A Distinctively Biblical Apologetic

A Sequel to *The Defense, the Witness, and the Light*

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Abstract

In *The Defense, the Witness, and the Light* I mapped the kinds of Christian apologetics. This paper is the sequel. It sets out an apologetic drawn from the biblical writers and the church of the first centuries, offered as an alternative in its own right, not as a seventh school on the old map. My thesis is that the apologetic Scripture describes and the early church practiced is a prayed and Spirit-dependent life, ordered around the gospel and visible enough that people ask about it; that it is ready, when they ask, with a reasoned answer that starts from what God has already said and shown, prepares the ground with what the hearer already lives by, and brings him into the Scriptures as soon as possible; and that it understands its own labor as sowing, watering, and reaping in a field that belongs to God, who alone gives the growth. Part One begins with God's part: the field is God's, prayer is the first apologetic act, and the Spirit converts. Part Two turns to the life that prompts the question, shaped by the Sermon on the Mount and set on a stand. Part Three gives the answer when the question comes. Part Four keeps distinct the word that is sown and the people who are sown. Part Five places this apologetic beside the kinds named in the first paper. Nothing here is offered as a technique that converts, and nothing as a substitute for argument.

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The church has been given more than a list of arguments. She has been given a field, a seed, a lamp, a question, and a Spirit. In *The Defense, the Witness, and the Light* I mapped the kinds of Christian apologetics: six methods of justification, the lines of argument those methods use, the modes in which they are spoken, and three kinds of my own that the standard surveys do not name.[1] A map tells you where the roads are. It does not tell you how the first Christians walked them. This paper is the sequel. It sets out an apologetic drawn as directly as I can draw it from the biblical writers and from the church of the first centuries, and it offers that apologetic as an alternative in its own right, not as a seventh school on the old map.

The thesis can be put in one long sentence. The apologetic Scripture describes and the early church practiced is a prayed and Spirit-dependent life, ordered around the gospel and visible enough that people ask about it; it is ready, when they ask, with a reasoned answer that starts from what God has already said and shown, prepares the ground with what the hearer already lives by, and brings him into the Scriptures as soon as possible; and it understands its own labor as sowing, watering, and reaping in a field that belongs to God, who alone gives the growth. Every clause in that sentence has a text behind it, and most of them have a martyr behind them as well.

The order of the paper follows the order of the work. Part One begins with God's part, because the apologist is a laborer in another man's field: the field is God's, prayer is the first act, and the Spirit is the one who converts and the apologetic's power. Part Two turns to the life that prompts the question: a life ordered around the task, shaped by the Sermon on the Mount, set on a stand and not under a basket, and therefore asked about. Part Three gives the answer when the question comes: an answer from life and not only from existence, a ground prepared by what I will call the lines of common sense, a hand-off into Scripture as soon as possible, the apostolic shape of the spoken answer, and a conversation shaped by five points of my own. Part Four takes up sowing, watering, and reaping, and keeps distinct the two seeds of the parables, the word that is sown and the people who are sown. Part Five places this apologetic beside the kinds named in the first paper and closes by urging readers to read and listen widely, so that they can point others to good help. A list of resources by topic follows the conclusion.

Two cautions belong at the start. The first is that nothing in this paper is offered as a technique that converts. The Spirit converts. The second is that nothing here is offered as a substitute for argument. Paul reasoned in the synagogue and in the marketplace. The early apologists wrote to emperors and governors in the most careful prose they had. The question is not whether to reason. The question is what the reasoning is for, who it depends on, and what kind of life is standing behind it when it is spoken.

[1] Gerald Milton Smith, Jr., "The Defense, the Witness, and the Light: Kinds of Christian Apologetics" (manuscript, October 8, 2026), 1–2, 19–21.

Part One: Where the Apologetic Begins

I. The Field Is God's

Paul settled a quarrel in Corinth by reducing every Christian worker to his proper size. The Corinthians had made parties around preachers. Paul answered with a farm. "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building."[2]

I put the task in three words: sowing, watering, and reaping. The triad is my own way of saying it, and the words are not Paul's in this passage. His terms are planting, watering, and God giving the growth, and for those three terms the shorthand I use is PWG: planting, watering, God giving the growth. I keep my three words because the concept is the same, and because the third word, reaping, has its own home in the Gospel of John and in Galatians, as this paper will show in Part Four. But I will not let my words stand without his. Paul's sentence is the charter of everything that follows: "neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth." The apologist who forgets that sentence will either despair when nothing grows or boast when something does. Both are the same mistake.

The field is God's in at least four senses. It is his by creation, because the people we speak to are his image-bearers before they are our hearers. It is his by providence, because he has already placed them, "having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God."[3] It is his by the word, because the seed is his: "so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."[4] And it is his by the harvest, because the growth happens in a way the sower cannot manage. Jesus told the parable of the seed that grows by itself so that no disciple would mistake his own labor for the cause of life. The man scatters seed, "He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how."[5]

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[2] "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building." 1 Cor. 3:6–9 (ESV).

[3] "Having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God." Acts 17:26–27 (ESV).

[4] "So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it." Isa. 55:11 (ESV); see Isa. 55:10.

[5] "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how." Mark 4:26–27 (ESV).

"He knows not how" is not an admission of failure. It is the sower's freedom. A man who believes he must produce the growth will reach for whatever produces a response: pressure, flattery, a cleverness that wins the exchange and loses the person. A man who knows the growth is God's can afford to be patient, honest, and gentle, because he is not carrying what he was never asked to carry. Jesus said the same thing from the side of the harvest. "One sows and another reaps." "I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."[6] The apologist enters a field where others have already worked, and he will leave it to others who will work after him. Faithfulness, not visible response, is the measure of his part.

This does not make the labor small. Paul says the laborers "are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor." The wages are real, and the labor is real. God is pleased to give growth through planting and watering. He does not give it by planting and watering, as if the means had power of their own, and he does not commonly give it without them. That is the shape of the whole apologetic. The means are commanded, and the power is not in the means.

II. Prayer Is the First Apologetic Act

In the first paper I named prayerful reliance on the Holy Spirit as the second of four non-negotiables. Here I want to say more than that prayer is required. Prayer is where the apologetic begins, and it is the act that runs underneath every other act in this paper.

Jesus did not first tell his disciples to go. He first told them to pray. "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."[7] The order matters. Before there is a conversation, there is a request that God would send someone to have it. The apologist who has not prayed for laborers has not yet understood that he is one, and that he was sent.

The apostle's requests show where prayer belongs at every stage of the work. Prayer goes before the door: "pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ."[8] Prayer goes into the mouth: "that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel."[9] Prayer goes with the word after it has left the speaker: "pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored."[10] And prayer

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[6] "For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor." John 4:37–38 (ESV).

[7] "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." Matt. 9:37–38 (ESV).

[8] "Pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ." Col. 4:3 (ESV).

[9] "That words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel." Eph. 6:19 (ESV); see Eph. 6:18–20.

[10] "Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you." 2 Thess. 3:1 (ESV).

asks for clarity, "that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak."[11] Door, mouth, word, and clarity are four places where the apologist is helpless and God is not. Paul, who could out-argue the philosophers at Athens, asked to be prayed for at every one of them.

The church in Jerusalem shows what happens when such prayer is answered. Threatened by the council, they did not ask for safety. They asked for boldness. "And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness." Luke records the answer: "And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness."[12] The prayer was for speech, and the answer was the Spirit, and the result was speech. That sequence is the apologetic in miniature.

The early church kept this order, and its defenders said so in the documents they addressed to outsiders. The unknown author of the letter to Diognetus begins his answer to a pagan's questions by praying in the hearing of the man he is answering: "I implore God, who enables us both to speak and to hear, to grant to me so to speak, that, above all, I may hear you have been edified, and to you so to hear, that I who speak may have no cause of regret for having done so."[13] He asks for two gifts, one for the speaker and one for the hearer, and he asks them of the same God. That sentence ought to be the silent preface of every apologetic conversation.

Justin Martyr tells how he came to faith, and the turning point is a command to pray. An old man had reasoned with him by the sea, sent him to the prophets, and then left him with this: "But pray that, above all things, the gates of light may be opened to you; for these things cannot be perceived or understood by all, but only by the man to whom God and His Christ have imparted wisdom."[14] The old man had argued well. He did not trust the argument to open the gates.

The early Christians also prayed for the people who opposed them, and they told those people so. Justin writes to the emperor that Christians "pray for our enemies, and endeavour to persuade those who hate us unjustly to live conformably to the good precepts of Christ."[15] Prayer and persuasion stand in the same sentence. Aristides says of the Christians that "they offer prayer that these may repent of their error."[16] Tertullian tells the governors of the Empire, "Without ceasing, for all our emperors we offer prayer," and he describes the assembly as a place where, "offering up prayer to God as with united force, we may wrestle with Him in our supplications. This

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[11] "That I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak." Col. 4:4 (ESV).

[12] "And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness." "And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness." Acts 4:29, 31 (ESV).

[13] *The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus* 1, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, rev. A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 25. The editor's introductory note places the letter "towards the close of the apostolic age" and doubts that its last two chapters belong to it. Ibid., 23–24.

[14] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 7, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:198.

[15] Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 14, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:167.

violence God delights in."[17] Aristides goes further still: "to me there is no doubt but that the earth abides through the supplication of the Christians."[18] Whatever we make of that last claim, it tells us where those Christians thought the world's real business was being done.

The point for the apologist is practical. Pray before you speak, for the door and the words. Pray while you speak, silently, for the hearer. Pray after you speak, for the word to run. Pray for the people who oppose you, by name. Pray with others, as the assembly did, because the work is not private. And pray for laborers, because the field is larger than any one life. An apologetic that has a method for everything except prayer has a method for everything except the one thing Jesus told us to do first.

III. The Spirit Who Converts, and the Apologetic's Power

I have said that the Holy Spirit is the agent of conversion in every case. I want to say it more fully now. The Spirit is the one who converts, and the apologetic's power. Both halves of that sentence matter, and the second is easily lost while the first is being defended.

The first half is plain in Scripture. Jesus promised the Helper: "when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment."[19] Conviction is the Spirit's work, and so is the new birth that follows it. Jesus told Nicodemus that this birth is as free as the wind: "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."[20] At Capernaum he said where coming to him begins: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."[21] And Paul tells Titus how the change happens when it comes. God "saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit."[22] No apologist has ever argued a man into the new birth. An argument can be heard, weighed, and granted while the heart stays where it was. When

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[16] Aristides, *Apology* 17 (Syriac), trans. D. M. Kay, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Allan Menzies, vol. 9 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 279. Kay reports Eusebius's statement that the *Apology* was presented to Hadrian, and the Syriac heading that implies Antoninus Pius. Ibid., 261.

[17] Tertullian, *Apology* 30, 39, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, rev. A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 42, 46.

[18] Aristides, *Apology* 16 (Syriac), in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 9:278.

[19] "And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment." John 16:8 (ESV).

[20] "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." John 3:8 (ESV).

[21] "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day." John 6:44 (ESV).

[22] Titus 3:5 (ESV).

the heart moves, the Spirit has moved it. Luke says of Lydia at Philippi, "The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul."[23] Paul spoke, and the Lord opened. That sentence holds the whole doctrine in small.

The second half is where the apologist lives day to day. The Spirit is not only the one who acts at the end, when someone believes. He is the power of the whole apologetic from the beginning. Jesus said, "he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness."[24] Two witnesses, one testimony: the Spirit's witness does not replace the disciples' witness, and the disciples' witness is not the Spirit's. The risen Lord told his followers that they would "receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses."[25] The power is for the witness.

Paul describes his own preaching at Corinth in these terms. "And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."[26] Paul is not describing a man with nothing to say. He came bearing "the testimony of God," and he had decided its content: "Jesus Christ and him crucified." What he refused was a faith that would rest on the speaker. He wanted the Corinthians to stand where no rival speaker could move them, "in the power of God," and that power was present because the Spirit was. His weakness, fear, and trembling did not hinder the work. They kept anyone from mistaking whose work it was. The apologist who is afraid of saying too little should take courage here, and the apologist who is proud of saying it well should take warning.

To the Thessalonians Paul gives a verse that gathers this whole paper into one sentence. "Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake."[27] Word, power, Spirit, conviction, and a visible life are named together in a single sentence. That is the apologetic I am describing. Take away the word, and the life is a riddle. Take away the Spirit, and the word is sound without force. Take away the life, and the word is contradicted by its messengers.

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[23] Acts 16:14 (ESV).

[24] "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning." John 15:26–27 (ESV).

[25] "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Acts 1:8 (ESV).

[26] 1 Cor. 2:1–5 (ESV).

[27] "Because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake." 1 Thess. 1:5 (ESV).

The Spirit is also given in answer to prayer, which is why prayer and the Spirit cannot be separated in this first part. "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"[28] The apologist who asks for the Spirit is not asking for something God is reluctant to give.

Cyprian, writing to his friend Donatus, describes his own conversion in the language of a man who had thought it impossible. He had asked, "How … is such a conversion possible, that there should be a sudden and rapid divestment of all which, either innate in us has hardened in the corruption of our material nature, or acquired by us has become inveterate by long accustomed use?" Then it happened, "by the agency of the Spirit breathed from heaven," and "a second birth had restored me to a new man." His conclusion is the apologist's creed: "All our power is of God; I say, of God."[29]

What follows for practice is this. The apologist is to prepare as if everything depended on the clarity of his answer, because Peter commands him to be prepared. He is to speak as one who knows that nothing depends on his cleverness, because Paul refused to let faith rest on it. He is to ask for the Spirit before, during, and after. And he is to measure his work by faithfulness, not by visible results, because the Spirit, like the wind, does not report to us before he moves.

Part Two: The Life That Prompts the Question

IV. A Life Ordered Around the Task

The fourth non-negotiable in the first paper was a heart filled with the desire to orient all of life around this task. It is the hinge of everything in this part.[30]

The apostles give this ordering two short commands. "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person."[31] The walk comes before the answer, and the answer is fitted to "each person," not to a type. The second command was given to slaves, people with no public voice at all: "not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior."[32] A slave who would not steal was an ornament on

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[28] Luke 11:13 (ESV).

[29] Cyprian, *To Donatus* 3–4, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, rev. A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 5 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 275–76.

[30] Smith, "Defense, the Witness, and the Light," 4.

[31] "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." Col. 4:5–6 (ESV).

[32] "Not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior." Titus 2:10 (ESV).

the doctrine. Paul could think of no one so lowly that his daily honesty did not count as an argument.

The letter to Diognetus describes what such ordered lives looked like to an outsider in the second century. The Christians did not withdraw into enclaves. “For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity.” They lived in Greek and barbarian cities alike, following local custom in food and clothing, and yet “they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners.”[33] The writer then gives the line that has stayed with the church ever since: “To sum up all in one word—what the soul is in the body, that are Christians in the world.”[34]

That is the shape of an ordered life. It is not a separate life. It is the same work, the same streets, the same meals, and the same taxes, ordered by another center. The sojourner pays his rent and keeps his word and raises his children in the same city as his neighbor, but he does all of it as one who is going somewhere. The difference is not in the furniture. It is in the direction.

What does that ordering look like on a Tuesday? It means that a man’s work is done well enough to be trusted and honestly enough to be examined. It means that speech is gracious, so that when the moment for an answer comes, it does not have to overcome a reputation for contempt. It means that the household is a place where strangers are welcome, because many of the conversations that matter happen at a table. It means that suffering, when it comes, is borne in a way that makes others wonder. And it means that the Scriptures are known well enough to be turned to at the right moment, because the goal of the whole ordering is to bring persons to the gospel and to that library of truth.

V. The Ethic of Matthew 5–7

If a life is to be ordered around the task, it needs content. The Sermon on the Mount supplies it. I do not mean that the Sermon is a technique for impressing unbelievers. I mean that the life the Sermon describes is the life that, when it is actually lived, provokes the question Peter expects. The early apologists understood this so well that when Justin set out to tell the emperor what Christians believe, he quoted the Sermon.

The Sermon begins with character, not with conduct. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” The blessed are the mourners, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers. They are also the persecuted: “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.”[35] The apologist who lives as one of the meek and the merciful already contradicts what most of his neighbors expect a religious man to be. The

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[33] *Epistle to Diognetus* 5, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:26.

[34] *Epistle to Diognetus* 6, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:27.

[35] “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.” Matt. 5:3, 11 (ESV); see Matt. 5:3–12.

apologist who wins arguments by contempt has stepped outside the Beatitudes before he has finished his first sentence.

The Sermon then makes four demands that bear directly on an apologetic life. The first is truthfulness. “Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.”[36] A man whose plain word can be trusted does not need oaths, and he does not need to overstate his case. The apologist must be the last person in the room to inflate an argument, misquote an opponent, or claim more certainty than he has. The second is love of enemies. “But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”[37] The opponent in the conversation is a neighbor to be loved and prayed for, not an obstacle to be removed. The third is freedom from anxiety and money. “You cannot serve God and money.” “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”[38] A life visibly free from that anxiety is a strange thing in any economy, and strange things get asked about. The fourth is fruit. “Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.”[39] The tree is known by what it bears, and the people watching are not wrong to judge the message by the messengers.

The Sermon ends with a house. “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.” The storm comes to both houses. The difference is not that one man avoided the storm. It is that “it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”[40] A believer who suffers loss and does not collapse has given an argument no lecture can give.

Justin understood all of this. Writing to the emperor in the middle of the second century, he devotes chapters of his *First Apology* to what Christ taught, and much of what he cites is from the Sermon: “But I say unto you, Pray for your enemies, and love them that hate you, and bless them that curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you.”[41] He then makes the claim that every apologist must be willing to make about his own people: “let those who are not found

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[36] “Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.” Matt. 5:37 (ESV); see Matt. 5:33–37.

[37] “But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” Matt. 5:44–45 (ESV); see Matt. 5:43–48.

[38] “You cannot serve God and money.” “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” Matt. 6:24, 33 (ESV); see Matt. 6:19–34.

[39] “Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.” Matt. 7:20 (ESV); see Matt. 7:13–20.

[40] “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.” “But it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.” Matt. 7:24–25 (ESV); see Matt. 7:24–27.

[41] Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 15, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:167. Justin’s sayings of Jesus are his own loose and harmonized citations, not the wording of any English version.

living as He taught, be understood to be no Christians, even though they profess with the lip the precepts of Christ."[42] He does not mean that works earn salvation. He means, as Jesus did, that the tree is known by its fruit. Justin invites the emperor to judge Christians by the Sermon. That is a bold invitation, and only a church that is living the Sermon can safely make it.

Tertullian makes the same appeal from the side of non-retaliation. "If we are enjoined, then, to love our enemies, as I have remarked above, whom have we to hate? If injured, we are forbidden to retaliate, lest we become as bad ourselves: who can suffer injury at our hands?"[43] Aristides reports the same pattern: "they do good to their enemies," "Falsehood is not found among them," "And he, who has, gives to him who has not, without boasting."[44] When the poor among them had no spare food, he says, "they fast two or three days in order to supply to the needy their lack of food."[45]

This is where the third non-negotiable from the first paper lives: a life that is in compliance with the relationship we are claiming and representing. People smell a hypocrite quickly. The Sermon is the measure of that compliance. It is not a measure anyone meets perfectly, and the Sermon itself begins with the poor in spirit and the mourners, so a confessed failure is not hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is the pretense. The apologetic life is not a perfect life. It is a life that is honest about its imperfection, repentant when it fails, and visibly aimed at the Sermon's righteousness.

VI. Not Under a Basket: Life as Light

In the first paper I named a kind of apologetic of my own, life-as-light apologetics. Here it becomes one of the pillars of the whole approach. Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."[46] Mark gives the same image as a question, which is how Jesus often taught: "Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a stand?"[47] The answer is obvious. Nobody lights a lamp in order to hide it. A disciple who hides his light has forgotten what a lamp is for.

Life as light is a kind of apologetic in its own right. It is good works made visible, so that the one who sees them glorifies the Father. It overlaps with the requirement I have already described, but it is not that requirement under another name. A life that matches what we claim is required of every type of apologetic. Life as light is something more: the true life set where it can be seen. A life can be consistent and still be hidden. A life can be visible and still be false. The non-negotiable forbids the false life. The kind puts the true life where it can be seen.

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[42] Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 16, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:168.

[43] Tertullian, *Apology* 37, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:45.

[44] Aristides, *Apology* 15 (Syriac), in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 9:276–77.

[45] Aristides, *Apology* 15 (Syriac), in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 9:277.

[46] Matt. 5:14–16 (ESV).

[47] Mark 4:21 (ESV).

Paul tells the Philippians to be "blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world."[48] Jesus names the sign by which the world will recognize his people: "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."[49] The light is not only individual. It is the visible love of a people for one another, seen from outside.

There is a tension here, and it should be faced honestly. The same Sermon that says "let your light shine before others" also says, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven."[50] The two sentences do not contradict each other. The difference is in the aim. In chapter five, the works are seen so that the Father is glorified. In chapter six, the works are performed so that the performer is admired. The light is seen; it is not staged. A Christian who arranges his good works for an audience has turned the lamp into a spotlight, and a spotlight points at the wrong person.

The early church held this balance in a way that should humble us. Aristides wrote of the Christians, "And they do not proclaim in the ears of the multitude the kind deeds they do, but are careful that no one should notice them; and they conceal their giving just as he who finds a treasure and conceals it." And yet in the same chapter he could say, "And verily, this is a new people, and there is something divine (lit: a divine admixture) in the midst of them."[51] They hid their giving, and the light still shone. That is the right order. When the deeds are hidden for God's sake and still seen, the glory goes where it belongs.

Tertullian reports what the pagans said when they saw it. They pointed at the Christians and remarked how they loved one another and how they were "ready even to die for one another." Tertullian sets that beside the pagans' own condition: they "themselves are animated by mutual hatred," and "they themselves will sooner put to death."[52] The Christians did not have to advertise that love. Their enemies described it for them.

The light, finally, is not ours. In the parable of the weeds, which I take up in Part Four, Jesus promises that at the end of the age "the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father."[53] The shining now is a foretaste of that shining then, and both are the Father's doing. The church does not own the light. She holds it.

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[48] "That you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world." Phil. 2:15 (ESV).

[49] John 13:35 (ESV).

[50] Matt. 6:1 (ESV).

[51] Aristides, *Apology* 16 (Syriac), in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 9:278. The parenthesis is the translator's.

[52] Tertullian, *Apology* 39, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:46.

[53] "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear." Matt. 13:43 (ESV).

VII. The Question the Life Provokes

Peter's command is the text from which the word apologetics is ordinarily taken, and it is usually read as a command to have arguments ready. It is that. But the order of the verse is worth more attention than it usually gets. "But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame."[54]

The sequence runs like this. First, Christ is honored as holy in the heart. Second, there is a hope visible enough that someone asks about it. Third, there is a question. Fourth, there is a reasoned answer. Fifth, the answer is given with gentleness and respect. Sixth, there is a good conscience and good behavior behind it. Peter assumes that people will ask. He assumes it because he assumes that the hope will be visible. A hope that no one ever notices is not the hope he has in mind.

This is the apologetic I have in view, one in which faith is so plainly lived that people are motivated to ask. Peter says the same thing in other places. "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."[55] To wives with unbelieving husbands he writes, "so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives."[56] "Without a word" does not mean that the word is unnecessary. It means that the conduct gains a hearing the word would not otherwise have had. Luke records the same effect in Jerusalem, where the church was "praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."[57]

The early church's best-known apologetic letter exists because someone asked. The letter to Diognetus opens by listing the questions an educated pagan was asking about the Christians: "what God they trust in, and what form of religion they observe, so as all to look down upon the world itself, and despise death, while they neither esteem those to be gods that are reckoned such by the Greeks, nor hold to the superstition of the Jews; and what is the affection which they cherish among themselves; and why, in fine, this new kind or practice [of piety] has only now entered into the world, and not long ago."[58] Look at the questions. Why do they despise death? Why do they love one another? Why now? Every one of them was prompted by something Diognetus had seen. Nobody asks why a people despise death unless he has watched them do it.

Tertullian says the same of the persecutions. The suffering Christians, he says, were "teachers not by words, but by their deeds," and their steadfastness drove onlookers to ask what lay

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[54] 1 Pet. 3:15–16 (ESV).

[55] 1 Pet. 2:12 (ESV).

[56] "Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives." 1 Pet. 3:1 (ESV).

[57] Acts 2:47 (ESV).

[58] *Epistle to Diognetus* 1, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:25. The brackets are the translator's.

beneath it: “For who that contemplates it, is not excited to inquire what is at the bottom of it? who, after inquiry, does not embrace our doctrines?”[59] He overstates the result; not everyone who inquired believed. He does not overstate the sequence. The life provoked the inquiry, and the inquiry made way for the doctrine.

The practical lesson is simple, and it is hard. If no one ever asks you about your hope, the first question is not whether your arguments are ready. It is whether your hope is visible. And when someone does ask, the question is a gift. It is the door Paul asked the Colossians to pray for. It should be answered with gentleness and respect, and it should be answered.

VIII. Testimony: What Was Seen and Heard

The question often comes in a personal form. Not “Is Christianity true?” but “What happened to you?” That question calls for the first of the three kinds of my own that I named in the first paper, testimonial and experiential apologetics. It is the answer that bears what has been seen, heard, handled, and tasted.

The apostles could not be silenced on this ground. When the council ordered Peter and John to stop speaking in the name of Jesus, they answered, “for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”[60] This is what Jesus had appointed them to: “you will be my witnesses.”[61] The man born blind is the pattern for the rest of us, who did not walk with Jesus in Galilee. He did not try to settle questions he could not answer. “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”[62] The Samaritan woman is the pattern of where testimony leads. “Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me all that I ever did.’” Then Jesus stayed, “And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, ‘It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.’”[63] Testimony is a real cause of faith, and it exists to be surpassed by the word.

The early apologists used testimony with confidence. Justin tells the emperor what changed him. “For I myself, too, when I was delighting in the doctrines of Plato, and heard the Christians slandered, and saw them fearless of death, and of all other things which are counted fearful, perceived that it was impossible that they could be living in wickedness and pleasure.”[64] He was a philosopher, and he was persuaded first by watching Christians die. He also tells the emperor what changed many others, who “have changed their violent and tyrannical disposition, being overcome either by the constancy which they have witnessed in their neighbours’ lives, or by the extraordinary forbearance they have observed in their fellow-travellers when defrauded, or by

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[59] Tertullian, *Apology* 50, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:55.

[60] Acts 4:20 (ESV).

[61] Acts 1:8 (ESV).

[62] John 9:25 (ESV).

[63] John 4:39, 41–42 (ESV); see John 4:39–42.

[64] Justin Martyr, *Second Apology* 12, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:192.

the honesty of those with whom they have transacted business."[65] Neighbors, fellow travelers, business partners: ordinary people, watched by other ordinary people, in the ordinary places where life is lived.

Justin also gives the church's corporate testimony, the before and after of a whole people. "We who formerly delighted in fornication, but now embrace chastity alone; we who formerly used magical arts, dedicate ourselves to the good and unbegotten God; we who valued above all things the acquisition of wealth and possessions, now bring what we have into a common stock, and communicate to every one in need; we who hated and destroyed one another, and on account of their different manners would not live with men of a different tribe, now, since the coming of Christ, live familiarly with them."[66]

A generation or two later, Origen used the same argument against Celsus, one of Christianity's ablest critics. He asked Celsus to compare "the former lives of many converts to His doctrine with their after conduct," and he spoke of "a marvellous meekness of spirit and complete change of character, and a humanity, and goodness, and gentleness" in those who had "honestly accepted the doctrine concerning God and Christ, and the judgment to come."[67] Even a hostile Roman governor recorded the testimony of those he interrogated. Pliny the Younger wrote to the emperor Trajan that former Christians affirmed they had bound themselves by oath "never to commit any fraud, theft, or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up."[68] It was meant as a report on a troublesome sect. It reads as an unintended character reference.

The patristic witness to the Christians' fearlessness before death has one more use, which I will come to in Part Three. Every culture despises cowardice. The early church showed what courage looks like when it has a reason.

Testimony has limits, and the first paper set them out. It is allowed to be incomplete. It is not allowed to end in the witness. A testimony that leaves the hearer admiring the speaker has failed. A testimony that sends him to the word has done what the Samaritan woman did.

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[65] Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 16, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:168.

[66] Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 14, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:167.

[67] Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.26, 1.67, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, rev. A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 407, 427.

[68] Pliny the Younger, *Letters* 10.96, in *Letters of Pliny*, trans. William Melmoth, rev. F. C. T. Bosanquet, Project Gutenberg eBook 2811, https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/2811/pg2811.txt. The Latin reads "ne furta ne latrocinia ne adulteria committerent, ne fidem fallerent, ne depositum appellati abnegarent."

Part Three: The Answer When They Ask

IX. Answering from Life, Not Only from Existence

When the question comes, it is rarely about the first cause of the universe. It is about the life the asker has watched. Why this hope? Why this patience? Why this calm at the graveside? Why do you not hate the man who cheated you? The questions Diognetus asked were of this kind. They were questions about a life.

That is why the second of my three kinds, life apologetics, belongs at the center of the spoken answer. I set it out in *Life Beyond Existence*. "The main claim of this book can be put in one sentence: existence is not yet life. Existence means that there is something rather than nothing. Life, as ordinary people mean the word, is existence plus purpose, meaning, love, joy, peace, hope, individual identity, significance, and wonder."[69] "The question is not whether we are here. The question is whether being here is livable."[70]

The visible life displays those goods, and the spoken answer accounts for them. This is the meeting point of Part Two and Part Three. The asker has seen hope, peace, love, and joy in a life. The answer tells him where they come from. Minucius Felix put it in a sentence that could stand over this whole paper: "We who bear wisdom not in our dress, but in our mind, we do not speak great things, but we live them."[71] The same writer said of the Christians' funerals, "Still we adorn our obsequies with the same tranquillity with which we live," and he gave the reason: "Thus we both rise again in blessedness, and are already living in contemplation of the future."[72] A tranquil funeral is a question. The resurrection is the answer.

This is also why an answer that stops at existence will not do. If someone asks why a Christian is at peace while his wife is dying, and the answer is an argument that the universe had a beginning, the argument may be sound, and it has still not answered the question. The question was about life. In *Life Beyond Existence* I wrote that the Christian redescription of these goods "is the grammar within which the gospel is news rather than noise."[73] The life apologetic is that grammar. It prepares the hearer to understand what the gospel is offering, because it shows him that he already wants what the gospel offers, and that he already lives as if it were real.

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[69] Gerald Milton Smith, Jr., *Life Beyond Existence: Why I Believe* (manuscript, September 12, 2026), 10.

[70] Smith, *Life Beyond Existence*, 20.

[71] Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 38, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 4:197. The Latin reads "non eloquimur magna sed vivimus."

[72] Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 38, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 4:197.

[73] "None of this is yet the full Christian gospel. It is the grammar within which the gospel is news rather than noise." Smith, *Life Beyond Existence*, 23.

X. The Seed Already Sown: Justin's Spermatic Word

Before I set out the lines of common sense that prepare the ground, I need to say why there is ground to prepare. Why should an unbeliever recognize anything in what I say before he believes it? Justin Martyr gave an answer to that question in the second century, and his answer has been used and misused ever since. I want to address it, and I want to use it, carefully.

Justin wrote that the Stoics and the poets were admirable in some of their moral teaching "on account of the seed of reason [the Logos] implanted in every race of men."[74] His Greek phrase is *sperma tou logou*, the seed of the Word. Elsewhere he calls it the *spermatikos logos*, the spermatic or seed-bearing Word, and from that phrase the idea takes its usual name. He did not leave the idea vague. Every time he uses it, he sets the part against the whole. The philosophers lived by "a part only of the word diffused [among men]," while Christians live "by the knowledge and contemplation of the whole Word, which is Christ."[75] "For whatever either lawgivers or philosophers uttered well, they elaborated by finding and contemplating some part of the Word. But since they did not know the whole of the Word, which is Christ, they often contradicted themselves."[76] And in his fullest statement: "For each man spoke well in proportion to the share he had of the spermatic word, seeing what was related to it. But they who contradict themselves on the more important points appear not to have possessed the heavenly wisdom, and the knowledge which cannot be spoken against. Whatever things were rightly said among all men, are the property of us Christians."[77] He closes with a distinction that is the key to using him well: "For the seed and imitation imparted according to capacity is one thing, and quite another is the thing itself, of which there is the participation and imitation according to the grace which is from Him."[78]

There is one place where Justin's words, read one way, go further than Scripture allows. In the *First Apology* he says that Christ "is the Word of whom every race of men were partakers; and those who lived reasonably are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists; as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus, and men like them."[79] Read as a claim that the philosophers were saved by their share of reason, that sentence has to be declined. Paul says that those who knew God "did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in

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[74] Justin Martyr, *Second Apology* 8, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:191. Justin's Greek is "διὰ τὸ ἔμφυτον παντὶ γένει ἀνθρώπων σπέρμα τοῦ λόγου." Justin, *Apologia II* 8.1, in Edgar J. Goodspeed, ed., *Die ältesten Apologeten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1915).

[75] Justin Martyr, *Second Apology* 8, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:191. The Greek for the first phrase is "κατὰ σπερματικοῦ λόγου μέρος." Justin, *Apologia II* 8.3, in Goodspeed, *Die ältesten Apologeten*.

[76] Justin Martyr, *Second Apology* 10, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:191.

[77] Justin Martyr, *Second Apology* 13, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:193. The Greek of the first sentence is "ἕκαστος γάρ τις ἀπὸ μέρους τοῦ σπερματικοῦ θείου λόγου τὸ συγγενὲς ὁρῶν καλῶς ἐφθέγξατο." Justin, *Apologia II* 13.3, in Goodspeed, *Die ältesten Apologeten*.

[78] Justin Martyr, *Second Apology* 13, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:193.

[79] Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 46, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:178.

their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened."[80] Faith "comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."[81] Justin's own distinction answers his overstatement. The seed given "according to capacity" is one thing; participation "according to the grace which is from Him" is another. A share of reason is not a share of grace.

So this paper uses Justin within a Reformed frame, and it means something specific by that. A recent study argues that Justin's seed was not, in his own intent, a doctrine about other religions at all, and that "the seed of the Word … is precisely human reason, sown by the Word in every human being."[82] That reading fits Scripture well. The Word through whom "All things were made"[83] is the one by whom every human being reasons, judges, and knows. What can be known about God "is plain to them, because God has shown it to them."[84] The Gentiles "show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness."[85] God "has put eternity into man's heart."[86] In *Life Beyond Existence* I put the same point in Calvin's terms: "knowledge of God is not merely a conclusion we may or may not draw; it is part of being human, distorted by sin but never fully erased."[87]

In that frame, Justin's idea does four things for this apologetic.

First, it explains the ground. The common-sense lines that follow do not try to put something into the hearer that was never there. They speak to what God has already sown in him. That is why they can be heard at all.

Second, it licenses the use of the hearer's own best writers. "Whatever things were rightly said among all men, are the property of us Christians." Paul did exactly this at Athens when he quoted their own poets: "as even some of your own poets have said."[88] The apologist may quote

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[80] "For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened." Rom. 1:21 (ESV).

[81] Rom. 10:17 (ESV).

[82] Pierluigi Banna, "Justin and Seminal Reason: A Christian Path to Interreligious Dialogue?," *Cuestiones Teológicas* 51, no. 115 (2024), abstract, https://doi.org/10.18566/cueteo.v51n115.a06.

[83] "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." John 1:1–3 (ESV).

[84] Rom. 1:19 (ESV).

[85] Rom. 2:15 (ESV).

[86] "He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end." Eccles. 3:11 (ESV).

[87] Smith, *Life Beyond Existence*, 21.

[88] "For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring.'" Acts 17:28 (ESV).

a philosopher, a novelist, or a song against the worldview it came from, because the truth in it was never the worldview's property.

Third, it predicts what the apologist will find. Those who know only part of the Word "often contradicted themselves." The partial knower lives by goods his worldview cannot support. That is the opening for an internal critique, and it is the opening the lines of common sense will press.

Fourth, it sets a limit. The seed in reason is enough to leave a man without excuse. It is not enough to save him. Justin's own distinction, capacity against grace, keeps the apologist from mistaking agreement on common ground for conversion. The ground is prepared so that the word may be sown in it, not so that the preparation can stand in for the sowing.

Justin's seed must also be kept distinct from the two seeds of Jesus' parables, which I take up in Part Four. The seed in the parable of the sower is the word preached. The good seed in the parable of the weeds is a people sown into the world. Justin's seed is neither; it is reason itself, as the Word has given it to every human being. It is useful to hold the three together in one order, which this paper proposes: the apologetic speaks to the seed already sown in reason, sows the seed that is the word, and is itself part of the seed that is a people. The three must not be blurred. Each has its own text, and only the second is the word that saves.

XI. Preparing the Ground: Five Lines of Common Sense

I want now to set out what I call the lines of common sense. The name and the five lines are mine. They are not the foundation of the apologetic. The foundation is the word. They are the preparation of the ground, the plowing that comes before the sowing, and they lead into the biblical approach rather than standing in for it.

The phrase common sense has a history. Thomas Reid defined its principles this way: "If there are certain principles, as I think there are, which the constitution of our nature leads us to believe, and which we are under a necessity to take for granted in the common concerns of life, without being able to give a reason for them; these are what we call the principles of common sense; and what is manifestly contrary to them, is what we call absurd."[89] Reid did not set common sense against reason. "It is absurd to conceive that there can be any opposition between reason and common sense. It is indeed the first-born of reason."[90] What this paper adds is the order.

Each line is built the same way, and the way is deliberate. It opens with Scripture. Before anything is said about the hearer's experience, God's word has already said it, and the line simply repeats what God has said about the life the hearer is living. Then the point itself is stated plainly. Then the hearer's own life is examined honestly: the things he loves and fears, keeps and condemns, and could not give up without ceasing to be the person he is. Last comes the hand-off, which is never to an abstract deity but to the God of the Scriptures and to his Son. The Bible is not held back until the end, like a label kept for a box once it has been filled. It is the reason the lines exist, because only Scripture explains why the hearer knows what he knows and lives as he

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[89] Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind, on the Principles of Common Sense* (Edinburgh: A. Kincaid & J. Bell; London: A. Millar, 1764), chap. 2, sect. 6.

[90] Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (Edinburgh: John Bell; London: G. G. J. & J. Robinson, 1785), essay 6, chap. 2, 530.

lives. Tertullian worked this way when he appealed to what he called "the testimony of the soul," and I return to him after the five lines.

The first line: life needs an explanation that simple scientific observation cannot provide

The psalmist says to God, "For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light."[91] Jesus says, "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself."[92]

My first point is that life needs an explanation that simple scientific observation cannot provide. The subject is life. It is not the bare fact that anything exists, which is a different question with its own long history and its own place among the classical arguments. The subject is the living person who wakes in the morning wanting his day to count. Science can tell us a great deal about him, and the apologist should be glad of all of it. It can follow the chemistry of his cells, the firing of his nerves, and the inheritance he received from his parents. What it cannot do, by looking, is tell him what his life is for, because a purpose does not register on an instrument. Yet he cannot live a single week without one. He sets goals, honors promises, mourns what he has lost, and thinks a life thrown away is a tragedy and not merely a waste of material.

Suppose he answers that purpose is only a feeling natural selection found useful. He has then explained the feeling by explaining away the thing felt, and the next morning he still wakes wanting his day to count. In *Life Beyond Existence* I put it this way: "The words can be kept. Their weight as real claims on us cannot."[93] The hand-off is to the God with whom is "the fountain of life," and to the Son who has life in himself, of whom Peter told the crowd in Jerusalem, "you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses."[94]

The second line: life needs a definition that goes beyond existence

Scripture prays that "the God of hope" will fill believers "with all joy and peace in believing," and it says that "God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."[95]

My second point is that life needs a definition that goes beyond existence, and that the distinctives of this life need a legitimate grounding in reality that scientific observation cannot find or explain. The distinctives are the ones I named in *Life Beyond Existence*: purpose,

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[91] Ps. 36:9 (ESV).

[92] John 5:26 (ESV).

[93] Smith, *Life Beyond Existence*, 22.

[94] "And you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses." Acts 3:15 (ESV).

[95] "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." Rom. 15:13 (ESV). "So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." 1 John 4:16 (ESV).

meaning, love, joy, peace, hope, individual identity, significance, and wonder. "These are not decorations added on top of biology. They are what we mean when we say that a person has a life rather than a series of chemical events."[96]

These goods are the content of this line. I support them by three analogies, and the analogies are only analogies. The first is the laws of logic. Aristotle stated the most basic of them: "It is impossible for the same attribute at once to belong and not to belong to the same thing and in the same relation," and he called it "the most certain of all principles."[97] No one has ever weighed a law of logic or seen one under a microscope. It is not material. Yet it is real, nobody escapes it, and the man who denies it has to use it in the denial. The second is other minds. Another person's thoughts are never seen. We infer them, and we could not live for an hour without believing in them. The third is the contempt for cowardice found wherever people live together. No people has sung the praises of the soldier who ran and left his friends to die. Scripture lists "the cowardly" first among those excluded from the new creation.[98] Justin, as we have seen, was won in part by Christians who were "fearless of death."

Each analogy has the same shape. Logic, other minds, and the judgment against cowardice are real, universal, and non-material. Observation does not find them, and every life depends on them. The distinctives of life are like that. Love is not only attachment behavior. Hope is not only a forecast. Significance is not only social status. Wonder is not only novelty plus a chemical response. The man who reduces them in theory still lives by them in practice. He loves his children as his children and not as carriers of his genes, and he hopes for things no forecast can promise. Augustine said it in a prayer I quoted in *Life Beyond Existence*: "You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."[99] The hand-off is to the God of hope, who is love, and to the gospel that says this life "has been forfeited and restored."[100]

The third line: society needs a foundation that is deeper than preference

Scripture says, "The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms," and Isaiah says of the people God rules, "For the Lord is our judge; the Lord is our lawgiver; the Lord is our king; he will save us."[101]

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[96] Smith, *Life Beyond Existence*, 20.

[97] Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 4.3, 1005b19–20, trans. Hugh Tredennick, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1933). Tredennick adds, "and we must add any further qualifications that may be necessary to meet logical objections."

[98] "But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death." Rev. 21:8 (ESV).

[99] Smith, *Life Beyond Existence*, 21.

[100] "The gospel will say that this life has been forfeited and restored, that the restoration is the person of Jesus Christ, and that the public sign of restoration is an empty tomb." Smith, *Life Beyond Existence*, 23.

My third point is that society needs a foundation that is deeper than preference, and therefore a worldview based on the eternal. Every society argues about justice, and every argument about justice assumes that justice is there to be argued about. Two neighbors who quarrel over a boundary are not comparing tastes. Each is appealing to a right that neither of them invented. In *Life Beyond Existence* I wrote, "Politics concerns justice, which is a moral word. If there is no moral law, politics is the organization of force."[102] If preference is the floor, the strong will prefer, and the weak will be told that they lost the vote. No one is safe on that floor for long, because the preference that protects him today can be withdrawn tomorrow. Isaiah puts judge, lawgiver, and king in one person, and that person is eternal. Only a law that does not change with the vote can tell a vote that it is wrong.

Hume saw the same gap from the other side. Reading the systems of morality he had met with, he found that they passed from what is to what ought to be without notice, and he asked that "a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it."[103] He was right to ask. A count of what people want will never become a rule about what they owe. The hand-off is to the eternal God who is judge, lawgiver, and king, and whose last word in Isaiah's sentence is not a rule but a rescue: "he will save us."

The fourth line: a familial structure needs motivation beyond pleasure and fulfillment

Scripture says, "male and female he created them," and Jesus asks, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"[104]

My fourth point is that a familial structure needs motivation beyond pleasure and fulfillment. A family asks more of its members than pleasure can pay for. A husband and wife keep a promise made decades earlier by two younger people who did not know what it would cost. A father tells his son the truth when a lie would keep the peace. A mother spends twenty years forming a character she may never see finished. None of that is explained by pleasure, and much of it costs fulfillment. Jesus' argument assumes that even evil fathers give good gifts to their children. The love of a parent is a fact nearly everyone knows from one side or the other, and it points beyond itself. "The family is the first community in which a human being is addressed by name and so becomes more than a specimen." Marriage as covenant, "promise under God, not a renewable contract of desire," belongs to life "because promise is a temporal structure of love."[105] A family held together only by pleasure dissolves when the pleasure does. The hand-off is to the Father

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[101] Deut. 33:27 (ESV); Isa. 33:22 (ESV).

[102] Smith, *Life Beyond Existence*, 90.

[103] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, bk. 3, pt. 1, sect. 1, Project Gutenberg eBook 4705, https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4705.

[104] Gen. 1:27 (ESV); Luke 11:13 (ESV).

[105] Smith, *Life Beyond Existence*, 90–91.

"from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,"[106] whose love is the pattern for a father's, and "who did not spare his own Son."[107]

The fifth line: an economy needs direction that motivates a work ethic beyond sustenance

Scripture says, "You cannot serve God and money," and Paul writes that "each will receive his wages according to his labor," and calls slaves to show "all good faith."[108]

My fifth point is that an economy needs direction that motivates a work ethic beyond sustenance. If work is only for survival, then work ends where survival is secure, and whatever is done beyond that point is either greed or foolishness. People do not live that way, and they do not admire those who do. They honor the man who keeps working after he could stop, so that he has something to give. They can tell a market that serves neighbors from one that consumes them. Scripture gives work its direction from the beginning: "Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God."[109] Labor is commanded, and it is bounded by worship. Paul worked with his own hands so that he could "help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"[110] "If human beings are accidental collocations, there is no reason why a wage should be just rather than merely clearing. If human beings are image-bearers, work is dominion and service, property is stewardship, the poor are not a class to be managed but neighbors, and wealth is not innocent merely because it is efficient."[111] The hand-off is to the God who gives each his wage, who forbids the service of money, and who tells his people to seek first his kingdom.

How the lines hand off

Tertullian gives the early church's model for this whole stage. He appealed to the soul's own witness, to what ordinary people say without thinking: "'God is great and good'—'Which may God give,' are the words on every lip." He concluded, "O noble testimony of the soul by nature Christian!"[112] Minucius Felix made the same appeal to the common people who "lift their hands to heaven, say nothing else but Oh God, and God is great, and God is true, and if God shall permit."[113] But Tertullian did not stop there. In the next chapter he moved straight on: "But, that

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[106] "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named." Eph. 3:14–15 (ESV).

[107] Rom. 8:32 (ESV).

[108] Matt. 6:24 (ESV); 1 Cor. 3:8 (ESV); Titus 2:10 (ESV).

[109] Exod. 20:9–10 (ESV).

[110] Acts 20:34–35 (ESV).

[111] Smith, *Life Beyond Existence*, 92.

[112] Tertullian, *Apology* 17, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:32. The Latin is "O testimonium animae naturaliter Christianae!"

[113] Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 18, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 4:183.

we might attain an ampler and more authoritative knowledge at once of Himself, and of His counsels and will, God has added a written revelation for the behoof of every one whose heart is set on seeking Him, that seeking he may find, and finding believe, and believing obey."[114] The soul's testimony hands off to the written word. That is the shape I want.

I do not end the five lines with a summary argument that adds up their conclusions and announces that the result is God. That is the classical cumulative pattern, and it has its place in the methods I mapped in the first paper. It is not this stage. These lines do not climb to God from neutral ground and then label the summit with a biblical name. They begin in Scripture, they let the hearer see that Scripture has already described his own life, and they hand him to the word that names what he has been living by. Paul's sentence at Athens is the model: "What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you."[115] The lines do not finish the work. They open the field.

Two guards keep the stage honest. First, the lines prepare a hearer for Christ; they are not a resting place short of him. Someone who grants that purpose is real and that justice needs a foundation has moved, but he has not yet heard the gospel. The plowing is for the sowing. Second, the lines must be argued with gentleness and respect, and that includes fairness to the other side. The apologist should know the best naturalist replies and state them at their strongest, as I tried to do in *Life Beyond Existence*, before he answers them.

XII. Into Scripture as Soon as Possible

The first non-negotiable in my earlier paper was that any presentation of the truth of the gospel needs to be steeped in the Scripture, with the goal of introducing, as soon as possible, the person who is being introduced to the truth of the gospel to that library of truth. More can be accomplished by well placed Scripture than any level of argumentation. The lines of common sense exist to serve that goal. They are measured by how quickly they bring a hearer to an open Bible.

Paul gives the reason. "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."[116] The word itself carries the power. "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."[117] "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe."[118] The apologist who keeps the Scriptures closed until he has won every argument has reversed Paul's order. He is trusting the wisdom that Paul said the world did not know God through.

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[114] Tertullian, *Apology* 18, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:32.

[115] "For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you." Acts 17:23 (ESV).

[116] Rom. 10:17 (ESV).

[117] 1 Cor. 1:18 (ESV).

[118] 1 Cor. 1:21 (ESV).

The early apologists understood this, and they said it to the people they were trying to persuade. Aristides ends his account of Christian life by handing the emperor the Christians' own book: "Take, then, their writings, and read therein, and lo! you will find that I have not put forth these things on my own authority, nor spoken thus as their advocate; but since I read in their writings I was fully assured of these things as also of things which are to come."[119] He had described their lives, and then he pointed past their lives to their Scriptures. The shorter Greek form of his *Apology* makes the same hand-off: "if you deign to look into the writings of the Christians, you will find that I state nothing beyond the truth."[120]

The old man who argued with Justin by the sea did the same. After their conversation, he sent Justin to the prophets. "There existed, long before this time, certain men more ancient than all those who are esteemed philosophers, both righteous and beloved by God, who spoke by the Divine Spirit." Then he said something about those prophets that every apologist should hear: "For they did not use demonstration in their treatises, seeing that they were witnesses to the truth above all demonstration, and worthy of belief."[121] Justin tells us what happened next. "But straightway a flame was kindled in my soul; and a love of the prophets, and of those men who are friends of Christ, possessed me."[122] And he gives his own counsel to every reader: "I would wish that all, making a resolution similar to my own, do not keep themselves away from the words of the Saviour."[123]

Tertullian tells the governors what Christians do when they gather: "We assemble to read our sacred writings," and "with the sacred words we nourish our faith, we animate our hope, we make our confidence more stedfast."[124] And he makes a striking promise about those writings: "Whoever gives ear will find God in them; whoever takes pains to understand, will be compelled to believe."[125]

In practice, this means at least three things. The apologist should know the Scriptures well enough to quote them naturally and accurately. He should look for the earliest honest moment to open them with the person he is speaking to, and the Gospels, especially John and Mark, are a good place to begin. And he should be willing to read with the person over time, because watering, as Part Four will show, is a long middle.

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[119] Aristides, *Apology* 16 (Syriac), in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 9:278.

[120] Aristides, *Apology* 16 (Greek), in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 9:276–79.

[121] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 7, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:198.

[122] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 8, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:198.

[123] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 8, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:198.

[124] Tertullian, *Apology* 39, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:46.

[125] Tertullian, *Apology* 18, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:33.

XIII. The Apostolic Shape of the Spoken Answer

Paul's speech at Athens is the fullest example in the New Testament of an apostle speaking to people who had no Bible. It is worth following closely, in the order Luke gives it, without forcing it into a scheme it does not have.

Luke sets the scene with a man already moved. "Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols." Before he said a word, the idols grieved him. What he said afterward came out of that grief, and that is the order for every apologist: the heart is moved before the mouth. "So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there."[126] Luke then gives the content in a single phrase: "he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection."[127] Whatever Paul said on the Areopagus, it was said by a man who had already named Jesus and the resurrection in the marketplace.

The speech starts from what God has already made known. Paul stands among people who have built an altar to a god they admit they do not know, and he does not mock it. He tells them, "What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you." Then he names the God their altar could not name: "The God who made the world and everything in it," who "himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything," and who made the nations "that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us."[128] When he cites their poets a moment later, he is speaking to the seed already sown in reason, which this paper set out with Justin's help.

Paul then draws a conclusion from the poets' own line. "Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man."[129] If we are his offspring, he is not our product. The argument is one sentence long, and it leaves the city's idols standing in the hearer's mind as the strange things they are. Paul does not stay to elaborate it. He has a man to name.

Then comes the call to repentance, and only after it the reason for the call. "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."[130] Paul's sequence runs from the command to repent, to the day of judgment, to the man God has

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[126] "Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there." Acts 17:16–17 (ESV).

[127] "Because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection." Acts 17:18 (ESV).

[128] Acts 17:23–27 (ESV).

[129] Acts 17:29 (ESV).

[130] Acts 17:30–31 (ESV).

appointed, and to the resurrection by which God gives assurance. It is a summons, and it rests on a person and on an event that took place in public.

Luke records the response without embarrassment. “Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, ‘We will hear you again about this.’ So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.”[131] In the terms Part Four will use, one morning’s sowing fell on the path, waited for watering, and was reaped. Paul did not measure the day by the mockers, and the apologist should not measure his own by them either.

Paul’s letter to Timothy gathers what the church confessed about Christ into a few lines. “Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.”[132] Every line has Christ as its subject, and that is where every answer is headed. The lines of common sense prepare the ground, and Athens names the God who made it, but nothing has been answered until the hearer has heard of the one who came in the flesh, was vindicated, and was taken up. Two lines of the confession describe the work this paper is about: “proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world.” The proclaiming is ours. The believing is the Spirit’s gift.

The manner of the answer belongs to it as much as the content. Peter asks for “gentleness and respect.”[133] Paul at Athens shows what that looks like. The idols provoked him, and yet he began with the Athenians’ own altar rather than with ridicule, and he treated their poets as worth hearing. Gentleness is not softness about the truth, for Paul called the whole city to repent. It is the refusal to treat the hearer as the enemy when the enemy is the idol.

XIV. The Shape of the Conversation: Five Points of My Own

An apologist needs an outline to carry in his head, so that a conversation can move toward the gospel without becoming a recitation. I use five points. The outline is mine, and it may help memory to notice that every point begins with the same letter: Our Problem, God’s Person, God’s Provision, God’s Purpose, and God’s Path. They are all P’s.

The outline can be followed briefly, with a verse for each point, or it can be followed up in depth, as a conversation allows. The deeper versions take up the Trinity, the reliability of Scripture, the truth of the resurrection, and the other questions that come when a person begins to take the gospel seriously. Part Five will say where to find help for those deeper conversations.

Our Problem

Our problem is that we are sinners who stand in need of being restored to a relationship with God. We are sinners who need forgiveness so that a relationship with him can be restored. We are sinners who cannot truly find meaning or purpose or joy or peace or love or hope or lasting

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[131] Acts 17:32–34 (ESV).

[132] 1 Tim. 3:16 (ESV).

[133] 1 Pet. 3:15 (ESV).

wonder without that relationship being restored. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”[134] “But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.”[135] “For the wages of sin is death.”[136]

This is where the lines of common sense meet the gospel. The goods of life that the hearer already wants are the goods he cannot keep without God. God “has put eternity into man’s heart,” and nothing short of the eternal will fill it.[137] The problem is not first that he lacks information. It is that he is separated from the One who is the source of the life he is seeking.

God’s Person

God has revealed himself as the triune God, eternally existing in three distinct persons. He is personal, he is love, and he is our Creator, to whom we need to be restored. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”[138] “So God created man in his own image.”[139] “God is love.”[140] Jesus commanded his disciples to baptize “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” and Paul blessed the church with “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.”[141] The Word who “was with God” and “was God” is the one through whom “All things were made.”[142]

This point matters for the apologetic because the goods of life are personal. Love needs a lover and a beloved. If God were a single person alone from eternity, love would have had no object before creation. The triune God is love in himself. As I put it in *Life Beyond Existence*, love “is the creaturely echo of the love that is already real in God as Father, Son, and Spirit.”[143]

God’s Provision

God’s provision is Christ: his life, his work, his death, and his resurrection. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the

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[134] Rom. 3:23 (ESV).

[135] Isa. 59:2 (ESV).

[136] “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Rom. 6:23 (ESV).

[137] Eccles. 3:11 (ESV).

[138] Gen. 1:1 (ESV).

[139] Gen. 1:27 (ESV).

[140] 1 John 4:8 (ESV).

[141] “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Matt. 28:19 (ESV). “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” 2 Cor. 13:14 (ESV).

[142] John 1:1–3 (ESV).

[143] Smith, *Life Beyond Existence*, 23.

Father, full of grace and truth."[144] "But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."[145] "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God."[146] "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."[147]

Christ was "declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead."[148] The resurrection is the public center of the provision, and Paul gave it as tradition received and delivered: "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive."[149] "Most of whom are still alive" implies to Paul's first readers that the witnesses could still be found and questioned. The apologist should be ready to point people to good work on the resurrection, as I tried to do in *Life Beyond Existence*, where an appendix treats "The Resurrection as Public History."[150] Part Five names more.

God's Purpose

God's purpose is that we might have life, and have it abundantly; that we might come to him and be given rest; and that he might resurrect us into a new creation for eternity. Jesus said, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."[151] He said, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."[152] Paul wrote, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."[153] And John saw the end of the story: "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear

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[144] John 1:14 (ESV).

[145] Rom. 5:8 (ESV).

[146] "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit." 1 Pet. 3:18 (ESV).

[147] John 3:16 (ESV).

[148] "And was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord." Rom. 1:4 (ESV).

[149] 1 Cor. 15:3–6 (ESV); see 1 Cor. 15:3–8.

[150] Smith, *Life Beyond Existence*, 158.

[151] "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." John 10:10 (ESV). The older rendering is "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." John 10:10 (KJV).

[152] Matt. 11:28 (ESV).

[153] 2 Cor. 5:17 (ESV).

from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."[154]

This is the point at which life apologetics comes home. The purpose, meaning, love, joy, peace, hope, identity, significance, and wonder that the hearer has been seeking are not illusions to be managed. In *Life Beyond Existence* I wrote that revelation tells us what they are: "Hope is the resurrection, Christ's and therefore ours. Identity is adoption. Significance is election and vocation, not branding. Wonder is worship."[155] The abundant life Jesus promised is life in the full sense: "life is existence received as gift and calling."[156]

God's Path

God's path is faith and repentance: asking God for forgiveness, and confessing Christ as Lord and Savior. Jesus began his preaching with it: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."[157] Peter preached it: "Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out."[158] Paul summarized it: "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."[159] John promised the forgiveness it asks for: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."[160] And Paul made plain that the path is not an achievement: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."[161]

The path is God's, not the apologist's. He can describe it, invite a person onto it, and pray. He cannot walk it for anyone, and he cannot open the gate. That returns us to the beginning of this paper. The Spirit converts. The apologist sows.

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[154] Rev. 21:3–4 (ESV); see Rev. 21:1–5.

[155] Smith, *Life Beyond Existence*, 87.

[156] Smith, *Life Beyond Existence*, 21.

[157] Mark 1:15 (ESV).

[158] Acts 3:19 (ESV).

[159] "Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." Rom. 10:9–10 (ESV).

[160] 1 John 1:9 (ESV).

[161] Eph. 2:8–9 (ESV).

Part Four: Sowing, Watering, and Reaping

XV. The Sower and the Seed That Is the Word

Jesus told the parable of the sower to explain why the same word produces such different results. "A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."[162]

Jesus himself tells us what the seed is. In Mark, "The sower sows the word."[163] In Luke, "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God."[164] The seed is not the apologist's argument, his personality, or his story, though all of these may carry it. The seed is the word.

The soils teach patience, and they teach realism. Some hearers will not understand, and "the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart." Some will receive the word "with joy," and then fall away "when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word." Some will be choked by "the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches." And some will hear "the word and understands it," and bear fruit, "in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."[165] The sower in the parable does not test the soil before he sows. He sows generously, on every kind of ground. The apologist who waits until he is sure of good soil will sow little seed and miss most of the good ground.

The parable also explains why the apologist does not control the result. The difference between the soils is not in the seed. The same seed falls on all four. The difference is in the ground, and only God can make bad ground good. That is why prayer, which this paper began with, belongs to the sowing. The sower asks the Lord of the harvest to prepare the ground he cannot prepare.

XVI. The Good Seed That Is a People

There is a second parable of sowing in Matthew 13, and it must be kept distinct from the first. "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away."[166] When the disciples ask for the meaning, Jesus explains it in terms that surprise readers who assume every seed in the Gospels is the word. "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of

[162] Matt. 13:3–8 (ESV).

[163] Mark 4:14 (ESV); see Mark 4:3–20.

[164] Luke 8:11 (ESV).

[165] Matt. 13:19–23 (ESV).

[166] Matt. 13:24–25 (ESV); see Matt. 13:24–30.

Man. The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one."[167]

In this parable the seed is not the word. The seed is people. The Son of Man sows his own people into the world, as a farmer sows wheat in a field. That is a different image from the sower, and both must be heard without being blurred. In the first parable, the word is sown into hearts. In the second, believers are sown into the world. The first tells the apologist what he scatters. The second tells him what he is.

This second parable belongs with Part Two of this paper. The life that prompts the question is the life of the good seed, planted by the Son of Man in the field of the world, growing among the weeds until the harvest. The letter to Diognetus saw the same thing: "The soul is dispersed through all the members of the body, and Christians are scattered through all the cities of the world."[168] Justin, too, called the Christians a seed, the seed for whose sake, he said, God delays the dissolution of the world.[169] The good seed does not choose its field, and it does not uproot itself because weeds grow nearby. It grows where it was sown.

The parable also forbids a certain kind of zeal. The servants want to pull up the weeds at once. The master says, "No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest."[170] The judgment belongs to the end of the age and to the angels, not to the servants. The apologist is not sent to weed the world. He is sent to grow in it, faithfully, until the harvest, and to sow the word wherever he is planted. And the end of the parable returns us to the light: "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father."[171]

XVII. Watering: The Long Middle

Paul planted, and Apollos watered. Watering is the W in PWG, and most of the work in any field is the watering. It is the long middle between the first word and the harvest, and it is where most apologists either grow weary or grow faithful.

Watering is follow-up. It is the second conversation, and the tenth. At Athens, after the speech, some said, "We will hear you again about this."[172] The apologist must be ready to be heard again. Watering is friendship, hospitality, a meal, a visit in a hospital, a book given and discussed. It is answering the same question again, more patiently. It is reading a Gospel together, a chapter at a time. It is the kind of slow, faithful contact that the Christians Justin describes provided to their

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[167] Matt. 13:37–38 (ESV); see Matt. 13:36–43.

[168] *Epistle to Diognetus* 6, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:27.

[169] Justin Martyr, *Second Apology* 7, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:190. Justin's Greek is "διὰ τὸ σπέρμα τῶν Χριστιανῶν." Justin, *Apologia II* 7.1, in Goodspeed, *Die ältesten Apologeten*.

[170] Matt. 13:29–30 (ESV).

[171] Matt. 13:43 (ESV).

[172] Acts 17:32 (ESV).

neighbors, their fellow travelers, and their business partners, who were won by "constancy" and "forbearance" and "honesty" seen over time.[173]

Paul gives the principle that governs the long middle. "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up."[174] "In due season" means God's season, not ours. "If we do not give up" means the watering is often longer than we expected.

The psalmist gives the emotion of the long middle. "He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him."[175] Sowing is often done in tears. The apologist who has watered for years and seen nothing knows those tears. The psalm does not promise that the tears will be short. It promises that they will not be the end.

Watering is also where the speech described in Colossians matters most. "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person."[176] Each person. A long friendship lets the apologist learn what this person actually asks, fears, and hopes, so that his answer can be fitted to the person rather than to a script.

XVIII. Reaping Belongs to the Lord of the Harvest

The third word in my triad is reaping. Paul's own third term in 1 Corinthians 3 is God giving the growth, the G in PWG, and I keep his sense in my word: the harvest is God's. Jesus told his disciples, "lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together."[177] The reaper often reaps what others sowed. The sower often never sees the harvest. They rejoice together because the field and the harvest belong to someone else.

The parable of the growing seed ends with reaping, and the timing is the farmer's response to what the seed has done on its own: "But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."[178] The apologist does not ripen the grain. He recognizes when it is ripe and gathers it. In Jerusalem Luke records the harvest without crediting any apostle: "And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."[179] The Lord added. That is the grammar of every true conversion.

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[173] Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 16, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:168.

[174] Gal. 6:7–9 (ESV).

[175] Ps. 126:6 (ESV).

[176] Col. 4:6 (ESV).

[177] John 4:35–36 (ESV).

[178] Mark 4:29 (ESV); see Mark 4:26–29.

[179] Acts 2:47 (ESV).

The early church saw this harvest under pressure, and it saw God's hand in it. Tertullian told the governors that their persecutions were failing: "The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed."[180] The Latin is shorter still: "semen est sanguis Christianorum." The letter to Diognetus says the same: "Do you not see that the more of them are punished, the greater becomes the number of the rest? This does not seem to be the work of man: this is the power of God; these are the evidences of His manifestation."[181] Minucius Felix said simply that "our actual number both continues and abides undiminished, and strangers increase it."[182] And Pliny reported to Trajan, in alarm, that the movement had spread beyond the cities: "this contagious superstition is not confined to the cities only, but has spread its infection among the neighbouring villages and country."[183]

None of those writers credited the growth to technique. They credited it to God, and they saw it in suffering. That is a sobering thought for an apologist in a comfortable age. The harvest belongs to the Lord. The laborer's part is to pray for laborers, to sow, to water, to gather when the grain is ripe, and to rejoice with every other laborer, because "He who plants and he who waters are one."[184]

Part Five: Placing It, and Preparing to Point

XIX. How This Apologetic Holds the Other Kinds

What I have described is not a seventh school to set beside the six methods of the first paper. It is the frame in which any of them can be faithfully used. The first paper ended by saying that the four non-negotiables are what an answer has to be in order to be an answer a neighbor can trust. This paper has tried to show what a whole life looks like when those four are taken as the shape of the work rather than as a checklist laid over it.

My three kinds sit inside this frame. Testimonial and experiential apologetics is the answer to the question "What happened to you?" Life apologetics is the answer to the question about hope, peace, and love that a visible life provokes, and it supplies the content of the second line of common sense. Life-as-light apologetics is the visible life itself, set on a stand so that the Father is glorified.

The six methods are tools in the hand of the sower. A classical argument may help a hearer who has been told that belief in God is irrational. An evidential case for the resurrection may help a hearer who thinks the Gospels are legends. A cumulative case may help a hearer who wants to

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[180] Tertullian, *Apology* 50, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:55. The Latin text is in Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 50.13, ed. F. Oehler, rev. T. R. Glover, The Tertullian Project, https://www.tertullian.org/latin/apologeticus.htm.

[181] *Epistle to Diognetus* 7, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:28.

[182] Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 31, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 4:192.

[183] Pliny, *Letters* 10.96, trans. Melmoth, rev. Bosanquet.

[184] 1 Cor. 3:8 (ESV).

see how the whole fits together. A presuppositional critique may help a hearer who thinks his worldview is neutral. Reformed epistemology may help a believer who has been told he has no right to believe without a proof. The fideist emphasis may remind the apologist that the goal is an encounter with God in Christ, not a won argument. Each of these has its place under prayer and under the Spirit. None of them converts. All of them can water.

XX. Read and Listen: Preparing to Point Others

No one apologist can answer every question well. The person who asks about the problem of evil, the reliability of the Gospels, the claims of Islam, the deity of Christ, or the origin of the universe deserves a better answer than any one of us can give unaided. Part of a life ordered around this task is the preparation to point people to good help.

So I urge every reader to read and to listen. Read good argumentation from each of the methods named in the first paper: the classical, the evidential, the cumulative, the presuppositional, the Reformed epistemological, and the fideist, as well as the writers who work in the modes of story and conversation. Listen to the debates, lectures, and podcasts in which careful Christians answer hard questions in public. The purpose is twofold. First, it prepares the apologist himself, so that he understands the questions better than he did and can answer more truly. Second, it prepares him to give resources and directions to the people he is speaking with, both in answering difficult questions and in supporting their own approach as they grow.

The list of resources that follows this paper is arranged by topic rather than by method, because people ask questions by topic. It includes books, podcasts, YouTube channels, and lecture series. The writers in it do not all agree with one another, and they do not all agree with me. I have not marked those disagreements. We are all Christians, so we are brothers in Christ. A reader who wants to know where a writer stands on a disputed question can find out by reading him.

Three topics deserve special mention because they correspond to the deeper versions of my five-point outline. For God's Person, a reader should be pointed to good work on the Trinity and the deity of Christ. For God's Provision, he should be pointed to good work on the resurrection and on the reliability of the Scriptures that report it. And for every point, he should be pointed back to the Scriptures themselves. The resource list is a set of signposts. The road is the word.

Conclusion

The first paper ended with four things that remain non-negotiable, whichever method is in hand and whichever kind is doing the work. This paper ends by restating them as the life of the sower.

The sower is steeped in Scripture, because the seed is the word, and faith comes from hearing the word of Christ. He wants to bring every person he speaks with into that library of truth as soon as possible. He prays, because the harvest belongs to the Lord of the harvest, and because Jesus told him to pray before he told him to go. He relies on the Spirit, who is the one who converts and the apologetic's power. His life complies with the relationship he claims, because people smell a hypocrite quickly, and because the good seed is known by its fruit. And his whole life is ordered around the task, so that his work, his speech, his household, and his suffering are a lamp on a stand rather than a lamp under a basket.

When someone asks him for a reason for the hope that is in him, he answers with gentleness and respect. He answers from life and not only from existence. He prepares the ground with what the hearer already lives by, he speaks to the seed already sown in reason, and he moves as quickly as he honestly can into the Scriptures and to Christ crucified and risen. He follows the shape of the conversation: our problem, God's person, God's provision, God's purpose, and God's path. And then he waits, and waters, and prays, because he knows the order of PWG: "neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth."[185]

The apostles did this. The early church did this, under persecution, and the field grew. We are not asked to do more than they did. We are asked to do the same, in our own fields, with the same Spirit. "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."[186]

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[185] 1 Cor. 3:7 (ESV).

[186] Matt. 5:16 (ESV).

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Tertullian. *Apologeticum*. Edited by F. Oehler. Revised by T. R. Glover. The Tertullian Project. https://www.tertullian.org/latin/apologeticus.htm.

Appendix: Apologetic Resources by Topic

Books, podcasts, YouTube channels and lecture series, arranged by the question each one helps answer. Labels in brackets help a reader find the kind of resource he needs.

1. Atheism and naturalism

Books

- Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). [Reformed epistemology]
- Edward Feser, *The Last Superstition: A Refutation of the New Atheism* (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 2008). [Thomist]
- John C. Lennox, *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* (Oxford: Lion, 2007).
- John C. Lennox, *Gunning for God: Why the New Atheists Are Missing the Target* (Oxford: Lion, 2011).
- John C. Lennox, *Can Science Explain Everything?* (The Good Book Company, 2019).

- Alister McGrath and Joanna Collicutt McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion? Atheist Fundamentalism and the Denial of the Divine*, US ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2007).
- David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). [Eastern Orthodox]
- Victor Reppert, *C. S. Lewis's Dangerous Idea: A Philosophical Defense of Lewis's Argument from Reason* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003).
- Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004). [classical]
- Frank Turek, *Stealing from God: Why Atheists Need God to Make Their Case* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014).
- Alvin Plantinga and Michael Tooley, *Knowledge of God* (Malden, MA, and Oxford: Blackwell, 2008). [debate format]
- William Lane Craig and Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, *God? A Debate between a Christian and an Atheist* (Oxford University Press, 2004). [debate format]
- J. P. Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism: Learning to Respond to a Dangerous Ideology* (Crossway, 2018).
- Andy Bannister, *The Atheist Who Didn't Exist: Or the Dreadful Consequences of Bad Arguments* (Monarch Books, 2015).
- C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1947).

Media: see section 13 (Reasonable Faith, Cross Examined, Capturing Christianity, Premier Unbelievable?, Solas).

2. The existence of God

Books

- William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2008). [classical]
- William Lane Craig, *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010).
- William Lane Craig, *The Kalām Cosmological Argument* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1979).
- William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (Chichester, U.K.; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).
- Edward Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017). [Thomist]
- Edward Feser, *Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009). [Thomist]
- Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). [cumulative case]
- Jerry L. Walls and Trent Dougherty, eds., *Two Dozen (or So) Arguments for God: The Plantinga Project* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).
- J. P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1987).

- Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994). [Catholic; classical]
- Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967). [Reformed epistemology]
- Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). [Reformed epistemology]
- Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, eds., *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983). [Reformed epistemology]
- C. Stephen Evans, *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God: A New Look at Theistic Arguments* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- R. C. Sproul, *Defending Your Faith: An Introduction to Apologetics* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2003). [Reformed; classical]
- R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1984). [Reformed; classical]
- Greg L. Bahnsen, *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith* (Atlanta, GA: American Vision; Texarkana, AR: Covenant Media Foundation, 1996). [Reformed; presuppositional]
- Greg L. Bahnsen, *Pushing the Antithesis: The Apologetic Methodology of Greg L. Bahnsen*, 1st ed. (Powder Springs, Ga.: American Vision, 2007). [Reformed; presuppositional]
- Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1998). [presuppositional]
- Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1955). [presuppositional]
- John M. Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1994). [presuppositional]
- K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles and Practice in Defense of Our Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013). [covenantal / presuppositional]
- K. Scott Oliphint, *The Battle Belongs to the Lord: The Power of Scripture for Defending Our Faith* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2003). [covenantal / presuppositional]
- Gavin Ortlund, *Why God Makes Sense in a World That Doesn't: The Beauty of Christian Theism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2021).
- Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Dutton, 2008).

Media: see section 13 (Reasonable Faith; drcraigvideos; Capturing Christianity; FreeThinking Ministries; Ligonier "Defending Your Faith"); Plantinga's Gifford Lectures page (section 13).

3. Evil and suffering

Books

- Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974). [free-will defense]

- D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1990). [Reformed]
- John S. Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problems of Evil*, rev. and expanded ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004). [Reformed]
- Timothy Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering* (New York: Dutton, 2013).
- C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (London: Centenary Press, 1940).
- C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, first American ed. (Greenwich, Conn.: Seabury Press, 1963). [literary / personal]
- Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). [Catholic; Thomist]
- Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- John C. Lennox, *Where Is God in a Coronavirus World?* (The Good Book Company, 2020).

Media: Biola's *Think Biblically* has an episode dated Oct. 6, 2026, "When The Journey Hurts" (section 12). Also see Unbelievable? and Truth Unites (section 13).

4. Science and faith (cosmology, fine-tuning, evolution and design)

Books

- Stephen C. Meyer, *Signature in the Cell: DNA and the Evidence for Intelligent Design* (New York: HarperOne, 2009). [intelligent design]
- Stephen C. Meyer, *Darwin's Doubt: The Explosive Origin of Animal Life and the Case for Intelligent Design* (New York: HarperOne, 2013). [intelligent design]
- Stephen C. Meyer, *Return of the God Hypothesis: Three Scientific Discoveries That Reveal the Mind behind the Universe* (HarperOne, 2021). [intelligent design]
- Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box* (New York: Free Press, 1996). [intelligent design]
- Michael J. Behe, *Darwin Devolves: The New Science about DNA That Challenges Evolution* (New York: HarperOne, 2019). [intelligent design]
- Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay W. Richards, *The Privileged Planet: How Our Place in the Cosmos Is Designed for Discovery* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2004). [fine-tuning / design]
- Robin Collins, "The Teleological Argument: An Exploration of the Fine-Tuning of the Universe," in Craig and Moreland, *Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, 202–81. [fine-tuning]
- Geraint F. Lewis and Luke A. Barnes, *A Fortunate Universe: Life in a Finely Tuned Cosmos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). [fine-tuning; a physics book, not an apologetic]
- Alister E. McGrath, *A Fine-Tuned Universe: The Quest for God in Science and Theology* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).
- John C. Lennox, *Seven Days That Divide the World: The Beginning According to Genesis and Science* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2011).

- Hugh Ross, *The Creator and the Cosmos* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1993). [old-earth creation]
- Jason Lisle, *The Ultimate Proof of Creation: Resolving the Origins Debate* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2009). [young-earth; presuppositional]
- Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006). [evolutionary creation]
- J. P. Moreland et al., eds., *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2017). [intelligent design]
- William Lane Craig, *In Quest of the Historical Adam: A Biblical and Scientific Exploration* (Eerdmans, 2021).
- Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies* (2011): see section 1.
- R. C. Sproul, *Not a Chance: The Myth of Chance in Modern Science and Cosmology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1994). [Reformed]

Media

- Reasons to Believe (Hugh Ross et al.), website, https://reasons.org/. [old-earth creation] YouTube "Reasons to Believe," https://www.youtube.com/@RTB_official.
- ID the Future (Discovery Institute), podcast, https://idthefuture.com/. [intelligent design] Discovery Institute YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/@DiscoveryInstitute. Center for Science and Culture, https://www.discovery.org/id/.
- Answers in Genesis, website https://answersingenesis.org/ and YouTube https://www.youtube.com/@AnswersinGenesis. [young-earth creation]
- BioLogos, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/@BioLogos. [evolutionary creation]
- John Lennox, website, https://johnlennox.org/.

5. The resurrection

Books

- Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2004). [minimal facts]
- Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic; Nottingham: Apollos, 2010).
- N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).
- Gary R. Habermas, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).
- Gary R. Habermas, *On the Resurrection*, vol. 1, *Evidences* (B&H Academic, 2024).
- Gary R. Habermas, *On the Resurrection*, vol. 2, *Refutations* (B&H Academic, 2024).
- William Lane Craig, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989).
- Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998).
- Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict: Life-Changing Truth for a Skeptical World*, 4th ed. (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2017).

- Josh McDowell, *More Than a Carpenter* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1977).
- Sean McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles: Examining the Martyrdom Accounts of the Closest Followers of Jesus* (Farnham, Surrey, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015).
- Mike Licona, *Paul Meets Muhammad: A Christian-Muslim Debate on the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2006).

Media

- Risen Jesus Ministries (Mike Licona), website, https://www.risenjesus.com/.
- Dr. Gary R. Habermas, "Online Resource for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ," website, https://www.garyhabermas.com/.
- Testify (Erik Manning), YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/@TestifyApologetics; companion site "Is Jesus Alive?", https://isjesusalive.com/.
- InspiringPhilosophy (Michael Jones), YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/@InspiringPhilosophy. Site https://www.inspiringphilosophy.com/.

6. The reliability of Scripture (textual transmission, canon, archaeology, historicity)

Books

- Peter J. Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?* (Crossway, 2018).
- Peter J. Williams, *The Surprising Genius of Jesus: What the Gospels Reveal about the Greatest Teacher* (Crossway, 2023).
- Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006).
- Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Nottingham: Apollos; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2007).
- Craig L. Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe the Bible? An Evangelical Engagement with Contemporary Questions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2014).
- F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, 5th rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960).
- Michael R. Licona, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels? What We Can Learn from Ancient Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).
- Craig A. Evans, *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2006).
- Daniel B. Wallace, ed., *Revisiting the Corruption of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 2011). [textual criticism]
- J. Ed Komoszewski, M. James Sawyer, and Daniel B. Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2006). [textual criticism]
- Elijah Hixson and Peter J. Gurry, eds., *Myths and Mistakes in New Testament Textual Criticism* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2019). [textual criticism]
- James R. White, *The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust Modern Translations?*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2009). [Reformed Baptist author]

- Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2012). [Reformed]
- Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013). [Reformed]
- Andreas J. Köstenberger and Michael J. Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2010).
- Charles E. Hill, *Who Chose the Gospels? Probing the Great Gospel Conspiracy* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003). [archaeology / OT history]

Media

- Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts (Daniel B. Wallace, founder), website, https://www.csntm.org/. The site says: "In 2002, Daniel B. Wallace founds the Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts."
- Canon Fodder (Michael J. Kruger), blog, https://michaeljkruger.com/.
- Wes Huff, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/@WesHuff.
- Testify (Erik Manning): see section 5.

7. The Trinity and the deity of Christ

Books

- James R. White, *The Forgotten Trinity* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1998). [Reformed Baptist author]
- Robert M. Bowman Jr. and J. Ed Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus in His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2007).
- Robert M. Bowman Jr., *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity: An Answer to Jehovah's Witnesses* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1989).
- Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*, pbk. ed. (Eerdmans, 2005).
- Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008).
- Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2010).
- Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012).
- Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004). [Reformed]

Media: Alpha & Omega Ministries / The Dividing Line (section 9); Truth Unites (section 13).

8. Morality

Books

- C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952). [moral argument, Book I]

- C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, first American ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1947).
- David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- C. Stephen Evans, *Why Christian Faith Still Makes Sense: A Response to Contemporary Challenges* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2015).
- Robert Merrihew Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2011).
- Paul Copan and Matthew Flannagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide? Coming to Terms with the Justice of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2014).

Media: Stand to Reason and Think Biblically (section 12); Cross Examined (section 13).

9. Religious pluralism and other religions (Islam, cults)

Books

- Nabeel Qureshi, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus: A Devout Muslim Encounters Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2014).
- Nabeel Qureshi, *No God but One: Allah or Jesus?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2016).
- Nabeel Qureshi, *Answering Jihad: A Better Way Forward* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2016).
- James R. White, *What Every Christian Needs to Know about the Qur'an* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2013). [Reformed Baptist author]
- Andy Bannister, *Do Muslims and Christians Worship the Same God?* (IVP, 2021).
- Mike Licona, *Paul Meets Muhammad*: see section 5.
- Harold A. Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith & Mission* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001).
- Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, US ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans; Geneva: WCC Publications, 1989).
- D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996).
- Walter R. Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965). [cults]
- Francis J. Beckwith et al., eds., *The New Mormon Challenge* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002). [Latter-day Saints]
- Robert M. Bowman Jr., *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity: An Answer to Jehovah's Witnesses* (1989): see section 7.
- Gavin Ortlund, *What It Means to Be Protestant: The Case for an Always-Reforming Church* (Zondervan, 2024). [Protestant–Catholic–Orthodox questions]

Media

- Apologetics Roadshow (David Wood), YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/@ApologeticsRoadshow. [Islam] Acts 17 ministry site https://acts17.com/.
- Alpha & Omega Ministries (James R. White), YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/@AominOrg. [Reformed Baptist; Islam, cults, textual questions] Also *The Dividing Line* webcast page, https://www.aomin.org/aoblog/webcast/. White's personal channel is DrOakley1689, https://www.youtube.com/@DrOakley1689.
- Apologia Studios, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/@ApologiaStudios. [Reformed]
- Solas Centre for Public Christianity (Andy Bannister), website https://www.solas-cpc.org/ and YouTube https://www.youtube.com/@SolasCPC.

10. Free will and determinism

Books

- William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1987). [Molinist]
- Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998). [Molinist]
- Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, ed. Paul Ramsey, Works of Jonathan Edwards 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957). [Reformed]
- Paul Helm, *The Providence of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994). [Reformed]
- D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981). [Reformed]
- John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2001). [Reformed]
- Richard A. Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice: Freedom, Contingency, and Necessity in Early Modern Reformed Thought* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2017). [Reformed]
- Willem J. van Asselt, J. Martin Bac, and Roelf T. te Velde, eds., *Reformed Thought on Freedom: The Concept of Free Choice in Early Modern Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2010). [Reformed]
- James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, eds., *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001). [multi-view]
- Dennis W. Jowers, ed., *Four Views on Divine Providence* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2011). [multi-view]
- Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).
- John Martin Fischer, Robert Kane, Derk Pereboom, and Manuel Vargas, *Four Views on Free Will* (Malden, MA, and Oxford: Blackwell, 2007). [philosophy; multi-view]

Media

- FreeThinking Ministries (Tim Stratton), website https://www.freethinkingministries.com/ and YouTube "Freethinking Ministries"

https://www.youtube.com/@FreeThinkingMinistries; podcasts at https://www.freethinkingministries.com/free-thinking-podcasts. [Molinist]

- Premier Unbelievable?, "Does free will exist? Alex Malpass vs Tim Stratton," hosted by Andy Kind (January 5, 2024), and "James White vs William Lane Craig: Calvinism vs Molinism on the problem of evil" (December 4, 2021), https://www.premierunbelievable.com/unbelievable.

11. Meaning and the life questions

Books

- Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical* (New York: Viking, 2016).
- Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 30th anniv. ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998).
- Francis A. Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1972).
- Francis A. Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason* (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1968).
- Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966).
- Thomas V. Morris, *Making Sense of It All: Pascal and the Meaning of Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1992).
- John Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).
- Gregory Koukl, *The Story of Reality: How the World Began, How It Ends, and Everything Important That Happens in Between* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2017).
- Rebecca McLaughlin, *10 Questions Every Teen Should Ask (and Answer) about Christianity* (Crossway, 2021).
- G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane Company; London: John Lane, 1909).
- G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1925). [literary / imaginative]
- Alister E. McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019). [literary / imaginative]
- Andrew Davison, ed., *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy and the Catholic Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012). [literary / imaginative]

Media

- Gospel in Life (Timothy Keller), website https://gospelinlife.com/ and YouTube https://www.youtube.com/@gospelinlife.
- The Veritas Forum, website https://www.veritas.org/ and YouTube https://www.youtube.com/@VeritasForum.
- Closer To Truth, website https://closertotruth.com/ and YouTube https://www.youtube.com/@ClosertoTruthTV. [interview series; mixed viewpoints]

12. Objections from culture

Books

- Rebecca McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity: 12 Hard Questions for the World's Largest Religion* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2019).
- Rebecca McLaughlin, *The Secular Creed: Engaging Five Contemporary Claims* (The Gospel Coalition, 2021).
- Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay? And Other Questions about Homosexuality, the Bible and Same-Sex Attraction* (The Good Book Company, 2013).
- Sam Allberry, *7 Myths about Singleness* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2019).
- Sam Allberry, *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies: How the Gospel Is Good News for Our Physical Selves* (Crossway, 2021).
- Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Crossway, 2020).
- Nancy R. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2018).
- Nancy R. Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004).
- Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into Christian Faith* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Crown & Covenant, 2012). [Reformed Presbyterian author]
- Sean McDowell and John Stonestreet, *Same-Sex Marriage: A Thoughtful Approach to God's Design for Marriage* (Ventura, CA: Baker Books, 2014).
- Glen Scrivener, *The Air We Breathe: How We All Came to Believe in Freedom, Kindness, Progress, and Equality* (The Good Book Company, 2022).
- Tom Holland, *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World*, US ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2019). [historian; not an apologist]
- Alvin Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2015). [Reformed epistemology; a short version of *Warranted Christian Belief*]
- Gregory Koukl, *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2009).

Media

- Stand to Reason (Greg Koukl), website https://www.str.org/ and YouTube https://www.youtube.com/@STRvideos. Podcasts page https://www.str.org/podcasts.
- Sean McDowell, YouTube https://www.youtube.com/@SeanMcDowell and website https://seanmcdowell.org/.
- Think Biblically (Biola University; hosts Sean McDowell and Scott Rae), podcast, https://www.biola.edu/blogs/think-biblically.
- Confronting Christianity (Rebecca McLaughlin), website, https://www.confrontingchristianity.org/. YouTube "Rebecca McLaughlin," https://www.youtube.com/@RebeccaMcLaughlin.
- Sam Allberry, website, https://samallberry.com/.

13. General and cross-topic channels, podcasts, and lecture series

- Reasonable Faith (William Lane Craig): website https://www.reasonablefaith.org/; podcast page "Our Podcast | Reasonable Faith," https://www.reasonablefaith.org/media/reasonable-faith-podcast; YouTube "ReasonableFaithOrg," https://www.youtube.com/@ReasonableFaithOrg; YouTube "drcraigvideos," https://www.youtube.com/@drcraigvideos.
- Capturing Christianity (Cameron Bertuzzi), YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/@CapturingChristianity. The channel's own description: "My name is Cameron Bertuzzi. This channel is aimed at exposing the truth of Mere Christian belief." Website https://capturingchristianity.com/; podcast archive https://capturingchristianity.com/category/podcast/.
- Cross Examined (Frank Turek), website https://crossexamined.org/, YouTube https://www.youtube.com/@CrossExamined ("content from the Cross Examined team lead by our founder & president Dr. Frank Turek"), and podcasts page https://crossexamined.org/podcasts/.
- Stand to Reason (Greg Koukl): see section 12.
- Ligonier Ministries (founded by R. C. Sproul): website https://www.ligonier.org/; YouTube https://www.youtube.com/@Ligonier; *Renewing Your Mind* podcast, https://learn.ligonier.org/podcasts/renewing-your-mind. Teaching series "Defending Your Faith by R.C. Sproul," https://learn.ligonier.org/series/defending-your-faith. [Reformed; classical]
- Truth Unites (Gavin Ortlund): YouTube https://www.youtube.com/@TruthUnites; website https://truthunites.org/; podcast "Truth Unites" on Apple Podcasts, https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/truth-unites/id1700282740.
- FreeThinking Ministries (Tim Stratton): see section 10.
- InspiringPhilosophy (Michael Jones): see section 5.
- Testify (Erik Manning): see section 5.
- Apologetics Roadshow (David Wood): see section 9.
- Alpha & Omega Ministries (James R. White): see section 9.
- Premier Unbelievable? (Premier; rotating hosts, e.g. Andy Kind and John Nelson): website https://www.premierunbelievable.com/ and show page https://www.premierunbelievable.com/unbelievable; YouTube "Premier Unbelievable?" https://www.youtube.com/@premierunbelievable. [Christian–non-Christian dialogue]
- Mike Winger, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/@MikeWinger.
- Wes Huff, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/@WesHuff.
- Sightline Ministry (formerly Josh McDowell Ministry): website https://sightlineministry.org/; YouTube https://www.youtube.com/@SightlineMinistry.
- Solas (Andy Bannister): see section 9.
- Biola University YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/@BiolaUniversity; *Think Biblically*: see section 12.
- Apologetics 315, website, https://apologetics315.com/.
- bethinking.org, website, https://www.bethinking.org/.
- Edward Feser, blog, https://edwardfeser.blogspot.com/. [Thomist]

- Alvin Plantinga, Gifford Lectures (University of Aberdeen, 1987): “(1) Warrant: The Current Debate (2) Warrant and Proper Function (3) Warranted Christian Belief.” https://giffordlectures.org/lecturers/alvin-plantinga. [Reformed epistemology]