Him (cf. vs. 33-37). Religious people may uphold *justice*, but the reborn will gladly suffer *injustices* for the name of Christ (cf. vs. 38-42). Along these lines, Christ says that while the religious will love those who love them, the reborn will love their enemies too (cf. vs. 43-47). In fact, while the religious may *worship* God, the reborn are commanded and expected *to be like* God (cf. v. 48).

In terms of the superior moral virtue that God is expecting of His people, these last statements are worth a closer look. Christ said:

You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in Heaven. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.
(Matt 5:43-47).

Christ recognized that there is a **“love”** of **“those who love you”** that even the unregenerate can muster. However, it is in our response to those who hate and hurt us that the true nature of someone’s virtue is demonstrated. In time, and under pressure, the virtue of the authentic Christian will be proven superior. While the unregenerate may appear to love briefly, their fake, fleshly love will not endure like real, miraculous love does (cf. 1 Cor 13:1, 8).

It is real love that separates the Christian from the self-righteous, self-deceived, and self-serving monks and maniacs of any other religion. Some of the most committed Buddhists meditate, and some of the most committed Muslims murder. Where is the love in all of that? Sitting alone while meditating on a mountaintop can be selfish, not spiritual, nor supernatural, and neither is killing your enemies or killing yourself in the name of your God. Muslims are known for martyrdom, but not mercy, exposing them as spiritual frauds.

God’s word says, **“If I . . . surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing”** (1 Cor 13:3), demonstrating that fanaticism is not the ultimate proof of true religion. Mere *commitment* to a cause is not a virtue, for it can spring from powerful selfishness or deception. Remember Saul from Tarsus who with **“zeal”** was **“persecuting the church”** (Phil 3:6), perhaps with more determination than all others? Therefore, it matters not that someone might be as committed to their cause as the Christian is to theirs. Anyone can be very dedicated to something, even to sin.

On the other hand, to be neck deep among the failings and offenses of fellow humans and still sincerely love them, like God loves them, is a miracle that only Holy Spirit indwelt Christians can perform. Anyone, including unbelievers, can *like* people, but only Christians can really *love* them.

The moral superiority to be expected from God’s people is evident in Christ’s question, **“what are you doing more than others?”** (v. 47). Accordingly, John Stott remarks:

This simple word “more” is the quintessence of what he is saying. It is not enough for Christians to resemble non-Christians; our calling is to outstrip them in virtue. Our righteousness is to exceed (*perisseuseē* ... *pleion*) that of the Pharisees and our love is to surpass, to be more than (*perisson*) that of the Gentiles. Bonhoeffer puts it well: 'What makes the Christian different from other men is the "peculiar", the *perisson*, the "extraordinary", the "unusual", that which is not a matter of course" . . . It is "the more". . . . For him [Jesus] the hallmark of the Christian is the "extraordinary".²²

But Christ does not stop there. He does not say that we must merely be *more* virtuous than unregenerated humans, but He actually goes on to say, **“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is**

perfect" (Matt 5:28).²³ This is an extraordinary command from God to be like God. Certainly not in knowledge or power, but in love. As J. Oswald Sanders (1902-1992) has commented here, "The Master expects from His disciples such conduct as can be explained only in terms of the supernatural."²⁴

And God expects God-like love from us because we can love like this. Accordingly, the popular NT scholar William Barclay (1907–1978) commented on this passage:

We must note that this commandment is possible only for a Christian. Only the grace of Jesus Christ can enable a man to have this unconquerable benevolence and this invincible goodwill in his personal relationships with other people. It is only when Christ lives in our hearts that bitterness will die and this love spring to life. It is often said that this world would be perfect if only people would live according to the principles of the Sermon on the Mount; but the plain fact is that no one can even begin to live according to these principles without the help of Jesus Christ. We need Christ to enable us to obey Christ's command.²⁵

More recently, Dr. MacArthur has commented on Christ's statement:

That perfection is also utterly impossible in man's own power. To those who wonder how Jesus can demand the impossible, He later says, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26). That which God demands, He provides the power to accomplish.²⁶

D.3) The Uniqueness of Forgiveness

Notice as well that Christ does not say that loving enemies and persecutors is something real "**sons**" of God *might* do, but rather, something they *must* and, therefore, *will* do.²⁷ And while it is clear that Christ is not teaching perfectionism here,²⁸ we should not hastily invent excuses or interpretations that would automatically diminish the supernatural standard that Christ is expecting of the Holy Spirit indwelled sons and daughters of God (cf. Lev 11:44-5; 19:2; 20:26; Deut 18:13; 2 Cor 13:11; Col 1:28; 1 Pet 1:15-16).

This same uncompromising, supernatural standard of love is also communicated in the Sermon on the Mount when Christ says:

If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matt 6:14-15).

Notice again that forgiveness is not simply an option for those who are saved, but something that Christ anticipates Christians will be doing. This is, in fact, one of the most telltale signs that someone is not a born again Christian. Those who cannot, or will not, forgive the offenses of others are in a precarious position to claim that they are in a regenerated forgiven state themselves.²⁹ As Dr. Stott puts it, "Nothing proves more clearly that we have been forgiven than our own readiness to forgive."³⁰

Because of the unique supernatural ability of born again Christians to forgive, it uniquely even speaks of forgiveness. Again, as Arthur Lindsey has noted:

Other than Christianity, no other religion or philosophy requires reconciliation and mandates forgiveness. No one but Jesus said that if you do not forgive, you are not forgiven (Matthew 6:15). No other religious teacher requires that we reconcile with anyone who might have something against us, even if we think it is unjustified, before we come to worship God (Matthew 5:23-24).³¹

D.4) Distinguishing the Divine from the Demonic

An important and final reference to *virtue apologetics* in the Sermon on the Mount occurs when Christ says:

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father Who is in Heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!'" (Matt 7:15-23; cf. 12:33-34)

The ultimate power of *virtue apologetics* is perhaps best expressed by Christ when He prescribes it for distinguishing between the divine and the demonic. We need to imagine all of the religious things a person would need to do and say to be accepted as a Prophet of God (i.e. the "**sheep's clothing**"). Christ even points out that they may

do authentic and amazing miraculous things in His name.³² As we point out elsewhere, the Scriptures teach that the sheer power of demonic miracles can equal those of God Himself, including foretelling the future (cf. Deut 12:32-13:1-4), and resurrecting the dead (cf. Rev 13:3).³³

How then can we possibly know that people who have the power to perform miracles and gladly do so in the name of the King, are actually “**evildoers**”? The King said by their moral fruit. It is not by the content of their message alone that a false prophet will be exposed, but rather, it will be primarily by the content of their character. The first can be faked, the other cannot because it requires a supernatural enablement that God will only grant to those who are His.³⁴

Christ knows that the unregenerate cannot match the virtue (“**good fruit**”) of the regenerate, no matter how religious they may be. In addition, in spite of all the supernatural power God may grant satan, the devil cannot and will not duplicate the greatest miracle which is supernatural virtue. Accordingly, because virtue is the ultimate apologetic, in the end, it alone is sufficient to distinguish divine from demonic power and people. As discussed further elsewhere, the test of supernatural morality exposes a great number of false prophets, philosophers, and “faith healers” in our day as counterfeits.³⁵

Not only does virtue expose false prophets in the Church, but false philosophers in the world as well. The immorality of the foremost secular philosophers is well known. For example, we read that Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), one of the most influential pagan philosophers in all of history:

had five children out of wedlock, and he abandoned them all. Then he maintained, supposedly out of his reasoning, intellect and common sense, that children do not need parents to give them discipline or guidance, and that the state should be responsible for raising them—an idea that is still shaping some educational and child-rearing theories to this day. His conclusions were not based on true reason but on his desire to justify the moral choices he had already made.³⁶

It is supernatural virtue that clearly marks a man as a source of the truth, making the King the ultimate source of truth. Christ’s moral expectations on His followers are supernaturally high because He expects supernatural virtue to be the ultimate and universal apologetic for His teachings. In fact, while we can find an abundance of Christ’s teaching that relates to *virtue apologetics*, we can find none that would place any importance on *intellectual apologetics*.

Pastoral Practices

- It is important to ensure that our church is visibly and consistently meeting a need in the community at large in order that they may “see our good deeds.” Do an annual, advertised service project for the local school. Get your church’s name on one of those roadside signs telling people you are keeping that part of the community clean. Find one significant need and become known for the best place to have it met.

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Jesus, thank You for Your supernatural example of virtue while You lived on Earth. And thank You for giving us the power of Your Holy Spirit so that we can imitate You. Help us to live in that power!

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) How was Christ’s moral perfection proven and what is its significance in proving Him to be true?
- 2) What is at least one important reason that the most important and repeated command in the NT (over one hundred times) is that God’s people would love?
- 3) Why does the Scriptures repeatedly state that the ultimate apologetic for Christianity is not our love for unbelievers, but for other Christians?
- 4) What are several references to *virtue apologetics* in the Sermon on the Mount?
- 5) How do reborn Christians excel even fanatically religious people in virtue?
- 6) Why is forgiveness a uniquely Christian concept among world religions?

- 7) Why do we claim it is not the power of miracles, but the virtue of the miracle-worker, that ultimately distinguishes the divine from the demonic?

Recommended Reading

- John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, revised edition of *Christian Counter Culture* (John Stott, 1978). An extraordinary commentary on this valuable Scripture and a vital message to the Church today.

Publications & Particulars

¹ Norm Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics (BECA)* (Baker, 1999), 138. Geisler documents the immorality of Muhammad more specifically on pages 506-9.

² Francis Schaeffer, *The Mark of a Christian*, (Intervarsity, 1970), 7.

³ *Ibid.*, 13, 21.

⁴ Neither D. A. Carson (*The Gospel According to John*, [Eerdmans, 1991]), nor Leon Morris (*The Gospel According to John*, [Eerdmans, 1992]), nor Herman Ridderbos (*The Gospel According to John* [Eerdmans, 1997]), nor any other commentators we consulted see any significance in Christ's specific reference to "**friends**" at John 15:3.

⁵ Unfortunately, in our opinion, Dr. Morris spends a great deal of ink trying to downplay the emphasis in the NT on loving other Christians as opposed to unbelievers (cf. *Testaments of Love: A Study of Love in the Bible* [Eerdmans, 1981], esp. pp 211-224). He seems concerned about the accusations of some that the NT *never* refers to loving non-Christians, especially the writings of John. This is, of course, nonsense, as Dr. Morris aptly points out. As Dr. Morris puts it, "It may not be easy to prove that throughout the New Testament there is a uniform emphasis on loving "outsiders," but it is harder to prove that there is any other attitude." (209) We would agree, but instead of defending and downplaying the NT emphasis and priority on loving other Christians, we would be better off explaining it and recognizing why this is a NT fact.

⁶ It is difficult to find a commentary that will state clearly that the "**fruit**" referred to by Christ in John 15 is virtue. However, Albert Barnes comments on John 15:2 and says, "To bear fruit is to show by our lives that we are under the influence of the religion of Christ, and that that religion produces in us its appropriate effects, Gal. 5:22-23." (*Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM [Findex.Com, 1999]).

Likewise, Leon Morris writes, "The 'fruit' is not defined here, but we need not doubt that qualities of Christian character are in mind as elsewhere in

the New Testament (Matt 3:8; 7:20; Rom 6:22; Gal 5:22; Eph 5:9; Phil 1:11; etc. [see also Psa 72:3; Matt 12:33-37; James 3:17; Heb 12:11])” (John, 595). We would disagree that the term “is not defined here” as the King speaks a great deal about love for God and people in this very context, suggesting that this is His definition of the fruit He has in mind.

While most commentators do not make the meaning of “fruit” here plain, others suggest it means Christian converts. Their main reason is derived from John 15:16 where Christ says, “**I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.**” Accordingly, D. A. Carson comments, “The fruit, in short, is new converts” (John, 523). However, this appears unlikely when in the same speech the King says, “**He [the Father] cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit** (John 15:2) which would mean (apparently according even to Dr. Carson, cf. John, 515) that if you do not win Christian converts you are a fake Christian. While there are Scriptures that probably use the idea of “fruit” to refer to Christian converts (cf. Prov 11:30; Matt 21:43; Phil 1:22; Col 1:6, 10), this is not one of them if it is interpreted in context. The reference to “**fruit that will last**” is simply referring to the unique endurance of authentic Christian virtue throughout their lifetime, proving them to be born again Christians.

⁷ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Eerdmans, 1992), 286.

⁸ Barnes, *in loc.*

⁹ Morris, *John*, 651.

¹⁰ Carson, *John*, 569.

¹¹ For further discussion of the problem of immorality and disunity among Christians for the cause of *virtue apologetics* see section 5.16.A.

¹² We do not agree with strict *Dispensational* theologians who deny that the Sermon on the Mount is binding upon Christians. If it was relevant to the Jews, how much more so for the Christian! Especially since, as we demonstrate here, only Spirit-filled Christians could actually obey it. And why would we deny that Christ came to teach the Church He came to start and build (cf. Matt 16:18)?

¹³ We are not aware of anyone who demonstrates the *virtue apologetics* in the Sermon on the Mount better than the renowned NT scholar John Stott. His commentary, in fact, constitutes one of the very rare discussions of *virtue apologetics* in modern Christian literature, although his comments were written in 1978. Nonetheless, he is easily worth the following lengthy quote:

Jesus emphasized that his true followers, the citizens of God's kingdom, were to be entirely different from others. They were not to take their cue from the people around them, but from him, and so prove to be genuine children of their heavenly Father. To me the key text of the Sermon on the Mount is 6:8: 'Do not be like them.' It is immediately reminiscent of God's word to Israel in olden days: 'You shall not do as they do. [Lev 8:1-4] It is the same call to be different. And right through the Sermon on the Mount this theme is elaborated. Their character was to be completely distinct from that admired by the world (the beatitudes). They were to shine like lights in the prevailing

darkness. Their righteousness was to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, both in ethical behaviour and in religious devotion, while their love was to be greater and their ambition nobler than those of their pagan neighbours.

There is no single paragraph of the Sermon on the Mount in which this contrast between Christian and non-Christian standards is not drawn. It is the underlying and uniting theme of the Sermon; everything else is a variation of it. Sometimes it is the Gentiles or pagan nations with whom Jesus contrasts his followers. . . . At other times Jesus contrasts his disciples . . . with religious people. . . .

Thus the followers of Jesus are to be different--different from both the nominal church and the secular world, different from both the religious and the irreligious. The Sermon on the Mount is the most complete delineation anywhere in the New Testament of the Christian counter-culture. Here is a Christian value-system, ethical standard, religious devotion, attitude to money, ambition, life-style and network of relationships--of which are totally at variance with those of the non-Christian world. And this Christian counter-culture is the life of the kingdom of God. . . .

[T]here have been many other attempts to accommodate the Sermon on the Mount to the low levels of our moral attainment. In the fourth and fifth chapters of his book *Understanding the Sermon on the Mount*, Harvey McArthur first surveys and then evaluates no fewer than twelve different ways of interpreting the Sermon. He says he might well have subtitled this section 'Versions and Evasions of the Sermon on the Mount,' for all but one of the twelve interpretations offer prudential qualifications of its apparently absolute demands.

At the opposite extreme are those superficial souls who glibly assert that the Sermon on the Mount expresses ethical standards which are self-evidently true, common to all religions and easy to follow. 'I live by the Sermon on the Mount,' they say. The most charitable reaction to such people is to assume that they have never read the Sermon which they so confidently dismiss as commonplace. . . .

For the standards of the Sermon are neither readily attainable by every man, nor totally unattainable by any man. To put them beyond anybody's reach is to ignore the purpose of Christ's Sermon; to put them within everybody's is to ignore the reality of man's sin. They are attainable all right, but only by those who have experienced the new birth which Jesus told Nicodemus was the indispensable condition of seeing and entering God's kingdom. For the righteousness he described in the Sermon is an inner righteousness. Although it manifests itself outwardly and visibly in words, deeds and relationships, yet it remains essentially a righteousness of the heart. It is what a man thinks in his heart and where he fixes his heart which really matter. It is here too that the problem lies. For men are in their nature evil. [Matt 7:11] It is out of their heart that evil things come [cf. Matt 7:21-23] and out of their heart that their mouth speaks, just as it is the tree which determines its fruit. So there is but one solution: 'Make the tree good, and its fruit good'. [Matt 7:16-20; 12:33-37] A new birth is essential.

Only a belief in the necessity and the possibility of a new birth can keep us from reading the Sermon on the Mount with either foolish optimism or hopeless despair. Jesus spoke the Sermon to those who were already his disciples and thereby also the citizens of God's kingdom and the children of God's family. [e.g. 5:16, 48; 6:9, 32-33; 7:11] The high standards he set are appropriate only to such. We do not, indeed could not, achieve this privileged status by attaining Christ's standards. Rather by attaining his standards, or at least approximating to them, we give evidence of what by God's free grace and gift we already are. (*The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, revised edition of *Christian Counter Culture* [John Stott, 1978], 18-19; 27, 29).

- ¹⁴ Contrary to some, in the analogy of the salt, we see that while Christians may lose their effectiveness and abandon their purpose due to impurities, they do not, and cannot lose their true identity. Accordingly, Dr. Carson comments:

Strictly speaking salt cannot lose its saltiness; sodium chloride is a stable compound. But most salt in the ancient world derived from salt marshes or the like, rather than by evaporation of salt water, and therefore contained many impurities. The actual salt, being more soluble than the impurities, could be leached out, leaving a residue so dilute it was of little worth. In modern Israel savorless salt is still said to be scattered on the soil of flat roofs. This helps harden the soil and prevent leaks; and since the roofs serve as play grounds and places for public gathering, the salt is still being trodden under foot.

This explanation negates the attempt by some (e.g., Lenski, Schniewind, Grosheide) to suppose that, precisely because pure salt cannot lose its savor, Jesus is saying that true disciples cannot lose their effectiveness. The question "How can it be made salty again?" is not meant to have an answer . . . The point is that, if Jesus' disciples are to act as a preservative in the world by conforming to kingdom norms, if they are "called to be a moral disinfectant in a world where moral standards are low, constantly changing, or non-existent . . . they can discharge this function only if they themselves retain their virtue" (Tasker). (*Matthew*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. CD-ROM [Zondervan, n.d.]

- ¹⁵ Some may see a rebuttal of Matt 5:13-16 (and *virtue apologetics* itself) in Matt 6:1 where Christ says: "**Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in Heaven.**" The apparent contradiction is solved by noticing that there is an obvious difference in motive being described here. In Matthew 5 the motive for the public good deeds Christ is commanding is to glorify God, while in chapter 6 the motive Christ is warning about is to glorify the person.

The fact that Christ is speaking of two different kinds of righteousness is evident in their differing results as well. The one produces praise to God, the other the displeasure of God. Finally, we would suggest that those who would do good deeds merely to be seen by men to glorify themselves are not born again Christians anyway, and would not have the supernatural ability to perform *virtue apologetics* in the long run.

¹⁶ Morris, *Matthew*, 104.

¹⁷ Carson, *Matthew*, 5:13.

¹⁸ Ibid. Dr. Barnes had commented on Matt 5:13:

Salt renders food pleasant and palatable, and preserves from putrefaction. So Christians, by their lives and instructions, are to keep the world from entire moral corruption.

We believe Christ was likewise referring to morality when He said, "**Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other**" (Mark 9:50). Likewise, we have argued elsewhere that Paul's reference to "**conversation [that is] always full of grace, seasoned with salt**" (Col 4:6).

¹⁹ John MacArthur, *MacArthur's New Testament Commentary (MNTC)*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Parsons Technology, 1997), Matt 5:1-2.

²⁰ The Greek here for "**surpasses**" is *perisseuoē*, which means "to superabound (in quantity or quality), be in excess, be superfluous." (*Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, James Strong, ed. Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Parsons Technology, 1998).

²¹ Two wrong views related to Christ's statement in Matt 5:20 and following can be suggested here. First, Christ is not speaking of a *positional* righteousness granted by God to believers in Christ, but rather a *practical* righteousness that will be demonstrated by believers. Christ's emphasis throughout the Sermon on the Mount especially is the latter, not the former.

Secondly, Christ is not speaking only of a "deeper" more sincere righteousness that only God might see, but rather an outwardly observable righteousness that other people can see as well. Therefore, the following interpretation by Dr. Stott seems inadequate:

Christian righteousness far surpasses pharisaic righteousness in kind rather than in degree. It is not so much, shall we say, that Christians succeed in keeping some 240 commandments when the best Pharisees may only have scored 230. No. Christian righteousness is greater than pharisaic righteousness because it is deeper, being a righteousness of the heart. . . . Pharisees were content with an external and formal obedience, a rigid conformity to the letter of the law; the King teaches us that God's demands are far more radical than this. The righteousness which is pleasing to him is an inward righteousness of mind and motive. For 'The Lord looks on the heart' (Stott, *Sermon*, 75).

But, "**Man looks at the outward appearance**" (1 Sam 16:7) and Christ clearly states just a few verses earlier that the Christian is to, "**let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds**" (Matt 5:16), making it clear that He intends our superior righteousness to be abundantly evident to people as well, not just God. Dr. Stott is right to point out that the greater righteousness that Christ's followers are to have is a qualitatively deeper one, but he would seem to unnecessarily limit Christ's statement to deny that it also includes a greater, visible, quantitative righteousness as well. Would we not expect greater visible virtue from followers of Jesus that were to be indwelt with the Holy Spirit as opposed to the spiritually dead Pharisees?

Contrary to Dr. Stott, Dr. Carson sums up our position well when he comments on Matt 5:20: "The verb "surpasses" suggests that the new righteousness outstrips the old both qualitatively and quantitatively (Bonnard) (see on 25:31-46)" (*Matthew*, underlining added).

²² Stott, *Sermon*, 121.

²³ Many cannot accept that Jesus commanded us to be morally perfect. Calvin claimed that in Matthew 5:48, "This *perfection* does not mean *equality*, but relates solely to resemblance. . . . There is no comparison here made between God and us" (*Commentaries*, online at www.ccel.org). Dr. Barnes finds a way to dilute *teleios* in Matthew 5:48 into meaning mere consistency. Likewise, Dr. Morris says, "Jesus is calling on his followers to be mature people" (*Matthew*, 134).

Indeed, the Greek has a variety of meanings, but "perfect" as in flawless is one of them, and the fact that the perfection is being compared to God proves this is Christ's meaning. Accordingly, Dr. MacArthur writes:

Teleios (**perfect**) basically means to reach an intended end or a completion and is often translated "mature" (1 Cor. 2:6; 14:20; Eph. 4:13; etc.). But the meaning here is obviously that of perfection, because the **heavenly Father** is the standard. The "sons of [the] Father" (v. 45) are to be **perfect, as [their] heavenly Father is perfect**. That perfection is absolute perfection. (*Commentary, in loc.*)

Along the same lines, Reformed scholar James M. Boice wrote:

This verse does not teach perfectionism, since none of us are or can be perfect in this world. But what does it teach?

William Barclay explains it by use of the meaning of the Greek word *teleios* ("perfect"), which describes something perfectly suited to the end for which it was created, like a full-grown adult as opposed to a person who is still a child, or a tool perfectly suited to a task. "The Greek idea of perfection is functional," Barclay says.

R. V. G. Tasker sees it differently. He thinks Torrey is right "in supposing that the underlying Aramaic word was active in sense, and that the meaning here is 'all-including (in your good will) even as your Father includes all.'" Harry Ironside also sees the verse as a call for impartiality, arguing, "This is perfection in the sense of the complete absence of partiality, thus imitating him who is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34), but who lavishes his favors upon just and unjust alike?"

Those interpretations could be on the right track, but I think D. A. Carson is wiser when he refuses to drop the idea of perfection so easily. It is true that we will never be perfect in this life, but the perfections outlined in this sermon are still those for which we should aim and that we should increasingly attain by God's grace and power in our lives.

Carson notes that the form of this verse is exactly the same as Leviticus 19:2, with "holy" merely being displaced by "perfect" ("Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy"), and that Leviticus 19:2 is likewise urged on God's people in the Bible. . . .

Barclay is not entirely wrong when he says that we should be perfectly fitted to that for which we were created. But this is not some low standard, as if it meant only to be a well-rounded person. We were created to be like God, to aim at Christ-like character. The only way we

will be able to aim at that character and achieve it is if God gives us a transformed heart. (*Matthew* [Baker, 2001], 93-94).

W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison concur that Christ is commanding moral perfection:

The immediate context of 5:48 is the most important key to its understanding. The tradition demanded love of neighbor, but Jesus demands love of enemy, which means, in effect, love of all. To obey Jesus' words, is law, is, therefore, to love utterly: no more can be asked. And in this lies perfection; love of unrestrained compass lacks for nothing. It is catholic, all-inclusive. . . . It is perfect. (*Matthew*, (ICC) [T & T Clark, 1988], Vol. 1:562-3).

Likewise, Dr. Stott writes:

The concept that God's people must imitate God rather than men is not new. The book of Leviticus repeated some five times as a refrain the command, 'I am the Lord your God; . . . you shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.' . . . [O]ur obedience will come from our hearts as the manifestation of our new nature. . . . Our Christian calling is to imitate not the world, but the Father. And it is by this imitation of him that the Christian counter-culture becomes visible. (Stott, 122-124).

Matthew Green (*The Message of Matthew* [Intervarsity, 2000]) and John Nollan (*The Gospel of Matthew (NIGTC)* [Eerdmans, 2005]) have little to say.

²⁴ Quoted in MacArthur, Matt 5:43-48.

²⁵ William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible* CD-ROM (Liguori, 1996), Matt 5:43-48

²⁶ MacArthur, in loc.

²⁷ The NEB translation catches the idea here when it reads: "**Love your enemies and pray for your persecutors; only so can you be children of your heavenly Father**" (Matt 5:45). Accordingly, John Calvin commented:

When he expressly declares, that no man will be a child of God, unless he *loves those who hate him*, who shall dare to say, that we are not bound to observe this doctrine? The statement amounts to this, "Whoever shall wish to be accounted a Christian, let him *love his enemies*." It is truly horrible and monstrous, that the world should have been covered with such thick darkness, for three or four centuries, as not to see that it is an express command, and that every one who neglects it is struck out of the number of the children of God (*Commentaries*)

Calvin's concern about the "Dark Ages" is applicable to our own day when there are continuing efforts within the Church to water down God's expectations of born again Christians. Calvin goes on to comment that the reason God has such expectations is that, "he looks at the design of our calling, which is, that, in consequence of the likeness of God having been formed anew in us, we may live a devout and holy life." Along the same lines, John Stott remarks on this command:

Having indicated that our love for our enemies will express itself in deeds, words and prayers, Jesus goes on to declare that only then shall we prove conclusively whose sons we are, for only then shall we be

exhibiting a love like the love of our heavenly Father's (Stott, *Sermon*, 120, underlining added).

²⁸ Dr. Stott insightfully comments on Christ's call to perfection:

Some holiness teachers have built upon this verse great dreams of the possibility of reaching in this life a state of sinless perfection. But the words of Jesus cannot be pressed into meaning this without causing discord in the Sermon. For he has already indicated in the beatitudes that a hunger and thirst after righteousness is a perpetual characteristic of his disciples, and in the next chapter he will teach us to pray constantly, 'Forgive us our debts.'

Both the hunger for righteousness and the prayer for forgiveness, being continuous, are clear indications that Jesus did not expect his followers to become morally perfect in this life. The context shows that the 'perfection' he means relates to love, that perfect love of God which is shown even to those who do not return it. . . . We are called to be perfect in love, that is, to love even our enemies with the merciful, the inclusive love of God. (*Sermon*, 121-22)

²⁹ Dr. Morris seems to have the meaning of Christ's warning correct when he comments: "Jesus is saying that to fail to forgive others is to demonstrate that one has not felt the saving touch of God" (*Matthew*, 149).

On the other hand, Dr. MacArthur seems to water down the warning when he writes:

An unforgiving spirit not only is inconsistent for one who has been totally forgiven by God, but also brings the chastening [how about condemnation] of God rather than His mercy. Our Lord illustrates the unmerciful response in the parable of Matthew 18:21-35. There a man is forgiven the unpayable debt representing sin and is given the mercy of salvation. He then refuses to forgive another and is immediately and severely chastened [rather, doomed to eternal torture] by God. (Matt 6:9-15).

It would seem Dr. MacArthur is assuming that Christ's audience is only believers, but He is probably talking to a mixed crowd. Also, Christ's words both in Matthew 6 and 18 suggest more than divine chastening, but rather condemnation. In fact, it would seem in the latter passage that Christ is clearly warning of eternal Hell when He says: **"In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how My heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart"** (Matt 18:34-35).

It is important to notice that if the King's offender could not pay his debt while out of jail, it would seem a hopeless impossibility for him to pay it while confined to jail, and the torture then is implied to be never ending. Accordingly, Dr. Carson comments "The servant is to be tortured till he pays back all he owes, which he can never do" (*Matthew*, *in loc.*). Therefore, in Matthew 6, we would suggest Christ is speaking of the judgment of the unregenerate who cannot forgive.

³⁰ Stott, *Sermon*, 48.

³¹ Arthur Lindsey, *Love the Ultimate Apologetic: The Heart of Christian Witness* (Intervarsity, 2008), 123, 171.

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- ³² Most commentators agree that the miracles Christ is alluding to are real. For further discussion see chapter 10.6.
- ³³ For further discussion of the devil's delegated power to work miracles see chapter 10.6.
- ³⁴ Virtue is obviously not the only biblical authentication of God sent Prophets. The ability to predict the future perfectly was one that God prescribed from the very beginning (cf. Deut 18:20-22), which NT Prophets like Agabus possessed as well (cf. Acts 11:28; 21:10-11), and which any real Prophet should be able to exhibit today. For further discussion regarding the authentication of Prophets see chapters 9.10-11.
- ³⁵ For further discussion on how *virtue apologetics* exposes many "Christian" celebrities as frauds see sections 10.14.C; 11.7.B.9; 11.8.E-F.
- ³⁶ James Emery White, *A Mind for God* (Intervarsity, 2006), 94-5.