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## Chapter 5.4

# Apologetics According to the Apostles

*Virtue, Not Arguments*

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### **Overall Objective**

To demonstrate the importance Paul & Peter placed on *virtue apologetics* and rescue 1 Peter 3:15 from the *intellectual apologists*.

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### **Primary Points**

- The list of the greatest miracles in Scripture is found in 1 Corinthians 13.
- Paul believed Christians possessing the Spirit were to be something more than "**mere men**" (1 Cor 3:3), but rather super-human in their morality.
- While levitation would be recognized as an amazing miracle because of the pervasiveness of gravity in Nature, so love should likewise be recognized because of the great power and pervasiveness of selfishness in humanity.
- No one, apart from the enablement of the only God, can unconditionally love sinful people like He does, and Christians do.
- The Apostle Paul appealed to his supernatural virtue as an authentication of being a messenger from God.
- *Virtue apologetics* is biblically and succinctly described when Paul refers to "**weapons of righteousness**" to defend his ministry.
- Miraculous power alone cannot prove a divine commission. Purity of life must go with the miracles to assure us that a teacher has come from God.
- *Virtue apologetics* is the Apostle Peter's emphasis throughout his epistle.
- When the Apostle writes: "**Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have**" (1 Pet 3:15), he is not referring to being asked for *intellectual* reasons for the *Christian faith* as many claim, but rather, the reason for the Christians' amazing *virtuous* faith in difficult circumstances, which would be the Gospel itself, not a defense of the Gospel.
- There is an unwarranted pressure that *intellectual apologists* place on us to "out-think" and "out-read" unbelievers in order to defend our faith. It is far more important, possible, biblical, and powerful to out-love them.

## A) ***Apologetics According to Paul: "Weapons of Righteousness"***

### A.1) ***Virtue Apologetics in the Church***

*Virtue apologetics* is repeatedly mentioned by the Apostle Paul in his writings. This is precisely the approach he was emphasizing when he said that slaves were to respect their masters so that **"our teaching may not be slandered"** (1 Tim 6:1), and **"that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive"** (Tit 2:10). Christian widows were to live in such a way as **"to give the enemy no opportunity for slander"** (1 Tim 5:14). Christian women in general were to be virtuous, **"so that no one will malign the word of God"** (Tit 2:5). The Apostle aptly describes anyone with mere religion as those who **"claim to know God, but by their actions they deny Him"** (Tit 1:16). Christians in a legal dispute were not to take their case **"in front of unbelievers"** (1 Cor 6:6) and expose themselves to ridicule for a lack of morality. *Virtue apologetics* is certainly being described by Paul when he writes the Thessalonians:

**Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.** (1 Thess 4:11-12)

It is also *virtue apologetics* that the Apostle is encouraging when he exhorts the Philippians:

**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 [the Gospel].** (Phil 2:14-16)

Here, the Apostle reminds us that the simple virtues of thanksgiving and peace making are to accompany our presentation of the Gospel.

An expectation of supernatural virtue was reflected in the Apostle's interaction with the Corinthians. In the third chapter of his first letter he writes:

**You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?" For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men?** (1 Cor 3:3-4)

Notice that Paul believed Christians possessing the Spirit were to be something more than **"mere men,"** but rather super-human in their moral virtue. While **"jealousy and quarreling"** is a very common vice among **"mere men,"** it is not to be expected among Christians. Accordingly, various translations have the Apostle accusing these people of acting **"like natural men,"** <sup>1</sup> as opposed to supernatural men; **"behaving like any merely human person"** <sup>2</sup> instead of something more than human; **"behaving like ordinary men"** (RSV), **"being merely human"** (ESV), **"acting like people of the world"** (NCV), and **"acting like those who are not Christians"** (NLT).

In fact, because their immorality continued by the time the Apostle wrote his second letter, at the conclusion of it he writes: **"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?"** (2 Cor 13:5). And the **"test"** was that they would **"not do anything wrong . . . but . . . do what is right"** (v. 6). <sup>3</sup> Super-human virtue is to so much be a part of the normal Christian life that if a person is not consistently exhibiting it, they bring even their claim to be a Christian into serious jeopardy. <sup>4</sup>

Finally, the Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians:

**Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the Gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God.** (Phil 1:27-28)

The Apostle expected extraordinary **"conduct . . . worthy of the Gospel of Christ"** from these Christians including a **"one spirit"** kind of unity and boldness in the face of persecution. Their remarkable virtue was to be precisely what set them apart and demonstrated as a supernatural **"sign"** to unbelievers that they were doomed, but the Christians saved. <sup>5</sup>

## **A.2) The Greatest Miracle is Love: 1 Cor 13:4-8**

In fact, do you want to see a list of the greatest, most supernatural miracles in the Bible? Maybe you think we should go to Exodus and the miracles of Moses, or 1 and 2 Kings to read about Elijah and Elisha, or surely the Gospels and Acts to study the amazing miracles of Christ and His Apostles. No, even from God's perspective, these are

not the places where we read of the greatest miracles. Rather, that list of the greatest miracles is found in the most definitive passage of Scripture on love:

**Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup>It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup>Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup>It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. <sup>8</sup>Love never fails.** (1 Cor 13:4-8)

Being "**patient**" and "**kind**" to people who hurt or hate you is miraculous. Not envying what others have, nor boasting about what you have is a moral miracle. Never being "**self-seeking**" but always others-seeking in all you do is an amazing miracle. Keeping "**no record of wrongs**" done to you and forgiving everyone is simply supernatural. Having an unconditional love that "**never fails**" no matter what happens is the greatest of all miracles occurring today.

This stuff just doesn't happen apart from the working of Almighty God. While levitation would be recognized as an amazing miracle because of the great power and pervasiveness of gravity in Nature, so love should likewise be recognized because of the great power and pervasiveness of selfishness in humanity. Patience, kindness, humility, selflessness, forgiveness, and faithfulness are the greatest miracles ever performed by anyone, even God Himself. They are, in fact, the most supernatural thing about God the Father and the Son when He was on this Earth.

Remember that the Apostle Paul is writing this in the context of arguing what truly is supernatural. Like the miracle-hungry Corinthians, he no doubt thinks that the abilities he has listed are miraculous including, "**gifts of healing . . . miraculous powers . . . speaking in different kinds of tongues** [human languages]," "**the interpretation of tongues,**" a "**gift of prophecy** [that] **can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and . . . a faith that can move mountains**" (1 Cor 12:9-10; 13:2).

However, the Apostle says that if those possessing such gifts "**have not love**" they are "**nothing**" (1 Cor 13:2) Why? The presence of such love is an infallible test of the Spirit's presence. The various miraculous gifts, as important as they were and as highly as Paul valued them, can all be duplicated by pagans. Doctors are "**healing**" people, scientists have solved a great number of "**mysteries,**" linguists can teach you foreign "**tongues,**" and excavators can "**move mountains.**" And as we demonstrate elsewhere, all of these miraculous gifts have been accomplished by demonically empowered people. <sup>6</sup>

But no one, apart from the enablement of the only God, can unconditionally love sinful people like He does, and Christians do. In a

world where every human is born with an irresistible and overpowering selfish nature, love is a much greater miracle than all of these miraculous gifts combined.

Like Christ, the Apostle commanded Christians to love their enemies when he wrote the Romans **“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. . . . Do not repay anyone evil for evil”** (12:14, 17). These are *very unnatural* things for humans to do, and highlight the supernatural essence of Christian love.

However, let us notice as well, that like Christ (cf. John 13:34-35; 15:12-13), and unlike too much of American Christianity, the Apostles focus on our love for other Christians, not unbelievers. The Apostle Paul shares the balance when he writes: **“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers”** (Gal 6:10). It is not that we should not love those outside of the **“family of believers,”** but that it is in the local church where real *agapē*, patient, forgiving, humble love is called on, and demonstrated the most.

### **A.3) Virtue Apologetics in Paul’s Life**

Like Christ, His Apostles authenticated themselves as sources and messengers of superior spiritual truth with the miracles they performed (cf. Acts 14:3; 2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:3-4). But the Apostle Paul also appealed to his supernatural virtue as an authentication of being a messenger from God. For example, when Paul spoke to an angry crowd in Jerusalem, he introduced his speech with, **“Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense [apologia]”** (Acts 22:1). What then was the Apostle’s apologetic approach? He sought to prove that Christ had personally commissioned him to, **“be a witness to all men”** (v. 15) of salvation in Christ by reminding them that he had previously, **“persecuted the followers of this Way to their death”** (v. 4; cf. vs. 5, 19-20; 2 Tim 1:12-13). He testified to his supernaturally changed life in order to provide proof for his supernatural claims.

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

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

Accordingly, he wrote, **“we [supernaturally] put up with anything rather than hinder the Gospel of Christ”** (1 Cor 9:12). Even though the Apostle often worked authenticating miracles (cf. Acts 14:3; 2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:3-4), an important approach to proving the superiority of his spiritual authority was his supernatural virtue.

Accordingly, in a letter essentially dedicated to defending the divine authority of his ministry (2 Corinthians) he begins by saying:

**Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God** (2 Cor 1:12).

No doubt Paul’s Gospel was from God (cf. Gal 1:11-12), and his miracle working abilities (cf. 2 Cor 12:12), but equally supernatural was his **“holiness and sincerity that are from God”** (2 Cor 1:12) which likewise authenticated his message.

Throughout the epistle the Apostle Paul attempts to prove that he has God’s truth, as opposed to the **“false apostles”** (2 Cor 11:13), based on his superior virtue. We read again:

**Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God”** (2 Cor 2:17).

He also mentions the great suffering he had endured for the sake of his Gospel, which was no doubt greater than what his opponents were willing to suffer for their false gospel (cf. 2 Cor 11:21-28).

Likewise, another apologetic passage is chock full of references to supernatural virtue when the Apostle writes:

**We put no stumbling block in anyone’s path, so that our ministry [and the Gospel] will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left** (2 Cor 6:3-7; cf. 2 Tim 3:10-14).

Here, the **“power of God”** is manifested in **“sincere love”** and **“truthful speech”** and the powerful proof that the Apostle is relying on to silence his critics is **“weapons of righteousness.”** One could hardly suggest a phrase that would reflect *virtue apologetics* better than that.

The Apostle followed the same apologetic approach in his writings to the Thessalonians, reminding them that he and His companions

lived a supernatural life of love among them in order to not hinder their reception of the Gospel, or their belief in Paul as a messenger of it:

**You know how we lived among you for your sake. . . . As Apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you,<sup>7</sup> but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.<sup>8</sup> We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the Gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.<sup>9</sup> Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.<sup>10</sup> You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.** (1 Thess 1:5; 2:1-11).

The NLT translates 1:5: “[Y]ou know that the way we lived among you was further proof of the truth of our message.” Several commentators agree with this meaning. Albert Barnes (1798-1870) commented:

He means here that he and his fellow-laborers had set them an example, or had shown what Christianity was by their manner of living, and that the Thessalonians had become convinced that the religion which they taught was real. The holy life of a preacher goes far to confirm the truth of the religion which he preaches, and is among the most efficacious means of inducing them to embrace the gospel.<sup>7</sup>

Likewise, John MacArthur writes:

He told the Thessalonian believers that the spiritual power manifest in his life and the lives of his fellow ministers affirmed the accuracy of their preaching. The apostle (and no doubt Silas and Timothy, as well) was truthful, humble, selfless, gentle, caring, passionate, and compassionate toward the Thessalonians. He worked among them with his own hands so that he would not have to accept any money from them (2 Thess. 3:7-8). The Thessalonians had not only heard the gospel preached, they had seen it lived out in Paul, whose life was a rich example of the power of the gospel he preached (see 2 Cor. 1:12).<sup>8</sup>

The Apostle’s writings abound with references to *virtue apologetics* for the messenger of spiritual truth (cf. Acts 20:18-19, 33-34; 1 Cor 4:9-13; 10:31-11:1; 2 Cor 4:1-2; 11:4-12; 2 Thess 3:7-10; 1 Tim 4:12-16). Accordingly, the great Baptist theologian Augustus H. Strong (1836-1921) wrote many years ago:

Miracles, therefore, do not stand alone as evidences. Power alone cannot prove a divine commission. Purity of life and doctrine must go with the miracles to assure us that a religious teacher has come from God. . . . No amount of miracles could convince a good man of the divine commission of a known bad man.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, we are given an expanded understanding of what the King meant when He told His disciples that before they could fulfill their mission as His witnesses, they must be **“clothed with power from on high”** (Luke 24:49) and **“baptized with the Holy Spirit”** (Acts 1:5). Accordingly, He told them, **“you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth”** (Acts 1:8). Obviously, this supernatural **“power”** included the ability to work physical miracles. However, it no doubt also empowered them to have the supernatural virtue necessary to be authenticated Apostles (representatives) of Christ as well.

### **Pastoral Practices**

- Do you highlight the miracle of love in your church? Surely if someone were physically healed in your church it would be noted. How about the more important miracle of sacrificial humble service? Be more diligent to celebrate this miracle before your people as well.

## **B) Apologetics According to the Apostle Peter**

### **B.1) Live Such Good Lives Among the Pagans: 1 Pet 2:12**

When the Apostles Peter and John were brought before the Jewish authorities for healing a lame man, it does not seem the officials were impressed at all with the physical miracle, not knowing by what power it had been performed (cf. Acts 4:5-7). However, we do read: **“When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus”** (Acts 4:13). To be astonished is biblical language for a miracle, and it was supernatural courage in the face of opposition that spoke to these hardened religionists the most.

*Virtue apologetics* is the Apostle Peter's emphasis throughout his epistle. The Christians are encouraged to be holy, in contrast to those who live in spiritual "**ignorance**" (cf. 1:14-16). The result of being "**born again**" through "**obeying**" the Gospel of Christ is to be morally "**purified**" and exercising a "**sincere**" and deep "**love for your brothers**" (cf. 1:22-23). *Virtue apologetics* is the reason the Apostle writes:

**Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, [and you need to defend your faith] they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us.** (1 Pet 2:11-12).

Accordingly, Wayne Grudem notes in his commentary on 1 Peter that *virtue apologetics* is the central theme of the remainder of the letter:

Thus [1 Peter 2:11-12] form a brief prologue to the second half of the letter and in fact state in summary form what Peter will explain in detail in 2:13-5:11: Christians living in an unbelieving society must avoid sinful desires and continually maintain exemplary patterns of life, so that unbelievers will be saved and God glorified. There is no reason to doubt that such a strategy for evangelism would still work today.<sup>10</sup>

Accordingly, the Apostle describes the God-given mandate for *virtue apologetics* when he writes concerning their conduct toward authorities, "**[I]t is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men**" (2:15). The Apostle prescribes *virtue apologetics* for the home as well as the world when he says:

**Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.** (1 Pet 3:1)

Submission, especially to an unkind spouse, is a great, God-glorifying miracle, so much so that the Apostle suggests it is the most powerful apologetic to an unbelieving husband. Such willing humility in a person is non-existent among the followers of any other religion, and even the most hardened husbands can recognize this and "**be won over without words by the behavior of their wives**" when they supernaturally exhibit the miracle of such servanthood.

The Apostle continues his plea for *virtue apologetics* in chapter three when he commands: "**Do not repay evil with evil or insult**

**with insult, but with blessing . . . Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened”** (vs. 9, 14).

## **B.2) Give the Reason for Your Amazing Virtue: 1 Pet 3:15**

Then in verses 15-16 the Apostle writes:

**But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.**

This is, of course, the classic text used to support *intellectual apologetics* and a biblical mandate for Christians to be well versed in historical, scientific, and philosophical reasons for the superiority of the Christian faith. On the contrary, we would suggest that the Apostle Peter is not referring to *intellectual apologetics* at all, but is in fact, clearly speaking of the power of *virtue apologetics*.

In essence, Peter is anticipating an unbeliever being astonished by the virtue of these Christians and asking them why they have those virtues in such difficult circumstances. The answer would be “I’m a follower of Christ Who gives me the Holy Spirit.” The answer Peter is referring to is not an intellectual, philosophical defense of Christianity, but rather, the Gospel of Jesus Christ itself! Not a defense of the Gospel, but a simple explanation of it, because the virtue has already won a hearing.

Contrary to many Christian apologists as demonstrated below, the “pre-evangelism” that the Apostle is talking about is *virtue*, not answering “tough questions about our faith,” as claim as demonstrated below. The question these unbelievers are asking in this context is NOT “Why are you a Christian?” with the answer being philosophical answers. The question being anticipated here is “Why are you so virtuous?” with the answer being “I have believed the Gospel of Jesus Christ and He now lives in me.”

Accordingly, Dr. Grudem writes:

[S]ince the questioning is concerning the hope that is in you, Peter must be assuming that the inward hope of Christians results in lives so noticeably different that unbelievers are prompted to ask why they are so distinctive [in virtue, not intellect] (cf. 4:4).<sup>11</sup>

The answer would be, of course, “We are Christians,” not “this is all the intellectual reasons you should believe in Christ.” As Peter Achtemeier puts it in his respected *Hermenia* commentary, the Apostle

Peter is referring to a "readiness to explain what it is that causes them to act as they do"<sup>12</sup> the answer again being, the indwelling of God, not philosophical arguments about God.

Let us notice that the context of this chapter is the rather severe persecution the Christians are being subjected to.<sup>13</sup> People were being "evil" to them and insulting them (3:9). They were being spoken "maliciously against" and subjected to "slander" (3:16). The Apostle tells these Christians that the unbelievers "heap abuse on you" (4:4). There was the threat of "harm" and that they would "suffer for what is right" (3:13, cf. 17; 4:1), such that normally they should "be frightened" (3:13-14), instead of having "hope" (v. 15).

In response to their persecution, these Christians were to "be compassionate and humble" (v. 8). They were not to "repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this [virtue apologetics] you were called" (v. 9). They were to be "eager to do good" and "suffer for what is right" and as a result they would be "blessed [makarioi]" (v. 14), the Greek literally meaning "to be happy."<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, the KJV reads, "[I]f ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye." Likewise the TEV translation reads, "But even if you should suffer for doing what is right, how happy you are!"

Because these Christians have "set apart Christ as Lord" (v. 15) they are exhibiting "good behavior in Christ" (v. 16) and living in the power of the Holy Spirit with His fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, even in the face of opposition and difficulty (cf. Phil 1:28). Therefore, the Apostle anticipates that the supernatural virtue, or "the hope" and "good behavior" that they have in the midst of such difficulties will amaze the pagans enough to ask about the source of such virtue. And "the reason for the hope" would be their relationship with Christ.

Therefore, what Christians need to have "prepared" is not intellectual arguments and answers to support the Gospel, but a clear description of the Gospel! Notice that the unbelievers are not asking the persecuted Christians for the philosophical or historical reasons for the *Christian faith*, but the reasons for their personal amazing faith in difficult circumstances. The Christians are being asked for "the reason for" their ability to have supernatural "hope" in the midst of suffering.

At this point, there is no need for further apologetics, the *intellectual* kind or otherwise. The Apostle anticipates that the supernatural ability to have hope practiced by these persecuted Christians (i.e. *virtue apologetics*), has already won them a hearing of the Gospel itself, not a hearing for mere philosophical and historical reasons for the Christian faith (i.e. *intellectual apologetics*). These

astonished unbelievers are not asking for a *defense* of the Gospel, but are already open to a simple *explanation* of it! And it would have, in fact, been a great mistake for these Christians to launch into *intellectual apologetics* instead of a simple explanation as to why they possessed supernatural virtue.

Along these lines, John Calvin commented on this passage:

But it ought to be noticed, that Peter here does not command us to be prepared to solve any question that may be mooted; for it is not the duty of all to speak on every subject. . . . Peter had in view no other thing, than that Christians should make it evident to unbelievers that they truly worshipped God, and had a holy and good religion. . . . *Hope* here is by a metonymy to be taken for faith. Peter, however, as it has been said, does not require them to know how to discuss distinctly and refinedly every article of the faith, but only to shew that their faith in Christ was consistent with genuine piety [i.e. *virtue*].<sup>15</sup>

We have many examples throughout Church history of the kind of apologetics the Apostle Peter was speaking of,<sup>16</sup> but the following testimony of a Chinese Christian concerning her harsh and hardened jailer will have to suffice at this time:

When jailer Kane next came on duty, she did not seem as stern as before. Again she stood in front of my cell. "It's really strange," she said. For the first time I had the impression she was speaking to me. I opened my eyes hesitantly. "What is strange, Mrs. Kane?" I asked her.

"The faces of people these days. It isn't only in the prisons. It's on the outside, as well. Everybody is nervous and tense and angry. Even the children look wicked. I must confess that the faces of people irritate me. That's why I find this cell so different." I was surprised and asked her what she meant.

She had difficulty expressing herself. "What shall I say?" she began. I--I guess it's because I find the faces of those in this cell peaceful."

"Peaceful?" I echoed. "In here?"

"That's right. Your face and that of the prisoner in cell three and the one in cell five are all peaceful." . . .

The ones she mentioned were believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. . . .

"Would you tell me in what way our faces are strange, Mrs. Kane?"

"Well," she began hesitantly, "it almost seems as though you have the faces of angels. And I can't understand it. Nowhere else have I found peaceful faces in this world."

That night a change occurred in our relationship, and I asked if I could talk to her. "You said that our faces look peaceful," I

began, "and you said it was strange. Would you like to know why we can look peaceful in such a place as this?"

"Yes," she said, "I want to know about it." <sup>17</sup>

This is a perfect example of the Apostle Peter's admonition to, "**Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the** [ability to have] **hope**" (1 Pet 3:15) in the midst of difficult circumstances as discussed elsewhere. <sup>18</sup> 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. Likewise, real apologetics is not studying in order to comfortably answer difficult questions, but rather humbly suffering in order to display a supernatural peace and joy. And 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.

The unfortunate bias in American Christianity toward *intellectual apologetics*, and the subsequent disregard of *virtue apologetics*, is demonstrated by the popularity of a distorted and misleading interpretation of 1 Peter 3:15. *The Life Application Bible Commentary* is typical when it explains:

All Christians must be ready and able to give a reasonable defense of their faith [belief in Christianity, not an explanation of their ability to have hope]. They need not be apologists or theologians, but every Christian ought to be able to clearly explain his or her own reasons for being a Christian.

Christianity is founded on evidence; and though it cannot be supposed that every Christian will be able to understand all that is involved in what are called the evidences of Christianity, or to meet all the objections of the enemies of the gospel; yet every man who becomes a Christian should have such intelligent views of religion, and of the evidences of the truth of the Bible, that he can show to others that the religion which he has embraced has claims to their attention. <sup>19</sup>

Likewise, in the Introduction to *The Apologetics Study Bible*, Kenneth Boa under the article "What is Apologetics": "The idea of offering a reasoned defense of the faith is evident in . . . especially 1 Pt 3:15." <sup>20</sup>

Again, and on the contrary, the unbelievers are not asking for intellectual reasons for the Christian faith, but rather the "**reason**" for the Christians' supernatural ability to have "**hope**" in the midst of persecution. And the answer would be the Gospel of the King itself, not "the evidences of Christianity" as claimed above.

Likewise, one of the foremost *intellectual apologists*, the rightly respected Norm Geisler, clearly promotes this unfortunate error when he writes:

The most important reason to do [*intellectual*] apologetics is that God told us to do so. The classic statement is I Peter 3:15, which says, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."

This verse tells us to be ready. We may never run across someone who asks tough [*intellectual*] questions about our faith, but we should still be ready to respond if someone does. Being ready is not just a matter of having the right information available, it is also an attitude of readiness and eagerness to share the [*intellectual*] truth of what we believe. We are to give a[n] [*intellectual*] reason to those who ask the questions. It is not expected that everyone needs pre-evangelism, but when they do need it, we must be able and willing to give them an [*intellectual*] answer.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, I. Howard Marshall comments in the *IVP New Testament Commentary*:

The text probably implies no more than that Christians should always seize such opportunities when they arise, but it is fair to add that they will be unable to capitalize on the opportunities if they are not already prepared with a coherent [*intellectual*] understanding of faith and some practice in rehearsing it.<sup>22</sup>

Along the same lines, the well known Creationist Henry Morris quotes 1 Peter 3:15 and writes, "The Lord expects Christian believers, as his chosen and called witnesses, to be able to give an answer and this implies life-long study of both his word and his world."<sup>23</sup>

Likewise, Dr. MacArthur has written:

Effective Christian witness includes being able to answer questions about the faith. Peter commanded believers to "sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence" (1 Pet. 3:15).<sup>24</sup>

More recently, Sean McDowell has quoted 1 Peter 3:15 to support the claim:

The biblical evidence is clear: All Christians are to be trained in apologetics . . . This involves learning how to respond to common objections raised against the Christian faith. . .<sup>25</sup>

Such an approach is nothing new, as Dr. Barnes had commented on 1 Peter 3:15:

[W]e are to state the reasons why we regard the system of religion which we have embraced as true—implies, that we should be acquainted with the evidences of the truth of Christianity, and be able to state them to others. It should also be an object with every Christian to increase his acquaintance with the evidences of the truth of religion, not only for his own stability and comfort in the faith, but that he may be able to defend religion if attacked, or to guide others if they are desirous of knowing what is truth.<sup>26</sup>

More recently, perhaps the most famous Christian apologist, Josh McDowell, in his excellent reference, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, also misinterprets the question being asked by these enquirers in 1 Peter 3:15 when he writes:

The manner in which the word “defense” is used in 1 Peter 3:15 denotes the kind of defense one would make to a legal inquiry, asking, “Why are you a Christian?” A believer is responsible to give an adequate answer to the question.<sup>27</sup>

On the contrary, the question being asked in 1 Peter 3:15 is *not* “Why are you a Christian?,” but rather, “Why do you have the ability to have hope even though you are being persecuted?” And the answer was to be, because *we are Christians*, not intellectual reasons why they were Christians.

Unfortunately, a recent collection of essays from leading *intellectual apologists* is entitled *To Everyone An Answer*,<sup>28</sup> clearly referring to 1 Peter 3:15. Yet, the description of the book has nothing to do with 1 Peter 3:15.

Likewise, the well respected Christian apologist William L. Craig misinterprets the Apostle Peter as well when he says:

Thus, against those who think that it is inappropriate to present arguments and evidence to show that the Christian faith is true stands the New Testament involvement in just such a project, both in the example of Jesus and the Apostles and in entire books dedicated to this purpose. Indeed, we are actually commanded by Scripture to have ready an apologia to present to any unbeliever who asks us the reason for our faith (1 Peter 3:15).<sup>29</sup>

First, notice the distortion of the Scripture here by suggesting that the Christians are being asked for a defense of the “Christian faith” in general, rather than the “**reason**” for their ability to have faith (“**hope**”) in the midst of their suffering. We agree with Dr. Craig that “we are actually commanded” by the Apostle here to do something, but we had better properly understand what it is. It is not to “**be**

**prepared** "to present arguments and evidence to show that the Christian faith is true" as Dr. Craig suggests. Rather, in the context of unbelievers noticing a Christian's supernatural ability to exercise virtue in difficult circumstances, we are to be prepared to present the simple Gospel.

Which, by the way, may give many Christians a great deal of relief. Far too many of them have been intimidated by *intellectual apologists* into thinking all of us need to be like them, and they have misused 1 Peter 3:15 to do so. On the contrary, the Apostle is commanding something all Christians can do the very first day they become Christians: act with supernatural virtue and tell people the reason why they can.

Not only is *intellectual apologetics* not being commanded here as so many suggest, but we are not at all sure what examples of *intellectual apologetics* in the life of "Jesus and the Apostles" that Dr. Craig would be referring to. As we have demonstrated elsewhere, their practice was to preach the simple Gospel, not *intellectual apologetics*.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, the rightly respected James Emery White, former President of Gordon-Conwell seminary has written of his past:

I was surrounded by very bright people who were not Christ-followers and were eager to explain why. To hold on to my faith, much less contend for it, would demand fulfilling the Bible's clear and commanding exhortation to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15). I knew I had to out-think those who were challenging my faith; and to out-think them, I had to out-read them.<sup>31</sup>

Here is some of that unwarranted pressure that *intellectual apologists* place on Christians to "out-think" and "out-read" unbelievers in order to defend our faith and influence them. On the contrary, and with all due respect Dr. White, it is far more important, possible, biblical, and powerful to out-love them.

These are all good, godly men we're sure, but their bias toward *intellectual apologetics* and against *virtue apologetics* would seem to unfortunately lead them to misinterpret 1 Peter 3:15. And none of our critiques are intended to unnecessarily devalue the great value that evidences for the faith have for Christians

However, what Christians need to have "**prepared**" is not intellectual arguments and answers to support the Gospel, but a clear description of the Gospel! And the supernatural virtue is to also be a part of sharing the reason for our ability to have hope, as the Apostle Peter instructs them to do it with "**gentleness and respect**" even toward "**those who speak maliciously against,**" and "**slander**" them (3:16).

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.

### **Pastoral Practices**

- Are all the people in your church “**prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks [them] to give the reason for the hope that [they] have**” as the Apostle instructed? Again, we are not talking about *intellectual apologetics* but the simple, powerful Gospel itself.

Unfortunately, all kinds of ministries have developed models for training people in evangelism that present the Gospel in various ways, many claiming to be the best. Choose one that is simple and can be shared with a small booklet. We recommend the one published by Evangelism Explosion and available at <https://www.evangelismexplosion.org/shop/Inventory.jsp?category=TRACTS+FOR+WITNESSING>.

Don't be concerned with equipping everyone to answer all the tough questions people may come up with. It will be a great accomplishment if everyone can simply share their testimony and a clear, accurate explanation of the Gospel.

- One reason that people in our church may not have many opportunities to share the Gospel is that they are not being supernaturally virtuous enough in their workplaces and neighborhoods. Encourage them to perform the miracle of love more, not only because God has enabled them uniquely to do so, but to draw more people to Christ! As one man put it: Our people should be asking themselves, “Does my life demand an explanation?”

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## ***Extras & Endnotes***

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### **A Devotion to Dad**

*Our Father in Heaven, thank You again for the power to be a living miracle of love and holiness in such a selfish, wicked world. Help me to make the most of every opportunity to shine my light for You to bring glory to You on this Earth where You get so little, and to draw my lost brothers and sisters to You.*

### **Gauging Your Grasp**

- 1) What are some examples of *virtue apologetics* in Paul's writings?
- 2) Where do we claim is the list of the greatest miracles in Scripture? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 3) Besides performing miracles, what else was supernatural about the Apostle Paul that authenticated his ministry as a messenger of God?
- 4) What do we claim is a major theme of 1 Peter and why?
- 5) What is the common interpretation of 1 Peter 3:15? What is our interpretation of this passage? Which one do you believe is correct and why?
- 6) Why do we claim *intellectual apologetics* puts an unnecessary pressure on Christians?

### **Publications & Particulars**

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<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, (TNTC) (Eerdmans, 1985, reprint 1999), 62.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC) (Eerdmans, 2000), 286.

<sup>3</sup> In addition to 2 Corinthians 13:5, we believe the Apostle could be interpreted even in 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 as not being certain of their salvation. Obviously, all modern translations have the Apostle describing the Corinthians as "**infants in Christ** [*en Christō*], leading most commentators to conclude he knows they are Christians. But how could he know this,

especially when he clearly says they are not acting like Christians? At the very least, some nine months later when 2 Corinthians is sent, Paul clearly has his doubts based on 13:5.

Accordingly, it may be unwise to interpret the Apostle as making the dogmatic and sweeping statement that he believed everyone he was addressing in the Corinthian church was a born again believer.

In fact, while NT scholar Anthony Thiselton believes, "Paul has no doubt that the addressees have received the Spirit" he translates the Greek of 1 Corinthians 3:1 in the following way: "**I could not address you as people of the Spirit, but as people moved entirely by human drives, as people who in Christian terms are infantile**" (286). That could have a substantially different meaning than the usual understanding of being "in Christ."

Dr. Thiselton supports his translation with the following:

Often Paul uses [*en Christō*] in the full theological sense of *being-in-Christ*. But as J. Weiss has conclusively shown, he uses the phrase in at least five distinct ways, of which the above ["in Christian terms" "pertaining to Christ"] is only one category (Weiss, *Earliest Christianity*, 2:468-69, esp. n. 22.).

To translate [merely] *in Christ* runs the further risk of seeming to suggest that a Christ-centered faith can yield to a more "advanced" Spirit-centered faith, which is closer to the view of some at Corinth than to Paul, who would utterly reject it.

J. Francis suggests, "*from a Christian point of view,*" which approximates Weiss and our **in Christian terms** (289, fn 344).

If Paul in fact was saying, "from a Christian point of view you are infantile" it would seem this would carry the spiritually condemning nature of the rest of the paragraph, his belief that they are not acting like Christians, and his later doubts some months later that many of them may not be Christians. This would also avoid the popular but unbiblical and harmful error that contradicts at least 1 John, that there is such a thing as a habitually sinning "carnal" Christian.

<sup>4</sup> For further discussion of the fact that supernatural virtue must accompany a believable profession of Christian faith see the arguments against some subjective feeling of a "testimony of the Spirit" in chapter 3.4 and the biblical attributes of *saving faith* in chapter 6.3.

<sup>5</sup> It is surprising that many commentators either downplay the effect of the "**sign**," mentioned by the Apostle in Philippians 1:28, or suggest it is a sign only to Christians. For example, Peter O'Brien writes in his well regarded *New International Greek Testament Commentary*:

As an Attic [Greek] law term it [*endeixis*: "sign"] denoted 'proof' obtained by an appeal to facts and may be rendered a 'sure sign' (NEB, JB, Gpd) or 'clear omen' (Mft, RSV). The point is not that the adversaries themselves see this (the dative . . . is one of reference), though perhaps they may have a dim awareness of it. (*The Epistle to the Philippians NIGTC* [Eerdmans, 1991], 155; see also Homer Kent, *Expositors Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelien ed. CD-ROM [Zondervan, n.d.].)

On the contrary, Paul clearly says that the Philippians' virtue, "**is a sign to**

**them** [unbelievers],” and the fact that *endeixis* is in the dative form as an indirect object does not alter this. And “dim awareness” does not reflect the meaning of the word Paul uses for “**sign**.” Nonetheless, it is difficult to find a commentary that will take Paul at face value here.

<sup>6</sup> For more on demonic miracle working see chapters 11.11-13.

<sup>7</sup> Albert Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Findex.Com, 1999), 1 Thess 1:5.

<sup>8</sup> John MacArthur, *MacArthur’s New Testament Commentary*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Parsons Technology, 1997), 1 Thess 1:5.

<sup>9</sup> Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 3 Vols. (Judson, 1907, 1953), 128.

<sup>10</sup> Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, (TNTC) (Eerdmans, 1988, repr. 1999), 117.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>12</sup> Dr. Achtemeier writes concerning 1 Peter 14b-15:

These verses, along with v. 16, explain how the Christians are to react to suffering imposed on them because of their faith. The first element in that reaction (v. 14b) is to be lack of fear . . . The second element (v. 15a) is to be faithfulness to Christ as Lord, again expressed in the form of a command, followed by an explanation (v.15b) of how that faithfulness is to be carried out, namely, by a readiness to explain what it is that causes them to act as they do. (*1 Peter*, (*Hermeneia*), [Augsburg, 1996], 231-2)

<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, Dr. Grudem comments at verse 13:

Here Peter begins a new section dealing specifically with the problem of persecution by unbelievers. Although this theme has been hinted at in 1:6; 2:12, 15, 19; 3:1 and 9, this is the first time Peter confronts persecution as his primary subject and deals with it at length. (151).

Likewise, Dr. Achtemeier writes:

Because the theme of this passage-Christian life in the midst of hostility-is familiar throughout the letter, one is dealing here with the core of the author’s message to his readers who are facing social oppression and persecution. (229).

<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, the common translation of *makarioi* here as “**blessed**” gives many the connotation that Peter is referring to some future reward. On the contrary, Peter expects these believers to be experiencing *makarioi* in the midst of their present suffering. Thus the NIV, “**you are makarioi**.” Likewise, Dr. Grudem writes: “the Gk. text does not contain a verb but a plural adjective which applies to the readers, ‘if you suffer ... (you) blessed ones’, and it most naturally indicates blessing which comes at the same time as the suffering, not after it.” (151)

Secondly, “**blessed**” is not a good translation of *makarioi* in our culture which often views it as being rewarded. Originally in ancient Greek it meant to be “free from daily cares and worries,” later coming to mean simply to “be happy.” (U. Becker, “Blessing” in *NIDNTT*, 1:215). Such happiness was understood as being related to being favored by God. Accordingly, Dr.

Carson comments on the use of *makarioi* in the Beatitudes: "Usually *makarios* describes the man who is singularly favored by God and therefore in some sense "happy"; but the word can apply to God (1 Tim 1:11; 6:15). (*Matthew*, 5:3)

Thus, we would suggest the following translations are the best:

"[I]f ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye" (KJV; cf. NEB).

**"But even if you should suffer for doing what is right, how happy you are!"** (TEV)

Perhaps the worst translation is the NLT which reads **"But even if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it."** (cf. CEV, LB)

- <sup>15</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Bible Commentaries*; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).
- <sup>16</sup> For many other examples and testimonies to *virtue apologetics* see chapter 5.18.
- <sup>17</sup> Excerpted from Esther Ahn Kim, *If I Perish* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1977), 247-48.
- <sup>18</sup> For discussion of 1 Peter 3:15 see section 5.4.B.2.
- <sup>19</sup> *Life Application Bible Commentary*, Grant Osborne, ed., Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Findex.com), 1 Pet 3:15.
- <sup>20</sup> Kenneth Boa "What is Apologetics?" *The Apologetics Study Bible*, (Holman, 2007).
- <sup>21</sup> Norm Geisler, "Apologetics" *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics (BECA)* (Baker, 1999).
- <sup>22</sup> I. Howard Marshall, 1 Peter, *IVP New Testament Commentary* (Electronic Edition STEP Files (Parsons, 1997)
- <sup>23</sup> Henry Morris, *For Time and Forever*, 86.
- <sup>24</sup> MacArthur, *Commentary*, Acts 17:26-34.
- <sup>25</sup> Sean McDowell, "Introduction," in *Apologetics for a New Generation*, Sean McDowell, ed. (Harvest House, 2009), 18-19.
- <sup>26</sup> Barnes, *loc. cit.*
- <sup>27</sup> Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (1999), xxx.
- <sup>28</sup> *To Everyone An Answer*, (Intervarsity, 2004)
- <sup>29</sup> William L. Craig, *Five Views on Apologetics*, (Zondervan, 2000), 43.
- <sup>30</sup> For discussion of the approach that Jesus and the Apostles had to evangelism, which had virtually nothing to do with *intellectual apologetics*, see chapter 5.13.
- <sup>31</sup> James E. White, *A Mind for God* (Intervarsity, 2006), 36.