

# Introduction

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Christian apologetics is, at root, a biblical discipline. To some, this may sound so obvious as to be redundant. To others, however, it is a hotly contested proposition. At least part of the purpose of this collection of essays is to set in the foreground the necessity of exegetical and theological foundations for any Reformed, Christian apologetic. A Reformed apologetic is only Reformed to the extent that its tenets, principles, methodology, and so forth are formed and re-formed by Scripture.

One aspect of apologetics that has been lacking in the literature, to the point of near extinction, is the *ground* for the discipline of apologetics itself. Of course, the general reason for apologetics is given in the meaning of the term; the reason to engage in the discipline of apologetics is to defend the faith. But why be engaged in such an enterprise? Does the Christian faith really need defending? Doesn't defending the

faith smack of defensiveness? Or is the primary purpose of apologetics simply to give Christian philosophers something to do?

Because the defense of Christianity has, at least historically, taken place in the context of philosophical objections to the faith, apologetics has taken on a reputation as, in the first place, a philosophical discipline. Much of the history of apologetics has been concerned to show, philosophically, that Christianity can stand intellectual scrutiny and emerge without too many bruises.

This trend, however, has had the effect, directly or indirectly, of undermining the discipline itself. It has led many to believe, and some to argue, that the most difficult issues of philosophical theology or theological philosophy should be engaged only by those philosophically trained, those whose minds have been able to meld together the best of theology with the best of philosophy.

To cite just one example, William Craig notes in *The Only Wise God* and again in *Time and Eternity* that those who want to know how the deep things of God relate to his creation should consult Christian philosophers. Says Craig:

Some readers of my study of divine omniscience, *The Only Wise God*, expressed surprise at my remark that someone desiring to learn more about God's attribute of omniscience would be better advised to read the works of Christian philosophers than of Christian theologians. Not only was that remark true, but the same holds for divine eternity.<sup>1</sup>

This line of thinking is most unfortunate. As happened in the medieval period, such thinking will inevitably lead to the need for a radical, biblical reformation of those ideas and concepts developed by philosophers. If one wants to know about God's omniscience or his eternity, if one wants to think deeply about God and his relationship to the world, if one wants to do apologetics, the first place to look is

1. William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 11. It is interesting to note that Craig references the medieval period as a time when students were required to master philosophy before tackling theology; today's theologians, according to him, are ill-equipped to think about the deep things of God. Craig seems not to be aware that the medieval period, in its attempt to synthesize Christianity with philosophy, was in desperate need of biblical reformation, which, in God's providence, brought back the primacy of Scripture for such discussions. For a review of Craig's *Time and Eternity*, see K. Scott Oliphint, *Westminster Theological Journal* 63 (2001): 439–45.

to Scripture, and then to those theologians who faithfully articulate its teachings. Philosophy, even Christian philosophy, has a long and resolute history of turning its back on a consistent Reformed theology.<sup>2</sup> It, therefore, has not fared well with regard to theological (or philosophical-theological) discussions.<sup>3</sup>

What, then, can we learn from Scripture about the ground (and the task) of Christian apologetics? One of the best places to begin is in 1 Peter, especially chapter 3. As Peter begins his first epistle, note the designation of those to whom he writes:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you. (1 Peter 1:1–2)<sup>4</sup>

It is best to read these verses as one long designation. This is who Peter's recipients are; this is how he views them. They are elect exiles, chosen ones who are dispersed. Because dispersed, they may feel as though they do not belong. But they do belong—to God, according to his foreknowledge, *in* the sanctification of the Spirit, *unto* (*eis/eiς*) obedience to Christ.

Notice, most especially, that these readers, while being elect (*eklektōis/ἐκλεκτοῖς*), are nevertheless exiles (*parepidēmois/παρεπιδήμοις*). They are those who have no land—aliens, strangers, and not residents. The place wherein they reside is not their home.

Scripture gives abundant witness to the importance of land and home for God's covenant people. Without land, God's people are not

2. One of the reasons philosophy, especially philosophical theology, has too often undermined theology is that its *principium* is reason, not revelation. This too is most unfortunate. Particularly when much of philosophy seeks to understand who God is, a better recipe for error could hardly be imagined. See K. Scott Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith: Philosophy in the Service of Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006).

3. Thus, Craig's conclusion in *Time and Eternity* that God was eternal when there was no creation, but since, according to Craig, he simply could not relate himself to time and remain eternal, he needed to set his eternity aside at creation.

4. Scripture quotations in this introduction are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All right reserved.

“a people.” What are the current wars in the Middle East all about? Land. Why? Because of the continued belief that a people are identified and set apart by the land they possess. This, as we know, hearkens all the way back to that great salvific event of the Old Testament, the Exodus. God’s people were set free from Egypt to possess a land. And it was God who would give them that land.

But Peter is writing to scattered people in order to remind them of new covenant priorities. They are now, because chosen and elected by God in Christ, who is himself the King, *aliens* in this world. This world is not their home. The “land” of God’s people is now the *new* heavens and the *new* earth. Their home is in Christ, and in his kingdom. So, the fact that they are scattered is really an incidental matter in the end. Even if they were *not* scattered, even if they were “home,” they would still not be home.

This notion is of paramount importance when we think of apologetics specifically, and of our Christian identity more generally. As Christians, we know what it is like to be aliens. It is much like traveling to another country. Everything seems strange: the language is different, the customs are different, the values are often different, it is difficult to think that we really “belong.” But that is Peter’s point. These Christians do not belong to a physical place. They are united to Christ and are seated with him in the heavenlies. They are elect in him, secure only in the Father’s sovereign act of grace and mercy in salvation. They belong, first and foremost, to him.

Peter notes that he is writing to those “who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:5). Notice that, as Christians, we “are being guarded” (*phrouroumenous*/φρουρουμένων). The Greek word is a military term; it is battle terminology. It means we are shielded *by* God’s power and *through* our faith in Christ. When we think of apologetics, then, we are not to see it as in itself a shield or guard from the attacks of the world. God is our shield; he alone guards us by his power because of, and through, our union with Christ.

The reason it is important *not* to see apologetics as our guard and shield is that we will immediately begin to think that warding off attacks from the world, or shielding ourselves, is really in our hands. We might begin to think that it all depends on our own efforts, our

own apologetic expertise, whether or not we can defend the faith. But God guards us *while* we defend.

Our apologetic defense is not our shield. We do not rely on what we say or on our methodology or our gifts and skills when we defend the Christian faith. That would be a defense that is centered on us. But our defense is not man-centered, it is God-centered from beginning to end. Our defense of the faith, therefore, is *through faith*. That is, we trust in God as we defend, not in ourselves. Our trust is in him and his power, both to guard us and to change hearts and minds.

Peter then moves to the reality of suffering for Christians. That reality frames the quintessential passage on apologetics, 1 Peter 3:15. Suffering is the context in which the *locus classicus* of apologetics comes. Notice the passage:

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For

“Whoever desires to love life  
and see good days,  
let him keep his tongue from evil  
and his lips from speaking deceit;  
let him turn away from evil and do good;  
let him seek peace and pursue it.  
For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,  
and his ears are open to their prayer.  
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts regard 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. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. (1 Peter 3:8–17)

The section beginning in verse 8 through verse 12 addresses “all of you.” Prior to verse 8, Peter has been addressing specific groups as to their behavior; now he wants to sum up his exhortation by addressing all of them together. As Peter finishes the general address, encouraging these suffering Christians to do what is honorable to God in the midst of suffering, he begins, in verse 13, a more specific application of what they should do as they are abused from the outside, just how best to respond to their enemies.

The first important thing to notice about verses 13–17 is the way in which Peter *grounds* his instruction in the verse that immediately follows: “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 Peter 3:18). Here Peter gives the primary and foundational *reason* (*hoti/ὅτι*) that we are to act in a certain way toward outsiders. That reason is that Christ himself suffered. *He* was righteous, and he suffered, not only *for* the unrighteous, but also *by the hands* of the unrighteous.

In verse 13, Peter asks, “Who is there to harm you . . . ?” This is a double-edged question. It is meant to encourage his readers by reminding them that, while there are those who can harm the body, the readers need fear (as Peter had heard his Master say) only the One who can destroy both body and soul in hell (Matt. 10:28). But it is also meant to remind them that, in fact, there are those who may want to harm them. The word Peter uses here for harm (*kakōsōn/κακώσων*) is the word used of Herod Agrippa in Acts 12, which tells of Herod’s putting James to death and seeking to harm Peter. So, Peter has in mind the kind of persecution that he himself experienced, and the kind he was likely experiencing even as he wrote this epistle. He is reminding his readers, and us, that the suffering we all experience is penultimate, and that it is not worthy to be compared to the glory that will be revealed in us.

The specifically apologetic section of this passage actually begins in the latter part of 1 Peter 3:14. There Peter refers to Isaiah 8:12–13: “Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the LORD of hosts, him you shall regard as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.” This passage issues a change of perspective. It calls the Lord’s people

to fear *him* rather than those who persecute them. You will note that there is purposed equivocation in the word *fear*. We are not to fear the Lord in the same way that we fear those who persecute us, but we are to fear him as the one who is holy; we fear him with reverence and awe (as Peter will explain in a moment).

So, our focus changes from the persecutors and what they can do, to the Lord and who he is. Note in Isaiah 8:13 that it is Yahweh (יהוה) whom we are to fear. Peter picks this up in 1 Peter 3:15 and refers it to Jesus Christ without hesitation. It is Yahweh, Christ himself who is the Lord, whom we are to set apart *as Lord* in our hearts.

The only finite verb used in this section is the verb *sanctify* (*hagiasate/ἀγιάσατε*), and it is used as an imperative. This command serves to provide the imperatival force to the rest of the verse. The focus of the command is on our responsibility to sanctify *Christ* as Lord in our hearts as a requirement for the apologetic task (how distant this seems to be from so much of the history of apologetics).

It is worth emphasizing that Peter's use of Isaiah 8 is given a Christological (and therefore, eschatological) emphasis. As we noted above, while Isaiah 8 has Yahweh (יהוה), "the LORD," and the Septuagint has *kyrios* (κύριος), Peter without hesitation gives the command to sanctify *Christ* as Lord. There can be no question in Peter's mind as to whom we are to serve in these last days.<sup>5</sup> Because Jesus' work is completed in his death and resurrection, he now has been made both Lord and Christ. We are to set Christ apart as Lord, even as he now *is* Lord and has sat down at the right hand of God (Mark 16:19; Heb. 1:3; 10:12).

So the essence of who we are is servants (and children) of Christ (1 Peter 2:16), who is himself Yahweh, the Lord. If we get that straight, then we know at least one of the ways we are to demonstrate the lordship of Christ: by defending the Christian faith.

Peter then tells us that we are to be "ready" (NASB). The word used in 3:15, *hetoimoi* (ἔτοιμοι), is in adjectival form and thus is not, strictly speaking, an imperative. Some have wanted to construe its force as imperatival, given its dependence on the imperative, "sanctify" (NASB).

5. This hearkens back, you may remember, to Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:36: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Others have seen it as simply adjectival, so that, while it depends on the imperative, is it better translated, “by being ready,” so that it modifies the imperative rather than extends it. Whatever the case, there is no question that it carries the force of something we *must* do. Either we must do it because it is a way of setting Christ apart as Lord, or we must do it because it carries the force of a command. To set Christ apart as Lord, therefore, is (in part) to ready ourselves.

And we are always to be ready, says Peter, to give an answer, a defense, an apology (*pros apologian*/πρὸς ἀπολογία). The term here is a legal one. It is the technical term for a defendant’s rebuttal against charges in a court of law.<sup>6</sup> There is no question, then, that the context here is apologetic in nature.

It must be said here, in case it is not obvious, that one of the primary ways to ready ourselves for the apologetic task is by our study and knowledge of Scripture. We may also desire to study philosophy or culture or some other relevant area in order to strengthen or deepen or broaden our defense. There is nothing wrong with such study. Some of the essays in this book hope to show the relevance and importance of such study. But if we study those things to the neglect of Scripture, then we have not adequately prepared ourselves for the apologetic task.

We should note here, as well, Peter’s use of a phrase that can be translated “to require an account,” that is, a *logos* (λόγος). That word, too, carries legal connotations. Peter sees our responsibility of setting Christ apart as Lord and therefore of answering charges brought against the faith, as if they were brought to us in a court of law. He wants the answers and responses to be taken that seriously.

Notice that the defense, in this context, is not specifically of “the faith,” but rather of “the hope” (*elpidos*/ἐλπίδος). This is likely Peter’s way of summarizing the Christian life (cf. Acts 23:6; 26:7; Col. 1:23; 1 Tim. 1:1; Heb. 3:6; 6:18; 7:19; 10:23).<sup>7</sup>

It is also Peter’s way of reminding us of the lordship of Christ. That lordship is both a present reality, as we have seen, and his future,

6. It is used in this sense in Acts 25:16; Phil. 1:7, 16; 2 Tim. 4:16, as is the verb *apologeomai*/ἀπολογέομαι in Luke 12:11; 21:14; Acts 24:10; 25:8; 26:1, 2, 24. We could note also Paul’s use of the word in 1 Cor. 9:3; 2 Cor. 7:11.

7. Note that in the epistle to the Hebrews, especially, hope is a way of summarizing the entirety of the Christian life.

consummated reign over all things. The hope of the suffering Christian is that Christ is coming to judge the quick and the dead. Peter reminds us that the invisible things are the lasting, permanent, essentially “real” things.

All of this is just to say that the word *apologia*, along with its derivatives, expresses a situation in which we are called on to defend ourselves, more specifically, to defend Christianity, against those who would seek to undermine or destroy it. In the context of 1 Peter 3, we are commanded to do so.

As important as the injunction to sanctify and to defend is, the injunction in verse 16 is equally important: “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.” Peter uses here the stronger conjunction “but” (*alla/ἀλλὰ*), in order to stress that when we defend the faith, it is to be defended with meekness and reverence. That is, our defense ought to be patterned after Christ himself, who was meek (see Matt. 11:29; 2 Cor. 10:1), and it is to be done not in the fear of those who oppose us, but in the fear of the Lord (see 2 Cor. 5:11).

So there is a three-step progression in this passage, a three-step approach to apologetics that Scripture gives us and that is absolutely essential. (1) We are first to have firmly resolved in our own minds that even though there may be attacks and persecution, Christ is on the throne. Jesus is Lord, and we must establish that in our own hearts. (2) We are to do apologetics in the context of those attacks; we are to defend the faith, making plain the truth of the gospel, the hope that is in us. This can be done only as we explicitly rely on Scripture. This will, inevitably, take us beyond and around issues of bare theism, to the centrality of Christ. (3) We are to do this with gentleness and fear. That is, we should not be threatened, nor will we be, if we remember who is in charge of the universe, who is *really* in control.

Imagine how difficult conditions must have been when Peter wrote these instructions. This epistle was directed to a group of scattered Christians who themselves were suffering persecution. The emperor Nero was a tyrant whose life left much to be desired. During his reign, the Roman world was chaotic and falling apart. Though it would

take years for the empire finally to collapse, the turmoil that marked this stage in Rome's history was the beginning of the end. Not only were there wars and attacks from without—in Britain and Judea, for example—but there was turmoil within. Whether or not the emperor's personal ethics mattered to the empire was debated. Not only had Nero divorced his first wife and married another, but when he was tired of his second wife, he kicked her to death and then married a woman whose husband he executed. It would not have been easy, to say the least, to be gentle in such circumstances, to have no fear of man, to be bold in defense.

That, however, is our mandate; it is our duty. We are to be bold in our defense, yet gentle and meek in our manner of defense. As Cornelius Van Til used to say, we must be *suaviter in modo, fortiter in re*.

This, then, is our ground; this is why we do apologetics. It is a discipline that has as its content and context, not bare theism, as much of apologetics wants to maintain (and which, by the way, is foreign to Christianity), but the glorious gospel of Christ—his death, resurrection, ascension, and coming again. And it is our task, our mandate, our privilege to be engaged in it as soldiers of the Divine Warrior King, the Lord of Hosts.

It is our hope that this book will demonstrate the necessity of the truth of Scripture, and the implications of that truth, for apologetics. As we said above, Reformed apologetics is “reformed” to the extent that it takes its cue from Scripture and the theology that flows therefrom. The following essays are meant to spell out more clearly the need for, and the beauty of, an apologetic surrounded by the rich truths of the Reformed faith.