
Chapter 5.12

Rescuing Other Scriptures from *Intellectual Apologetics*

Table of Topics

- A) Demolishing Arguments?:** *2 Cor 10:3-5*
- B) Defending and Confirming the Gospel?:** *Phil 1:7*
- C) Contending for the Gospel?:** *Phil 1:27*
- D) Know How to Answer Everyone?:** *Col 4:5-6*
- E) Persuading Men?:** *2 Cor 5:11*

Publications & Particulars

Primary Points

- *Intellectual apologetics* is too prone to taking every biblical reference to “defending the faith” or making a “defense” as support for their ministry.
- Paul’s reference to “**demolish[ing] arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God**” (2 Cor 10:5) referred to his teaching ministry and “**the authority the Lord gave**” him “**for building . . . up**” the Corinthian Christians in their faith.
- Paul’s reference to “**defending and confirming the Gospel**” (Phil 1:7) is referring to the formal trial he was awaiting in prison at the very time he wrote the Philippians.
- Neither is his reference to “**contending as one man for the faith of the Gospel**” (Phil 1:27) a reference to *intellectual apologetics* in contradiction to his rejection of this very thing in 1 Corinthians. The Apostle may be encouraging the Philippians to unitedly *spread* “**the faith of the Gospel**” or *defend* it against false teachers in the Church, just as Jude had.
- Paul’s reference to our “**conversation**” with “**outsiders**” being “**seasoned with salt**” (Col 4:5-6) relates to its virtuous, not eloquent, interesting, or intelligent nature.

There are, of course, several passages of Scripture that *intellectual apologetics* uses to support their place in the evangelism of unbelievers. We have already discussed 1 Peter 3:15 and found it to actually support *virtue apologetics* and not the *intellectual* kind at all. Likewise, we have come to the same conclusion regarding other passages.

Part of the problem is that every reference to “defending the faith” or making a “defense” is claimed by *intellectual apologists* as support for their ministry. For example, Norm Geisler writes in the context of offering Scripture to support *intellectual apologetics*:

Titus 1:9 makes knowledge of Christian [intellectual] evidences a requirement for church leadership. An elder in the church should “hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”¹

The problem with Dr. Geisler’s application of this Scripture is that the contents of “**the trustworthy message**” Titus was to protect had absolutely nothing to do with the extra-biblical, philosophical, scientific “evidences” that Dr. Geisler refers to.

In a similar way, Jude’s encouragement to “**contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints**” (Jude 1:3) is not an encouragement to pursue *intellectual apologetics* as too many assume. Jude goes to explain what truth is being attacked when he writes: “**For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord**” (v. 4). Again, “contending for the faith” has nothing to do with using extra-biblical arguments to defend the Gospel.

A) Demolishing Arguments?: 2 Cor 10:3-5

A passage that is commonly used to support the need for *intellectual apologetics* is 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. Accordingly, Norm Geisler writes on this passage:

This means we should confront issues in . . . the expressed thoughts of others that prevent . . . them from knowing God. This is what apologetics is all about.²

The full passage reads:

¹ By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am “timid” when face to face with you, but “bold” when away! ² I beg you that when I come I

may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world.

³ For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. ⁶ And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.

⁷ You are looking only on the surface of things. If anyone is confident that he belongs to Christ, he should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as he. ⁸ For even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than pulling you down, I will not be ashamed of it. ⁹ I do not want to seem to be trying to frighten you with my letters. ¹⁰ For some say, "His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing." ¹¹ Such people should realize that what we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present. (2 Cor 10:1-11)

Perhaps the most popular application of this passage is to focus on the Apostle's statement that "**we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ**" (v. 5), and suggest he is referring to the need for the individual Christian to monitor their thoughts, ensuring they reflect the truth of Christ. This is true, of course, and there are other Scriptures that clearly encourage this (cf. Phil 4:8; Rom 13:14; 1 Cor 14:20).

However, the Apostle's wording is not in the first person here as if he is describing something he does to himself, and which we can individually apply to ourselves. Rather, he is describing what the Apostles hope to do in their ministry *to others* against the "**strongholds . . . arguments and every pretension**" they believe, and "**every thought**" and even "**every act**" "**that sets itself up against the knowledge of God**" (vs. 4-6). The Apostle is talking about his ministry to help others reject lies and believe the truth.

Proponents of *intellectual apologetics* are understandably eager to apply Paul's references of demolishing "**strongholds . . . arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God**" (10:4-5). The implication is that the Apostle is referring to his efforts with unbelievers to refute their anti-Christian philosophies in order to prepare them for the Gospel. ³ The NLT would seem to reflect

this perspective when it reads: **"With these weapons we break down every proud argument that keeps people from knowing God. With these weapons we conquer their rebellious ideas."**

While such a translation helps to see that the Apostle is speaking of his ministry to others, refuting the first popular perspective noted above, it seems to imply that the Apostle is speaking of his evangelistic ministry to unbelievers. We don't believe either interpretation reflects the Apostle's intent.

It would seem that several contextual clues point to the Apostle speaking of his teaching ministry to the Corinthian believers to help them grow in their Christian faith. Most commentators agree that Paul is defending his ministry against critics in Corinth who say that, **"Paul [is] . . . 'timid' when face to face . . . but 'bold' when away!"** (v. 1); and **"His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing"** (v. 10).⁴ Accordingly, this is Paul's theme in the proceeding chapters and perhaps is summed up in chapter 12 when he writes, **"Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you [as the purpose of our ministry]? We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ; and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening"** (12:19). And it is this very spiritual **"strengthening"** that Paul is speaking of back in chapter 10.

Thus, the key statement to Paul's thoughts is 10:8: **"even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you [the Corinthian Christians] up rather than pulling you down, I will not be ashamed of it."** And it is his ministry and **"authority"** from **"the Lord . . . for building up"** the Corinthian believers that the Apostle is speaking of in terms of his teaching against their **"strongholds . . . arguments and every pretension"** and **"every thought"** and even **"every act"** **"that sets itself up against the knowledge of God"** (vs. 4-6). Accordingly, his goal for this church is **"to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete"** (v. 6). Whatever the Apostle means in this rather difficult statement, he is not primarily talking about a ministry of evangelism, but rather discipleship.

Therefore, we believe the Apostle's references to teaching against the Corinthian's **"strongholds . . . arguments and every pretension"** and **"every thought"** and even **"every act"** **"that sets itself up against the knowledge of God"** (vs. 4-6) to be analogous to the ministry he described to the Colossian church:

²⁴ **Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of His body, which is the church.** ²⁵ **I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness—** ²⁶ **the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and**

generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. ²⁷ To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

²⁸ We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. ²⁹ To this end I labor, struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me.

¹ I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. ² My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴ I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. ⁵ For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is. (Col 1:24-2:5)

While these teaching ministries described in 2 Corinthians 10 and Colossians 1-2 certainly included defending the Gospel, it was not for the purpose of persuading unbelievers, but protecting and discipling believers, helping them be **"obedient to Christ"** (2 Cor 10:5), their **"obedience"** to be **"complete"** (v. 6), for **"building . . . up"** their Christian faith (v. 8) and **"strengthening"** them as Christians (12:19). Accordingly, the **"knowledge of God"** (2 Cor 10:5) which Paul wishes to defend cannot be confined to only the Gospel.

In addition, those who would claim that in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 the Apostle is speaking of arguing with unbelievers about their pagan philosophies for the purpose of evangelism, completely forget that this is precisely what he had told the Corinthians he would not do (cf. 1 Cor 1:17-2:5). ⁵

It also ignores Paul's clear admission in this very letter that the real obstacle unbelievers have to getting saved is not intellectual, but spiritual, because, **"The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ"** (2 Cor 4:4; cf. 1 Cor 2:14). ⁶

B) Defending and Confirming the Gospel?: *Phil 1:7*

The Apostle wrote the Philippians: **"whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the Gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. . . . I am put here for the defense of the gospel"**

(Phil 1:7, 16). Many interpret the Apostle's reference to "**defending** [*apologia*] **and confirming** [*bebaiōsei*] **the Gospel**" (Phil 1:7) and working for its "**defense** [*apologian*], as clear biblical support that he was habitually involved in *intellectual apologetics*.

Along these lines, Gordon R. Lewis, Professor of Systematic Theology at Denver Seminary has written:

In no way does I Corinthians [1:17-2:5] oppose speaking in favor of the wisdom of God. Paul does not contradict his own ministry, "I am appointed for the defense of the Gospel" (Phil 1:16). And all members of the church share "in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel." (Phil 1.7) ⁷

Dr. Lewis shared this in a book promoting *intellectual apologetics* and the defense of the Gospel to unbelievers using philosophical and/or scientific arguments. On the contrary, the Apostle said that the Philippians "**share in God's grace with**" him. not in a ministry of apologetics. Secondly, notice that Dr. Lewis is willing to completely set aside Paul's clear denunciation of using "**superior wisdom**," "**preaching . . . with wise and persuasive words**," or preaching anything "**except Jesus Christ and Him crucified**" (1 Cor 2:1-5) all with intentionally making the Gospel seem foolish to unbelievers. And Dr. Lewis sets aside Paul's clear teaching by assuming that the kind of "**defense of the Gospel**" (Phil 1:16) the Apostle is speaking of in Philippians is Dr. Lewis' *intellectual apologetics*.

Rather, we believe the Apostle is referring to the formal trial he is awaiting in prison for at the very time he wrote the Philippians. In fact, he says, "**I am put here** [in prison awaiting trial before government authorities] **for the defense of the Gospel.**" (Phil 1:16). ⁸ As Dr. Barnes writes: "He is probably referring to the time when he made his defense before Nero, and vindicated himself from the charges which had been brought against him." ⁹ And as we will see, the numerous such defenses the Apostle made before government authorities involved Paul's testimony of a changed life and his character (i.e. *virtue apologetics*) and never the philosophical or scientific arguments of *intellectual apologetics*.

NT scholar Ralph P. Martin succinctly describes two common views of what Paul is referring to in Philippians 1:7, 16:

Paul's being *in chains or defending and confirming the gospel* may be interpreted in two ways. It may refer to his ministry of preaching [in general]: so [J. A.] Motyer. ¹⁰ In this case 'defending the gospel' means disarming prejudice and overcoming objections to the truth (for this sense see 2 Cor. 7:11), and 'confirming' means the positive declaration of the truth.

Or the phrase may be taken as having to do with his imprisonment [currently in Rome when he writes the Philippians].

In this case, *defending* and *confirming*, *apologia* and *bebaisios*, are legal terms which describe his trial before the imperial court (cf. 2 Tim. 4:16 [and 1 Cor 9:3; Acts 22:1; 25:16]) or his provincial judges. The second view is taken by recent writers, such as [F. F.] Bruce¹¹ and [G. F.] Hawthorne,¹² following Moulton-Milligan¹³ who state that, on the evidence of the papyri, 'the word (*bebaisios*) must always be read with the technical [legal-"court room"] sense in mind'.¹⁴

The first reason to reject the notion that Paul is speaking of a consistent practice in his evangelistic ministry to engage in "disarming prejudice and overcoming objections," perhaps in the manner that *intellectual apologetics* would suggest, is that Paul denounced this very kind of ministry in 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5¹⁵ and there are no descriptions of him doing otherwise in the NT. The second reason is to remember the emphasis that the Apostle placed on *virtue apologetics* to defend himself throughout his writings.¹⁶

In addition, the consistent use of *bebaisios* ["**confirming**" Phil 1:7] in ancient Greek writings to refer to a legal defense before a judge would seem conclusive. In addition, this is a consistent use of *apologia* ["**defending**" Phil 1:7] in the NT as well. Accordingly, Governor Festus tells King Agrippa, "**I told them that it is not the Roman custom to hand over any man before he has faced his accusers and has had an opportunity to defend [apologian] himself against their charges**" (Acts 25:16).

Therefore, if we want to know what the Apostle meant by "**defending [apologia] and confirming [bebaiōsei] the Gospel**" (Phil 1:7), we can look at rather detailed descriptions of him doing this. We have written in chapter 5.4:

[W]hen Paul spoke to an angry crowd in Jerusalem, he introduced his speech with, "**Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense [apologia]**" (Acts 22:1). What then was the Apostle's apologetic approach? He sought to prove that Christ had personally commissioned him to, "**be a witness to all men**" (v. 15) of salvation in Christ by reminding them that he had previously, "**persecuted the followers of this Way to their death**" (v. 4; cf. vs. 5, 19-20; 2 Tim 1:12-13). He testified to his supernaturally changed life in order to provide proof for his supernatural claims.

Likewise, before Governor Festus and King Agrippa, Paul made "**his defense [apologeito]**" of his Christian faith (Acts 26:1) to "**persuade**" them (vs. 28-29). And he simply relates that a personal encounter with Christ (cf. vs. 12-18) supernaturally transformed him from a man who was violently persecuting Christianity (cf. vs. 10-11), into a man who was sacrificially preaching Christianity (cf. vs. 19-23).

Along the same lines, in answer to the accusations of false Apostles in Corinth, the Apostle said, **"This is my defense [apologia] to those who sit in judgment on me"** (1 Cor 9:3), and then proceeded to describe in detail how he had ministered there without expecting money, which set him apart from his adversaries (cf. 1 Cor 9:1-18).¹⁷

This is *virtue apologetics*, not the *intellectual* kind.

Regarding the Apostle's reference to **"confirming the Gospel"** (Phil 1:7) we have absolutely no biblical evidence that this referred to intellectual arguments. However, we have considerable biblical data that the Apostles uniquely confirmed the Gospel by performing miracles (Acts 14:3; cf. 2 Cor 2:12; Heb 2:3-4). However, while *super-supernaturalists* erroneously claim we can and should do the same today,¹⁸ the **"greater works"** (John 14:12) Jesus promised us was the supernatural moral transformation that comes with the preaching of the Gospel and regeneration.¹⁹ And this is precisely what the **"demonstration of the Spirit's power"** (1 Cor 2:5) was in Corinth, and the Apostle wrote of such supernatural confirmation of the Gospel in Thessalonica:

⁴ For we know, brothers loved by God, that He has chosen you, ⁵ because our Gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. . . . ⁶ You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. ⁷ And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸ The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, ⁹ for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. (1 Thess 1:4-9)

Such confirmation of the Gospel by supernatural *virtue* rather than intellectual arguments was something the Apostle was very concerned about. Accordingly, he wrote the Corinthians: **"My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power"** (1 Cor 2:4-5).

In summary, then, the Apostle's reference to **"defending [apologia] and confirming [bebaiōsei] the Gospel"** (Phil 1:7) as he awaited trial in prison was to just one of numerous such defenses he made before government authorities in which he used *virtue apologetics*, not the *intellectual* kind.

C) Contending for the Gospel?: *Phil 1:27*

At Philippians 1:27 the Apostle writes to the believers:

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man [synathlountes: "shared struggle"] for the faith of the Gospel.

We have discussed the important elements of *virtue apologetics* in this verse elsewhere.²⁰ Here we are concerned with what he meant by the Philippian church unitedly "**contending . . . for the faith of the Gospel.**" Again, some may see allusions to making *intellectual* defenses of the Gospel to unbelievers. But would Paul tell the Philippians to do something that he had told the Corinthians he did not do? We doubt it. Accordingly, there are two interpretations that are better.

One is that the Apostle may be encouraging them to unitedly *spread* "**the faith of the Gospel.**" This would be analogous to his thanksgiving of their "**partnership in the Gospel**" (1:5) which obviously included their financial support (cf. 4:15-16), but could have included evangelism in Philippi as well.

However, some understand Paul to be encouraging the Philippians to *defend* "**the faith [doctrine] of the Gospel**" against false teachers in the Church. As demonstrated above, Jude's reference to "**contend[ing] for the faith**" (1:3) referred to this very thing. Accordingly, Dr. Martin shares this view convincingly:

What object are they striving to maintain? *The faith* seems to be the objective content of their testimony, the 'grand deposit' of Christian truth committed to the church (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:14; Jude 3) to proclaim to the world. 'Faith of our fathers! Holy faith' has been the rallying call of God's people in every age, and never more so than in days of persecution and doctrinal laxity. 'There is no agreement (possible) unless there is agreement as to what constitutes the gospel' (Motyer). The enmity of surrounding paganism and the more insidious inroad of false teaching (3:18ff) will set the Philippians on their guard, and inspire them to maintain the faith against the latter, and to resist boldly the former.²¹

D) Salty conversation?: Col 4:5-6

The Apostle wrote the Colossians:

Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. (Col 4:5-6)

Once again, many have used the Apostle's words to suggest that God expects Christians to be so knowledgeable about the extra-biblical, philosophical, scientific, and historical arguments for the defense of Christianity that they "**may know how to answer everyone.**" Actually, this is just one more passage of Scripture that speaks clearly of *virtue apologetics*, and has unfortunately been obscured by *intellectual apologists*.

The Apostle's reference to being "**wise**" here has nothing to do with being knowledgeable about intellectual arguments for the Christian faith, but rather, concerns the way we "**act**" in relation to unbelievers.²² As we have demonstrated elsewhere in *KOG*, "wisdom" in the Bible is synonymous with being moral, not smart.²³ One aspect of being wise is to "**make the most of every opportunity**" to share the Gospel with "**outsiders,**" the very ministry that Paul has just been speaking about in the previous verses.²⁴

In our efforts to share that Gospel with unbelievers, our "**conversation**" needs to be "**full of grace**" (i.e. gracious) and patience, not arguments. Accordingly, our communication of the Gospel should be "**seasoned with salt.**" As commentators agree, this is speaking of the *style* of our speech. Unfortunately, however, it is all too common to see interpretations like that of NT scholar N. T. Wright:

The metaphor of "salty" speech was a common one in the ancient world. Paul knows that a tedious monologue is worse than useless in evangelism. Christians are to work at making their witness interesting, lively, and colorful.²⁵

Likewise, the *Life Application Bible* reads at Colossians 4:5: "Speech that is *seasoned with salt* is interesting (as opposed to dull) . . . adds "spice" to a discussion (by penetrating to deeper levels)." NT scholar Peter T. O'Brien believes Paul means:

Their words must not be dull or insipid but should be interesting. . . . This could be taken as 'witty.' . . . Here Paul's statement has particular reference to Christians responding with the right word to those who ask questions of the community.²⁶

Once again, too many commentators have forgotten the Apostle's own description of his evangelistic ministry: "**When I came to you, brothers,** [to communicate the Gospel] **I did not come with**

eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. . . .³ **I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.** ⁴ **My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words**" (1 Cor 2:1, 3-4). So, in fact, endeavoring to make our Gospel presentations seem "lively," "colorful," and "witty," is actually unbiblical.

While "salty" speech certainly has to do with its style, Paul did not intend for it to refer to its eloquence. Rather, in keeping with the idea of acting morally wise and having gracious speech toward unbelievers, our "**conversation**" being "**seasoned with salt**" relates to its virtuous nature. We would suggest then that Paul's metaphor of speech being "**seasoned with salt**" is essentially synonymous with speech that is "**full of grace.**"

Salt was understood in the ancient world as an element that would preserve things from corruption. As we have argued elsewhere, this was the King's meaning when he proclaimed Christians as "**the salt of the Earth**" (Matt 5:13).²⁷ We are uniquely the moral preservative of human society. Likewise, for the purpose of the *virtue apologetics* that the Apostle is encouraging here, "**conversation**" being "**seasoned with salt**" refers to speech that is virtuous, holy and loving, in addition to being "**full of grace.**"

Accordingly, several commentators see a parallel to "salty" speech in Paul's description of Christian speech in Ephesians when he writes:

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. . . .³¹ **Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander . . .** ⁴ **Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.** (Eph 4:29, 31, 2:4)

Of course, to exhibit any of these sinful characteristics in our speech to "**outsiders**" (Col 4:5) would make any efforts to communicate the Gospel ineffective.

Now we can better understand the Apostle's thought: "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (Col 4:5). Virtuous, not intellectual, speech is "how to answer everyone." Again, the emphasis here is on how we are *acting* and *speaking*, not on *what* we are speaking. Paul is not speaking of "what" we should "**answer everyone,**" but "**how**" we should do it. The Apostle's concern again is not so much on how intellectual the content of our "**conversation**" with unbelievers may be, but rather, the morality of our actions toward them, and the graciousness of our speech with them.²⁸ Almost any virtuous response to critics is more powerful than

an intellectual one. Once again, love is the most important apologetic for the Gospel.

Paul's words in Colossians 4:5-6 are analogous to Peter's in 1 Peter 3:15: "**Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.**" We will demonstrate in next chapter that Peter is simply referring to a Christian telling someone "I'm a Christian" in response to their question of how they have so much "**hope**" in a difficult circumstance. Pete is not implying that the "**reason for the hope**" we would communicate is all kinds of intellectual arguments for the Christian faith. Like Paul, Peter is saying that not only our virtue wins a hearing of the Gospel with unbelievers, but the Gospel itself should be communicated with virtue.

E) Persuading Men?: *2 Cor 5:11*

Paul says in 1 Corinthians, "**My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words**" (2:4). How do we reconcile this with his statement in 2 Corinthians that "**we try to persuade men**" (5:11)? We believe he is speaking of two different audiences.

In 1 Corinthians he is clearly speaking of his ministry to the unregenerated ("**those who are perishing**" v. 1:18). Accordingly at 2:1 he states, in contrast to only using plain speech with unbelievers, that "**We do, however, speak a message of [persuasive] wisdom among the mature**" (2:6). Here we clearly see that when ministering to the unregenerated he did not use persuasive wisdom, but he did when ministering to the believers.

Likewise, we would expect the Apostle to be consistent in his second letter to the Corinthians. Accordingly, when he says there "**we try to persuade men**" (5:11), we should take his teaching in 1 Corinthians into consideration and assume that he is again speaking of his ministry to believers. And indeed, the whole context of the statement reveals this:

So we [believers] make it our goal to please Him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. ¹⁰ For we [believers] must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Since, then, we [Apostles] know what it is to fear the Lord [because believers will "appear before the judgment seat of Christ"], we try to persuade men [believers to do good works]. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience [believing Corinthians]. ¹² We are not trying to commend ourselves to you [believing

Corinthians] **again, but are giving you** [believing Corinthians] **an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart.** ¹³ **If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you** [believing Corinthians]. (2 Cor 5:9-13)

We see then that the “persuasion of men” (v. 11) applies to the fact that “**we** [believers] must “**make it our goal to please**” God because “**we** [believers] **must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ**” (vs. 9-10). Accordingly, it is a mistake to interpret Paul’s reference to persuading men as referring to his “**ministry of reconciliation**” with unbelievers, which he begins describing later in v. 18.

Our interpretation agrees with other statements of Paul (cf. 1 Cor 1:18-2:5 and Col 1:28 with a careful recognition that the context is discipleship not evangelism; cf. 1:24). ²⁹

Publications & Particulars

¹ Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics (BECA)* [Baker, 1999], 37.

² Ibid.

³ Commentators suggesting that Paul is specifically speaking of defending the Gospel to unbelievers in 2 Corinthians 10:1-5 include Albert Barnes (*Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM [Findex.Com, 1999]), Charles Hodge (*Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM [Findex.Com, 2003], and Colin Kruse (*2 Corinthians, TNTC* [Eerdmans, 1987], 173-4).

⁴ See C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (BNTC) [Hendrickson, 1997], 254. Likewise, Paul Barnett suggests:

His immediate application in this verse [4], however, may be to his detractors among the Corinthians. . . . Perhaps Paul has in mind [in verse 5]. . . the self-elevated Corinthian critics . . . (*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT) [Eerdmans, 1997], 465)

However, Dr. Barnett does not seem consistent in this application, suggesting that Paul’s reference to “**the knowledge of God**” be confined to the Gospel (465).

Calvin seems to embrace all three of the contexts we list here, and evidently doesn’t see any problem with that. (online at www.ccel.org, *in loc.*)

⁵ For this interpretation of 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5 see section 5.11.A.1.

⁶ For further discussion on the mental state of unregenerated humans see chapters 4.12-14.

- ⁷ Gordon R. Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims* (Moody, 1976).
- ⁸ Dr. MacArthur only sees this view as a possibility (Phil 1:3-8). Peter O'Brien says our view is "likely" but not complete, suggesting that both views that Dr. Martin describes below are true. (*The Epistle to the Philippians NIGTC* [Eerdmans, 1991], *in loc.*)
- ⁹ Barnes, Phil 1:7.
- ¹⁰ J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians*, 1984.
- ¹¹ F. F. Bruce, *Philippians*, 1983.
- ¹² G. F. Hawthorne, "The Interpretation and Translation of Philippians 1:28b," *ExpTim* 95 (1983), 80-81.
- ¹³ J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, (1914-1930).
- ¹⁴ Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians TNTC* (Eerdmans, 1987, repr. 1999), 65.
- ¹⁵ For further discussion of Paul's rejection of *intellectual apologetics* at 1 Cor 1:17-2:5 see section 5.11.A.1.
- ¹⁶ For further discussion of Paul's emphasis on defending himself with his character (*virtue apologetics*) see section 5.4.A.3.
- ¹⁷ Excerpt from section 5.4.A.3.
- ¹⁸ For refutation of the "power evangelism" view that the modern preaching of the Gospel is to be accompanied and confirmed by physical miracles of healing see chapter 11.6.
- ¹⁹ For arguments that Christ's reference to Christians doing "**greater** [miraculous] **works**" (John 14:12) is to the spiritual miracle of regeneration through the preaching of the Gospel, instead of greater or more physical miracles than Christ performed, see section 10.5.B.2.
- ²⁰ For further commentary on Philippians 1:17 see section 5.4.A.1.
- ²¹ Martin, 89. Dr. MacArthur agrees (Phil 1:27-30). Dr. O'Brien merely offers the rather generic interpretation: "[T]he Philippians are to present a united and unwavering front against the attacks of the enemy in their conflict for the Gospel. (151)
- ²² Dr. Barnes comments on the meaning of "**wise**" here: "That is, conduct uprightly and honestly. Deal with them on the strictest principles of integrity, so that they may not have occasion to reproach the religion which you profess. (Col 4:5)
- N. T. Wright says:
Be wise in the way you act is literally 'walk in wisdom,' that is, follow Christ as God's pattern for full and authentic human living. Their lives are to reflect this wisdom *towards outsiders*. Paul knew only too well (1 Cor 10:32) the importance of giving the world no reason to criticize or gossip about the behavior of Christians. Blameless life lays the foundation for gracious witness. (*Colossians and Philemon (TNTC)* [Eerdmans, 1986, repr. 1999], 153)

Peter T. O'Brien interprets acting "wise" here as follows:

These readers are to be godly, giving no occasion for valid criticism (cf. 1 Cor 10:32, "Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God"). They should be tactful on one hand, yet bold in their Christian witness to outsiders on the other. (*Colossians, Philemon (WBC)* [Word, 1982], 241)

²³ For further discussion on the biblical meaning of wisdom see chapters 14.17-14.18.

²⁴ Dr. MacArthur claims, "Paul is not speaking here of preaching the gospel, but general conversation" (Col 4:2-6). There is no reason to exclude evangelism from the "**conversation**" with "**outsiders**" that Paul is speaking of, especially in light of the fact that in the verses immediately preceding these, he is praying for his own evangelistic ministry to unbelievers.

²⁵ Wright, 153.

²⁶ O'Brien, 242-3.

²⁷ For further discussion of the fact that Christ was referring to morality when He used the metaphor of "**salt**" see section 5.3.D.1.

²⁸ Unfortunately, Dr. Barnes seems to give an *intellectual apologist* spin to Paul's thoughts when he interprets him: "be prepared to answer anyone who may question you about your religion in a way that will show that you understand its nature. (Col 4:6)

Likewise, Dr. MacArthur writes:

Believers must also know how to **respond to each person**. They must know how to say the right thing at the right time. In Peter's words, they must be "ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence" (1 Pet. 3:15).

If this is referring to an *intellectual apologist's* approach, then we demonstrate otherwise regarding 1 Peter 3:15 at section 5.4.B.2.

²⁹ For a discussion of Acts 18:4 see section 5.13.B.5.