

The End¹ of Apologetic Evidence...is its Power to Convict²

Why the World isn't Clamoring to Deal with its Implications

According to Romans 1:18-20, God does NOT condemn people for what they *cannot* know and neither does He judge us according to our IQs! The Bible is clear that as individuals we have each been intentionally designed (Psalm 139) with distinctive clusters of gifts in terms of personality, passions, and skills (Romans 12:6) together with the opportunity to express them through our free wills. Furthermore circumstances are dealt to each of us under God's providence in varying measures of "advantages" and/or "hindrances" (however one might perceive them). So, we won't all be held accountable to exactly the same criteria (James. 3:1) since multitudes of people, for example, haven't even had the opportunity to hear the Gospel, let alone respond to it. On the basis of the demonstrable character of Jesus by his giving his life on the cross for the world, there are solid grounds for trusting his judgment to be fair regarding those who are ignorant of that message. Nevertheless, the question of whether or not people are *actually* guilty is a different matter from the question of His decree concerning one's eternal destiny.

God is surely **NOT** indifferent as to how we *use* our gifts with respect to both our interactions with the external world and our internal reflections upon the same. Both of these commissions were issued to us by God to the end that we should habitually pursue truth. Indeed this goal is deemed by Scripture to be among our highest *moral* priority.³ Whether by expressing indifference toward basic truth concerns, or willfully misrepresenting the same; both postures are judged to be an affront to His purposes as the God of truth (Ps. 119:160). This indeed is the crux of the matter. The malaise that this paper addresses does not pertain to whether people have broken some so-called "un-perceivable" code, but instead to a hostile attitude expressed toward what we all **can know** and yet choose to avoid. Briefly put, the fundamental human malady before us is our sinful inclination to "**suppress the truth**" insofar as it hinders our determination to evade the authority of God in our personal lives (Rom. 1:18).

Indeed it is this very propensity (a trait that is observationally provable) which is the clearest of indicators of the sinful condition of our hearts. It is often stated in Christian circles that one of the most damaging ploys of the devil with respect to hindering the spread of the Gospel in recent times entails the broad disintegration of the concept of moral absolutes which logically follows from allegations of God's non-existence. Indeed there is little question but that the mounting moral relativism of our day has efficiently stifled the potency of written moral codes to convict secular consciences. Nevertheless Romans 1:18-21 and 2:1-5, taken together, nullifies that very damper by framing *sinful* acts in such a way that consciences are confronted, not by some so-called elusive set of strictures, but by the brute facts of reality with respect to both the external world of nature and the inner awareness of our consciences. When for example *scientifically*-minded people insist on the one hand that intellectual claims be grounded on empirical⁴ facts while they instead turn a blind eye to the current drive to insulate gender-identity claims from the scrutiny of anatomical facts, they are committing intellectual suicide (Rom. 1:21). Secondly, whenever one imposes a moral expectation onto another person, yet exempts him/herself from that standard, he resorts to a double-standard in gross violation of the golden rule (Rom. 2:1f). Notice that in **neither** case is a guilty verdict dependent on biblical revelation for the reason that the violators have broken their **own** standards scientifically, rationally, and psychologically.

¹ The word "end" can mean "purpose," as opposed to "demise."

² Romans 1:18-20/3:19-20.

³ John 3:19.

⁴ "Empirical" evidence refers to that which can either be measured or perceived by our five senses.

Consequently, one's level of receptivity to apologetic evidence (AE) that favors God's existence and power is directly related to the question of whether or not we have received the new birth (John 3:3) in spiritual conversion. Martin Luther describes our proclivity to sin very effectively in his famous treatise titled "The Bondage of the Will,"⁵ where he notes that we don't sin *against* our will, but instead *because of* our sinful will. Stated bluntly, we sin not because we *can't* do otherwise, but because we *won't*...and because we *won't*, the anticipated good simply *won't* get done! Such is the debilitating power of sin upon our lives.⁶ Only after the Holy Spirit has cleared through our innate⁷ sinful opposition to the lordship of Christ in our personal lives, do we come to gladly learn of the broad array of AE (scientific, historical, rational, etc.) which affirms that the Gospel is indeed consistent with factual reality. On the other hand, insofar as our wills continue to be driven by our personal bondage to *self-centeredness*,⁸ then every indication that suggests the Gospel might be true will consequently be perceived as a threat to our flawed sense of well-being. This is the obstacle that AE *must* overcome, even as it is so-intended. It also effectively explains with great clarity just why it is that Christians are generally⁹ far more eager to consider a body of AE favoring the Christian claim, than are non-Christians.

This dark reality isn't intended to stifle the use of AE in our proclamation of the Gospel. Rather, it is my goal to heighten the urgency for its employment (2 Corinthians 10:5) by clarifying that AE is a vital means which Scripture itself uses to confront sinners that, by their rebellion against the Lordship of God in Christ, they are in contradiction with reality across a wide array of aspects. Readers may be surprised to learn that the imperative to *obey* truth has its foundation not in science, but in the Holy Bible which states that God demands obedience to truth in every single realm of life, from the sciences (Rom. 1:18f.), to historical investigation (Luke 1:1-3), to both *personal* daily social interaction (Ephesians 4:15) and *public* concerns (Rom. 13:1f.). In matters of truth in this context, it is NOT the case that truth depends on science, but the other way around. It is instead science that utterly depends on its researchers following where the scientific evidence leads for the sake of truth, as opposed to for solely pragmatic considerations. Although science can't provide its own reasons why truth must be obeyed, the fact remains that unless truth is followed in the course of scientific investigation, the latter will lose its status as a credible guardian of knowledge and instead degenerate into a perverse form of intellectual manipulation known as sophistry.¹⁰ For this reason, it is vital that there be religious revival that is clearly Christ-centered in order for the scientific enterprise to maintain its proper focus. I do acknowledge that Christianity has all-too-often grossly violated this very same principle by depriving science its rightful authority as a purveyor of empirical truth about the natural order. Yet the good news is that a vigilant application of AE can keep the sin of both of these parties in check. At bottom both individuals and the larger society as a whole,¹¹ have a stake in including AE in Christian proclamation that is conveyed with such a sense of conviction as to lead to a wholesale conviction of the sin of unbelief in the God of Truth.

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⁵ Philip Watson, ed. Martin Luther's "Bondage of the Will." Luther's Works, Am. ed. (Fortress, 1972, v. 33, p. 64.

⁶ Romans 6:16.

⁷Innate, that is, due to Adam's Fall (Romans 5:12) as opposed to by creation which, God stated then, is good (Genesis 1:31).

⁸ As opposed to God-centeredness, is the very biblical definition of sin.

⁹ On the other hand certain Christians assume that AE is illegitimate on the grounds that "*God's Word can stand on its own!*" For a rebuttal of that position see my essay, "The Pervasive Employment of Apologetics in the Bible," at my website: www.christianityontheoffense.com

¹⁰ Plato correctly noted in his dialogue, Gorgias" (R. Baldick, ed., Penguin, 1996, line 462f), that morality can't be grounded in rhetoric itself. Yet I would add that philosophy in itself cannot give foundation to truth, but only a correct religious world-view (i.e. biblical Christianity).

¹¹ See my paper, "Does the Bible Permit Denigrating Science in Order to Maintain our Faith?" at my website, Op.cit. (9).