

# The Pervasive Employment of Apologetics in the Bible

*"[They examined] the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so"—Acts 17:11*

I have at times been challenged by the weighty assertion that it is improper to appeal to evidence outside of the Bible as a basis for affirming its truth. To the contrary, so the argument goes, Scripture properly stands on its own authority, thereby rendering such appeals to external evidence illegitimate. At a recent Bible study one parishioner stated to the effect that this is what Pastors in the Missouri Synod have consistently taught. I hasten to add at this point that I am actually honored as pastor, and my leadership is assisted, when such concerns are expressed so directly and honestly. It is very difficult for me to address concerns of a kind that people typically won't express even though I know many of you may be wrestling with them privately. The above Bible study under consideration considered the theme of apologetics, which means to give a reasonable answer to a given challenge. When Peter wrote, "*Always be prepared to give a reason for the hope that is in you...*" (1 Peter 3:15), he used the Greek word *apologia*. When presenting an *apologia*, one is NOT saying "I'm sorry," but instead declaring, "*This is my reasoned answer to your challenge.*" With respect to my sister's specific concern, I would frame the basic question as follows, "Can our *apology* appeal, on the authority of the Holy Bible, to evidence *outside* of the pages of the Bible?" In search of an answer to that question, the only legitimate means of answering it is to, well, go to the pages of the Bible.

I am convinced that her observation about the *history* of the Missouri Synod is accurate. I also acknowledge that if that traditional practice is the correct one on authority of the Bible, then apologetics has NO place in our Synod. This is the all-important question: Does the Bible oppose apologetics? To answer that question, it is necessary to investigate **what Scripture actually says** about these matters if indeed it addresses these concerns at all. It is not sufficient to merely repeat what someone else has taught (myself included) without studying the Bible for ourselves. On further reflection, my reply to her challenge is that the Bible *does* appeal both to logic and reason, and also to the reality of confirmatory extra-biblical evidence (from outside the pages of the Scriptures). Consider the following examples:

## I. Concerning the Bible's employment of *logic* as a valid means of persuasion.

- A. In the Book of Job chs. 38f, God challenged Job at the level of logic by posing to him one probing question after another.
- B. The prophet Isaiah challenged the *logical absurdity* of an idolater cutting down a tree, burning one half to warm his family and cook a meal, while with the other half, carving it into an idol which he worships (Isaiah 44:9-17).
- C. Our Lord Jesus challenged his disciples to be "*wise as serpents and innocent as doves*" (Matthew 10:16).
- D. In a conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus said, "*If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?*" (John 3:12), thereby affirming His own commitment to truth even at the mundane (earthy) level.
- E. Jesus exposed His own authenticity (*do my works match my words?*) to the scrutiny of His disciples by asking them, "*Which of you convicts me of sin?*" (John 8:46).
- F. On the week prior to His death, Jesus routinely challenged the *logic* of his opponents to the degree that He confounded them (Luke 20:3-8, 26, 41-44).

- G. The Apostle Paul appealed to insights from the Athenians' own literary heroes by his highlighting implications that logically follow from them (Acts 17:27b-29).
- H. The Bible never even once pits its authority against the testimony of nature as though Scripture is forcing a battle between science and faith. To the contrary, in Romans 1:18-20 Paul writes that it is sinful to suppress the testimony of nature for the reason that it tells the truth about God's "*eternal power and deity*" (1:20). Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod scientist, the late Dr. John Klotz, correctly stated that our faith "*cannot go contrary to science and reason...There must be a basic unity between [scientific] facts and truth as it is given to us in revelation*" (Modern Science and the Christian Life. (Concordia, 1962), p.79).
- I. In Rom. 1:18-20 the Apostle Paul decries the ploy of suppressing the testimony of nature in the manner of young-earth creationism (YEC) which rejects all scientifically-attained knowledge of a kind that indicates to the contrary that creation of ancient.
- J. In Romans 1:18-32 the Apostle Paul describes the moral disintegration that logically follows upon deliberately turning away from belief in God who is the Maker of all things.
- K. In Rom. 2:1f., St. Paul highlighted the illegitimacy of committing the *double-standard* logical fallacy by holding other people accountable for keeping a set of standards that the imposer has no intention of keeping himself. The Apostle Paul suggests that every single person is guilty of this sin, and consequently is guilty before God, irrespective of whether they have access to the testimony of Scripture or not.
- L. The Apostle Paul appeals to the testimony of our own consciences that there exists a moral law-giver (God) who is the standard for the moral absolutes of right and wrong which is implanted in our hearts.
- M. Nearly 20 times in the Book of Acts various forms of the word *apologia* are employed to describe aspects of Paul's missionary methods.
- N. The Apostle John used the word *logos* (variously translated as "word," "reason," and "logic") when he began his Gospel by identifying Jesus as "the *logos*" (*In the beginning was the Word...all things were made through Him...and the Word became flesh*" (John 1:1, 3, 14). By this means John sought to construct an intellectual bridge for advancing the Gospel to the non-Jewish Greco-Roman audience.

**II. The Bible's consistent employment of truth in the classical sense entailing harmony between assertions and the state of affairs that they reference.**

- A. In Scripture "truth" as a concept is never appealed to or employed in any manner that contradicts rationality in the common sense of the term.
- B. Moses declared that the means for testing a false prophet is as follows: "*When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if that word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken presumptuously, you need not be afraid of him*" (Deut. 18:22). By this statement Moses was challenging hearers to test the words of a prophet against the actual unfolding of events in history.
- C. In John 1:1-3, 14, 29, Colossians 1:15-23 and Hebrews 1:1-3, the concepts of creation and the work of redemption in Jesus the Son of God are harmonized and reconciled.
- D. In John 14:6, Jesus who identifies Himself as the "way," at the same time reconciles the concept of "truth" with existential "life."

### III. The employment of apologetic arguments from the natural order (science).

- A. Psalm 19 boldly states, *“The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament proclaims His handiwork.”*
- B. Romans 1:19 states, *“Ever since the creation of the world [God’s] invisible nature, namely His eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.”*
- C. Romans 1:18-19 decries the practice of suppressing or denying the testimony of nature by calling it wickedness.
- D. It is recorded twice in the Apostle Paul’s missionary preaching to Gentile audiences that the testimony of nature is an indicator of God’s creational power (Acts 14:15 and 17:14f.).
- E. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations produced the book, The Natural Knowledge of God in Christian Confession and Christian Witness (boldface mine) which states: *“Advances in astronomy during the twentieth century ... led to the discovery that the universe is...expanding. [Such] discoveries thus suggested (by projecting backwards) the now generally accepted conclusion that the universe of space and time had a beginning in a finite past”* (LCMS, 2013, p.59). Notice that this statement from an authoritative arm of our Synod, despite its own commitment to young-earth creationism, appeals to mainstream *scientific* evidence because it is consistent with Genesis 1:1!

### IV. The Biblical appeal to external historical evidence in both Testaments in order to confirm the biblical claim to the truth of the events it describes.

- A. In Exodus 7-12 Yahweh wielded ten plagues onto Egypt in order to demonstrate to them His existence and power.
- B. In Exodus 14, Yahweh publicly demonstrated His saving power by leading Israel through the Red Sea.
- C. In Exodus 13, God demonstrated His presence to the Israelites by means of the Pillars of fire and fire.
- D. God demonstrated His glory by means of the clouds which covered Mt. Sinai (Ex. 24:16).
- E. In 1 Kings 18, when the prophet Elijah confronts the prophets of Baal, God sends down fire from heaven to ignite water-drenched sacrificial alters as a public demonstration that Yahweh is the only true God.
- F. In Matthew 11:20-24 Jesus, citing three examples, upbraids his Jewish audience for not repenting in the face of His mighty works done in public.
- G. In Matthew 11 we read that John the Baptist was experiencing doubt of such intensity while languishing in prison (soon to be beheaded under Herod Antipas) that he sent messengers to Jesus in search of assurance that the latter was *indeed* Messiah. Instead of quoting Scripture back to them, Jesus instead told the two to go, *“Go and tell John what you **hear and see** [boldface mine]: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them”* (11:4, 5). Notice that when Jesus employed the words “hear” and “see,”

He was affirming that the record of His deeds were a matter of *public* knowledge for large numbers of eye-witnesses.

H. Earlier in His public ministry Jesus commanded a paralyzed man to get up and walk home with pallet in hand **in order that** the public might be assured of His (Christ's) "*authority on earth to forgive sins* (Mark 2:10)."

I. In the Gospel of John ch. 9 where Jesus healed a man born blind, He chastised the skeptical audience for refusing to draw conclusions from that *public* miracle they had witnessed that He is indeed the Son of God.

J. In John ch. 10, Jesus affirms that His works (healings, casting out demons, multiplying loaves of bread and fish, etc.) point to His authority as God's Son in vs. 25, 37, 38.

K. At the close of His public ministry, Jesus said to His disciples in John 14:11, "*Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe me **through the miraculous works themselves*** [boldface mine]." See also v. 12.

L. The most common Greek word to be translated miracle is *seimeon*, meaning "sign," which in the case of Scripture serves to prompt witnesses of them to acknowledge God as the source of the demonstrated power. Indeed, every miracle recorded in Scripture, by definition refers to phenomena which occur in the public eye and therefore *outside* of the text of the Bible.

M. Jesus revealed His glory through his transfiguration (Matt. 17:2).

#### V. The Bible's appeal to *non-textual* evidence for Jesus' historical resurrection.

A. When Thomas expressed skepticism concerning Jesus' resurrection, Jesus replied (with mild rebuke) "*Put your finger [in my side] and see my hands...*" (John 20:27).

B. In Peter's sermon on the Festival of Pentecost, he proclaimed Christ's resurrection as a matter of *public* fact that was acknowledged to be true by the crowd. Notice, for example, the confidence behind Peter's assertion that Jesus' works were performed as he said, "**in your midst**, [further adding] **as you yourselves know**" (Acts 2:22). So, he concluded his message, "*This Jesus God raised up, and of that **we are all witnesses***" (2:32—boldface mine).

C. In St. Paul's list of witnesses of the risen Jesus, 1 Corinthians 15:6 stands out as unique for his statement, "*Then [Jesus] appeared to more than 500 brethren at one time, **most of whom are still alive...***" (boldface mine). Notice that Paul wasn't merely asserting that the risen Jesus was seen by a huge crowd, which could be easily refuted if it were false. He was further challenging his contemporaries to go to the living eye-witnesses and check the facts for themselves since they were a matter of publicly-verifiable knowledge.

D. St. Paul said to King Agrippa, "*I am persuaded that none of these things [concerning the events surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection] has escaped [your] notice since **this was not done in a corner***" (Acts 26:26—boldface mine).

It is important to be clear about my intentions in writing this article. I deliberately refrained (against my own passionate wishes) from listing the *actual* substantial body of extra-biblical historical and scientific evidence in support of the truth of the Gospel. In reply to my sister's valuable challenge, I have instead demonstrated **from Scripture alone**, that the Bible urges readers to consider evidence which lies outside the text of its pages. To that end, I have laid before you many examples where

Scripture both embraces and employs not only logic but also the appeal to publicly-known facts which are external to itself. So, I ask, why should Christians resist such powerful means in our witness today, since it is we who have the truth of the testimony of nature and history on our side?

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