
Chapter 5.10

The Current Status of Apologetics

The Woeful Neglect of Virtue Apologetics

Table of Topics

A) *Intellectual Apologetics*

- A.1) Types of *Intellectual Apologetics*: *Classical & Evidential*
- A.2) The Problems with *Intellectual Apologetics*: Unbiblical & ineffective in evangelism
- A.3) The Value of *Intellectual Apologetics*: *The building of the believer's faith*

B) *Other Approaches to Christian Apologetics*

- B.1) The Growing Popularity of "*Humble*" *Apologetics*
- B.2) The Non-apologetic of *Presuppositionalism*
- B.3) The Nonsense of *Reformed Epistemology*
- B.4) "Power Evangelism" in *Charismaticism*
- B.5) "Testimony of the Spirit" in Reformed Theology
- B.6) Experiential Religion in Liberal Theology

C) *The Woeful Neglect of Virtue Apologetics*

Extras & Endnotes

Table 5.10: *A Comparison of Apologetic Approaches*

Primary Points

- *Intellectual apologetics* refers to scientific, philosophical, and historical arguments for the existence of God and the superiority of the Christian faith.
- *Classic apologetics* focuses on proving the existence of God.
- *Evidential apologetics* includes proving the divinity of Christ and Scripture. .
- The current apologetic emphasis is either on *intellectual apologetics* reflecting modernism, or a self-effacing “humble” apologetics reflecting postmodernism.
- Contrary to the Apostle John in his epistle, there is a great lack of boldness in contemporary Christianity to compare religions on the basis of virtue.
- Despite the biblical and historical emphasis on *virtue apologetics*, there is an almost complete disregard for it in contemporary Christian literature.
- The present miracle resulting from our personal spiritual resurrection has as much apologetic value as the ancient miracle of Christ’s physical resurrection.
- Real “power evangelism” is not performing miracles to remove suffering, but rather, the power to live a virtuous life in the midst of suffering.
- Perhaps it is a perceived lack of virtue among Christians that makes us shy about the biblical mandate for *virtue apologetics*.
- Perhaps the neglect of *virtue apologetics* reflects the modern attraction to easy shortcuts. It is easier to learn and expound intellectual arguments for Christianity rather than exuding hope in the midst of painful trials like 1 Peter 3:15 is really talking about.

In previous chapters we demonstrated the biblical support for claiming that the Christian's spiritual and epistemological superiority is verified by the Christian's superior moral virtue. We also contended that *virtue apologetics* is the ultimate and universal apologetic that God intended for the fact that salvation is only through saving faith in the King. More than that, we will demonstrate in the next chapters that the most popular type of Christian apologetics (*intellectual apologetics*) was denounced by the Apostle Paul, has no biblical support whatsoever, and is inferior to *virtue apologetics* in relation to unbelievers in every way.

All of which makes the current status of Christian apologetics rather alarming. There is an unwarranted, unfortunate, and even unbiblical neglect of *virtue apologetics* in contemporary theology. Unfortunately, the apologetic emphasis today would seem to be on: 1) *intellectual apologetics* reflecting a modern approach, 2) a self-effacing "humble" *apologetics* reflecting a postmodern approach, or 3) "power evangelism" reflecting a *super-supernaturalists*¹ approach. And in the process, the biblical mandate and emphasis on the classic Christian approach of bold and confident *virtue apologetics* is neglected.

A) *Intellectual Apologetics*

A.1) Types of *Intellectual Apologetics*

We use the term *intellectual apologetics* to refer to those approaches which emphasize extra-biblical scientific, philosophical, and historical arguments for the existence of God and the superiority of the Christian faith. There are several varieties, all of which are rather complex, difficult to categorize because of their similarities, and each often claiming to be superior to the others as an approach to convincing the unbeliever of the Christian faith. While Christian apologists themselves admit that categorizing the different types of *intellectual apologetics* are difficult,² we will suggest two broad categories here including *classic* and *evidential*.

First, there is *classic apologetics* which focuses on proving the existence of God. Contemporary promoters of such an approach include Norm Geisler and R. C. Sproul. While such good men would deny that anyone can be saved apart from *saving revelation* from God, they do seem to insist that salvation must at least begin with reasoned arguments for the existence of God. Dr. Geisler, for example, writes:

The heart of this [*classical*] 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.³

Under the heading of *classic intellectual apologetics* we can suggest three different approaches to proving the existence of God. First, there is the *cosmological argument* which is essentially based on the idea that Creation had a beginning and that beginning was God. The recognized founder of this approach was Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and it is perhaps best known today from the writings of William Lane Craig.

The second approach of *classic intellectual apologetics* is the *ontological argument* which suggests that the fact that we can even contemplate such a being as God, proves that He exists. Its recognized originator was Anselm (1033-1109), the eleventh century Archbishop of Canterbury, and Alvin Plantinga is a contemporary representative of this view.

The third recognized approach of *classic intellectual apologetics* is the *teleological argument* which suggests that the intricate design of the universe proves the existence of God. A traditional promoter of this view was William Paley (1743-1805) and a contemporary one is Richard Swinburne, and a increasing number of those promoting *intelligent design*.⁴

While the *classic intellectual* approach to apologetics focuses on proving the existence of God, the *evidential* approach broadens its scope to include such topics as proving the deity of Christ and the divinity of Scripture. While the *classic apologist* normally insists that the existence of God must be proven first, the *evidential apologist* believes that there are a variety of valuable starting points for proving Christianity. *Evidential apologists* include C. S. Lewis (1898-1963), Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984),⁵ Josh McDowell, J. W. Montgomery, E. J. Carnell, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Gary Habermas, Paul Feinberg, and Basil Mitchell.

What all approaches to *intellectual apologetics* generally have in common is the belief that several truths must be proven before Christianity can make an exclusive claim to salvation. These include the existence of God, reliability of Scripture, and the deity of Christ. While biblical statements are used in *intellectual apologetics* there is

understandably a reliance on more “objective” extra-biblical data from philosophy, history, and science.

As demonstrated more fully below in our discussion of the neglect of *virtue apologetics*, the *intellectual* kind is by far the most popular in contemporary Christianity. So much so, that in virtually every discussion of the issue, the word “apologetics” is used to refer to only the *intellectual kind*.

A.2) The Problems of *Intellectual Apologetics*: Unbiblical & ineffective in evangelism

Throughout *Knowing Our God* we discuss several problems with *intellectual apologetics*. In chapter 2.2 we detailed why it is unnecessary to begin a systematic theology, or any presentation of biblical truth, with intellectual arguments to make it palatable to those who do not have the Spirit. Unfortunately, in our supposedly postmodern day, there is a lot of ink and effort wasted on trying to convince those without the Spirit, of the things of the Spirit. *Intellectual apologetics* would seem to ignore the Apostle’s warning: **“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned”** (1 Cor 2:14).

In the previous Book 4, chapters 4.12-4.15 we further demonstrate the epistemological differences between regenerate and unregenerate humans, explaining why the *devil-darkened reason* of unbelievers makes the arguments of *intellectual apologetics* rather worthless.

In the next chapter (5.11) we argue that Paul actually denounced the use of intellectual arguments to persuade and evangelize unbelievers. Likewise, in chapters 5.12-5.13 we further argue the unbiblical nature *intellectual apologetics* by addressing what we see as the misuse of other Scriptures to deny what Paul clearly stated to the Corinthians.

Finally, in chapter 5.14 we point out several aspects in which *virtue apologetics* is far superior to *intellectual apologetics*.

In summary, *intellectual apologetics* is first of all denounced by Scripture for the purposes of evangelism. Therefore, it is not surprising that it is ineffective, and inferior to biblical *virtue apologetics*. What is surprising then is that apologetics in modern Christianity is virtually synonymous with the unbiblical, ineffective kind, and the biblical, effective *virtue apologetics* is virtually absent in Christian literature.

A.3) **The Value of *Intellectual Apologetics*: The building of the believer's faith**

In our claim of the unbiblical and ineffective nature of *intellectual apologetics* in the context of unregenerated people, we do not wish to diminish its value among believers. Accordingly, we have written elsewhere regarding the faith of regenerated believers:

The first source of faith-building evidence we will suggest is research, of both biblical and extra-biblical sources. . . .

Extra-biblical sources as well can be very helpful in building our faith in God. The Scriptures invite the Christian to believe that several supernatural events have occurred in human history. While we might possess an adequate level of certainty in these events simply because they are recorded in documents that we regard as divine revelation, there is no doubt that our certainty is strengthened when additional evidence is found for them as well.

For example, we read in Genesis that God, "**made the stars**" (1:16). While we would certainly be inclined to believe such a statement simply because it is stated in Scripture, our faith is reinforced by the fact that astronomical data has convinced a large number of scientists that the probability of it being otherwise is *unbelievably* small. . . .

In the same way, geological, archeological, and linguistic evidence has strongly supported Scripture's testimony to a world-wide flood, the Tower of Babel incident, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire, the collapse of the walls of Jericho, the Hebrew Patriarchs, and the fulfillment of several prophecies.⁶ . . .

In fact, as stated elsewhere, we would suggest that Christian apologetics as a whole proves to be much more valuable for building the faith of *believers*, than sparking the faith of *unbelievers*. Even a Christian apologist such as Gary Habermas, who ardently believes in the value of evidential apologetics for unbelievers, is willing to say, "Not only is apologetics exceptionally useful with believers, it may even be its major value." We couldn't agree more, and it is because our *Spirit-liberated reason* thrives on evidence in building our own faith.⁷

Which is why books on *intellectual apologetics* are so popular in American Christianity. Not because these arguments have proven so capable of convincing unbelievers and causing evangelistic revival. Which is what they would do if they were as necessary and powerful in evangelism as many claim. No, the reason books on *intellectual apologetics* are so popular is that they bolster the Christian's faith.

But *intellectual apologetics* really only works for born again believers who can appreciate the evidence. Unfortunately, many are

claiming that *intellectual apologetics* is the answer keeping young people from leaving the faith. Accordingly, Sean McDowell writes:

A young person may walk away from God for many reasons, but *one* significant reason is intellectual doubt. According to the National Study of Youth and Religion, the most common answer nonreligious teens offered for why they left their faith was intellectual skepticism.

This is why David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group, writes in his book *unchristian*, "We are learning that one of the primary reasons that ministry to teenagers fails to produce a lasting faith is because they are not being taught how to think."⁸

Isn't the reason anyone leaves the faith the fact that they never really had it? The statistics reflect how many unregenerated youth are growing up in a church context. They do not suggest that instilling more reasons for the faith in such people would save them. In addition, there are many, many things more important for sustaining the faith of youth than *intellectual apologetics*. Experiencing the virtue in them because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is among them.

Finally, as we note elsewhere, we have witnessed youth who had considerable training in *intellectual apologetics* who were not born again, and their exceptional knowledge of Christianity actually hindered them in recognizing they needed a Savior. Which, again, is why the Apostle denounced the use of *intellectual apologetics* in evangelism, "**so that [saving] faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power**" (1 Cor 2:5).

B) Other Approaches to Christian Apologetics

B.1) The Growing Popularity of "Humble" Apologetics

While an overemphasis on *intellectual apologetics* has tended to detract from *virtue apologetics*, the unwarranted influence of *pluralism*⁹ and *postmodernism*¹⁰ would seem to have made it unpopular as well. There is a great lack of boldness in contemporary Christianity to compare religions on the basis of virtue. It may be helpful at this point to be reminded of the Apostle John's approach in defending and distinguishing Christianity in the pluralistic world he lived in. He simply and *unapologetically* wrote:

Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who does what is sinful is of the devil . . . No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has

been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are [the only two kinds of people on the planet]: **Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.** (1 John 3:6-10)

Far too many Christians today think such words are too simplistic and too bold. Accordingly, we fear that among some modern apologists and theologians that there is a greater desire to be politically correct, rather than biblically correct. James M. Boice (1938-2000), a very respected Reformed Bible teacher of our day wrote of this growing tendency when he said:

We live in such a mindlessly pluralistic society that it is thought uncouth if not wickedly immoral to suggest that some religions may be better than others or, even worse, that some religions may be wrong. But some are wrong. In fact, all are wrong that do not call us to faith in Jesus Christ.¹¹

A politically correct approach to apologetics is evident in the recent writings of Dr. John Stackhouse, Professor of Apologetics at Regent College, who writes in his book *Humble Apologetics*: “many believers in other faiths are more admirable than many of us Christians.”¹² We would respectfully suggest this is dishonest flattery, rather than humble honesty, and it does not reflect the Scripture’s teaching on the spiritual and moral uniqueness and superiority of the born again Christian. A moral superiority, by the way, that is required to even call oneself a Christian. And even as an *intellectual apologist*, Dr. Stackhouse is willing to write later, “I believe, frankly, that the generally dismal state of the churches in the West continues to be the single most important factor in the difficulty we face as apologists.”¹³ This would seem to highlight the importance of *virtue apologetics*, despite his neglect and denial of it.

Obviously, those who support *pluralism*, or the belief that all ethical religions can lead to eternal salvation, would disdain *virtue apologetics* as well. While we discuss this view more thoroughly elsewhere, it applies directly to our current topic.¹⁴ British philosopher John Hick is probably the most influential proponent of such a view today, and his most powerful argument for *pluralism* is a direct attack on the uniqueness of the born again Christian’s spiritual and moral superiority. He writes in an entry to *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*:

Coming to know both ordinary families, and some extraordinary individuals, whose spirituality has been formed by these different [religious] traditions and whose lives are lived within them, I have not found that the people of the other world religions are, in general, on a different moral and spiritual level from Christians.

They seem on average to be neither better nor worse than are Christians. . . .

But is this what we would expect if Christians have a more complete and direct access to God than anyone else and live in a closer relationship to him, being indwelt by the Holy Spirit? Should not the fruit of the Spirit, which according to Paul is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23), be more evident in Christian than in non-Christian lives? . . . Surely the average level of these virtues should be noticeably higher among Christians than among non-Christians. Yet it does not seem to me that in fact Christians are on average noticeably morally superior to Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, or Buddhists. . . .

[I]f we define salvation as an actual human change, a gradual transformation from natural self-centeredness to a radically new orientation centered in God and manifested in the "fruit of the Spirit," then it seems clear that salvation is taking place within all of the world religions-and taking place, so far as we can tell, to more or less the same extent. ¹⁵

While we might expect such a view from a pagan philosopher like Dr. Hick, ¹⁶ several evangelical Christians have agreed with him. For example, Michael McKenzie, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Liberty University praises the extraordinary virtue of Mother Teresa and remarks: "Such people of virtue need not belong to a particular religious tradition." ¹⁷ Then later, he adds: "Are acts of virtue religious? . . . At first glance, the answer is "no." In fact, that is part of their beauty: they are accessible and performable by anybody." ¹⁸

First, Mr. McKenzie seems to ignore the fact that Mother Teresa (1910-1997) professed and proved a very real relationship with Christ. She was a Holy Spirit indwelt Christian if there ever was one. Which is precisely why she is virtually synonymous with supernatural virtue all over the world. Secondly, even if "anybody" could act virtuous as Mr. McKenzie claims, a more biblical Christian apologist would be defending the divine mandate and objective reality of Christianity's moral superiority, instead of suggesting morality doesn't matter in claims to spiritual salvation.

Likewise, in the book from which we quoted Dr. Hick, even someone with the evangelical reputation of Alister McGrath, surrenders to Dr. Hick's challenge when he responds: "Anyone who argues that a Christian is, by virtue of his or her faith, morally superior to a Confucian is open to serious criticism." ¹⁹ Similarly, the editors of the book, Dennis Okholm and Timothy Phillips, both Professors of Theology at Wheaton College, state in their introduction: "Hick's argument for the moral parity of the religions appears to equate religion with moral

development, a thesis no world religion [apparently including Christianity] accepts.”²⁰ We would ask what, apart from salvation which is invisible to humans, would be more important to “equate religion with” than “moral development?”

Finally, R. Douglas Geivett and W. Gary Phillips, who even argue in the book for the *exclusive* view that salvation is only in Christ, rather weakly respond to Dr. Hick by saying:

Inter-traditional comparisons of virtue are . . . irrelevant. What matters is the person's standing before God. . . . The unique moral superiority of Christianity is not founded on the moral character of fallible Christians but is attested by Jesus' own sinless life. . . . Christians have no business trying to establish their own moral superiority.²¹

On the contrary, we have just as much business proving the reality of our present spiritual resurrection as we do Christ's past physical resurrection. And if we cannot, then we have no business telling the rest of the world that we alone possess the *Holy Spirit*.

In addition, we would point out that Dr. Hick is lumping together all those who merely *profess* to follow the Christian religion (like he does), with those who uniquely have a personal relationship with Christ and really possess the Holy Spirit. We would readily admit that there may be little spiritual and moral difference between merely professing Christians and devoted followers of any ethical religion. But the same cannot be said regarding those whom the Spirit of Christ, which is the only *Holy Spirit*, has indwelt. This is discussed further in chapter 5.16. Finally, we would offer the entire discussion in chapters 5.2-5.4 as our refutation of the above authors. They are all simply unbiblical.

May we never let the fakes, no matter how convincing, ever skew our understanding of what the Scriptures teach regarding the spiritual and moral enablement of the saints, and the biblical mandate for *virtue apologetics*.²² Likewise, may we never let some false, self-deceiving humility keep us from honestly recognizing and legitimately claiming the miraculous life transformation that has occurred through our belief in Christ. If the world knows that Christ's deliverance from the *power* of sin is superior, it will help them believe that His deliverance from its *penalty* is exclusive. By denying the former, “humble” apologetics does not advance the latter.

“Humble” apologetics is founded on a lie, which tells us right away, it is not Christian at all. The lie is that having the King live in us really doesn't morally transform us more than other religions and techniques in the world. That seems like something the devil would say, and it is precisely what “humble” apologists are saying.

Such a lie is promoted by the popular Christian author John Eldredge when he writes:

I doubt that many of us would go so far as to say we're transformed. Our names are written down somewhere in heaven, and we have been forgiven. Perhaps we have changed a bit in what we believe and how we act. We confess the creeds now, and we've gotten our temper under control . . . for the most part. But transformed seems a bit too much to claim. How about forgiven and on our way? That's how most Christians would describe what's happened to them.²³

We don't think so. If most of us Christians were to tell our salvation testimony, we would be able to provide abundant evidence that we have changed more than just "a bit in what we believe and how we act." In fact, according to the Apostle John, as opposed to the author John, if our love for people and morality hasn't changed a lot, then we are not even Christians.²⁴

B.2) The Non-apologetic of *Presuppositionalism*

While both the *classic* and *evidential* approaches to *intellectual apologetics* involve a reasoned, evidence-based method for supporting the superiority of Christianity, the next two approaches do not, making it questionable as to whether they can even be classified as Christian apologetics at all.

First, there is the *presuppositional* approach founded by Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987), and defended more recently by John Frame, both men having teaching positions at Westminster. Drs. Van Til and Frame suggest that the beginning point of apologetic discussions is to *presuppose* that the real God has revealed Himself uniquely in Scripture, for only then can anyone know the truth about Christianity. *Presuppositionalists* do not normally value the *classic* approach to proving the existence of God.

Here, we immediately see both the strength and weakness of this view as an apologetic. First, it rightly emphasizes the limitations of unregenerated humanity in being affected by evidences for God or Christianity. However, it is difficult to classify it as an apologetic at all, when it immediately demands that one presuppose the truth of Christianity's claims. In addition, as we have discussed elsewhere, those *presuppositionalists* who claim that no one can really know anything unless they know God, are in danger of falling into philosophical skepticism.²⁵

Nonetheless, it should be noted that the *Presuppositional* approach may have more biblical support than all of the *intellectual* approaches. Elsewhere we demonstrate that the Apostle Paul habitually "**argued from the Scriptures**" in his Gospel presentations.²⁶ This is a point that all *Presuppositional* apologists would make.

B.3) The Nonsense of Reformed Epistemology

Another *intellectual*, although non-evidential approach to apologetics is what has been labeled *Reformed epistemology*. This view also seriously doubts the value of the evidences for the existence of God or the claims of Christianity. In fact, *Reformed epistemology* suggests that particularly the existence of God need not be proven at all by logical reasoning because such a belief is self-evident to every human. This idea is essentially based on John Calvin's (1509-1564) suggestion that humans are created with a "sense of divinity," which acts as an internal witness to the existence of God. As with *presuppositionalism*, it is difficult to classify this approach as a Christian apologetic at all. Nonetheless, because of its growing popularity, we discuss it further elsewhere, and conclude that it is rather philosophical nonsense.²⁷

B.4) The Fraud of "Power Evangelism" in Charismaticism²⁸

Many Christians today would agree that the ultimate apologetic today is miracles. Unfortunately, we would suggest they have the wrong miracles in mind. John Wimber (1934-1997), the modern originator of what is called "power evangelism," "said that the two most important miracles for impressing unbelievers are 'falling [being "slain"] in the power of the Spirit and filling teeth" that had cavities.²⁹

On the contrary, and as demonstrated elsewhere, when the King promised His people that we would do even "**greater works**" than He after He left, He was not talking about greater *physical miracles* (cf. John 14:12).³⁰ How could we do something in the physical realm that would be *greater* than giving life to a man like Lazarus who had been dead for three days (cf. John 11:38-44), something that we seriously doubt *anyone* has done since? What *would* be greater, however, is giving people *spiritual and eternal* life, and this is what has been happening since Christ left the Earth and sent the Spirit He promised. And we partake in this greatest of all miracles by sharing the Gospel, an essential ingredient in the miraculous process of spiritual regeneration and conversion.

Advocates of "power evangelism" do not consider carefully enough that all the "miracles" they claim to perform can all be done by the power of humans or the devil (cf. Matt 7:21-23).³¹ It is not supernatural deeds that ultimately distinguish someone spiritually, but rather supernatural virtue.³² It is "character miracles" not "charismatic miracles" by which God intends to prove Christianity

today. Consequently, real “power evangelism” is not performing physical miracles to remove suffering, but rather, the power to live a virtuous life in the midst of suffering. This is something that proponents of “power evangelism” normally don’t want to accept because of their unbiblical expectation of physical healing.

With that said, it should not be denied that there are times when God will perform miracles, especially to introduce an area to the Gospel. One only needs to read accounts of the revival in China to see this happening.³³ But such occurrences fade by God’s own design, always leaving *virtue apologetics* to be His ultimate means of proving the Gospel. Along these lines, and a long time ago, the Church Father John Chrysostom (c. 347–407) preached something that proponents of “power evangelism” need to ponder:

Now if twelve men leavened the whole world, imagine how great our baseness, in that when we being so many are not able to amend them that remain; we, who ought to be enough for ten thousand worlds, and to become leaven to them. “But they,” one may say, “were apostles.” And what then? Were they not partakers with thee? Were they not brought up in cities? Did they not enjoy the same benefits? Did they not practice trades? What, were they angels? What, came they down from Heaven?

“But they had signs,” it will be said. It was not the signs that made them admirable. How long shall we use those miracles as cloaks for our own remissness? Why, many who had actually cast out devils, because they wrought iniquity, instead of being admired, did even incur punishment [cf. Matt 7:21-23].

And what can it be then, he will say, that showed them great? Their contempt of wealth, their despising glory, their freedom from worldly things [all of which are greatly desired by many of the foremost leaders of “power evangelism”³⁴]. Since surely, had they wanted these qualities, and been slaves of their passions, though they had raised ten thousand dead, so far from doing any good, they would even have been accounted deceivers. Thus it is their life, so bright on all sides, which also draws down the grace of the Spirit. . . .

And Himself too, when He was making laws for His own disciples, what said He? “Do miracles, that men may see you”? By no means. But what? “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.” And to Peter again He said not, “If thou lovest me,” “do miracles,” but “feed my sheep.” . . .

For when he [Paul] had said, “Covet earnestly the best gifts, and yet show I unto you a more excellent way;” he did not speak next of a sign, but of charity, the root of all our good things. If then we practice this, and all the self-denial that flows from it, we

shall have no need of signs; even as on the other hand, if we do not practice it, we shall gain nothing by the signs.³⁵

Not only do we deny that many “power evangelists” are actually working miracles at all, but we deny that such an approach is widely being used by God today, or that He desires to do so. And one sure reason that God would value *virtue apologetics* over “power evangelism” is the differences in what they teach the young convert. While we should not be at all particular about *how* people come to Christ, it should be acknowledged that those who come to Christ through the supernatural love of other Christians have a better chance of understanding that the essence of authentic Christianity is virtue. On the other hand, those who might be initially attracted to the faith because of miracles, would be in danger of thinking that such things are essential to Christianity, and have a skewed, *super-supernaturalist*³⁶ perspective on spirituality.

B.5) The Unbiblical Nature of a “Testimony of the Spirit” in Reformed Theology

We have written more fully on the topic of the “testimony of the Spirit” elsewhere.³⁷ Here, we can only briefly discuss it in the specific context of *virtue apologetics*. In our view, the love and righteousness displayed in the Christian’s life is not only the ultimate proof to the *world* that we are uniquely saved, but it is the only acceptable proof to *ourselves* that we are saved. Therefore, we suggest that two views, particularly from the Reformed camp, are inadequate in this regard.

Some Reformed theologians seem to suggest that our sense of assurance comes simply from assuring ourselves of the trustworthiness of Christ’s promises, and there is really no need to monitor the evidence in ourselves that we truly are recipients of those promises. We would agree that our *objective* certainty is based on the trustworthiness of God. However, our *subjective* assurance, how we really know that *we* are saved, is based on the objective moral evidence that the supernatural regeneration of the Holy Spirit produces in our lives.

Likewise, John Calvin (1509–1564) popularized the idea of an “internal testimony of the Holy Spirit” in which the Spirit subjectively and directly communicates to us that we are saved. Others claim this rather mystical “testimony of the Spirit” is what convinces us that Christianity in general is true. Accordingly, William Lane Craig, Research Professor of Theology at Talbot School of Theology writes:

Fortunately, God has not left us to our own devices to determine whether Christianity is true but has given us the [subjective, mystical] testimony of his own Spirit. By contrast, those who

subscribe to the magisterial use of reason face severe difficulties: (1) They would deny the right to Christian faith to all who lack the ability, time, or opportunity to understand and assess the [intellectual] arguments and evidence. This consequence would no doubt consign untold millions of people who are Christians to unbelief.³⁸

There would seem to be a few mistakes here. First, as demonstrated elsewhere, Scripture does not support Dr. Craig's idea of a subjective, direct communication of the Spirit proving Christianity.³⁹ The real "testimony" of the Spirit comes through the objective experience and observation of the fruits of the Spirit.

Secondly, Dr. Craig overestimates the amount of rational evidence needed by the average regenerated Christian to serve as a valuable support to their faith. It does not require an extraordinary amount of "ability, time, or opportunity" for most Christians to gain an understanding and conviction of the most helpful intellectual arguments for the Christian faith.

Thirdly, Dr. Craig shows a complete disregard for *virtue apologetics* when he assumes that the only use of reason to prove Christianity is *intellectual apologetics*. On the contrary, *virtue apologetics* requires reason as well, and is the best use of it in regards to apologetics.

Dr. Craig goes on to state, "Rational argument and evidence may confirm our Christian beliefs to us but cannot defeat them if we are walking in the fullness of the Spirit."⁴⁰ This is true, but not because the Spirit is sending us some sort of direct, mystical message that we are saved as Dr. Craig claims, but rather, because the objective, supernatural fruit of virtue that the Holy Spirit produces in our lives is more powerful evidence than any intellectual arguments against the Christian faith.

Accordingly, Gary Habermas, Distinguished Professor and Chair of the Department of Philosophy and Theology at Liberty University, although an advocate for the "testimony of the Spirit" as the ultimate proof of the Christian life, writes in response to Dr. Craig:

I agree that individual believers can rely on the witness of the Holy Spirit and still be rational even if they cannot answer difficulties. But perhaps Craig has misdiagnosed the specific problem that he has posed. In most cases, non-Christian challengers today are probably not questioning whether the Christian has [subjectively] experienced the Holy Spirit's testimony. It is far more likely that their reservations concern the Christian claims to exclusivity surrounding this experience-or even the way Christians behave with regard to these claims.⁴¹

Here, Dr. Habermas correctly points out why “the testimony of the Spirit” is useless as an apologetic to the world—it is an unverifiable, subjective experience that anyone else can claim as well.

In the same book, Paul D. Feinberg, Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Trinity rightly recognizes the weakness of Dr. Craig’s approach as well, stating:

If the entire case for Christianity were subjective and personal, it might make belief simply a matter of the will. One might choose to believe whatever he wanted, claiming that he had divine assurance that he was right. That is why there is also an external witness of the Holy Spirit. That witness is objective, and it is public so that under certain conditions it is available for critical scrutiny.⁴²

Unfortunately, however, Dr. Feinberg remarkably defines this “external witness of the Holy Spirit” not in terms of the virtue He produces, but “theistic arguments,” claims of experiencing God, an objective moral law, and divine revelation. Virtually everything *but* virtue.⁴³

B.6) The Inadequacy of *Experiential Religion* in Liberal Theology

Finally, we should note that *virtue apologetics* has nothing to do with the *experiential apologetics* promoted by such theologians as Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), Paul Tillich (1886-1965), John Hick, and espoused by a long line of Christian mystics. Such an appeal to experience is no different than that found in Eastern religious traditions that emphasize meditative practices, such as Zen Buddhism and forms of Hinduism. In these, contact with the real God is confirmed merely by attaining an experience of emotional enlightenment or higher states of emotional consciousness.

Unlike the religious mystic who claims an experience which is self-authenticating with no rational proof possible, we claim there is objective proof for the truth of the Christians’ experience of salvation. While it should be obvious that an apologetic or religion based on subjective feelings has nothing in common with one based on objective virtue, some have confused them and therefore rejected the latter as an apologetic foundation of religion.

Epistemological certainty about spiritual matters cannot be based on feelings, and neither can anything else be verified in this way either. As James Orr (1834-1914) wrote: “Religion based on mere feeling is the vaguest, most unreliable, most unstable of all things.”⁴⁴ Likewise, the Christian apologist E. J. Carnell (1919-1967) writes:

If a man by an inward 'crisis' experience thinks that he is called to rule the world, as did Hitler, then the validity of his act is as secure as the validity of his [feeling]. . . . Against all forms of argument from religious experience we pit the argument that feelings are not qualified to critique themselves. If feeling rather than intellect is the most qualified organ of man to know God, it follows that all of the feelings must be normative witnesses. Schleiermacher preferred the feeling of personal piety, but his selection does not exhaust the possibilities. There is also anger, jealousy, laughter, spite, love, and the like. Which of these feelings is the best channel through which to approach the Divine? ⁴⁵

C) The Woeful Neglect of *Virtue Apologetics*

In chapters 5.2-5.4 of *Knowing Our God* we demonstrated the great deal of biblical references to *virtue apologetics*. In chapter 5.11 we will argue that the Apostle Paul denounced *intellectual apologetics* as an approach to evangelism. In chapters 5.12-5.13 we further demonstrate the lack of biblical support for *intellectual apologetics*.

These facts alone makes it very difficult to understand why, in modern Christian literature, there is both an almost complete disregard for *virtue apologetics*, and an overwhelming emphasis on *intellectual apologetics*. While we do not wish to deny the value of the latter, as we have discussed above, it is simply inexcusable that Christian commentaries, reference works, and even books on apologetics, basically ignore the place of *virtue apologetics*. ⁴⁶

For example, A. J. Hoover includes at least eight different types of apologetic approaches in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, but none of them could be identified with *virtue apologetics*. ⁴⁷ The renowned Protestant theologian and apologist Bernard Ramm (1916-1992) in his entry under "Biblical Apologetics" in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* says, "the root of the NT apologetic is christological and incarnational," ⁴⁸ which, in our opinion, could have been a great introduction to pointing out the objective moral evidence that Christ lives in the Christian. There is, however, no such discussion. Neither is there in Dr. Ramm's otherwise very helpful, *Types of Apologetic Systems*. ⁴⁹

This is true as well of Gordon R. Lewis' *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims* and Zondervan's *Five Approaches to Apologetics* which together, enumerate a large number of popular and respected types of Christian apologetics, but none of them even hinting at *virtue apologetics*. Likewise, in Peter Jensen's recent contribution to the highly respected *Contours of Christian Theology* series, he claims that the three apologetic proofs of the Gospel are 1) NT fulfillment of OT prophecies, 2) the historical testimony of the Apostles, and 3) its philosophical merits. ⁵⁰ Apparently the objective moral effects of the

born again experience are not even worthy of mention by this first rate Bible scholar.

Along the same lines is R. C. Sproul's co-authored book *Classical Apologetics*.⁵¹ It is a fine presentation of *intellectual apologetics*, however, we perceive no mention of anything like *virtue apologetics*, in spite of the fact that, as we demonstrated in chapter 5.9, it has been a vital part of "Classical Apologetics" since the beginning of the Church.⁵² Finally, Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli have no mention of *virtue apologetics* in their popular and otherwise helpful *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*.⁵³

While the above references completely ignore *virtue apologetics*, other Christian apologists, while neglecting it, at least hint at it. For example, one could wish that the great twentieth century Christian apologist C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) would have turned his genius more toward *virtue apologetics* rather than just the *intellectual* type. Nonetheless, even he found space to note in his very popular *Mere Christianity*:

When we Christians behave badly, or fail to behave well, we are making Christianity unbelievable to the outside world. . . . Our careless lives set the outer world talking; and we give them grounds for talking in a way that throws doubt on the truth of Christianity itself.⁵⁴

Likewise, in speaking of the fact that Christians are spiritually regenerated Dr. Lewis wrote:

[T]he new men are dotted here and there all over the earth. . . . Every now and then one meets them. Their very voices and faces are different from ours: stronger, quieter, happier, more radiant. . . . They love you more than other men do, but they need you less.⁵⁵

Characteristically eloquent, but we would have hoped for more in such an influential apologetic book.

Likewise, in Dr. Lewis' otherwise insightful study, *The Four Loves*, he never mentions the virtue in the context as an apologetic for the Christian faith.⁵⁶ It is not as though others have written on the subject of *virtue apologetics* sufficiently to warrant other Christian apologists neglecting it.

Likewise, we would wish to see more on *virtue apologetics* from our favorite theologian J. I. Packer. Nonetheless, he writes the following:

Ecumenical goals for the church are defined nowadays in terms of the quest for social, racial, and economic justice, but it would be far healthier if our first aim was agreed to be personal and relational holiness in every believer's life. Much as the modern West needs the impact of Christian truth, it needs the impact of

Christian holiness even more, both to demonstrate that godliness is the true humanness and to keep community life from rotting to destruction. The pursuit of holiness is thus no mere private hobby, nor merely a path for a select few, but a vital element in Christian mission strategy today. The world's greatest need is the personal holiness of Christian people.⁵⁷

Somewhat surprising is the admission of William Lane Craig, a foremost *intellectual apologists*, when he writes:

Raised in a non-evangelical home, I became a Christian my third year of high school, not through any careful consideration of the evidence, but because those Christian students who shared the gospel with me seemed to be living on a different plane of reality than I was. Their faith in Christ imparted meaning to their lives along with a joyous peace, which I craved.

Once I became a Christian, I was eager to share the truth of my newfound faith with my family and high school friends, and thus I soon became engaged in presenting [intellectual] arguments for becoming a Christian.⁵⁸

It would seem that while Dr. Craig recognized that it was *virtue apologetics* that prepared him for the Gospel, he immediately pursued *intellectual apologetics* to attract others to the Gospel.

In a similar fashion, well known Christian apologist Lee Strobel, author of the best seller *The Case for Christ*, is a contributing author to the very helpful *Holman Apologetics Study Bible*. The majority of his introductory article, "How Apologetics Changed My Life" not surprisingly describes his study of scientific and historical evidence for Christianity. He concludes the article with: "For me, [intellectual] apologetics proved to be the turning point of my life and eternity." But that would not seem to be true. Earlier in the article he explains that he was an atheist who "married an agnostic named Leslie." Leslie "decided to become a follower of Jesus." Then Mr. Strobel describes the real apologetic that led him to seek Christ:

Then [after his wife became a Christian] something amazing occurred. [the language of a miracle]. During the ensuing months, I began to see positive changes in her character, her values, and the way she related to me and to the children. The transformation was winsome and attractive [i.e. apologetic]. So one day when she invited me to go to church with her, I decided to comply.⁵⁹

We believe that Mr. Strobel would have been more accurate to say it was the supernatural virtue of his wife that "proved to be the turning point" of his spiritual life, and accordingly, he missed a great opportunity to promote the place of *virtue apologetics*.

One of the most disappointing publications regarding Christian apologetics is *Baker's Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* authored by the *intellectual apologist*, Norm Geisler. Due to the author's personal persuasion, we would not expect a promotion of *virtue apologetics*. Nonetheless, considering the immense amount of biblical commands regarding *virtue apologetics*, one would think that a book with this title having 841 pages would devote at least one entry to it. It does not. In Dr. Geisler's entire *Encyclopedia* there is no entry for anything like *virtue apologetics*, even within rather lengthy articles under such headings as, "Apologetics, Types of"⁶⁰ or "Holy Spirit, Role in Apologetics."⁶¹ The only possible exception is a brief mention that some *evidentialist apologists* appeal to "changed lives," however, the example Dr. Geisler gives is Saul of Tarsus instead of contemporary examples.⁶² In fact, speaking exclusively of the physical miracles performed by Christ and the Apostles, Dr. Geisler claims, "If miracles have no evidential value, then there is no objective, historical evidence to support the claims of historic, Orthodox Christianity."⁶³ On the contrary, the spiritual miracles of *virtue apologetics* provide precisely what Dr. Geisler is looking for.

Nonetheless, Dr. Geisler is willing to write the following under the entry concerning "Pluralism":

It is debatable [we would say impossible] whether practitioners in nonChristian religions can really display what Galatians 5:22-23 calls "the fruit of the Spirit": love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Certainly nonChristians do loving things and feel the heart emotion of attachment that we call love. And others are gentle, good, kind, and self-controlled. But are they able to manifest agape love?

One can lead a philanthropic life and even die in a stand for personal beliefs, yet not show God-founded holistic true love (see I Cor. 13:3). Christians are to have a qualitatively different kind of love for one another and especially for God. While God's common grace enables evil people to do good (see Matt. 7:11), only the supernatural love of God can motivate a person to express true agape (cf. John 15:13; Rom. 5:6-8; 1 John 4:7). . .

Before one conclude too quickly that William James [nineteenth century psychologist] demonstrated the equality of all forms of saintliness in *Varieties of Religious Experiences*, Jonathan Edwards' *A Treatise on Religious Affections* should be perused. Edwards argues forcefully that manifestations of Christian godliness are unique, [there being] a difference in the highest level between Christian and non-Christian piety. . . .

A close comparison of the attitudes, goals, and motivations, as well as the actions, of [between] Mother Teresa and Mohandas

Gandhi would demonstrate the superiority of Christian compassion for the needy. On the modern religious scene, one must also sort out what is inherent to the moral system of another religion and what has become incorporated into it as the result of Christian missionary activity.

Hinduism as a system did not generate social compassion in Gandhi. Gandhi was a student of Christianity who seriously considered conversion. He proclaimed his admiration for Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. The social compassion found in some forms of current Hinduism is a foreign import from Christianity, the influence of those like Gandhi who had been touched by Christian principles. Even then it fell short of the full-orbed Christian compassion of Mother Teresa.⁶⁴

A bolder defense of *virtue apologetics* could hardly be found today, yet, it warrants no further discussion in this otherwise valuable publication.

This author had the personal opportunity to ask Dr. Geisler after a presentation why the superior virtue of Christians was not a respected approach to apologetics. He graciously, but briefly answered, "It is not objective enough." We would respond in several ways.

First, *virtue apologetics* is at least as objective as the interpretation and sources of ancient history that are relied upon for much of *intellectual apologetics*. Secondly, as noted elsewhere, Dr. Geisler admits that there are objective moral norms in humanity, and if so, it would seem there would be some basis for objectively evaluating the morality of religions.⁶⁵

Thirdly, we would claim that the most important and effective apologetic approach will not be the one that may gain the most respect from pagan scientists or philosophers, but the approach that is the most available for the individual Christian, and most powerful for the vast majority of unbelievers. Let us remember, that most of the elect that we are searching for could be described the same way as Paul did the Corinthian converts: "**Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards**" (1 Cor 1:26). Christian apologetics is for the purpose of influencing our lost friends, not the academy. Accordingly, this is a prevalent context and purpose in which the Bible always discusses apologetics.

Another example of the neglect of *virtue apologetics* in Christian literature comes from the pen of one of our favorite theologians, Herman Bavinck (1854-1921). Remembering the numerous quotes provided in the previous chapter regarding the *virtue apologetic* approach of the early Church, Dr. Bavinck's views seem inadequate, if not inaccurate. In the context of summarizing the apologetic approach

of the early Christians, he inexplicably lists just about everything else *but* the virtue of the early Christians:

[For the early apologists] this [philosophical] agreement [between pagans and Christians] does not cancel out the enormous difference in substance that exists between Christianity and the other religions. Comparative research reveals a series of differences, which demonstrate the superior excellence of Christianity over all [other] religions and can therefore serve as so many proofs for its truth.

Belonging to these internal criteria are the knowledge of the one true God who has been revealed only in Christianity, the complete redemption from sin and death, which has been won and is given by Christ, and the hope of eternal life, which has been brought to light by the gospel of Christ. Also included are the holy character and life of the prophets and apostles and above all of Christ himself [what about ancient and modern Christians which is an even more effective apologetic!].

Finally, it includes the antiquity and unity, the sublimity and simplicity, the riches and many-sidedness of Holy Scripture, which as a second book has been added by God to the first book (nature) and is in complete harmony with it, the predictions along with their fulfillment and the miracles, which lift the truth of Christian doctrine above all doubt.⁶⁶

It is hard to understand Dr. Bavinck's apparent dismissal of the most important apologetic approach in early Christian writing, unless it is intentional. And as we noted above in section B.1, there *are* some intentional efforts to downplay or even discredit *virtue apologetics* within the Christian ranks.

One of the more surprising assaults on *virtue apologetics* comes from the highly respected Reformed theologian Michael Horton, Professor of Theology and Apologetics at Westminster. From his contribution to a book which contains the writings of many of the most influential evangelical teachers of our day, we read:

Christianity does not rest on our testimonies of changed lives, for the Mormons, drug treatment centers, and psychotherapists can offer such examples. Nor is Christianity to be trusted because of a personal experience. How many times have we had personal experiences that turned out to be misunderstood? The Christian faith rests on the claim of its Founder that He was the Messiah, God incarnate, the Savior of the world, and the claim of its apostles that they were eyewitnesses to His resurrection.⁶⁷

If Dr. Horton is claiming that the ontological (i.e. its basis in reality) foundation of Christianity rests on scriptural and historical claims, we would agree. Without such documents and events there

would be no Christianity. However, the claims of Christianity are no more “self-authenticating” than the claim of other religions, and its apologetical foundation cannot rest on these things.

Additionally, we would respectfully disagree with Dr. Horton that anyone else, including “Mormons” and “psychotherapists” can claim the type of supernatural, enduring, moral transformation that occurs with the acceptance of the Christian Gospel. Also, *virtue apologetics* does not involve subjective experiences, but rather, objectively demonstrated and recognized moral behavior.

In addition, concerning the resurrection of Christ, we do not deny its immense apologetic value and recognize that it is repeatedly reflected in Scripture. However, we would insist that the present miracle resulting from our personal spiritual resurrection has at least as much apologetic value as the now rather ancient miracle of Christ’s physical resurrection. The Apostle Paul was right, of course, to insist that, **“if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins”** (1 Cor 15:17).⁶⁸ However, as we have detailed elsewhere, the Apostle John clearly claims the same futility concerning our faith if there is an absence of morality.⁶⁹

Theologically speaking, the resurrection of Christ is the foundation of the Christian faith. However, apologetically, this historical event would be significantly weakened if the Christian’s own deliverance from spiritual death could not be presently demonstrated by supernatural deeds of virtue. Purely from an apologetic perspective, the outworking of our spiritual resurrection can stand alone to prove the superiority of the Christian faith much better than the bare fact of Christ’s resurrection. As the old hymn says, “You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart.” While the resurrection of Christ proves that Christ saves, it does not prove to us or the world that we are saved. Superior and supernatural virtue empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit does.

Even more recently, Christian apologist Arthur Lindsey has written, *Love the Ultimate Apologetic: The Heart of Christian Witness*.⁷⁰ One would think with a title like that, we would not have needed to write a biblical and historical defense of *virtue apologetics*. However, the main intention of the writer is to address non-moral “religions” such as atheism and New Age. While there is a place for this, there is very little discussion of “moral” religions (e.g. Islam, Buddhism). Therefore, in our opinion, the author falls far short of establishing “Love” as “the ultimate apologetic” for Christianity.

Even in-depth and insightful studies on biblical love fail to provide any mention of the concept’s relation to apologetics. Accordingly, perhaps the most exhaustive study of the topic in Evangelical Christianity is Leon Morris’ (1914-2006) otherwise very good book, *Testaments of Love: A Study of Love in the Bible*.⁷¹ Yet, there is no

mention of the need, or biblical mandate for Christian love to be an apologetic for the Christian faith.

Tim Keller's book, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* was *World* magazine's book of the year. It too focuses on *intellectual apologetics* and outright rejects *virtue apologetics*. He claims Christians should realize that the unregenerate "will live lives morally superior to their own." This would not be consistently true of real Christians who possess the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, the best apologetic Pastor Keller can offer for the Gospel is: "I can give you enough rational reasons to believe in God that fall short of demonstrable proof but that cumulatively give me warrant to say that Christianity makes more sense than alternate views of reality."⁷² On the contrary, we believe God has given us more apologetic ammunition than that.

Finally, we will discuss perhaps the most influential *intellectual apologists* in Church history: Josh McDowell. We believe that the publication of his *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* was another example of the inexplicable disconnect between the type of apologetics that impressed him, and the kind he has committed a life of research to. Mr. McDowell purposely and unmistakably begins his well known *intellectual apologetic*, with a stirring testimony of the power of *virtue apologetics*. Relating how *virtue apologetics* led to his own seeking of Christ he writes:

[T]here was something . . . about this group that caught my attention. It was love. These [Christian] students and professors not only loved each other, they loved and cared for people outside their group. They didn't just talk about love; they got involved in loving others. It was something totally foreign to me, and I wanted it. So I decided to make friends with this group of people. . .

About two weeks later, I was sitting around a table in the student union talking with some members of this group. . . . Then I turned to one of the girls in the group and said, "Tell me, what changed your lives? Why are you so different from the other students and faculty?" She looked me straight in the eye and said two words I had never expected to hear in an intelligent discussion on a university campus: "Jesus Christ!"⁷³

While it is true that Mr. McDowell implies that "the overwhelming [historical] evidence I was accumulating that Jesus Christ was God's Son," also played a part in his conversion, it was *virtue apologetics* that gave him sufficient interest and reason to pursue the *intellectual* kind. Mr. McDowell goes on to relate a wonderful story of the power of *virtue apologetics*:

After I prayed [to receive Christ], nothing happened. There was no bolt of lightning. I didn't sprout angel wings. If anything,

I actually felt worse after I prayed, almost physically sick. I was afraid I had made an emotional decision that I would later regret intellectually. . . . I really felt I had gone off the deep end.

But over the next eighteen months my entire life was changed. . . . One of the biggest changes occurred in how I viewed people. . . . [A]fter I placed my trust in Christ, my thinking changed. Instead of using others to serve me, I wanted to be used to serve others. Becoming other-centered instead of self-centered was a dramatic change in my life.

Another area that started to change was my bad temper. I used to blow my stack if somebody just looked at me wrong. I still have the scars from almost killing a man during my first year in the university. My bad temper was so ingrained that I didn't consciously seek to change it. But one day, when faced with a crisis that would ordinarily have set me off, I discovered that my bad temper was gone. I'm not perfect in this area, but this change in my life has been significant and dramatic.

Perhaps the most significant change has been in the area of hatred and bitterness. I grew up filled with hatred, primarily aimed at one man whom I hated more than anyone else on the face of this earth. I despised everything this man stood for. I can remember as a young boy lying in bed at night plotting how I would kill this man without being caught by the police. This man was my father.

While I was growing up, my father was the town drunk. I hardly ever saw him sober. My friends at school would joke about my dad lying in the gutter downtown, making a fool of himself. Their jokes hurt me deeply, but I never let anyone know. I laughed along with them. I kept my pain a secret.

I would sometimes find my mother in the barn, lying in the manure behind the cows where my dad had beaten her with a hose until she couldn't get up. My hatred seethed as I vowed to myself, "When I am strong enough, I'm going to kill him." When Dad was drunk and visitors were coming over, I would grab him around the neck, pull him out to the barn, and tie him up. Then I would park his truck behind the silo and tell everyone he had gone to a meeting, so we wouldn't be embarrassed as a family. When I tied up his hands and feet, I looped part of the rope around his neck. I just hoped he would try to get away and choke himself.

Two months before I graduated from high school, I walked into the house after a date to hear my mother sobbing. I ran into her room, and she sat up in bed. "Son, your father has broken my heart" she said. She put her arms around me and pulled me close. "I have lost the will to live. All I want to do is live until you graduate, then I want to die."

Two months later I graduated, and the following Friday my mother died. I believe she died of a broken heart. I hated my father for that. Had I not left home a few months after the funeral to attend college, I might have killed him.

But after I made a decision to place my trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord, the love of God inundated my life. He took my hatred for my father and turned it upside-down. Five months after becoming a Christian, I found myself looking my dad right in the eye and saying, "Dad, I love you." I did not want to love that man, but I did. God's love had changed my heart.

After I transferred to Wheaton University, I was in a serious car accident, the victim of a drunk driver. I was moved home from the hospital to recover, and my father came to see me. Remarkably, he was sober that day. He seemed uneasy, pacing back and forth in my room. Then he blurted out, "How can you love a father like me?"

I said, "Dad, six months ago I hated you, I despised you. But I have put my trust in Jesus Christ, received God's forgiveness, and He has changed my life. I can't explain it all, Dad. But God has taken away my hatred for you and replaced it with love.'

We talked for nearly an hour, then he said, "Son, if God can do in my life what I've seen Him do in yours, then I want to give Him the opportunity." He prayed, "God, if You're really God and Jesus died on the cross to forgive me for what I've done to my family, I need You. If Jesus can do in my life what I've seen Him do in the life of my son, then I want to trust Him as Savior and Lord.' Hearing my dad pray this prayer from his heart was one of the greatest joys of my life.

After I trusted Christ, my life was basically changed in six to eighteen months. But my father's life was changed right before my eyes. It was like someone reached down and switched on a light inside him. He touched alcohol only once after that. He got the drink only as far as his lips, and that was it-after forty years of drinking! He didn't need it any more. Fourteen months later, he died from complications of his alcoholism. But in that fourteen-month period over a hundred people in the area around my tiny hometown committed their lives to Jesus Christ because of the change they saw in the town drunk, my dad.

You can laugh at Christianity. You can mock and ridicule it. But it works. If you trust Christ, start watching your attitudes and actions-Jesus Christ is in the business of changing lives.⁷⁴

While in our opinion, Mr. McDowell's book is the best ever written on *intellectual apologetics*, we would suggest the five pages McDowell devotes to *virtue apologetics* are an infinitely more powerful apologetic than the over 700 pages of *intellectual apologetics* that the rest of the

book is devoted to. All of which, again, makes it most surprising that there is no discussion at all of *virtue apologetics* anywhere in a book entitled *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*.

However, perhaps Mr. McDowell is changing his perspective. In a more recent book, *Apologetics for a New Generation*, he writes:

Most people assume I came to Christ through the intellectual route. Certainly, there can't be more than a few people who have documented more evidences to the faith than I have. And yet, all the evidence I have documented—on the reliability of the Bible, the deity of Jesus Christ, and the evidence for the resurrection—never brought me to faith in Christ.

That's right. The evidence did not bring me to Christ. The evidences got my attention, but it was God's love that drew me. It was the love I saw between a group of genuine believers who loved not only Jesus Christ but also each other—and even me! The evidence got my attention, but love drew me. . . .

When I arrived at Kellogg College in Battle Creek, Michigan, I met a group of Christians who exposed me for the first time to the love of God. Oh, how they loved each other. And I wanted what they had so badly that I would have paid anything for it. I would have pawned my soul to have what they had. That love—and the desire for that kind of friendship—paved the road of faith for me, and thus began my journey of faith.⁷⁵

We do not desire to be disrespectful to a man that has been used greatly by God. However, the reason, "Most people assume [McDowell] came to Christ through the intellectual route" is that he has often portrayed it that way. Even in this very book where Mr. McDowell claims, "the evidence did not bring me to Christ, his son Sean, in an effort to argue the importance of *intellectual apologetics* for evangelism, writes what would seem to contradict his own dad:

[T]hose [unbelievers] who respond to [*intellectual*] apologetics often become people of significant influence who are deeply committed to the faith. This has certainly been the case in the life of my father, Josh McDowell. He became a believer as a pre-law student while trying to refute the evidence for Christ.⁷⁶

Nevertheless, Josh McDowell, perhaps the most influential *intellectual apologist* of our time, writes what we have wanted to demonstrate in this book about *virtue apologetics*:

[I]t was not the proclamation of the truth that turned the world upside down [in first century Christianity]. You see, what happened in the first century—and the task we face today, as well—involved far more than a strictly modernist approach which appeals to the intellect. It also involved more than an extreme postmodern approach, which treats the truth as an irrelevance.

Our first century forbears would be unsatisfied with both modernism, which exalts truth but minimizes relationships, and postmodernism, which minimizes truth and exalts relationships. . . . The world we live in—the great host of people all around us—is desperate for truth that is firmly grasped, grounded, and communicated in the context of relationships.

[A] thoroughly biblical apologetic [is] what Paul referred to when he depicted the process that brought the Thessalonians to a vibrant faith in Christ: “Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us” (1 Thessalonians 2:8).

That’s what turned the world upside down in the first days of church history! . . . The way they lived their lives was further proof of the truth of the message (1 Thessalonians 1:5 NLT) ⁷⁷

It was more than “further proof.” It was the ultimate proof.

What then are the reasons for the conspicuous lack of discussion regarding the very biblical notion of *virtue apologetics*? Perhaps, as we address below, it is a perceived lack of virtue among Christians that makes us shy about the biblical mandate for *virtue apologetics*. However, we also fear it is another reflection of the worldly habit of desiring easy shortcuts to accomplish our goals. Which is easier, to learn and expound some intellectual arguments for Christianity, or to exude hope in the midst of painful trials like 1 Peter 3:15 is really talking about? As we stated elsewhere: “one primary reason that *intellectual apologetics* is so highly promoted, and *virtue apologetics* is so neglected in America, is probably because the one only requires study, and the other suffering.” ⁷⁸ American Christians too often desire rather painless shortcuts like politics, programs, and arguments to change people. Actually, the Great Commission and real Christian apologetics requires something much more—supernatural sacrificial love.

Pastoral Practices

- Do you have people in your church that could share powerful testimonies about their salvation? Encourage them to do so, and it can be encourage the believers and help unbelievers come to Christ.

Extras & Endnotes

Table 5.10: A Comparison of Apologetic Approaches

Type	Features	Problems	Biblical Support	Scholarly Support
Classical	Philosophical/scientific evidence to prove God's existence including the <i>cosmological</i> , <i>ontological</i> , and <i>teleological</i> arguments.	Doesn't directly prove or distinguish the Gospel and too complex.	Very little	Much
Evidential	Collecting a variety of evidences including historical evidence for Resurrection and authority of Scripture	Dependent upon historical evidence which is less convincing than contemporary evidence.	Little	The most
Presuppositional	Asks the unbeliever to presuppose the existence of God and the truth of Scripture.	Not really an apologetic at all.	Some	Some
Reformed Epistemology	Claims humans are born with an internal belief in God.	Not really an apologetic at all.	None	Growing
Virtue	Claims that the supernatural virtue empowered by the Holy Spirit in Christians uniquely proves the superiority of the Christian Gospel.	Moral weaknesses in individual Christians and misconceptions of Church history.	A lot	None

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) How is *intellectual apologetics* defined?
- 2) What are other approaches to Christian apologetics, and why do we claim they are inferior to *virtue apologetics*? Do you agree or disagree?
- 3) We claim that the current apologetic emphasis is either on *intellectual apologetics* reflecting modernism, or a self-effacing “humble” apologetics reflecting *postmodernism*. Would you agree or disagree and why?
- 4) We claim that, contrary to the Apostle John in his epistle, there is a great lack of boldness in contemporary Christianity to compare religions on the basis of virtue. Would you agree or disagree and why?
- 5) What is typically known as “power evangelism”? Why do we claim it is inferior to *virtue apologetics*? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 6) What is *experiential apologetics*? Why do we claim it is inferior to *virtue apologetics*? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 7) We claim that the present miracle resulting from our personal spiritual resurrection has as much apologetic value as the ancient miracle of Christ’s physical resurrection. Would you agree or disagree and why?
- 8) What two possibilities do we suggest for the reason that *virtue apologetics* is neglected? What reasons would you offer?

Recommended Reading

- The rest of Book 5: *Biblical Apologetics in Knowing Our God*.
- Francis Schaeffer, *The Mark of a Christian* (Intervarsity, 1970). A short booklet, and rather limited in scope, but perhaps the only example of any Christian literature devoted to the topic of *virtue apologetics* in the last several decades.

Publications & Particulars

-
- ¹ *Super-supernaturalism* is the unbiblical over-expectation of God's miraculous intervention, accompanied by the belief that the miraculous *sign gifts* of the biblical Prophets and Apostles are still operating today. For further discussion see chapters 10.13-16
- ² For discussion of categorizing approaches to Christian apologetics see introductions to *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims*, Gordon R Lewis (Moody, 1976) and; *Five Views on Apologetics*, Steven Cowan, ed. (Zondervan, 2000). Norm Geisler admits as well that, "There are differing kinds of apologetic systems, and no universally-acknowledged way to categorize them." (*Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics (BECA)* [Baker, 1999], 41). Dr. Geisler uses five categories: Classical, Evidential, Historical, Experiential, and Presuppositional. In our opinion, the historical approach is best discussed under the evidential approach. Also, Dr. Geisler unfortunately limits his experiential approach to non-verifiable mystical experiences, rather than including objective *virtue apologetics*, making this category not worth discussing.
- ³ Norm Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Baker Book House, 1976), 8-9.
- ⁴ For further discussion regarding *classic apologetics* see section 2.12.D
- ⁵ As noted below under "Recommended Reading," Dr. Schaeffer wrote one of the few modern discourses concerning *virtue apologetics* in his booklet *The Mark of the Christian*. Nonetheless, he wrote much more that would be considered *intellectual apologetics* and even wrote in the above mentioned booklet: "We should have an intellectual apologetic. The Bible commands it and Christ and Paul exemplify it." ([Intervarsity, 1970], 16). We would offer sections 2.2.C and 2.3.B.1.b-c as a refutation of Dr. Schaeffer's claim.
- ⁶ For further discussion of these evidences for the authority of Scripture see chapter 2.7. and 9.8.
- ⁷ Excerpt from section 6.12.C.1.
- ⁸ Sean McDowell, in *Apologetics for a New Generation*, Sean McDowell, ed. (Harvest House, 2009), 19.
- ⁹ *Pluralism* is essentially the belief that all moral religions provide salvation. For further discussion see section 6.10.B.
- ¹⁰ *Postmodernism* in its most radical form, denies the possibility of any absolute, objectively authoritative truth. For further discussion see section 2.6.A; chapter 2.11 and section 3.1.C.4.f.
- ¹¹ James M. Boice, "A Better Way: The Power of the Word and Spirit" in *Power Religion: The Selling Out of the Evangelical Church*, Michael S. Horton ed. (Moody, 1992), 119.
- ¹² John G. Stackhouse, *Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 120. Underlining added.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁴ For further discussion of *pluralism* see section 6.10.B.

¹⁵ John Hick in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, eds. (Zondervan, 1996), 39, 41, 43.

¹⁶ We confidently describe Dr. Hick as an unbeliever in spite of his claim to have “underwent a powerful evangelical conversion under the impact of the New Testament figure of Jesus” in his college days. (*Four Views*, 29). Dr. Hick spends a good deal of ink in the book we have quoted him, to purposely attempt to persuade the reader that he is indeed an evangelical Christian, and in fact he does speak and write in many Christian forums. However, a man’s doctrine reveals his heart. Accordingly, Norm Geisler writes:

John Hick is one of the most important philosophers of religion of the late twentieth century. His literary output and influence has been a strong force against orthodox Christianity at several crucial junctures. (*BECA*, 316. Underling added).

Dr. Hick’s heresies include: 1) The denial that Scripture possesses divine authority (Froelich, 12), 2) The belief that eventually all people will be saved (Geisler, 746), 3) That reincarnation is valid (*Ibid.*, 639), 4) The denial that there is an eternal punishment after death (*Death and Eternal Life* [1976], 244), and 5) A rather odd habit of referring to God as merely “the Ultimate Reality” or the “Real” (*Four Views*, 17).

While all of these *may* unfortunately be the belief of an authentic Christian, at least an immature one, we would suggest that Dr. Hick’s denial of the deity of Jesus Christ cannot be (cf. Rom 10:9). He has written: “That Jesus was God the Son incarnate is not literally true, since it has no literal meaning.” (“Jesus and the World Religions,” in *The Myth of God Incarnate*, ed. John Hick [Westminster, 1977], 178). Christ’s deity will be very “literal” when Dr. Hick is called to give an account before His throne some day.

Nonetheless, Dr. Hick suggests that the Scripture’s teaching regarding the deity of Christ is merely a metaphor intended to function as a religious myth (*Ibid.* 177-8). Therefore, we do not accept the philosopher’s claim to be a Christian, nor are we surprised that he would promote the idea that Christianity is not unique in any way for the salvation of human souls.

It will be noted here as well that we think Dr. Hick’s doctrine of *eschatological verification* is insufficient and not rooted in reality. He seems to suggest that we do not need evidence *now* for our beliefs, but merely a promise or hope that the evidence will be provided later. Obviously such a belief fits in well with his desire to claim all ethical religions are equal. To the contrary, however, God is in the business of giving us evidence *now* for those things we are to believe in and **“has given us the Spirit [now] as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come [later].”** (2 Cor 5:5). And it is precisely because Dr. Hick does not seem to have the Spirit that he is groping for some imagined verification in the future. God save his soul!

For further study on the heresies of John Hick see, “The Disintegration Of John Hick’s Christology,” Douglas McCreedy, *JETS* 39:2 (June 1996) p. 257-270.

¹⁷ Michael Mckenzie, “Listening To Virtue’s Voice: The Connection Between Ethics And Apologetics,” *Journal of Christian Apologetics* 1:2 (Winter 1997), 52. Evidently for Mr. Mckenzie, there is no connection.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁹ *Four Views*, 68.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

²² Obviously this statement involves several issues that must be supported elsewhere. For a discussion of *false faith* see chapter 6.6.

²³ John Eldredge, *Waking the Dead* (Thomas Nelson, 2003), 57.

²⁴ See extended discussion of the Apostle John's description of born again Christians in chapter 5.5.

²⁵ For further discussion of *presuppositionalism* see section 2.12.D.

²⁶ Regarding Paul's proving the Gospel through the Scriptures see section 5.13.B

²⁷ For further discussion regarding *Reformed Epistemology* see chapter 2.8.

²⁸ For a definition of modern *charismaticism* see endnote 1 in chapter 5.6.

²⁹ Erwin Lutzer, *Who Are You to Judge?* (Moody, 2002), 214.

³⁰ For further discussion of Christ's meaning of "greater works" in John 14:12 see section 10.5.B.2.

³¹ For further discussion regarding the fraud and demonic nature of many so called "miracles" in modern *super-supernaturalism* see section 11.7.B.9 and 11.8.E-F.

³² For further discussion of distinguishing demonic and divine miracle working see chapter 11.13.

³³ For accounts of such direct divine miracles see especially sections 10.2.A; 10.2.C; 10.3.C; 10.4.A.1.

³⁴ For further discussion of the immoral behavior of prominent "miracle workers" in the Church see sections 11.7.B.9; 11.8.E-F.

³⁵ John Chrysostom, *Homily on Matthew*, (online at www.ccel.org), 46.

³⁶ *Super-supernaturalism* is the over-emphasis on the miraculous popular in Christianity today. For further discussion, see chapters 10.13-16.

³⁷ For further discussion regarding the "testimony of the Spirit" specifically as it regards the assurance of salvation see chapter 3.6.

³⁸ Craig in Cowan, 37.

³⁹ For further discussion regarding the "testimony of the Spirit" specifically as it regards the assurance of salvation see chapter 3.6.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴¹ Gary Habermas in Cowan, 64.

⁴² Paul Feinberg in Cowan, 160.

-
- ⁴³ Ibid., 160-66.
- ⁴⁴ James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World* (Regent College, 1997), 20.
- ⁴⁵ Edward J. Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* (Eerdmans, 1956), 79.
- ⁴⁶ Perhaps the only exception in the last several decades of Christian scholarship is Francis Schaeffer's little booklet, *The Mark of a Christian* (Intervarsity, 1970). It is excellent, just not long or popular enough.
- ⁴⁷ See the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (EDT)*, Walter Elwell ed. (Baker, 1984), 69-70.
- ⁴⁸ Bernard Ramm, "Biblical Apologetics" in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE)*, Geoffrey W. Bromiley ed., 4 vols., (Eerdmans, 1988), I:190.
- ⁴⁹ Bernard Ramm, *Types of Apologetic Systems* (Van Kampen, 1953).
- ⁵⁰ Peter Jensen, *The Revelation of God* (InterVarsity, 2002), 40-42.
- ⁵¹ R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsey, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Academie Books, 1984).
- ⁵² For the testimonies of early Church leaders to *virtue apologetics* see chapter 5.9
- ⁵³ Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (InterVarsity Press, 1994)
- ⁵⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Harper Collins, 2001), 208.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., 223.
- ⁵⁶ C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (Collins, 1960)
- ⁵⁷ J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step With the Spirit* (Revell, 1984), 103.
- ⁵⁸ William L. Craig in Cowan, 26.
- ⁵⁹ Lee Strobel "How Apologetics Changed My Life" *The Apologetics Study Bible*, (Holman, 2007).
- ⁶⁰ Geisler, *BECA*, 41-45.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., 330-37.
- ⁶² Ibid., 42.
- ⁶³ Ibid., 452
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., 598.
- ⁶⁵ Regarding objective morals by which we can evaluate other religions see section 5.15.A and 5.16.B.2.

-
- ⁶⁶ Herman Bavinck, *Prolegomena, Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 1 (Baker, 2003), 509.
- ⁶⁷ Michael S. Horton, "Recovering the Plumb Line" in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, John H. Armstrong, ed. (Moody, 1996), 257.
- ⁶⁸ For further discussion of the significance of the historical fact of Christ's resurrection see section 2.5.D.
- ⁶⁹ Regarding the futility of our faith without supernatural morality see chapter 5.9.
- ⁷⁰ Arthur Lindsey, *Love the Ultimate Apologetic: The Heart of Christian Witness*. (Intervarsity, 2008).
- ⁷¹ Leon Morris, *Testaments of Love: A Study of Love in the Bible* (Eerdmans, 1981).
- ⁷² See interview with Tim Keller in *World*, June 28, 2008, 69-71.
- ⁷³ Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Josh McDowell, 1999), xxiv
- ⁷⁴ Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Josh McDowell, 1999), xxv-xxvii
- ⁷⁵ Josh McDowell in *Apologetics for a New Generation*, Sean McDowell, ed. (Harvest House, 2009), 65.
- ⁷⁶ Sean McDowell, 21.
- ⁷⁷ Josh McDowell, 23.
- ⁷⁸ Quoted from 5.4.B.2.