
Chapter 5.1

Born Again Living

Virtue Apologetics: *The Ultimate Proof of Christianity*

Overall Objective

To introduce a biblical approach to proving the exclusivity of Christianity in a pluralistic world.

Table of Topics

A) The Ultimate Apologetic: *Supernatural virtue*

A.1) God's Approach to Apologetics: *Character Miracles*

A.2) A Popular Approach to Apologetics: *Intellectual Arguments*

B) The Meaning of Virtue: *Love & holiness*

B.1) *Agapē* Love

B.2) *Qādash* Holiness

Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- Apologetics is the field of study which provides proof for the claims of Christianity to be the only faith through which people can be accepted by God.
- God's primary proof for His claims has never been intellectual, as is popularized today, but rather, supernatural.
- God does not intend today to authenticate the Gospel with "charismatic" miracles, but rather, with "character" miracles, because the greatest miracles occurring today are the transformation of sinners into saints.
- The superior virtue of Christians proves the salvific exclusivity of the Christian Gospel because real moral transformation only occurs with its reception.
- The moral virtue of God, and all the moral virtue He expects of us, can be summed up in the biblical ideas of love and holiness.
- While sexual, parental, and friendship love are by far the most common ideas of love in both the ancient and modern world, it is unconditional *agapē* that the early Christians virtually invented in order to describe God's love.
- While all other loves are founded on and limited to liking someone, *agapē* love *does not even begin until we do not naturally like someone*. It is the only kind of love that you can have for your enemies.
- Imagine hugging, kissing, or eating the most *disgusting* and *dangerous* thing imaginable, and you are just beginning to imagine what *agapē* is.
- Because of its supernatural nature, the noun *agapē* was *never* used in *any* classical Greek literature that we know of before the NT.
- Christianity is the only religion or philosophy that requires forgiveness.
- Because God is holy, holiness is another ultimate proof that someone has a relationship with Him.

A) The Ultimate Apologetic: *Supernatural Virtue*

A.1) God's Approach to Apologetics: *Character Miracles*

It is one thing to claim that born again Christians possess an exclusive and superior knowledge of God, as we have elsewhere in *Knowing Our God*. It is another thing to prove it, both to ourselves, and to the world. This is the purpose of *apologetics* and the defense of the exclusivity of the Christian faith. *Apologetics* is not telling someone why you are sorry you are a Christian. Neither is it making someone else sorry they asked why you are a Christian. Rather, the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (EDT)* states under "Apologetics":

The English word comes from a Greek root meaning "to defend, to make reply, to give an answer, to legally defend oneself." In NT times an *apologia* was a formal courtroom defense of something (cf. 2 Tim 4:16). As a subdivision of Christian theology apologetics is a systematic, argumentative discourse in defense of the divine origin and the authority of the Christian faith.¹

Christian apologetics then is the field of study which provides proof for the claims of Christianity to be the only faith through which people can be accepted by God. the King said, "**I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me**" (John 14:6). The Apostle Peter said, "**Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other Name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved**" (Acts 4:12). The Apostle Paul wrote: "**there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus**" (1 Tim 2:5). Either these men are liars, or all followers of any other religion are damned. Right away, then, we see that such a critical claim demands considerable proof.

While we will certainly argue in this book that God desires us to engage in apologetics, we do not believe it can save anyone, and that its value in even leading people to Christ is limited. Nonetheless, God certainly desires that His people give the world evidence for the salvific exclusivity of the Christian Gospel.

Several different angles have been taken in Christian apologetics, but the most popular ones could be categorized as *intellectual apologetics*,² which involve philosophical, historical, or scientific evidence and arguments, with the goal of demonstrating that Christianity simply makes better sense of the world than other religions. We would suggest, however, this was not the primary approach of God in either the OT or NT. Instead, God's approach to authenticating His truth has always been *miracles*.

For example, it is the miracle of Creation that provides proof that leaves humanity “**without excuse**” (Rom 1:20) for not believing its message of the existence and authority of a Creator. Accordingly, when the Creator came to Earth, He did not simply claim a superior spiritual knowledge, but proved it with supernatural deeds (cf. John 4:11; 20:20-21; Acts 2:22). Likewise, Christ’s Apostles authenticated themselves as sources and messengers of superior spiritual truth with the miracles they performed (Acts 14:3; 2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:3-4). Even in the OT, it was the miracle of plagues in Egypt (cf. Exod 7-12), the miracle of conquests in Canaan (cf. Josh 5-13, esp. 2:8-11), the miracle of fire before the prophets of Baal (2 Kgs 18:15-40), and the supernatural humbling of the king of Babylon (Dan 4), that God intended as evidence that He was the only true God.

How then are Christians today supposed to prove to themselves and others that they possess superior spiritual knowledge? How do we justify our claim that we are right and saved, and the rest of the world is wrong and damned? Is it with intellectual arguments? No, it is again with *miracles*. Do we mean casting out demons and healing headaches? No, we mean real miracles, the kind that only God can do (cf. Matt 7:15-23). We mean the “**greater works**” of power that the King said would accompany His people after His departure and the coming of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 14:12).

Here, however, we part company with many Christians today and claim that by “**greater works**” Christ did not mean the physical healing of the body, but rather, the spiritual healing of the soul.³ Ordinarily, God does not intend today to authenticate the Gospel with “charismatic” miracles, but rather, with “character” miracles.⁴ The greatest miracles occurring today are the transformation of sinners into saints, lusters into lovers, and the greedy into givers. This miracle of supernatural regeneration is *the* ultimate apologetic for the superiority of the Christian faith, far surpassing all other apologetic approaches combined. This is because it results in a supernatural love and holiness that can be witnessed by all. And as NT scholar Leon Morris (1914-2006) put it in a rare study on the topic, “Love is a sheer miracle.”⁵

What better way to prove Jesus than to have people meet Jesus? And they do when Christians act like Jesus by the unique power they have because the Holy Spirit lives in them.

How do we know that the Gospel of the King is the only Gospel that saves? We know because real and supernatural human transformation is in the name and power of Christ alone. No other Gospel can claim or boast of the same holy, miraculous, moral fruit of this Gospel. We know the spiritual transformation that we have experienced has occurred in the *name* and *power* of the King, because it only occurs with the communication and reception of the *Gospel* of the King.

To the question of, "How do we know this spiritual experience of regeneration cannot happen by some other religion?" we answer simply that it cannot and never has. The kind of superior life change we have experienced only happens in the name of the King and this is because the Holy Spirit (the only One who can create such change) only acts in the name of the King and no other.

Contrary to the growing number of *pluralists*⁶ in our day, salvation is only found in knowing and accepting the King for who He is. And the best way of knowing whether or not one has the King, is to judge how well they are obeying and acting like the King, and born again Christians far surpass any other humans in these categories. The superior virtue of Christians proves the salvific exclusivity of the Christian Gospel because supernatural moral transformation only occurs with its reception.

Which makes it all the more disturbing that *virtue apologetics* is also the most neglected approach to Christian apologetics in our day.⁷ This is in spite of the fact that it can be proven both biblically and historically that God has always intended virtue to be His ultimate and universal apologetic for salvation through Him. G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936) remarked: "Original sin . . . is the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved."⁸ On the contrary, if the sinful nature of unregenerated humanity can be proven by their sinfulness, then the New Nature of the regenerated can be proven by their virtue.

Whether or not the Holy Spirit is healing bodies upon the command of "faith healers" is debatable,⁹ but it is beyond doubt that He is healing hearts upon the preaching of the Gospel. In addition to spiritual regeneration which uniquely allows the Christian to accept the Gospel, the Spirit continues to work to provide undeniable, supernatural, and *objective* proof of their salvation, and their spiritual and epistemological superiority. This miracle of spiritual rebirth through the Holy Spirit of Christ demonstrates itself in the supernatural and superior *virtue* that flows from the lives of regenerated Christians, explaining our labeling of this approach as *virtue apologetics*.

More specifically, nobody *loves* the Creator and His human creations as sincerely, consistently, and deeply as Holy Spirit indwelled believers, and nobody can. Likewise, nobody is as *holy* as those uniquely indwelled with the *Holy* Spirit, which is only born again Christians. We believe the Bible clearly teaches these very things and that the superiority and certainty of our *born again believing* is proven by the superiority and certainty of our *born again living*.

A.2) A Popular Approach to Apologetics: *Intellectual Arguments*

As noted above, many contend that a presentation of Christian truth must begin with a rational defense of the superiority of its authority and sources. We would label this as *intellectual apologetics* in which there is an emphasis on philosophical, historical, and scientific arguments for the Christian faith.¹⁰ For example, the rightly respected apologist Dr. Norm Geisler writes:

The heart of this [*intellectual*] apologetic approach is that the Christian is interested in defending the truths that Christ is the Son of God and the Bible is the word of God. However, prior to establishing these two pillars on which the uniqueness of Christianity is built, one must establish the existence of God. For it makes no sense to speak about an act of God (i.e., a miracle) confirming that Christ is the Son of God and that the Bible is the Word of God unless of course there is a God who can have a son and who can speak a Word.

Theism, then, is a logical prerequisite to Christianity. What is more, an adequate test for truth is a methodological prerequisite to establishing theism. For unless the Christian apologist has a test by which he can show other systems to be false and theism to be true, then there is no way to adjudicate the conflicting claims of various religions and world views.¹¹

Likewise, the popular Reformed theologian R. C. Sproul says:

Apologetics is indispensable for the establishing of [the intellectual assent to Christian truth that occurs before someone gets saved]. Though apologetics may not be evangelism, it is [apparently always] a vital part of pre-evangelism.¹²

We would respectfully disagree. In order to be saved, people need to believe in the Savior, and they can do so without believing in a Creator. People need to believe in Jesus, and that can occur without belief in the Bible. While we do not wish to deny that the evidences produced by *intellectual apologists* have had some value for the conversion of some unbelievers, they do not have the preeminent evangelistic value that Drs. Geisler and Sproul suggest.¹³

In fact, the greatest value of *intellectual apologetics* is not in sparking the faith of unbelievers, but rather in building the faith of believers who can actually appreciate such evidence.¹⁴ This, in fact, may explain the misplaced emphasis on philosophical, historical, and scientific evidences for the Christian faith as a defense of it to unbelievers. It is because such evidences are so valuable to *us*, that we want to assume they will be valuable to the unregenerate as well, which is often not the case.

Several Scriptures are often used to give biblical support to defending the Christian faith with *intellectual apologetics*, but as will be demonstrated especially in chapter 5.4, there is virtually no clear support in Scripture for this popular approach and overwhelming evidence for *virtue apologetics*. Which makes one seriously wonder why, as demonstrated in chapter 5.8, there is virtually no modern discussion or references to *virtue apologetics* in modern Christian literature but literally thousands of books, articles, seminars, and websites dedicated to *intellectual apologetics*.

B) The Meaning of Virtue: Love & Holiness

If we are going to claim that *virtue* is the prescribed approach to apologetics in Scripture, perhaps we need to at least briefly define what we mean by it. For us, it is substantially summed up in the biblical ideas of love and holiness. Accordingly, in his very good book, *The Mark of a Christian*, Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984) wrote of the importance of maintaining both of these virtues:

The Christian really has a double task. He has to practice both God's holiness and God's love. The Christian is to exhibit that God exists as the infinite and personal God; and then he is to exhibit simultaneously God's character of holiness and love. Not his holiness without his love: that is only harshness. Not his love without his holiness: that is only compromise. Anything that an individual Christian or Christian group does that fails to show the simultaneous balance of the holiness of God and the love of God presents to a watching world not a demonstration of the God who exists but a caricature of the God who exists.¹⁵

Therefore, all the moral virtue of God, and all the moral virtue He expects of us, can be summed up in the biblical ideas of love and holiness. And it is important that Scripture is the source of our understanding of these virtues because the world hardly comprehends them, let alone practices them. Which simply illustrates why *virtue apologetics* works.

B.1) Agapē Love

In the Greek language there are four primary nouns for love, including *erōs*, *philia*, *storgē*, and *agapē*. *Erōs* is romantic, sexual love between a man and woman based on physical attraction. *Philia* is a warm, brotherly love between friends, based on mutual interests. *Storgē* is a natural love, especially between parents and children. *Agapē* is unconditional love, based on a decision made by the lover,

and having nothing to do with the attributes of the one loved, even to the point of loving those who are otherwise repulsive.¹⁶

Before discussing *agapē* (unconditional love), it is interesting to note that neither the Greek nouns *erōs* (sexual love), nor *storgē* (parental love) are ever used in the NT,¹⁷ and *philia* only once to refer to a sinful "**friendship with the world**" (James 4:4).

The complete absence of both the noun *erōs*, and even the verb *eraō* may be because: 1) God only intended sex to be for marriage, which is best defined in biblical terms as *agapē* (cf. Eph 5:25), 2) *agapē* love in a marriage will automatically include *erōs* (cf. 1 Cor 7:2-5), and 3) *erōs* is inherently selfish and therefore sinful if exercised all by itself. As C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) said of *erōs*, it is "ready for every sacrifice except [self] renunciation."¹⁸ Along the same lines, Dr. Morris writes:

Perhaps as good a way as any of grasping the new idea of love the Christians had is to contrast it with the idea conveyed by *erōs*. As we have seen, *erōs* has two principal characteristics: it is a love of the worthy and it is a love that desires to possess. *Agapē* is in contrast at both points: it is not a love of the worthy, and it is not a love that desires to possess. On the contrary, it is a love given quite irrespective of merit, and it is a love that seeks to give.¹⁹

The absence of *storgē* (family love) in the NT seems significant as well,²⁰ Dr Morris pointing out that:

It is probably significant that when they [early Christians] spoke of the Father's love for the Son they did not use *storgē* nor any word from this root. Rather, the Son is "Beloved," *agapetos*, of the Father (Matt. 3:17; 17:5; Mark 9:7; etc.).²¹

Perhaps the absence of *storgē* can similarly be explained by the fact that God really wants parents to exercise *agapē* with their children, because the natural, and ultimately conditional nature of *storgē* is insufficient to weather all the difficulties that can occur in family relationships, evidenced by the number of parents and children who end up hating one another because the initial *storgē* of very early childhood has worn thin.²²

As noted above, the noun *philia* ("friendship") is used only once in the NT, but cognates of the verb *phileō* are used about 30 times, a few times rather synonymously with the verb *agapaō*, but often with a negative connotation such as the "**love**" that the Pharisees had for the attention of people (cf. Matt 6:4; Matt 23:6-7; Luke 20:46).

Nevertheless, it becomes clear that neither sexual, parental, nor friendship love is the kind of love that is the essence of Christianity. While these are by far the most common ideas of love in both the ancient and modern world, it is unconditional *agapē* that the early

Christians virtually invented in order to describe a love that is different than all other loves that humans are familiar with. Indeed, while cognates of friendship love (*philia* and *phileō*) are used about 30 times in the NT, cognates of *agapē* are used over 250 times by NT writers.²³ Accordingly, Dr. Morris writes of *agapē*: “[I]t is the characteristic New Testament word—almost the only New Testament word—for love.”²⁴

The reason for this is obvious and significant. *Agapē* love is different from all the others in that it characteristically carries the idea of unconditional, and therefore, unending love (cf. 1 Cor 13:7). *Erōs*, *philia*, and *storgē* all require a natural attraction based on the attributes of the person being loved, and because of such dependence, they are fickle and unreliable. Accordingly, Greek scholar William Mounce succinctly describes the essence of *agapē* when he writes:

Agapē is a beautiful word picture of sacrificial love. It is expressed in the fact that “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). As such, *agapē* can be defined as unmerited and unwavering love.²⁵

“Sacrificial,” “unmerited,” and “unwavering,” rather completely describe *agapē*.

Perhaps an illustration of *agapē*, no matter how inadequate, will help. It is natural for the positive and negative poles of a magnet to bond together. Likewise, when a person finds in another person what they want, whether it be the body of a lover, the companionship of a friend, the security of a parent, or the sense of significance that comes from having a child, certain kinds of love occur. But what if the negative poles of two magnets are directed toward one another? They naturally and even rather violently repel. And the only thing that will bring them together is a force more powerful than the natural resistance occurring.

Agapē is such a force. It is not a natural love, but a supernatural one, overcoming the natural forces that pull two people apart. Whereas all other loves are founded on and limited to liking someone, *agapē* love *does not even begin until we do not naturally like someone*. It is the only kind of love that you can have for your enemies. It is the first kind of love that God had to have for us to even initiate a relationship with us. Relatively weak, ignorant, selfish, sinful, and yet proud humans, are not naturally attractive to an almighty, all-knowing, perfect God. It is only because of the force of His *agapē* that we can be brought together at all.

Imagine the most *disgusting* and *dangerous* thing imaginable, and then imagine what it would take for you to hug it, kiss it, or eat it, and you are just beginning to imagine what *agapē* is. Disgusting and dangerous is precisely and naturally what sinners are to God. His natural disgust for them is demonstrated by His current wrath upon them (cf. Ps 5:4-5; 11:5; Eph 2:3), and His future eternal punishment

of them in Hell. And sinners were dangerous to God the Son, some of whom personally killed Him, and all of whom ultimately put Him on the cross. *Agapē* overcomes disgust and danger, setting aside likes and even one's life. Accordingly, Dr. Morris writes of *agapē*:

"Herein is love," wrote John, "not that we loved God" [we will never understand what love means if we start with human response], "but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4: 10). It is the cross that brought a new dimension to religion, that gives us a new understanding of love. The New Testament writers saw everything in its light, finding their ideas about love revolutionized by what the cross meant. . . .

When we see man for what he is, the wrath of God for what it is, and the cross for what it is, then and only then do we see love for what it is. [cf. Rom 5:5-18].²⁶

Because of the supernatural and divine nature of *agapē*, it should not surprise us that the noun *agapē* was *never* used in *any* classical Greek literature that we know of before the NT.²⁷ While it was used some twenty times in the Greek translation of the OT (LXX, 300-100 B.C.), and a few other Jewish writings, Dr. Morris writes:

[I]t is a striking fact that *agapē* is very rare indeed before the New Testament, and very frequently used in it. . . . Why should the Christians use what was for all intents and purposes a new word for love? Because they had a new idea about the essential meaning of love. . . . The older words were not suitable vehicles for conveying the new meaning because they aroused associations the Christians did not intend; thus they used the new noun.²⁸

The idea of unconditional and unwavering love was never invented by humans, but has only become known through divine revelation. This would seem true of another uniquely NT virtue: serving. NT scholar I. Howard Marshall writes:

It is worth observing that the concept of serving is virtually new in Christianity or at least strongly characteristic of it. Neither in the Old Testament nor in the Hellenistic world of the time was the concept of work as service to be found. It stems from Jesus, who lived out what he taught.²⁹

All of this is because humans are born with a selfish nature, not a selfless one, and are not naturally capable of *agapē*. Therefore, its ultimate source is "**God**" Who "**is love** [*agapē*]" (1 John 4:8, cf. 16). To illustrate this, allow us to insert "those without God" into the text of the Bible's most detailed description of God-love:

[Those without God are always] **patient and kind**. [Those without God are never] **jealous**, [those without God never] **brag, and** [are never] **proud**. [Those without God are never] **rude**, [are never] **selfish, and** [never] **get upset with others**. [Those without God never] **count up wrongs that have been done**. [Those without God are never] **happy with evil but** [are always] **happy with the truth**. [Those without God] **patiently accept all things** [done to them]. [The love of those without God] **always trusts, always hopes, and always remains strong**. [The] **Love** [of those without God] **never ends**. (1 Cor 13:4-8 NCV)

God-love and those without God simply have nothing in common.

Accordingly, Christian apologist Arthur Lindsey writes:

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).³⁰

Likewise, the Greek scholar W. E. Vine wrote that *agapē* is:

The characteristic word of Christianity, and since the Spirit of revelation has used it to express ideas previously unknown [in humanity], inquiry into its use, whether in Greek literature or in the Septuagint [Greek translation of OT 300-100 B. C.], throws but little light upon its distinctive meaning in the NT.³¹

Amos N. Wilder (1896-1993), former Emeritus Hollis Professor of Divinity at Harvard Divinity School simply said, "agape is in effect a Christian creation."³² *Agapē* is rather exclusively a Christian word because it is an exclusive attribute of the Christian God and those He indwells.

Pastoral Practices

- Is there a Christian in your church that you simply do not like? Have you realized that loving begins where liking ends? Pray for that person and make a special effort to love them with the kind of God-love that enables us to embrace people who are otherwise not attractive. You will be acting like God when you do. And you will be setting an important "**example**" for your flock "**in love**" (1 Tim 4:12).

B.2) *Qādash* Holiness

Unlike the concept of *agapē* love, the idea of holiness was clearly and thoroughly defined and illustrated in the OT, through the word group *qdash*. Also unlike *agapē*, the concept could be readily derived from the ancient biblical world. While humans are born with an innate selfishness that prohibits them from producing *agapē*, they all have a conscience that universally enables them to recognize and pursue moral laws.³³ Ancient peoples knew what holiness was. Thomas E. McComiskey, Professor of OT and Semitic Languages at Trinity remarks regarding the *qdash* word group, "The word occurs in several dialects of Akkadian [c. 2500 B. C.] with the basic meanings "to be clean, pure, consecrated [devoted].""³⁴

Obviously in the OT, these ideas decidedly took on a moral sense, such that God was clearly revealed as being morally perfect. Accordingly, the Prophet Isaiah declares that Yahweh is "**the Holy One of Israel**" (1:4), the "**holy God**" (5:16), "**Holy, holy, holy**" (6:3), "**the Holy One**" (Isa 40:25), and that even His "**name is Holy**" (Isa 57:15).

The idea of "pure devotion" was especially illustrative of the holiness God expected from His people, and was also a root idea in the Hebrew word group *qdash*.³⁵ Which is why *qādēsh* meant "temple prostitute" (cf. Gen 38:21; Deut 23:17; etc.), or one whose life was completely devoted to the worship of pagan sex gods.³⁶ Nonetheless, in biblical religion, one devoted or consecrated to God obviously had to be morally clean and pure (cf. Lev 16:30; Ps 24:3-4), or more specifically, righteous, which *Webster's* defines as, "acting in accord with divine or moral law; free from guilt or sin."³⁷

Because God is holy, holiness is the other ultimate proof that someone has a relationship with Him. As the writer of Hebrews exhorts his readers: "**Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord**" (Heb 12:14). That is an important fact considering that it is *only* through a whole-hearted faith in the Gospel of the King that one is possessed by the *Holy* Spirit, giving them moral desires and abilities that no other humans have.

Of course, real love and holiness are bound together in defining what real supernatural virtue is. Accordingly, J. I. Packer writes:

As Jesus was law incarnate, so he was love incarnate, and following his way of self-giving is holiness in its purest and most perfect expression. Hard, harsh, cold-hearted holiness is a contradiction in terms. Love to God as prescribed in Matthew 22:37, citing Deuteronomy 6:5, and as voiced in Psalm 18, and love to neighbor as defined in I Corinthians 13:4-7 and illustrated in Jesus' story of the Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) is, by contrast, the very heartbeat of holiness. . . .

[W]ithout love anything purporting to be holiness is in God's sight nothing: In other words, it is a hollow sham. We do well to examine ourselves often at this point. ³⁸

Pastoral Practices

- Is there anything or anyone in your life that you need to separate yourself from in order to be holier and closer to God? Watch out especially for the things you do when you are tired or bored. Holy recreation is vital. God is expecting you to “**set an example for the believers in . . . purity**” (1 Tim 4:12).

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Father in Heave, we thank You for giving us the power to perform the greatest of all miracle working: love. We commit to exercising this miracle at every opportunity we have in order to glorify you and prove to others that we alone truly know You.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) What is *apologetics*?
- 2) How would you define *virtue apologetics*?
- 3) What do we claim is the greatest miracle occurring today? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 4) We claim that supernatural moral transformation only occurs with the reception of the Gospel. Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 5) How do we define *intellectual apologetics*? Would you agree that it is the most popular approach to proving the Christian faith to unbelievers? What biblical support would you give for that?
- 6) What two virtues sum up even the moral virtue of God?
- 7) What are at least four Greek words for love, and their meanings?

- 8) What are several things unique about the noun *agapē* and its meaning?

Recommended Reading

- The rest of the chapters of Book 5 which describe and defend *virtue apologetics* as the most effective and biblical approach to proving Christianity.
- *Types of Apologetic Systems* by Bernard Ramm, (Van Kampen Press, 1953). Gives the reader a good overview of traditional approaches to apologetics. Unfortunately, we can offer no good reference to *virtue apologetics*.

Publications & Particulars

¹ A. J. Hoover, "Apologetics" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (EDT)*, Walter Elwell ed., (Baker, 1984), 68.

² For further discussion of *intellectual apologetics* see section 5.10.

³ For further discussion of the vital understanding of what Christ meant when He said His followers would perform greater miracles than He upon His departure see section 10.5.B.2.

⁴ For further discussion and a critique of what has come to be known as "Power evangelism" see chapter 11.5.6.

⁵ Leon Morris, *Testaments of Love: A Study of Love in the Bible* (Eerdmans, 1981), 277.

⁶ *Pluralism* is essentially the belief that all moral religions provide salvation. For further discussion see section 6.10.B.

⁷ For further discussion on the neglect of *virtue apologetics* see section 5.10.C

⁸ G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, ch. II; online at www.ccel.org.

⁹ For further discussion of "faith healing" see Book 11: *Human Miracle Working*

¹⁰ For further discussion of *intellectual apologetics* see section 5.10.

¹¹ Norm Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Baker Book House, 1976), 8-9.

¹² R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsey in *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Academie Books, 1984), 22.

¹³ For further discussion of the value of apologetics for evangelism, and the balance between the need for regeneration, see section 2.12.C

¹⁴ For further discussion on the value of apologetics for believers see sections 5.11.D and 6.12.C.1.

¹⁵ Francis Schaeffer, *The Mark of a Christian*, (Intervarsity, 1970), 21.

¹⁶ While the distinctions between *agapē*, *erōs*, *storgē*, and *philia* are fairly consistently demonstrated in both Greek and biblical literature, like most words there is some overlap in their meanings as well, especially with *agapaō* and *phileō* sometimes being used rather interchangeably (cf. Matt 5:46; John 3:35; 5:20; 21:15-17). Particularly on the latter passage see D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Baker, 1996), 51-53.

Dr. Carson additionally points out that *agapaō* is used in 2 Sam 13:15 (incorrectly in our opinion) by the LXX translators to refer to Ammon's lust for Tamar. More significantly, it is used of Demas' sinful love for this world (cf. 2 Tim 4:10).

However, in our opinion, Dr. Carson's view is based on the verb *agapaō* and is too disrespectful of uniquenesses of the noun *agapē* in Christian literature when he writes:

[T]he content of God's love is not connected on a one-to-one basis with the semantic range of any single word or word group. What the Bible has to say about the love of God is conveyed by sentences, paragraphs, discourses, and so forth; that is, by larger semantic units than the word. (53)

On the contrary, there is enough uniqueness in the way the NT uses *agapē* to agree with other Greek scholars such as Amos Wilder that, "*agapē* is in effect a Christian creation" (quoted in Arthur Lindsey, *Love the Ultimate Apologetic: The Heart of Christian Witness* [Intervarsity, 2008], 86) to describe the love of God, as we demonstrate in this section.

¹⁷ Although, *storgē* love would seem to be illustrated at Matthew 7:9-11. However, note here that Jesus still reminds us that such people are "evil."

¹⁸ C. S Lewis, *The Four Loves* (Collins, 1960), 124.

¹⁹ Morris, 128. However, Dr. Morris adds:

Erōs can be beautiful. It is a valuable part of life, one that none of us can do without. In their enthusiasm for *agapē* some have written as though *erōs* is inherently evil. This simply is not so. Certainly *erōs* is not the way of salvation or the essential Christian idea of love. But that does not mean that *erōs* does not have its rightful place in the Christian life. Romantic love at its best is a wonderful, pure love, lofty and ennobling. No Christian ought to be critical of this love, considering the Bible's teaching on the subject.

The Song of Songs extols it in a way that the church has often delighted to see as an allegory of Christ's love. This is surely the wrong way to interpret the book, but the fact that it has been so understood by devout believers shows quite plainly that there is nothing essentially evil about this form of love. Moreover, throughout the Bible it is always taken for granted-and sometimes put into explicit words-that love

between the sexes is a good and beautiful part of normal living for God's people. (122)

²⁰ Although the compound *philostorgos* appears at Romans 12:10 to refer to "**brotherly love.**"

²¹ Morris, 117.

²² Additionally, Dr. Morris notes regarding *storgē*:

It is all the more interesting that the term is never used in the New Testament [cf. note above]. Coming closest to it is the negative form of the corresponding adjective, which indicates disapproval. Twice people "without natural affection" are condemned (Rom. 1:31; 11 Tim. 3:3). There can be no doubt from the general thrust of New Testament teaching, and specifically from what it has to say about the family, that the early Christians saw *storgē* as natural and right. But their failure to use the word in the New Testament documents shows that it was not *storgē* that they had in mind when they spoke of love. . . . We must realize at the beginning that Christian love is not simply a family tie, an emotion that might be expected to occur in any natural grouping. Christians may thus assume that *storgē* is important and indeed necessary, but not the distinctive Christian idea of love. (Ibid., 116-17)

²³ See NT linguistic statistics of these words in Morris, 125, fn. 35.

²⁴ Ibid., 125.

²⁵ William D. Mounce, *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* (Zondervan, 2006), 429.

²⁶ Morris, 129, 131.

²⁷ *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)*:

The vb. *agapaō* appears frequently from Homer onwards in Gk. literature, but the noun *agapē* is only a late Gk. construction. Only one reference has been found outside the Bible, where the goddess Isis is given the title *agapē* (*P. Oxy.* 1380, 109; 2nd cent. A.D.) [an instance of idolatry if there ever was one]. (W. Günther and H. G. Link, "Love" in *NIDNTT*, Colin Brown, ed., 4 vols., [Zondervan, 1986], 2:539)

Likewise, E. Stauffer in the standard scholar's reference the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament [TDNT]*, "finds no certain example among the Greeks" (Morris, *Love*, 124).

The noun *agapē* then is only clearly found once in all of ancient Greek literature, and only after its use in the NT was rather widely known. And its verb form primarily was used synonymously with romantic and friendship love, although perhaps one obscure reference can be found concerning the divine favor of a pagan god. Nonetheless, it is clear that the idea of unconditional, unwavering love was not invented by any human culture, including the Greeks, but was a revelation of God, found in the Septuagint (Greek translation of OT Scripture, 300-100 B. C.), and especially in the NT.

This again, in our opinion, suggests that Dr. Carson is too eager to downplay the significance of the use of *agapē* in the NT, when he criticizes other Greek scholars who "say that the writers of the Septuagint and the New Testament chose *agapaō* and cognates as the only adequate term with

which to talk about God's love" (*Fallacies*, 51). Actually, the data suggests that the *noun agapē* (not the verb) was used uniquely in Christian literature to describe the unconditional love of God, which in turn gave a particular Christian meaning of the verb *agapaō* in the NT. Dr. Carson simply seems unwilling to recognize any uniqueness in the early Christians' use of *agapē* despite the linguistic evidence.

Even in reference to the pre-NT use of the verb *agapaō* Dr. Morris writes:

Perhaps I should make it clear that the newness [of the concept of love] is in the noun [*agapē*], not the verb [*agapaō*]. The Christians did not produce a new verb but employed one already in common use—namely, *agapaō*. Even here they used a distinctive approach, because they used this word much more than they did *phileō*, and they did not use verbs such as *erāō* at all. The verb *agapaō* was used quite frequently in pre-Christian times, but when the Christians used it they gave it a deeper meaning.

Stauffer [in the *TDNT*] thinks that in secular Greek in general, *agapaō* was normally used in a more colorless sense than either *erōs* or *phileō*. He sees it as characteristically having a meaning something like "prefer" and therefore a verb suitable to convey the idea that God prefers one man to another. Stauffer also asserts that *agapaō* makes distinctions. It denotes "a free and decisive act determined by its subject," whereas *erōs*, among other things, "seeks in others the fulfillment of its own life's hunger." He also sees *agapaō* as having "little of the warmth of *philein*. Its etymology is uncertain, and its meaning weak and variable." But this is not true of the way it is used in the New Testament. There it certainly has a rich, positive meaning. (126-7)

²⁸ Morris, 125. However, Dr. Morris adds:

In saying this I am not claiming that the linguistics prove this point. The essential Christian idea of love is found in books where *agape* is not used, the meaning arising because of the way the Christians used the concept, not the word. I do not see a new idea of love in the New Testament because *agapē* is so characteristic; it is exactly the other way around. The early Christians had a new idea of love in whatever words they expressed it, but their novel use of *agapē* is significant. (125-26)

²⁹ I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter* (Intervarsity, 1991), 147.

³⁰ Lindsey, 123, 171.

³¹ W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Nelson, 1996), 381.

³² Lindsey, 86.

³³ The question of the universality of moral law is discussed in section 2.4.B.1.

³⁴ Thomas E. McComiskey, "qādash" in the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT)*, [Moody, 1980], 787.

³⁵ Accordingly, Dr. McComiskey remarks regarding the word group *qdash*:

A definitive use of the term occurs in Num 16:38. The censurers of the Korahites were regarded as holy because they had been devoted to the Lord. They were thus regarded as having entered the sphere of the

sacred by virtue of cultic ritual (v. 17) and were accorded a special place in the sanctuary. The devotion of the censers seems to have created a condition of inviolable holiness that could not allow for their being treated in a common way. (787)

The "pure devotion" of physical articles to God was certainly transferred to His people as well. However, concerning the popular idea that the essential meaning of *qdsh* is "separation," Dr. McComiskey remarks:

The meaning "to separate" is favored by many scholars, but the fact that *qdsh* rarely, if ever, occurs in a secular sense makes any positive conclusion in this regard difficult because of the limited evidence on which to base philological comparison. (Ibid. Contra, J. R. Williams in the *EDT*, 515)

³⁶ Ibid., 788.

³⁷ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/righteous>.

³⁸ J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step With the Spirit* (Revell, 1984), 114-15.