
Chapter 5.8

God's Plan for *Virtue Apologetics*

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Primary Points

- The authenticating evidence of the stars for God's existence will not be obscured by a few clouds. Likewise, the condemning proof of God's New Creations to the Gospel will not be sufficiently muffled by our failings, for like the message of Creation, God does not intend to give the world any legitimate excuse for ignoring it.
- God's commitment to *virtue apologetics* is clearly promised when the Apostle writes, "**He Who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus**" (Phil 1:6).
- Christ's parable of "the sower and the seed" illustrates several reasons why the superior virtue of born again Christians will be demonstrated.
- God not only works "inside of us" to empower *virtue apologetics*, but He also works sovereignly "outside of us" as well. He is quite willing to allow the refining fires of difficulties, divine discipline, and even persecution to burn away the worldly dross that obscures the image of the King in us.
- Difficulties make the unregenerate bitter and the regenerate better.
- Real "power evangelism" is not performing miracles to remove suffering, but rather, the power to live a virtuous life in the midst of suffering.
- Nothing may demonstrate this more than the supernatural testimony of Christian martyrs who, like their Lord, have undoubtedly faced their deaths with more virtue than the martyrs of any other religion.
- When "**the last days**" occur, the moral state of unbelievers at that time will practically guarantee the effectiveness of *virtue apologetics*.
- Because of the purpose and power of *virtue apologetics*, we should be able to find more comfort and endurance in our difficult circumstances.
- Unbelievers will love the world and be controlled by it, believers will not.
- The Scriptures make it evident that the moral superiority of God's people was intended to be His universal and ultimate apologetic for the Gospel, and that remains true regardless of how well Christians may be fulfilling that mission.

A) God's Sovereignty & Justice

Obviously, the effectiveness of *virtue apologetics* depends on a significant difference between the morality of believers and unbelievers. Admittedly, this is not always evident, especially in a *relatively* moral country like America. While real moral failure among real born again Christians is easily and widely exaggerated,¹ we have already noted that Christians still sin and our immoral choices will hinder God's intentions for *virtue apologetics*. Even so, there are several reasons we can be assured that the morality of His people will accomplish what God intends for it to accomplish.

First of all, it is important to be reminded of God's sovereignty because it is God's will for *virtue apologetics* to work. As the Prophet proclaimed, "**For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart Him?**" (Isa 14:27). The answer is no one. Accordingly, God has supernaturally equipped and enabled us to perform the supernatural virtue that He has purposed to be His ultimate and universal apologetic for the Gospel of the King.

The second reason that we can be assured of the effect of *virtue apologetics* is that God's just judgment of the human race partly depends on it working. God will send people to an eternity in Hell for not believing certain things, and because of His justice, He will ensure that humanity has no legitimate excuse for not believing those things.

This, again, is the purpose of Creation, and God has ensured that its convicting proclamation is clear enough so that, "**God's invisible qualities--His eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse**" (Rom 1:20). The authenticating evidence of the stars for God's existence will not be obscured by a few clouds. Likewise, the condemning proof of God's New Creations to the Gospel will not be sufficiently muffled by our failings, for like the message of Creation, God does not intend to give the world any legitimate excuse for ignoring it. And it is the virtue of His people that He has ordained as the universal and ultimate apologetic for the way of salvation.

B) God's Work in Us to Conform Us to Christ: *Phil 1:6*

How will God ensure that His ultimate purpose for *virtue apologetics* will be accomplished? We noted above the supernatural enablement that He has uniquely given His people. Similarly, God's commitment to *virtue apologetics* is clearly stated when the Apostle Paul promises the Philippian Christians, "**He Who began a good**

work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:6).

That "**good work**" is conforming us to the character of His Son (cf. Rom 8:29), the most virtuous Person who ever lived, so that we exhibit the same supernatural virtue He has. The Apostle's confidence that this transforming work would be completed in these Christians rested on the fact that, "**it is God [Himself] Who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose**" (Phil 2:13). While this is not the place to sort out the realms of our free will and God's controlling sovereignty, the Scriptures make it evident that He ultimately rules the Universe, and that He can and will work in us to make us "**will and to act according to His good purpose.**" That "**good purpose**" includes authenticating the exclusivity of the Gospel of the King with the miracle of our superior virtue.

C) God's Work Around Us to Allow Difficulties: *The seed on rocky soil*

Christ's parable of "the sower and the seed" illustrates several reasons why the superior virtue of born again Christians will be demonstrated in our world. Here, the King describes the responses of different people to the truth about the Gospel, and in the process, He clearly distinguishes between the virtue of believers and unbelievers.² First, He speaks of those whose real character will be exposed by God-ordained difficulties:

The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. (Matt 13:20-21)

Such falling away demonstrates a lack of such virtues as courage, loyalty, and perseverance, and it is in difficult circumstances in which such virtues are demonstrated. Endurance, and even joy in the midst of persecution is the mark of a true Christian (cf. Matt 5:10-12; 24:9-13; Acts 5:40-42; 13:49-52; 1 Cor 4:9-12; 2 Cor 6:4-5; 11:23-27; Col 1:24; 1 Thess 1:4-6; 2 Thess 1:4; Heb 10:32-34; 11:25-27; 1 Peter 3:15; Rev 2:3, 10), something that the merely professing Christian will not be able to do.

This is why God not only works "inside of us" to ensure the effectiveness of *virtue apologetics* as described above, but He also works sovereignly "outside of us" as well. He knows that when circumstances are easy, real virtue is more difficult to see and the moral differences between believers and unbelievers can be obscured.

Accordingly, the influential Reformed theologian John Gerstner (1914-1996) remarks:

[P]agans are often so pleasing largely because they have nothing much to test their patience or their virtue. . . . They may be born with silver spoons in their mouths and have so many of the gifts of this world that their charm reflects no great credit on them. . . . [I]t is not necessarily any favorable reflection on the effect of his philosophy or ethic that he is so-and-so, but merely an indication of the kindness of providence toward him.³

And this is why God will intentionally “turn up the heat” in an individual’s life by causing difficult circumstances to occur in their life, family, workplace, city, country, or world. Like metal, a person’s true qualities are exposed by fire, and God has the power, wisdom, and right to subject believers and unbelievers to His “heat” in order to ensure the effectiveness of *virtue apologetics*. It is in such difficult circumstances that the unregenerate get bitter and the regenerate get better. Difficulties expose the fake virtue of the one and refine the potential of real virtue in the other. As Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) put it:

True virtue never appears so lovely, as when it is most oppressed; and the divine excellency of real Christianity, is never exhibited with such advantage, as when under the greatest trials: then it is that true faith appears much more precious than gold!⁴

Edwards later explains this is precisely why the Scriptures call trials by this name:

These things are all over the Scripture called by the name of trials or proofs. And they are called by this name, because hereby [mere] professors are tried and proved of what sort they be, whether they be really what they profess and appear to be; and because in them, the reality of a supreme love to God is brought to the test of experiment and fact.⁵

Elsewhere again, Edwards writes eloquently of the purpose and blessing of our trials regarding our own assurance of our saving faith:

The surest way to know our gold, is to look upon it and examine it in God's furnace, where he tries it for that end, that we may see what it is. If we have a mind to know whether a building stands strong or no, we must look upon it when the wind blows. If we would know whether that which appears in the form of wheat, has the real substance of wheat, or be only chaff, we must observe it when it is winnowed. If we would know whether a staff be strong, or a rotten broken reed, we must observe it when it is leaned on, and weight is borne upon it. . . .

[W]hen God is said by these things to try men, and prove

them, to see what is in their hearts, and whether they will keep his commandments or no; we are not to understand, that it is for his own information, or that he may obtain evidence himself of their sincerity (for he needs no trials for his information); but chiefly for their conviction, and to exhibit evidence to their consciences.⁶

No doubt this is one reason why God allows difficult circumstances in the lives of His children. Therefore, Moses said to the Israelites:

Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order [for you] to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep His commands. (Deut 8:2; cf. Judg 2:21-22, 3:1-4; Exod 16:4; Job 23:10; Ps 66:10; James 1:2-3; 1 Pet 1:6-7; Rev. 3:17-18)

The fire of trial reveals the moral and spiritual superiority that Christians have over unregenerated humanity. The Apostle Paul speaks to this very thing when he tells the Philippians to not be:

frightened in any way by those who oppose [persecute] **you.** [Because] **This is a** [supernatural] **sign** [*endeixis*: proof, demonstration] **to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God** (1:28).

The Apostle believed that the supernatural fearlessness (a virtue) of the persecuted Christians would be a powerful apologetic argument for the Gospel to the unbelievers.

Nothing may demonstrate this more than the supernatural testimony of Christian martyrs who, like their Lord, have undoubtedly faced their deaths with more virtue than the martyrs of any other religion. A very, very great number of historical and contemporary examples could be given.⁷ Accordingly, Archibald Alexander (1752-1871), the nineteenth-century Princeton theologian, summarized the testimony of Christian martyrs when he wrote in his textbook on Christian apologetics:

Persons of all ages, of all conditions of life, and of both sexes, exhibited under protracted and cruel torments, a fortitude, a patience, a meekness, a spirit of charity and forgiveness, a cheerfulness, yea often a triumphant joy, of which there are no examples to be found in the history of the world. They rejoiced when they were arrested; cheerfully bade adieu to their nearest and dearest relatives; gladly embraced the stake; welcomed the wild beasts let loose to devour them; smiled on the horrible apparatus by which their sinews were to be stretched, and their bones dislocated and broken; uttered no complaints; gave no indication of pain when their bodies were enveloped in flames;

and when condemned to die, begged of their friends to interpose no obstacle to their felicity (for such they esteemed martyrdom), not even by prayer for their deliverance. By what spirit were these despised and persecuted people sustained? ⁸

A supernatural Spirit, the fruits of which are best observed in such difficult times and are the ultimate and universal truth that only Christians are possessed by God, and therefore, a possession of God.

Along these lines, Joseph Addison (1672-1719) wrote in his classic treatise, *Evidences of the Christian Religion*:

Under this head, I cannot omit that which appears to me a standing miracle in the three first centuries. I mean, that amazing and supernatural courage or patience which was shewn by innumerable multitudes of martyrs, in those slow and painful torments that were inflicted on them.

I cannot conceive a man placed in the burning iron chair at Lyons, amid the insults and mockeries of a crowded amphitheatre, and still keeping his seat; or stretched upon a gate of iron, over coals of fire, and breathing out his soul among the exquisite sufferings of such a tedious execution, rather than renounce his religion or blaspheme his Saviour. Such trials seem to me above the strength of human nature, able to overbear duty, reason, faith, conviction, nay, and the most absolute certainty of a future state.

Humanity, unassisted in an extraordinary manner, would have shaken off the present pressure, and have delivered itself out of such a dreadful distress, by any means that could have been suggested by it. We can easily imagine, that many persons, in so good a cause, might have laid down their lives at the gibbet, the stake, or the block but to expire leisurely among the most exquisite tortures, when they might come out of them, even by a mental reservation, or an hypocrisy, which was not without a possibility of being followed by repentance, and forgiveness, has something in it so far beyond the force and natural strength of mortals, that one cannot but think there was some miraculous power to support the sufferer. . . .

Let any man calmly lay his hand upon his heart, and, after reading these terrible conflicts in which the ancient martyrs and confessors were engaged, when they passed through such new inventions and varieties of pain as tired their tormentors, and ask himself, however zealous and sincere he is in his religion, whether, under such acute and lingering tortures, he could still have held fast his integrity, and have professed his faith to the last; without a supernatural assistance of some kind or other.

For my part, when I consider that it was not an unaccountable obstinacy in a single man, or in any particular set of men, in

some extraordinary juncture; but that there were multitudes of each fact, of every age, of different countries and conditions, who, for near 300 years together, made this glorious confession of their faith in the midst of tortures, and in the hour of death; I must conclude, that they were either of another make from what men are at present, or that they had such miraculous supports as were peculiar to those times of Christianity; when without them the very name of it might have been extinguished.

It is certain that the deaths and sufferings of the primitive Christians had a great share in the conversion of those learned Pagans who lived in the ages of persecution, which, with some intervals and abatements, lasted near three hundred years after our Saviour. Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Lactantius, Arnobius, and others, tell us, that this first of all alarmed their curiosity, roused their attention, and made them seriously inquisitive into the nature of that religion which could endue the mind with so much strength, and overcome the fear of death, nay, raised an earnest desire of it though it appeared in all its terrors.

This they found had not been affected by all the doctrines of those philosophers whom they had thoroughly studied, and who had been labouring at this great point. The sight of these dying and tormented martyrs engaged them to search into the history and doctrines of him for whom they suffered. The more they searched, the more they were convinced; till their conviction grew so strong, they themselves embraced the same truths, and either actually laid down their lives, or were always in readiness to do it, rather than depart from them.⁹

Such a testimonies should not surprise us as Christ Himself uniquely promised real Christians: “**My** [supernatural] **peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives**” (John 14:27), and neither does He give His peace to the world. By virtue of God’s unique presence in our life, we can not only have “**the** [miraculous] **peace of God, which transcends all understanding**” (Phil 4:7), but a peace that surpasses anything that non-Christians will experience in similarly difficult circumstances.

Yet, circumstances need not become so drastic for the superior virtue of born again Christians to be displayed. Indeed, the Apostle confirmed how easy it is to shine our moral light when he simply said:

Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life. (Phil 2:14-16)

If we are honest, we would admit that even in a relatively moral place as America, it is getting increasingly easier for Christians to shine their light.

In fact, God is so committed to *virtue apologetics* that He will intentionally discipline His people when their moral light fades. This purpose is implied when the Apostle remarks:

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us—they help us learn to endure. And endurance develops strength of character in us. (Rom 5:4 NLT)

Likewise, the writer to the Hebrews explains:

Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (Heb 12:10-11)

And it is these very difficulties that help us be more virtuous and a better witness to the superiority and exclusivity of the Christian faith, all of which makes such trials more than worthwhile.

While we have described contemporary tests of virtue that the Christian will uniquely pass, the Scriptures also speak of a future test that will demonstrate the same. The Apostle wrote:

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. (2 Tim 3:1-4)

When “**the last days**” occur, the moral state of unbelievers at that time will practically guarantee the effectiveness of *virtue apologetics*. Whatever superficial, self-centered, law abiding morality exists today, it will completely vanish when this world is about to end.

Along these lines, the King said that in the course of those days, His people:

will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of Me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other. . . . Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. (Matt 24:9-10, 12-13)

Those who understand that the regeneration and salvation that the Holy Spirit grants us in conversion is irreversible, will understand Christ's words here better. It is not real Christians who will be falling away, but the fake ones. Real Christians will **"stand firm to the end"** because all real Christians are really saved. But in those days there will be an **"increase of wickedness [and] the love of most will grow cold"** making the moral and spiritual superiority of born again believers more evident than ever. In that day, at least, only a blind fool will claim that there is no significant or perceptible difference in the virtues of regenerated followers of the King compared with the rest of the world.

The German Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) recognized where Nazism was headed in his day, and he eventually was martyred for standing for Christ against it. In one of his writings he quoted another man, whose words are important for all Christians anticipating persecution:

This commandment, that we should love our enemies and forgo revenge, will grow even more urgent in the holy struggle which lies before us . . . The Christians will be hounded from place to place, subjected to physical assault, maltreatment and death of every kind. We are approaching an age of wide-spread persecution . . .

Soon the time will come when we shall pray . . . It will be a prayer of earnest love for these very sons of perdition who stand around and gaze at us with eyes aflame with hatred, and who have perhaps already raised their hands to kill us . . . Yes, the Church which is really waiting for its Lord, and which discerns the signs of the times of decision, must fling itself with its utmost power and with the panalogy of its holy life, into this prayer of love.¹⁰

Because God intends the virtue of His people to be the ultimate apologetic for His Gospel, He is quite willing to allow the refining fires of difficulties, divine discipline, and even persecution to burn away the worldly dross that obscures the image of the King in us. Like many things in life such as athletics, a person's real potential is not demonstrated until the circumstances call for it. Such is the case with the potential for supernatural virtue in believers, and God will see to it that it is drawn out for His glory.

Because of the purpose and power of *virtue apologetics*, we should be able to find more comfort and endurance in the difficult circumstances we encounter. Not only is God allowing these to help us grow, but also to display our supernatural abilities in virtue to a watching world. Therefore, our temporary difficulties could be a part of leading someone to eternal salvation, which gives us even more reason to embrace them cheerfully and supernaturally.

Pastoral Practices

- Helping the saints properly respond to life's difficulties is a foremost task of Pastors. Next time you teach on this topic, consider adding the perspective described here, that at least one purpose for them is to be a witness to the power of God to unbelievers.

D) Our Resistance to the World's Temptations: *The seed in weedy soil*

Not only will the difficulties of this world clearly differentiate the virtue of believers and unbelievers, but the temptations of this world will do so as well. Accordingly, the King goes on to say in the parable of "the sower and the seed": "**The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful**" (Matt 13:22). To be "unfruitful" is to be damned (cf. John 15:1-6; Matt 3:10; 7:19; Luke 13:7-9). And the world will have a power over the unregenerate that will expose their true lack of virtue. Unbelievers will love the world and be controlled by it, real believers will not.

Accordingly, the Apostle John says:

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world. (1 John 2:15-16)

John makes it clear throughout his epistle that if "**the love of the Father is not in**" you, God is not in you and you don't have God.¹¹ And this is the condition of "**anyone [who] loves the world.**" And the love for the world in the unbeliever's life will eventually draw out of them the immorality that really rules their hearts. The enticements of this world will cause selfishness, pride, greed, fear, and lust to raise their ugly head and the superficially spiritual or moral person will be exposed for who they really are. Jonathan Edwards noted:

A man may be restrained from sin before he is converted; but when he is converted, he is not only restrained from sin, his very heart and nature is turned from it unto holiness: so that thenceforward he becomes a holy person, and an enemy to sin.

¹²

The spiritually regenerated hate sin and the temptations that cause it. But the unregenerate are no enemy to sin at all, and in fact welcome it as a friend when it serves their purpose. And sooner or later, sin will serve the unbeliever's purpose and their true moral and spiritual poverty and inconsistency will be exposed.

Finally, Christ describes the true believer in the parable of "the sower and the seed" when He says:

But the one who [truly] received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. (Matt 13:23)

The "**fruit**" here undoubtedly includes virtue, and compared with the relative absence of such fruit in the lives of those who do not have Christ, and therefore have no true spiritual roots or are spiritually choked, the real believers produce an abundance of virtue.

E) Tag! We're It

Some may remain unconvinced that God not only *intends* virtue to be His universal and ultimate apologetic for the Gospel of the King, but that He will also *ensure* that this intention is accomplished. To these we would first claim that accurate research on the morality of born again Christians would prove their moral superiority. However, elsewhere we explain the difficulty of such scientific data.¹³

Even so, we would also suggest that even if such research did not confirm the superior and supernatural virtue of born again Christians, the biblical expectation concerning *virtue apologetics* would not be changed. In other words, the Scriptures make it evident that the moral superiority of God's people was intended to be His universal and ultimate apologetic for the Gospel, and that remains true regardless of how well Christians may be fulfilling that mission.

If we cannot honestly and legitimately claim an overwhelming moral superiority over all followers of all other religions, then we have absolutely no business whatsoever of claiming that, "**there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus**" (1 Tim 2:5). Of course, the Gospel remains true regardless of our behavior, but an immoral Christian has no right to claim it is true.

Both believers and unbelievers can judge how well Christians today are fulfilling their God-given calling to be the moral salt and light of the world, but make no mistake about it, God is not going to give this calling to anyone else. Indeed, Christians may not always "shine" to their fullest potential, but the only real moral light that will ever shine in this world will come from Christians, and if we go dim, the whole

world goes dim, because God has ordained no other authentic spiritual and moral light source for the world. Tag! We're it.

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Our Father in Heaven, we thank You for the privilege of being Your representatives on this dark planet. Thank You that you have given us the supernatural power to prove ourselves to be Your followers and messengers. Help us to exercise it as we choose to be miraculously joyful, peaceful, and loving in even the most difficult circumstances, all to bring glory to You in both Heaven and on Earth.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) How does the fact of God's justice help to ensure that *virtue apologetics* will be effective?
- 2) What promise in Philippians 1:6 helps ensure that *virtue apologetics* will be effective?
- 3) How does Christ's example of the "seed in the rocky soil" demonstrate the eventual effectiveness of *virtue apologetics*?
- 4) What is at least one reason that God allows difficulties in the lives of His own children? Does this fact encourage you?
- 5) What are some of the most remarkable ways in which *virtue apologetics* has been demonstrated in the history of the Church?
- 6) How does Christ's example of the "seed in the weed soil" demonstrate the eventual effectiveness of *virtue apologetics*?
- 7) Why do we claim that *virtue apologetics* will be the easiest in "the last days"?
- 8) We claim that regardless of how well Christians carry out their responsibility ensure *virtue apologetics* throughout the world, that this approach remains God's universal and ultimate plan for

proving the Gospel to the world. Do you agree or disagree and why?

Publications & Particulars

¹ For further discussion regarding immorality among Christians see section 5.16.A.

² Contrary to some, the parable of The Sower and the Seed is not contrasting worldly Christians with holy ones, but rather fake Christians with real ones. For further discussion see section 6.6.B.

³ John Gerstner, *Reasons for Faith* (Harper & Row, n.d.), 222.

⁴ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, online at www.ccel.org, I.

⁵ Edwards, II.12.2.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ For a collection of modern examples of *virtue apologetics* see chapter 5.18.

⁸ Archibald Alexander, *Evidences of the Christian Religion*, at www.ccel.org.

⁹ Joseph Addison, *Evidences of the Christian Religion*, VII:4, 6-7

¹⁰ John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, (1978), 120-21.

¹¹ Other translations of 1 John 2:15 make it more apparent that John is saying to love the world is to not have God. The RSV renders it: "**If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him.**" The TEV is the same. The NEB reads: "**Anyone who loves the world is a stranger to the Father's love.**" Likewise, the CEV has it: "**If you love the world, you cannot love the Father.**" Other statements in John concerning the love of God being in us indicate that this is another way of John saying that we are Christians, and to not have such love in you is not to be a Christian (cf. 2:15; 3:17; 4:12, 16-18).

Accordingly, John Stott writes regarding 1 John 2:15:

The reason why we are enjoined not to love the world is because 'love for the Father' (RSV) and love for the world are mutually exclusive. If we are engrossed in the outlook and pursuits of the world which rejects Christ, it is evident that we have no love for the Father. 'Friendship with the world is hatred towards God' (Jas. 4:4). 'No-one can serve two masters' (Mt. 6:24; Lk. 16:13), and if we cannot serve God and mammon, neither can we love the Father and the world. (*The Letters of John*, TNTC, rev. ed., [Eerdmans, 1988], 104)

¹² John Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 3 vols. (Berea, 1991), III.7.

¹³ Regarding the difficulty of objective data on Christian morality see section 5.16.A.